AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Title: Perceptions of International Students in a Community College-Based Coordinated Studies Program.

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George Copa

This study presented an in-depth exploration of international student perceptions of a coordinated studies program (CSP) at Seattle Central Community College.

In conducting this research project, a phenomenological research methodology was used. Qualitative data were collected through participant observations, focus group, document review, and individual in-depth interviews with nine students. The data were analyzed systematically and categorized into the following four themes: (1) program integration, (2) program content, (3) program structure, and (4) program faculty. Data within each theme were then grouped under subcategories and themes were presented with examples of student’s statements to illustrate each theme.

International students found that the coordinated studies program provided a unique and positive educational experience. Of great importance, students found
that the experience was beneficial in addressing both social and academic areas in their lives.

For most of the international students in the study, the sense of supportiveness and relationship development opportunities were the most important features of the experience. International students were able to build relationships with both American students and other international students through prolonged cross-cultural interaction in and out of class. The international students valued the cross cultural learning and the introduction to American culture the CSP context provided.

The interdisciplinary nature of the CSP was, in general, viewed positively, though, for many students it was a big stretch since these types of learning strategies may not have been experienced in the past. Of the various activities in the CSP, international students regarded the small group work as the most rewarding of the in-class activities, and also enjoyed the out-of-class group projects and social activities.
Perceptions of International Students in a Community College-Based
Coordinated Studies Program

by

Andrea E. Insley

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Andrea E. Insley, Author
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Perceptions of International Students in a Community College-Based Coordinated Studies Program

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Since the beginning of the century, the number of international students studying in the United States has gradually increased. After World War II, international students began to appear in significant numbers (Barbar, 1985) and the 1960s brought an even larger international student enrollment (Crano and Crano, 1993). The United States government officially began recording numbers of enrolled international students in 1975 and in 1976 documented that there were 200,000 students being trained in the United States, primarily from developing countries (Pruitt, 1978). Based on the rapid increases, Scully (1981) projected an increase in the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities from approximately 312,000 in 1980-81 to more than 1 million in the early 1990s. This latter figure has proved an overestimate; nonetheless in 1997-98, more than 480,000 international students were enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education, 3.4% of the total U.S. enrollment (Davis, 1998). This rising tide is not entirely without direction. Increasing numbers of international students are turning toward the community colleges. In fact, the number of international students choosing community college has increased by 19.9% from 1993-1998 (Davis, 1998) to a total of 73,443 students, the strongest enrollment gains of all major institutional types. In
contrast, the international student enrollment in U.S. institutions at large only increased 7% during this same time period. International students are attending community colleges for a variety of reasons, including the relatively low cost of tuition and easier admission standards. In addition, the College Transfer model of attending a community college for two years and then completing a bachelor’s degree at a university is becoming more widely understood abroad. Finally, more international students are choosing community colleges because, for many students, they offer the most appropriate level of study needed for their careers upon returning home.

Statement of the Problem

International students are increasingly enrolling in community colleges in the United States. Substantial research documents that international students experience significant problems during their sojourn in the United States related to academic and social integration, loneliness and alienation, and difficulties related to language, finances, diet, and health. American higher educational institutions which enroll significant numbers of international students are attempting to address these concerns through a variety of venues. Traditionally, colleges have provided support services to international students such as orientation programs, advising and counseling, and opportunities for students to join clubs and take part in social activities. Curricular learning communities have been documented to broadly enhance the social and academic experience of many students (Tinto and Russo,
1994), and, therefore, may be beneficial to international students. In the review of literature, however, there is a lack of information regarding institutional attempts to integrate and acclimate international students into the academic and social structures of the college through pedagogical venues, such as curricular learning communities.

Coordinated Studies Programs

Colleges around the country have experiences with a variety of learning community models, adapted to special student populations and special needs. One form of curricular learning community is the Coordinated Studies Program (CSP). CSPs are experiential-based learning communities, based on cooperative learning practices (Tinto, 1993, 1997; Tinto, Russo, and Kadel, 1994). CSPs involve both faculty and students in full time (12-18 credits) interdisciplinary, active learning around “real world” themes, providing a forum for social and intellectual interchange and for building community among disciplines, students, faculty, the work world and academia. The pedagogy includes team teaching, integration of skill and content teaching, and active approaches to learning (Smith, 1995). Prior evaluative research on CSPs reports increased retention, increased overall GPAs, increased student satisfaction with and understanding of the institution, enhanced critical thinking skills, and an overall feeling of integration and supportedness through the development of relationships (Tinto and Russo, 1994). Within this context of
building community lies the potential for enhanced student success (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Tinto and Russo, 1994).

International Students in a Coordinated Studies Program

Seattle Central has one of the largest international student enrollments of any two-year institution in the United States. In 1997-98, Seattle Central was ranked number 16 among the nation's community colleges in terms of enrolled international students (Davis, 1998), comprising approximately 14% of its full time enrollment. International students have not been actively encouraged to enroll in CSPs over the years at Seattle Central. In fact, there is extremely limited research on international students participating in learning communities, together with American students. Some of the well-documented outcomes of learning communities are social and academic integration (Tinto, 1993, 1997). If the student outcomes documented for American students in this evaluative research applies to international students, this instructional pedagogy may be effective in enhancing the social and academic integration of international students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program. Employing a case study approach, the study examined the perceptions of nine international students during the quarter they are enrolled in the CSP at Seattle Central. More broadly, this study lays a
foundation for exploring the potential value of CSPs as a pedagogical vehicle for enhancing international student academic and social integration.

Relevance of the Study

Given the significant growth in numbers of international students in U.S. community colleges, it is relevant to understand the factors that affect the quality of their adjustment and their satisfaction with their experience in the United States. In the review of literature, a widely noted theme is that international students often have a difficult time adjusting to living and studying in the United States. Students have a wide variety of social and academic adjustment concerns (Hull, 1978; Klineberg, 1980; Scharma, 1973).

Research Question

The following question guided the design and scope of the study:

What is the experience of international students in the Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?

Sub-foci included:

- International student perception of the campus environment
- International student perception of the CSP pedagogies
- International student perception of CSP classroom and extra-curricular student-student and student-faculty interaction.
Overview of Research Methodology

I used the phenomenological approach for this case study (Patton, 1990). According to Patton, phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: “What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (p. 69). The qualitative research methodology chosen to capture the CSP experience included in-depth individual interviews, classroom observations, document review, and an interactive focus group interview.

Data collection took place in three stages. First, in-depth, open-ended individual interviews were conducted during the CSP experience at the case-study college site. These interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and coded according to themes (assigned phrases that represent recurring topics sorted from the descriptive data). During this stage, the researcher also conducted two observations of the CSP setting. The second stage of data collection employed the focus group interview. It was conducted with the same group of international students, 1-2 months after the CSP experience had ended. The focus group allowed participants to: (a) review, validate, correct, and provide additional input into the themes induced from the individual interviews; (b) describe the relationships among the themes; and (c) identify the major influencing factors and outcomes for international students related to their CSP experience. Finally, the researcher reviewed documents pertaining to the CSP.
Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the current body of knowledge regarding learning communities, international student adjustment, and more specifically, presents an in-depth look at what happens to international students in a coordinated studies program. Tinto and Russo (1994) documented the academic and social benefits for students who choose to participate in coordinated studies programs; however, no international students were involved in this research, and the potential benefits to international students of engagement in a CSP, together with American students, was undocumented. Therefore, this study explored the international student benefits and concerns that derived from CSP participation. Results are significant for community college and higher education leaders at large, regarding the potential of CSPs to respond to international student adjustment concerns as well as potentially enhancing their academic and social experience in the United States.

Description of the Setting

The setting for this study was Seattle Central Community College, an urban, public community college located in downtown Seattle, Washington. Seattle Central is a member of a three-college district, the Seattle Community Colleges—North Seattle, Seattle Central, and South Seattle Community College. The city contains a vast range of people hailing from all parts of the United States and many countries. Seattle Central’s student and staff population reflect this diverse composition, in fact, boasting the most diversity of any higher education institution in the
state of Washington. Seattle Central opened in 1967 and currently has an enrollment of approximately 5,000 full time students, in addition to approximately 700 international students (14% of overall enrollment).

Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie the conceptualization, implementation and analysis of this study:

1. This study assumed that international student success and satisfaction with the academic experience is of concern to community college administrators and faculty.

2. This study assumed that the Coordinated Studies Program model of learning community has broadly enhanced the social and academic experience of many students, and therefore, may be beneficial to international students.

3. This study assumed that the interviewees, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, participated willingly and that their comments and responses were honest and complete.

4. This study assumed that a phenomenological approach was best suited for capturing and communicating the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of international student perceptions and experiences.
Limitations and Delimitations

The following limitations are identified:

1. This study was a single-site case study, limited to a sample of CSP faculty and international students at one urban community college; therefore, judgments of the transferability of the study’s findings must rest with those interested in using those findings.

2. Secondly, and related to the question of generalizability, the integration of different core disciplines into the curriculum of the CSP was limited to courses in the Humanities/Social Sciences. Therefore, any generalization beyond the scope of such curriculum areas must rest with those interested in using the findings.

3. Finally, the study was not intended to assess the coordinated studies program itself but, rather, to characterize the international student experience in the program. This study was only the beginning of ongoing research on the subject of international student participation in Coordinated Studies Programs.

My study was delimited to address international student perceptions in a Coordinated Studies Program. It was a single-case study, spanning 3 to 4 months.
The subjects were nine international students in the Fall 1999 Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College.

Definition of Terms

International students are defined in various ways on college campuses. At some institutions, refugees and immigrants are classified as "international students." In addition, other terminology is potentially confusing. For clarification, I have included definitions of some of the terms included in this dissertation.

**Academic integration.** This term refers to the student's satisfaction with faculty relationships and instruction; and their feelings that the faculty of the college are sensitive to the interests, needs and aspirations of the students.

**Acculturation.** This is the process of adjustment that an international student goes through when adapting to the American culture. There are normally predictable stages which students can be expected to pass through. The unpleasant aspects of acculturation are sometimes referred to as culture shock and can include unhappiness, depression, and physical illness for a short period of time (Adler, 1975).

**Collaborative Learning.** Collaborative learning, sometimes referred to as cooperative learning, is the instructional use of small groups so that students work
together to maximize their own and each other’s learning. Smith and MacGregor (1992) define collaborative learning as “an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together” (p. 11). Regardless of the approach taken (i.e., peer teaching, cooperative learning structures, learning communities), collaborative learning actively engages faculty and students in the construction of knowledge, exploring a subject through the acquisition and organization of data, through observation, and through critical thinking and problem solving. The result is a learner-centered environment.

**Coordinated Studies Programs (CSPs).** This refers to a particular curricular cooperative learning model that restructures the traditional curriculum so that “members of the learning community—both faculty and students—are engaged full time (12-18 credits) in interdisciplinary, active learning around themes” (Gabelnick, et al., 1990, p. 28). Lectures, discussions, field trips, lab sessions, student presentations, small group activities in and out of class, and book seminars are common features and strategies of the program.

**English as a Second Language (ESL).** This term means learning the English language in a country where the predominant language is English. For example, international students in the USA study ESL.
In-depth phenomenological interviewing. This model of interviewing is used to better understand the experience of other individuals and the meaning they draw from their experiences in context. This method combines focused interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from the topic under study and life history interviewing. Open-ended questions form the primary method of data-gathering. The goal is to encourage the participant to reconstruct his or her experience in the context of the topic under study (Seidman, 1991).

International Students (Foreign Students). These two terms will be used interchangeably in the literature review as students who are nationals of another country and are studying in the United States on a student visa type such as F-1, M-1 or J-1.

International Student Services or International Education Programs Office (at Seattle Central). This is the office at the college campus which provides, among other functions, a liaison between international students and the college or university during the admissions, orientation and initial advising/counseling process. This office provides continued assistance and support to international students throughout their stay at the institution.

Curricular Learning Communities. These are instructional pedagogies characterized by groups of students taking two or more classes together which provides
both social and academic support. Gabelnick et al. (1990) define a curricular learning community as:

Any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses—or actually restructure the curricular material entirely—so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise (p. 19).

The five generic models of learning communities are linked courses, learning clusters, freshman interest groups, federated learning communities, and coordinated studies programs.

Chapter Summary

This study is presented in five chapters, providing an in-depth examination of international students' perceptions of one community college's coordinated studies program. Chapter One provides the background to the research problem and the purpose of the study. Chapter Two develops the conceptual framework for the study and presents a review of the literature respective to (1) international student adjustment and (2) curricular learning communities with a focus on the coordinated studies program model. Chapter Three contains a description of the research design and methodology the study will use. Chapter Four presents the results of the study. Chapter Five discusses the findings of the study and their implications for professional practice and future research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two is a review of the literature that provides the conceptual framework for this study. There is extensive literature relating to international students attending U.S. institutions of higher education, with approximately 70% of it from North American researchers (Altbach et al., 1985). The review focuses on international student adjustment research, including models of adjustment, academic and social/cultural adjustment, and social integration through relationship networks. There is also extensive literature on curricular learning communities. The review covers the historical development of curricular learning communities, discuss the five major types of learning communities, discuss the benefits of learning communities, and then focuses on the Coordinated Studies model of learning community and its benefits. At the end of Chapter Two, there is a discussion of findings and limitations of previous research.

Adjustment Research

Discussions of the presence of international students in two-year institutions began to appear in the literature in the mid 1960s. In 1968, the Institute of International Education's publication, Open Doors, first took special note of international students attending junior and community colleges and began collecting and reporting data on their enrollment.
Shultz (1977), in his survey article “Two-Year Colleges Move Toward Global Orientation,” traced the history of the involvement of two-year colleges with various aspects of international education, including international students. He indicated that the increase of international students at two year colleges was due in part to a growing world-wide awareness of the community college movement in the U.S., referrals of international students by four-year colleges and universities, the attraction of individualized instruction that is offered at community colleges, and lower expenses compared to senior institutions. Shultz (1977) further stated that international students chose two-year colleges because of open admissions policies, flexible programming, availability of technical training, the transfer function of two-year colleges, availability of developmental courses, extensive ESL training, and relatively low tuition.

In international student research, adjustment issues of international students have dominated the attention of researchers. However, there is tremendous variation within the research on adjustment and adaptation (Heikinheimo and Shute, 1986; Wan et al., 1992; Wilson, 1996). International students are faced with unique challenges—in addition to those faced by all students attending higher education institutions. Being from another culture, these students have a wide range of new experiences. They encounter different weather, living arrangements, food, customs, people and language (Perkins et al., 1977). Furnham and Tresize (1982) suggested that issues facing the international student are primarily academic problems associated with higher educational study and cross-cultural problems of living in a foreign culture (i.e., racial discrimination, language proficiency, dietary restrictions, financial difficulties, loneliness, alienation, and culture shock). Many international
students experience some degree of psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, helplessness, homesickness, and loneliness during their sojourn.

Adjustment Models

The most well-known research on student adjustment is the "U-curve" hypothesis first proposed by Lysgaard (1955) following his study of Norwegian students studying in the United States. Lysgaard theorized that:

Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a "crisis" in which one feels maladjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community. Or, to put it differently, he suggested that adjustment as a process over time operates at increasingly more intimate levels of contact with the community visited. The need for more intimate contact, however, makes itself felt before one is able to achieve such contact and for some time, therefore, one may feel "lonely" and "maladjusted" (Lysgaard, 1955, p. 51).

Lysgaard found that adjustment was "good" among students who had been in the U.S. fewer than six months, but "less well" for those who had been in the U.S. from six to eighteen months. Students reach a more positive state after eighteen to twenty-four months.

Church (1982) reviewed eleven studies that support the U-curve hypothesis, although these studies suggest that accommodation to the host culture does not return to the original level of positive attitude. Another five studies he reviewed did not support the hypothesis, and he concluded that support for the U-curve theory is weak and over-generalized. Klineberg and Hull (1979) found almost no
support for Lysgaard's hypothesis. Heath (1970) found the U-curve theory generally applied to students residing in the Berkeley International House. This variety in results and conclusions speaks to the great diversity and little unifying theoretical understanding within the research on international students.

In another model, Du Bois (1956) breaks down adjustment into four phases: the "spectator", the "adaptive", the "coming to terms" and the "pre-departure." Du Bois does not suggest time periods for these phases. The "spectator" phase is a period of psychological detachment from the new experience. While experiences might be interesting, confusing, or even humiliating, the student is not yet personally involved in the new environment, so is protected from serious distress or major influence. The "adaptive" phase is characterized by adjustment stresses and strategies. The sojourner is actively involved in the adjustment process to life in the host environment. The "coming of terms" phase is the period characterized by either marked positive/negative attitudes or by objective judgements of the host environment. Finally, the "pre-departure" phase occurs shortly before the individual leaves the host environment. The student often sees the environment and sojourn experience with a somewhat altered perspective, and may look toward home with either expectation or apprehension.

In another model, Hayes and Lin (1994) and Fernandez (1988) suggest that adjustment of international students follows a developmental course not unlike the five-stage Minority Identity Development Model proposed by Sue (1989). The five
stages that Sue identifies are conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and synergetic articulation and awareness.

**Academic Adjustment**

In general, international students’ main objective of studying in the United States is the successful achievement of academic goals (Heikinheimo and Shute, 1986). Some research indicates that academic success is related to psychosocial factors such as social adjustment and the well-being of the student (Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Berry and Kostovick, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979). Therefore, academic success may be hindered by inadequate or slow adjustment to the college setting. Because there are large numbers of international students on U.S. campuses, there is concern about this phenomenon and related issues, especially its effect on international students’ retention, academic success, and satisfaction with time spent in the United States.

**Social/Cross-Cultural Adjustment**

Many international students experience a painful period of adjustment. According to English (1958), adjustment is “a condition of harmonious relations to the environment wherein one is able to obtain satisfaction for most of one’s needs and to meet fairly well the demands, physical and social, put upon one” (p. 13). Studies from different disciplines have focused on the topic of “cross-cultural adjustment,” which conceptually refers to the process “through which an individual requires an increasing level of fitness or compatibility in the new cultural environment” (Kim,
Cross-cultural adjustment broadly refers to three dimensions (Ruben and Kealey, 1979): psychological adaptation, interaction effectiveness, and culture shock. *Psychological adaptation* refers to the psychological process of acclimating to a new culture; *interactional effectiveness* refers to a behavioral perspective which is concerned with sojourners’ social or communication skills in interacting with host nationals; and *culture shock*, a term initially introduced by Oberg (1960), refers to the distress experienced by sojourners in the host culture.

**Culture Shock**

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, such as customs, gestures, facial expressions, or words. Henderson et al. (1993) define culture shock as: "An individual’s lack of culturally appropriate frames of reference, social norms and rules to guide their actions" (p. 382). According to Furnham and Bochner (1982), culture shock occurs "in social encounters, social situations, social episodes, or social transactions between sojourners and host nationals," and it is "the reaction of sojourners to problems encountered in the dealings with host members" (p. 172). Culture shock is most commonly viewed as a normal process of adaptation to cultural stress involving such symptoms as anxiety, helplessness, irritability, and a longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment. Brislin (1981) has suggested that irritability, excessive concern with health, distrust and hostility towards members of the host culture, depression, and lowered work performance
are common symptoms of the culture shock and alienation that international students often experience. It has potential to overwhelm the sojourner in a new culture (Seeman, 1959).

Acculturation

Acculturation is defined as culture change which results from continuous, first hand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Redfield et al., 1936). Acculturative stress is defined as a reduction in health status (including psychological, somatic and social aspects) of individuals who are undergoing acculturation. Graham (1983) found that acculturative stress increases when the gap between the student’s traditional culture and the host culture is greatest.

Alienation

International students are also noted to experience feelings of alienation. In fact, alienation from university life experienced by international students is noted to be significantly more severe than that experienced by U.S. students (Owie, 1982). Burbach and Thompson (1973) defined alienation as including three elements: (a) feelings of powerlessness, (b) meaninglessness, and (c) social estrangement. Powerlessness is the feeling that it is impossible to achieve desired outcomes, and it is based on a subjective personal interpretation of the situation rather than objective conditions. Meaninglessness is the inability to make sense of what is happening and consequent uncertainty as to what to believe or do. Social estrangement is the feeling of loneliness.
Social Integration: Support Networks

International students need adequate support networks. Cobb (1976) notes that social support buffers stress by providing the individual with emotional support guidance. Social support provides a person with three sorts of information: that he or she is cared for and loved; esteemed and valued; and that he or she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation. Hence, it may be predicted that international students with a strong and supportive friendship network would be happier and better adjusted than those without such a network.

Bochner et al. (1977) provide a functional model for the development of international students' friendship and support patterns, stating that sojourners belong to three distinct social networks:

1) *A Primary, mono-cultural network*, consisting of close friendships with other sojourning compatriots. The main function of the co-national network is to provide a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed.

2) *A Secondary, bicultural network*, consisting of bonds between sojourners and significant host nationals such as academics, students, advisors and government officials. The main function of this network is to facilitate instrumentally the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner.

3) *A Third, multicultural network* of friends and acquaintances. The main function of this network is to provide companionship for recreational, "non-cultural," and non-task oriented activities.
The literature available on international student adaptation is almost unanimous in suggesting that international students want and need social contact with people in the host country. Direct contact with the host culture helps reduce the extent of problems experienced (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998; Furnham and Alibhair, 1985; Locke and Velasco, 1987; Selltiz and Cook, 1962; Shattuck, 1965). A study by Westward and Barker (1990) suggests that contact with certain host national individuals is positively correlated with social adjustment, academic success, and lowered probability of dropping out of academic programs for international students. Furnham and Bochner stated, “If sojourners are carefully introduced into a new society by close, sympathetic host-culture friends, the evidence indicates that they may encounter fewer problems than if they are left to fend for themselves” (1982, p. 171). For example, international students who have a high amount of social contact with host country nationals are apt to report more satisfaction with their sojourn abroad than those who do not (Alexander et al., 1981; Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998; Furnham and Alibhair, 1985; Klineberg and Hull, 1979). Selltiz and Cook (1962) found that sojourners who had at least one close host national friend experienced fewer problems than sojourners with no close host national friends. Although both Church (1982) and Antler (1970) emphasize the importance of contact with host country nationals, they commented that enclaves of co-nationals are supportive of people coping with the anxieties of adjustment because they provide a sense of belonging. Others, such as Bochner et al. (1977), however, place more emphasis on the host national network and state that this social support and help is of far greater importance to adjustment compared to that from a co-national network.
Though research stresses the significance of contact with the host culture, Miller's (1971) five year study revealed that international students associate mostly with fellow nationals, with whom they experience the most satisfying, intimate and warm contacts. Miller found that relations with Americans rarely go beyond superficial pleasantries. Klein et al. (1981) found that more than half of the Asian students studied had not established significant social relationships with Americans during their stay; in addition, those students considered Americans insincere, superficial, and incapable of real friendships. Accordingly, Kagan and Cohen (1990) found that students who are most resistant to the host culture receive most of their support from their co-national network. Alexander et al. (1976) note the following:

Having lost cultural and personal structure when they separated from the home country and feeling fearful or pessimistic about the possibility of making contact with Americans, very few are successful in coming close to American peers. Instead, they create a co-national “subculture” which recapitulates the home setting and provides necessary support but which also erects barriers to deep intercultural contact (p. 83).

Variables in International Student Adjustment

Several variables have been discussed as predictive of better adjustment and greater personal satisfaction among international students. One variable is the degree of contact with the host culture and support networks. Other variables include age, academic status, and gender. Younger students and undergraduates adjust better to a host culture, but older students and graduate students report more academic and personal satisfaction with their stay abroad (Church, 1982; Pruitt, 1978). There are also differences in perceptions and needs of male and female international students and in the way female and male students see themselves. Overall,
results suggested that women, as a group, question their self-efficacy, but men do not. Female international students, when compared to males, expect to have a harder time in school, are more easily discouraged, do not act on beliefs, and do not see themselves viewed as leaders (Manese et al., 1988).

In addition, differences in the background culture of international students seem to influence their adjustment. Spaulding and Flack (1976) reviewed a number of studies focusing on social behavior and adjustment to life in the United States by international students (Rising and Copp, 1968; Tanner, 1968; Antler, 1970; Becker, 1971). Most of these studies show that international students from Western industrialized countries tend to socialize more with Americans than do students from non-Western and less industrialized nations. Likewise, students coming from an urban setting abroad will adjust more readily in an urban setting in the U.S. Asian students, in particular, have been shown to have more difficulties in adjusting to the culture of the U.S. than students from Western countries (Altback et al., 1985; Fernandez, 1988; Henderson et al., 1993; Reinicke, 1986). Other variables include flexibility, non-authoritarianism, empathy, and high self-esteem, each of which correlate positively with positive cultural adjustment (Alexander et al., 1981; Berry and Kostovicik, 1983; Church, 1982; Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Liu, 1996). Also, students with better language competence experience less discomfort than do students with poor language competence (Church, 1982; Liu and Kuo, 1996; Pruitt, 1978). Finally, students with prior travel experience adjust more easily than do those who are away from home for the first time (Church, 1982; Hull, 1978; Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Pruitt, 1978).
Conclusion: International Student Adjustment

Adaptation is a process that blends academic, social, financial, cultural, and language-related elements. International students are more likely to have positive academic and nonacademic experiences if they enjoy a satisfying contact with the host community as well as their co-national network. High levels of social alienation may seriously interfere with the academic and occupation goals of students. Any attempt to enhance the attainment of their goals by host institutions would promote a greater sense of belonging and a corresponding decrease in social alienation. Although the issue of international student academic and cultural adjustment has been explored extensively (Kagan and Cohen, 1990; Selltiz and Cook, 1962), these studies have focussed on describing international student adjustment concerns and strategies for the development of support systems through special services on campuses. What remains to be explored in depth, however, are pedagogical approaches to addressing international student adjustment concerns.

Curricular Learning Communities

The 1984 National Institute of Education Report, Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education, identified three universal conditions of excellence: student involvement in the learning process; high expectations on the part of institutions, faculty, and the students themselves; and regular assessment and feedback for evaluative purposes. Recommendations for increasing student involvement included that every institution of higher learning should strive to create learning communities organized around specific intellectual themes or tasks. In addition, the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, in its national report Building Communities (1988), stressed the need for building the
internal college community and the classroom community as well as the external community.

Historical Development

Research and development on learning communities can be traced back to the work of Alexander Meiklejohn and John Dewey in the 1920s. Meiklejohn is considered a pioneer in the learning community movement because of his insights about the necessity to reorganize the structure of curriculum, challenging the value of “breaking knowledge into pieces.” He saw the college as an important arena for learning and practicing citizenship skills as determined by the general education curriculum. It was Meiklejohn’s (1932) insights that prompted the “ideal” college curriculum to be designed as the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin in 1927. This learning community was an integrated, full time, two-year, lower division program focusing on democracy in fifth-century Athens and nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.

Berkeley Experiment and the Evergreen State College

More than thirty years later, Joseph Tussman of the University of California at Berkeley, a former student of Meiklejohn, created a new program described as the Experiment at Berkeley (1960-1964), a model for other educational reform efforts (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Tussman believed that courses needed to be abolished as the basic curricular planning units and that educators needed to see the lower-division curriculum as a “program” rather than a collection of courses (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Tussman, 1969). This instructional model would “alleviate the lack of meaningful connection between courses; the need for greater intellectual
interaction between students and faculty; and the lack of sustained opportunities for faculty development” (Smith and MacGregor, 1992, p. 25).

The evolution of the Evergreen State College in the state of Washington was deeply influenced by the ideas of Tussman, regarding the concept that discrete courses were a major obstacle to effective undergraduate education. Therefore, the Evergreen State College was designed around year-long learning communities called “coordinated studies” programs that would be team taught around interdisciplinary themes (Jones, 1981). These “curricular designs” structured the educational environment to provide greater curricular coherence, a sense of purpose and group identity, more opportunities for active learning, and more intensive interaction between faculty and students (Leigh-Smith, 1988). The model became the basis for dozens of learning community adaptations in the 1970s and 1980s, and is still thriving at Evergreen today.

Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education

In the mid 1980s, Evergreen created a new public service initiative: the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education. Currently, the Washington Center is a consortium of 44 Washington public and private, 2 and 4 year institutions, including all 30 community and technical colleges, that coordinates faculty exchanges, provides guidance for the development of innovative approaches to curriculum reform and teaching practices, and launches multiple faculty development initiatives. Thirty-four of the Washington campuses have established a variety of student-centered learning communities as a central feature of their undergraduate curriculum (Pincus, 1996). All programs share common intentions “to rearrange the curricular time and space of both students and faculty to foster community, coherence, and connections among courses, and more
sustained intellectual interaction between students, between students and faculty, and between teachers” (Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, 1994, p. 2).

Five Major Types

The term “learning community” is used very broadly considering the many variations and designs among educational institutions of all levels. This study is focusing strictly on curricular learning communities. Curricular learning communities have two main objectives. First, they aspire to render intellectual coherence by linking or integrating disciplines and building relationships among subjects, or by teaching a skill (e.g. writing or speaking) in the context of one or more disciplines. Second, they strive to build both academic and social community among faculty and among students by enrolling them in a block of courses concurrently as a cohort, or having them meet for a block of time in an integrated curriculum program (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Of the many different curricular restructuring models being used, all of the learning communities intentionally link together courses or coursework to provide curricular coherence, more opportunities for active learning, and interaction between students and faculty (Leigh-Smith, 1993). According to Gabelnick et al. (1990), there are five major types of learning community curricular models. They are:

1. **Linked courses.** Sets of courses that are in some way related to one another in terms of focus or content, as determined by faculty at the institution, and for which specific groups of students co-register. The courses meet separately; however, the syllabi and/or assignments are usually coordinated. One example is the “paired course”, usually made up of a skills course and a content course.
2. **Learning (Course) Clusters.** A specialized form of the linked-course format in which a broader cohort community is formed by clustering three or more courses. The cluster becomes the entire load for the student for a quarter or semester. The instructors teach discrete courses, but work together like those who teach linked courses.

3. **Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS).** A model that links three courses around pre-major topics with a peer advising component. Each FIG cohort registers for all three courses and is a subset of 25 students from the larger classes. The arrangement is designed to give freshmen an immediate support system in a large college setting.

4. **Federated learning communities.** A more complex and academically ambitious model designed to build curriculum coherence and community for students and to provide considerable faculty development. Its objective is to overcome the isolation and anonymity of a large research university. As in the FIG, three courses are linked together by an overarching theme in which subsets of students become cohorts. Cohorts enroll in an additional three-credit “program seminar” related to all 3 federated courses and led by a “master learner”. This faculty member, from a discipline other than the federated courses, fulfills all of the academic responsibilities as the students in the three courses and is released full-time from other regular teaching responsibilities.

5. **Coordinated studies programs.** In 1970, coordinated studies debuted as part of Evergreen State College’s curricular design, a year-long learning community for first-year college students modeled after approaches of Meiklejohn (1932) and Tussman (1969). These team-taught interdisci-
plinary programs involve three to five faculty members and a group of 60-100 students. Faculty and student work together full time in active, interdisciplinary, thematic learning, but modes of delivery and emphasis on subject matter vary (Lenning and Ebbers, 1999).

The full-time nature of coordinated studies breaks open the traditional class schedule with diverse possibilities for scheduling longer blocks of time for extended learning experiences. Typical coordinated studies programs involve a mix of plenary sessions (lecture, films, or presentations) and small-group work (workshops, seminars, and lab sessions). “Book seminars” are the hallmark of most coordinated studies programs. Seminars are extended group discussions of a primary text or article, usually held twice a week. Each faculty member convenes his or her seminar group of about 20-25 students and acts as a facilitator, encouraging students to develop skills in taking charge of seminar time to dissect the text. (Gabelnick et al., 1990, pp. 29-30)

Benefits of Learning Communities

The “involvement” model (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993) and the “student departure” model (Tinto, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1998) provide the theoretical and conceptual reasons why student learning communities should positively impact college students, and much research supports both models. Astin introduced the theory of “involvement” with the academic institution. Student involvement with the institution was theorized to be directly related to the amount of “psychological and physical time and energy” of students, in both academic and non-academic contexts. Tinto discusses the importance of a student establishing membership in the academic and social spheres of the college through ongoing contact with members of the college community, both students and faculty (Tinto, 1988). The models suggest that learning communities should increase students’ development, achievement, and persistence through encouraging the integration of social and academic
lives within the college and its programs, and through quality interaction with peers, faculty members, and the campus environment.


Well-designed learning communities emphasizing collaborative learning result in improved GPA, retention, and satisfaction for undergraduate students (Gabelnick et al., 1990; MacGregor, 1991; Matthews, 1986; Smith, 1995).

For within-class learning communities to be successful, however, the learning communities must be "cooperative learning groups" rather than "traditional learning groups" (Johnson and Johnson, 1993). These categories can be differentiated as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperative Learning Groups</th>
<th>Traditional Learning Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive interdependence</td>
<td>No interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual accountability</td>
<td>No individual accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous membership</td>
<td>Homogeneous membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared leadership</td>
<td>One appointed leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for each other</td>
<td>Responsibility only for self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on task and maintenance</td>
<td>Emphasis on task only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills taught</td>
<td>Social skills assumed or ignored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observes and intervenes</td>
<td>Teacher ignores group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group processing</td>
<td>No group processing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, learning communities of various types and in different contexts—older/younger; varied ethnic/linguistic background; remedial/honors/regular; urban/rural; commuter/residential—that emphasize collaborative teaching and learning help undergraduate students in a wide variety of ways (Bruffee, 1984, 1987, 1993; Cox, 1993; Cohen, 1994; Gamson, 1994; Hill, 1985; Pike, 1997; Tinto, 1998; Tinto and Love, 1994, 1995; Tinto and Russo, 1994; Tinto, Love and Russo, 1994; Tinto, Russo and Kadel, 1994):

- GPA and the number of students on academic probation
- Amount and quality of learning
- Validation of learning (Rendon, 1994)
- Retention
- Academic skills
- Self-esteem
- Satisfaction with the institution, involvement in college, and educational experiences
- Increased opportunities to write and speak
- Greater engagement in learning
- The ability to meet academic and social needs
- Greater intellectual richness
- Intellectual empowerment
- More complex thinking and world view, and a greater openness to ideas different from one's own
- Increased quality and quantity of learning
- The ability to bridge academic and social realms
- Improved involvement and connectedness within the social and academic realms (Lenning and Ebbers, 1999).

**Benefits of Coordinated Studies Programs**

The pedagogy of a CSP as a particular type of curricular learning community results from the combination of three major teaching approaches: collaborative learning, inter-disciplinary team teaching, and learning community structure (Russo, 1995). A study of curricular learning communities at William Rainey Harper Community College used carefully defined control groups and sophisticated methodologies (Lucas and Mott, 1996). The study found large improvements over control groups on seven measures of attitudes toward learning and on many self-reported measures of students' group skills. In addition, students' improvements were significantly greater for "coordinated studies" groups compared with "linked classes" groups, which resonates with a finding of a research study supported by the National Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (Tinto and Love, 1994, 1995; Tinto, Love and Russo, 1994; Tito and Russo, 1994). In 1988-89, retention rates in Seattle Central's CSPs in transfer, vocational and developmental programs were examined over one year. That spring quarter, about 68% of all Fall-enrolled CSP students were still enrolled, compared to the college-wide average of 49% (MacGregor, 1991). Coordinated Studies Programs provide students with an enriched experience that adds a unifying dimension to disparate subjects (Matthews, 1986). Students and faculty collaborate in a social teaching and learning process, exploring variations of interdisciplinary curricula, which incorporate skills such as reading, math and communication into multiple disciplinary perspectives on societal issues such as world hunger, health, environmental issues and cultural pluralism (Smith and MacGregor, 1992; MacGregor, 1991). The opportunity to get to know a
group of students and faculty well, and to work with them towards achieving common goals, gives students the unique experience of community.

Student involvement in CSPs is further enhanced by an increasing amount of social, emotional, and academic peer support that emerges from classroom activities. Through seminars, group projects, class discussions, and self-evaluation reports, Coordinated Studies Programs allow—indeed compel—students to actively participate together in their learning both in and out of class (Tinto, Russo and Kadel, 1994).

**Coordinated Studies Programs at Seattle Central**

This study focuses on the perceptions of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) at Seattle Central Community College. Historically, Seattle Central was the first community college in Washington state to establish Coordinated Studies Programs. In February of 1984, Seattle Central faculty and administrators spent a day at Evergreen State College to learn about its Coordinated Studies Program model. Two of Seattle Central’s faculty spent the next quarter teaching in a CSP at Evergreen. Two Evergreen faculty taught at Seattle Central a few terms later, and, in partnership with Seattle Central faculty, taught the first CSP to 50 Seattle Central students in the Fall of 1984 (Washington Center for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education, 1990).

In the 1984-85 school year, there were approximately 135 students enrolled in three CSPs at Seattle Central. In the 1989-90 school year, almost 1,000 students participated in 23 CSPs. In the later 1990s, there were generally 3-4 CSPs offered in any given term at Seattle Central Community College. One example of a CSP was an 18-credit program entitled “The Global Village” which combined economics, ecology, English composition, and literature and explored issues such as the
ways people in the world are interconnected by written communication, global economics and ecology. The goal was to explore how everyone could become a part of world solutions. In addition to lectures and book seminar discussions, the program included field trips, workshops and other collaborative group projects. Other CSPs have won awards from the Department of Education including: “The Televised Mind,” a coordinated studies vocational program in communications; and “Our Ways of Knowing: The Black Experience and Social Change,” and “Speaking for Ourselves: Cross Cultural Visions and Connections.” The latter programs were specifically developed to reach out to Seattle Central students of color who had not previously enrolled in learning communities in significant number (Leigh-Smith, 1993). Seattle Central faculty recognize that new populations of students need to become collaborators in shaping programs and courses that address their needs. For example, in order to create an education that is more globally enlightened, it is essential to include non-Western cultural perspectives in learning communities with those of the West (Romer, 1983).

Discussion of Findings and Limitations of Previous Research

The literature and research I have reviewed in Chapter Two identify common adjustment issues for international students, including the lack of social and academic integration on campuses. Research stresses the importance of contact with host nationals as key to adjustment and integration. The Literature Review also introduces learning communities, the coordinated studies program model of learning community, and highlights student outcomes of learning communities and CSPs such as increased student satisfaction, increased retention, increased GPAs, increased sense of supportedness. In short, CSPs promote greater academic and social integration.
The question remains: Can participation—with American students—in a Coordinated Studies Program model of learning community enhance the academic and social integration of international students? There is a gap in the literature regarding international students in learning communities on American campuses, particularly in a college-level learning community together with American students.

Large random surveys have dealt with international student adjustment shallowly, for no contextual data were provided, thus limiting the depth and significance of the study. Other studies have explored in-depth the friendship patterns of international students or self reported perceived needs of international students. These studies all provide important insights into international student adjustment. The gap, however, is the limited research which examines the impact of a pedagogical intervention, a learning community which brings together Americans and international students. The Coordinated Studies Program model has been researched extensively, and the student outcomes reported for American students happen to be some of the key concerns of international students. In the opinion of this researcher, the potential of this pedagogical intervention is too provocative not to examine.

Chapter Summary

This chapter first presented a review of literature on international student adjustment issues. Second, the chapter reviewed the development and derived benefits of student participation in learning communities, and specifically, coordinated studies programs.

Some of key findings of this literature review are:

- International students suffer from adjustment concerns which are both academic and social/cultural.
- Lack of academic and social integration on the college campus can affect international students' academic achievement, in addition to their overall satisfaction with the college experience.
- Adjustment is enhanced by quality contact with someone from the host culture.
- There are many documented benefits of student participation in curricular learning communities, such as improved retention, improved GPA, supportedness, overall satisfaction, and academic and social integration.
- There is minimal research on pedagogical intervention strategies to assist international students in their academic and social integration.
- There is no research on international students in a CSP, together with American students, that I was able to find.

Despite a tremendous amount of research on the separate topics of learning communities and international student adjustment issues, it is surprising that so little research has been conducted on the topic of international students in learning communities, especially in the context of a CSP classroom setting, combining both American and international students. Chapter Three, which follows, provides a description of the research study methodology.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Chapter One introduced the subjects of international student adjustment concerns and Coordinated Studies Programs as a specific learning community structure. It also identified the research problem and purpose of study. Chapter Two reviewed relevant literature regarding international student adjustment, learning communities and Coordinated Studies Programs. The review of literature revealed serious issues and concerns facing international students in U.S. institutions of higher education in the areas of social and academic adjustment. It also revealed many student benefits from participating in learning communities and Coordinated Studies Programs, in particular. In the review of literature, there was no research providing focused analysis of the perceptions of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program, participating together with American students. To begin filling this gap in the literature, this study employed an in-depth case study approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of international students in a CSP. Chapter Three presents the rationale for the qualitative case study approach chosen to guide this study; a description of the case study site and participant selection; and a review of the study’s design, including the data collection and analysis methods employed, and additional information on the researcher.

This qualitative study attempted to capture and communicate the important dimensions of the experience of participating as an international student in a CSP,
together with American student participants. The research question posed to focus the inquiry is the following:

What is the experience of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?

Sub-foci included:

- International student perception of the campus environment
- International student perception of the CSP pedagogies
- International student perception of CSP classroom and extra-curricular student-student and student-faculty interaction.

As Marshall and Rossman (1994) advise, these questions "serve as boundaries around the study without unduly constraining it" (p. 28).

Rationale for the Method

The relative pros and cons of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective inquiry paradigms have been well documented (Bertrand et al., 1992; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Borg et al., 1993; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Guba and Lincoln, 1988, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Smith, 1983). Patton (1990) contrasts these two competing methodological paradigms: logical positivism uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations; in contrast, phenomenological inquiry uses qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction in context (Locke et al., 1993). In qualitative research, the researcher is, as much as possible, non-manipulative,
unobtrusive, and non-controlling while studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally (Patton, 1990). Bender (1993) states that the qualitative researcher,

wants to understand unique human experiences and to share both the understanding and the process of understanding with the reader. He or she gives the reader both a detailed description of the significant expressions of that human phenomenon along with the underlying pattern of the perceived meaning that has been identified (p. 60).

Finally, this type of research is largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of study (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

As Patton (1990) suggests, the decision regarding which methodological paradigm to follow should lie in the appropriateness of the method based on “the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available” (p. 39). Yin (1994) also outlines conditions the researcher should consider when choosing a research strategy: “(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (p. 4). These parameters provide guidelines for examining why a qualitative research strategy proves an appropriate fit for this study.

In this study, the primary purpose of the inquiry was to capture and communicate the in-depth experience and perceptions of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program. This intent is indicative of a phenomenological study, which, according to Bender (1993) “should be chosen when the researcher wishes to look rigorously at some human experiences in context and to describe that
experience in detail” (p. 62). Qualitative research methods are viewed as particularly appropriate for determining “the essence or essences of shared experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 70).

In addition, the research questions addressed by this study fit Yin’s (1994) basic categorization scheme of exploratory “what” questions and explanatory “how” questions. Yin (1994) suggests that the case study strategy is favored for “how” questions.

In sum, the qualitative, phenomenological case study method was the most appropriate methodological research strategy for exploring contextual factors and international student participant perceptions regarding the Coordinated Studies Program experience. This research design 1) is holistic, 2) looks at relationships within a system, 3) involves personal interaction, 4) requires the development of a model of what is occurring in the social setting, 5) incorporates the role of the researcher, and 6) requires ongoing analysis of the data (Janesick, 1994).

Case Study Site

Seattle Central Community College, a member of the Seattle Community College District, is located in downtown Seattle, Washington, where it serves a student population of approximately 10,000 students (5,000 Full Time Equivalent), including approximately 700 international students. Seattle Central was an ideal location to conduct this study, in part because of the institutionalization of the CSP offerings and the large number of international students studying at the college (approximately 14% of full time enrollments). CSPs receive support from administrators, faculty members, and staff members across the campus. Each year, faculty are involved in a CSP retreat to review and plan new CSPs. Students support CSPs at Seattle Central by registering for them and passing on positive reports to
their peers and advisors. Seattle Central has been offering Coordinated Studies Programs since 1984, and has conducted over 40 different CSPs, many of them multiple times.

Seattle Central’s international student population is one of the largest among community colleges in the nation, particularly when viewed as a percentage of full time students. The college has extensive support services for international students and I, the researcher, work in the International Education Programs division, thereby having access to international students and the school as an “available resource.” The CSP in which this study was focussed was a pilot program, bringing together a significant number of international students together with American students, and was offered through the Humanities and Social Sciences Division at the institution.

The study received the support of Dr. Charles Mitchell, President of Seattle Central, as well Dr. Ronald Hamberg, Vice President of Instruction, and Dr. Rosetta Hunter, Associate Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences. The case study site met the “ideal” site criteria outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1994):

(1) entry is possible; (2) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present; (3) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; and (4) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. (p. 51)

Design, Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis

The naturalistic and inductive nature of this qualitative inquiry necessitated a flexible and developmental design. As Patton (1990) explains, design flexibility is a key theme of qualitative inquiry:
While the design will specify an initial focus, plans for observations and interviews, and primary questions to be explored, the naturalistic and inductive nature of the inquiry makes it both impossible and inappropriate to specify operational variables, state testable hypotheses, and finalize either instrumentation or sampling schemes. (p. 61)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this characteristic as “emergent design,” in that the researcher must be sensitive and alert to emergent themes within the data as the investigation begins. This process of incorporating emerging themes from the data with hypotheses constructed during the study is characteristic of inductive analysis used in qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The strength of inductive analysis is that it facilitates the “grounding” of new models or theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As the study unfolds and patterns are revealed, the researcher “will begin to focus on verifying and elucidating what appears to be emerging” (Patton, 1990, p. 59).

**Data Collection and Sampling**

Two primary means of data collection methods were utilized over the course of the study: in-depth individual interviews and a focus group interview. In addition, I conducted observations and reviewed documents.

The first stage of the data collection process began with a total of eighteen in-depth, open-ended individual interviews with nine participating international students in a CSP. According to Denzin (1970) and Bender (1993), interviews are the most appropriate choice when the researcher is concerned with ascertaining the subjective meaning and experience of participants. The nine international students, who were each interviewed twice, were all in the same CSP with 39 other students. In total, there were 24 international students and 24 American students. The nine international students were from a wide variety of countries, including North East
Asia, South East Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The process of purposeful sampling (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) was used to determine which students to interview in order to describe the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across participant variation. This allowed me to select my participants from both genders, different academic majors and different cultural and national backgrounds. Although I do not generalize the findings of this study to all international students, I believe any common patterns that emerge from variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared perceptions of international students in the CSP. Therefore, I chose participants from a variety of nationalities to ensure that emerging themes were not culture-specific. All interviews were audio-taped (with the interviewees’ permission) for detailed accuracy and transcription purposes. Anderson (1995) comments that, “When used with care and skill, interviews are an incomparably rich source of data” (p. 222). After each transcription, I recalled the entire interview process and kept field notes to reflect my concerns over and experience with both the content and methodology. In addition, students reviewed their individual transcript and were given an opportunity to clarify or elaborate on points.

The second stage of the data collection process was a focus group interview with the same students. According to Morgan (1997), “the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (p. 12). Thus, the purpose of the focus group interview was: (1) to provide participants an opportunity to respond to the researcher’s analysis of thematic categories induced from the individual interview data; and (2) to generate additional spontaneous data that is not structured according to the researcher’s prejudices (Bertrand et al., 1992).
and (3) to facilitate an interactive group analysis of the CSP experience for international students. Participants listened and responded to a review of my preliminary thematic analysis of the interview data. This data verification process, referred to as member checking, allowed me "to obtain confirmation that the report has captured that data as constructing by the informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it, that is, to establish the credibility of the case" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 236).

In sum, the focus group interview allowed the international student participants to review, validate and provide additional input into the themes induced from the individual interviews. According to Locke et al. (1993), "In qualitative research, the focus of attention is on the perceptions and experiences of the participants. What individuals say they believe, the feelings they express, and the explanations they give are treated as significant realities." (p. 112)

In addition, two CSP class sessions were observed to enable me to gain a better understanding of the context within which the CSP is operating, as well as to observe the interaction between international students, American students and the faculty. I observed the participants firsthand, recorded information as it occurred, observed any unusual occurrences, and had the potential to observe and explore topics that could have been uncomfortable for the participants to discuss. The classes were observed in the second week and sixth week of the term to note any changes that occurred during the quarter. My field notes included descriptive observations and personal reflections. By descriptive field notes, I mean field notes that are well endowed with description and dialogue relevant to what occurred at the setting and its meanings for the participants. "Rich data are filled with pieces of evidence, with the clues that one begins to put together to make analytical sense out of what one studies" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 121).
Finally, I collected and examined documents such as the CSP syllabi from previous and current CSPs to provide historical data. Other documents included anonymous mid-term and final student self-evaluations during the CSP and course reading assignments. These documents provided information regarding the CSP topics that were addressed in class in order to further contextualize participant comments. The student self-evaluations for the course provided a generalized understanding of perceptions of all students enrolled in the CSP, in addition to rich data which corroborated the interview responses.

Data Analysis

Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who describes, analyzes, and interprets what has been seen and heard consistently and persistently (Wolcott, 1994). As Patton (1990) explains, in qualitative inquiry “there is typically not a precise point at which data collection ends and analysis begins” (p. 377). I analyzed and collected data in cycles throughout the study which enabled me to explore themes as they emerged and pursue unexpected leads during further interviews and the focus group session.

The interview transcripts constituted “raw data” for the initial analysis. I utilized the margin coding method, and as certain words, phrases, and ideas become recurring regularities in the data, these were assigned codes as emerging themes (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The working hypotheses was checked against the data and modified, as necessary, before being presented as findings. This process of incorporating emerging themes from the data with hypotheses constructed during the study is characteristic of inductive analysis used in qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The strength of inductive analysis is that it facilitates the
“grounding” of new models or theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The data summary from the individual interviews was presented at the interactive focus group session, comprised of the student participants. This member check provided participants an opportunity to respond to my analysis of the interview data.

Validity or “Trustworthiness”

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), criteria defined from one perspective may not be appropriate for judging actions taken from another perspective. The criteria that work quite well in positivist inquiry might not be usable in post-positivist inquiries because the basic assumptions and beliefs that lead to knowledge claims and criteria are fundamentally different between the two approaches.

In qualitative research, the word validity is often replaced by the word trustworthiness. In ensuring trustworthiness, the following strategies were employed:

- Triangulation of data: Data was collected through multiple sources to include interviews, focus group, observations and document analysis;
- Member checking: The participants served as a check throughout the analysis process. An ongoing dialogue regarding my interpretations of the participants’ reality and meanings ensured the veracity of the data;
- Repeated observations at the research site: regular and repeated observations of repeated phenomenon and setting occurred on-site over a 3 month time period;
- Clarification of the researcher bias: At the outset of this study, researcher bias was articulated in writing in the dissertation proposal under the heading “Role of Researcher.”
In order to ensure external validity, the primary strategy used in this study was to provide thick, rich detailed description which provided a solid framework for comparison if anyone is interested in transferability (Merriam, 1988). First, I provided a detailed account of the focus of the study, the participant’s basis for selection, and the context from which data was gathered, and my role in the process. Second, triangulation of data collection and analysis was used, which strengthens reliability as well as internal validity (Merriam, 1988). Finally, data collection and analysis strategies were reported in detail in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used in this study.

**Ethics**

Ethics and protection of the participants is an important part of the methodology of this study. Since the participants were sharing their personal beliefs, values and experiences, I, as the researcher, had the responsibility to safeguard this information from becoming public. Smith (1983) believes that the two most important principles for the protection of human subjects are informed consent and anonymity. Before conducting any interviews, I provided the subject with a written consent form stating the purposes of this educational research. Also, I used procedures to code data in such a way as to provide anonymity to the participant.

**Role of the Researcher**

The primary means of data collection was through interviews with selected participants who were enrolled in a CSP at Seattle Central. During the interviews, I was an active participant in the interview process. I prepared a set of questions to guide the course of the interview and elicit responses from the participant. I endeavored to act as an equal participant during the interviews without taking the role
of a dominant person or offering judgmental reaction to the participants’ responses or statements. “The investigator may begin with some preliminary questions in mind or may allow some foreshadowing of problems and relationships to direct the initial focus of attention. Otherwise, however, researchers try to avoid imposing presumptions and conceived structures” (Locke et al., 1993, p. 100). My role was to encourage the participants to relate experiences in their own words.

I am a doctoral student pursuing a degree in Education with a Community College Leadership focus. I have a Master’s Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language. I have been a doctoral student now for approximately three years. I am white, female, middle class, 37 years old, married with two children, and was born in the United States. I have taught English as a Second Language (ESL) in the United States to a wide variety of non-native English speakers including refugees, immigrants, and international students. I have also taught English to Chinese university students in Taiwan and immigrants in Germany. I have lived, worked or traveled in over 60 countries. I have experienced first-hand the adjustment process to a new culture and not having proficiency in the language of the country I was living and working. I believe this understanding of the context of being a non-native speaker in a foreign country enhances my awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to many of the challenges and issues encountered by international students, and improved my ability to work with the participants in this study.

Due to previous experiences working with international students, I bring certain biases to this study. Bender (1993) considers this one of the acceptable limitations of qualitative research. Bender states:
Rather than minimizing and eliminating researcher influence, the qualitative discipline requires elevating it to a conscious level and disclosing it to your reader. This practice not only enables you to redirect unconscious bias, but it reveals to your reader your unique perspective on the experience as you are studying. Your perspective represents half the research equation. (p. 50)

Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, these biases may have shaped the way I viewed and understood the data I collected and the way I interpreted my experiences. I began this study with the perspective that being an international student in a foreign country is very difficult and that overall language proficiency and access to a “bridge person”, to help bridge the cultural gap between the students’ culture and the host culture, are critical in the adjustment process. Another bias is that I believe that colleges and universities have an obligation to academically and socially support students, including international students, on their campuses through as many venues as fiscally possible. I also brought to the study a bias that community building is a “good thing,” and that the Coordinated Studies model of learning community has broadly enhanced the social and academic experience of many students, though it is not a good “fit” for all students.

Summary List of Data Collection and Analysis Tasks

I performed the following tasks:

1. Conducted two CSP class observations and 18 in-depth individual interviews of nine students.

2. Conducted a thematic analysis of individual interviews.
3. Conducted an interactive focus group data collection and analysis session with participants.

4. Reviewed documents.

5. Compared findings from observations, individual interviews and document review with data from the interactive focus group to produce summary findings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the rationale for choosing the qualitative phenomenological case study research methodology; a description of the case study site and participant selection; a description of the study's overall design, data collection, and data analysis methods; a description of verification strategies; and an introduction to the researcher and researcher biases.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Chapter Four presents the findings from the qualitative data collected throughout this in-depth case study exploring the experience of nine international student participants in a Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College. The following research question guided this study:

What is the experience of international students in the Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?

Sub-foci included:

- International student perception of the CSP content and pedagogies
- International student perception of CSP classroom and extra-curricular, student-student and student-faculty interaction.

This chapter has been divided into three sections. Section One introduces the reader to the setting, student participants and the method of ensuring trustworthiness of the data. Section Two presents the findings that emerged from the qualitative data. Section Two is further divided into subsections representing the findings related to the themes that emerged from the individual interviews, focus group, observations, and document review. Excerpts of participant statements are used to illustrate the findings. Neither students' real names nor any identifying information is given, so as to protect confidentiality. Section Three provides the transition into Chapter Five, where an in-depth discussion, implications, and suggestions for further research are presented.
Section One: Setting

Section One describes the setting of the study, the academic program in which the students were enrolled and the student participants themselves.

Setting

During Fall quarter 1999, 48 students were enrolled in a Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College, an urban college with approximately 5,000 full time students, located in downtown, Seattle, Washington. The CSP enrollment included 24 international students and 24 American students. The program was facilitated primarily by two faculty members, with a third faculty member having a two-week optional course as part of the credit offerings. The CSP was organized around a central theme that linked the courses from different disciplines and fields. In this case, the theme, “Having Our Say, Too,” provided the focus for students to explore discrimination and stereotyping based on ethnicity, gender, and age. Students attended class Monday to Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. On certain days, the class divided in half to form seminars with each of the two instructors. Other course activities included small and whole class discussions, seminars, lectures, guest speakers, films, communication games, and out-of-class projects. Assignments varied from individual to group projects, several student readings, multiple papers, speeches, group presentations, and mid- and end-of-term self-evaluations. Particular emphasis was given to cross-disciplinary topics and making “connections” across the disciplines, team teaching and collaborative learning, and student involvement in the construction of knowledge.
Research Participants

Nine international students from seven different countries voluntarily elected to participate in the study, including 5 females and 4 males, with ages ranging from 18 to 23. Virtually all of the students were studying in the College Transfer program with the goal to transfer to a university to complete a Bachelor’s degree. The amount of time they had already spent in the United States prior to enrolling in this course ranged from 3 weeks to 3 years.

Sources of data from the 9 students were drawn from the individual interviews, document review, the focus group, and the researcher’s classroom observations. The following chart (#1) called Data Sources provides information about the nine student participants who were interviewed and the way in which each participant’s oral and written comments will be identified (R1-R9) in the text. In addition, document review data will be identified by a (DR), focus group data with a (FG), and classroom observations will be designated (CO).

Chart #1 Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID, Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in U.S.</th>
<th>Program of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1, Japan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Business Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2, Japan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>College Transfer, Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3, Sweden</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>College Transfer, Undecided Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4, Brazil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>College Transfer, Electrical Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trustworthiness of the Data

Multiple data sources, including participant observations, individual interviews, focus group interview, and document review revealed the perceptions of these nine international students in the program. Qualitative data were collected and analyzed in three phases.

Phase one included participant observations and individual in-depth interviews. Broadly-based, open-ended questions were designed along with a list of more focused questions. The interview format was pilot tested on two students. Nine students who responded to the researcher's request were interviewed in the final study. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The student interviewees reviewed their own transcripts and verified their intended meanings. In several cases, the student would clarify their comments. In one case, the student indicated her comment in the transcript was influenced by an outside event of that day. She proceeded to tell me what she felt was a more accurate perception. The
transcriptions were analyzed systematically for themes. Data were coded, categorized and analyzed. Themes were presented along with examples of student’s statements to illustrate each theme. The researcher then asked three other current or former researchers to evaluate the themes and subcategories in relation to the illustrative comments. Several adjustments were made after these member checks were concluded. Data were finally organized into the following four themes: 1) program integration, 2) program content, 3) program structure, and 4) program faculty.

Phase two involved an interactive focus group which included six of the original nine students, and served to elaborate upon the subcategories and themes, as well as to verify the trustworthiness of the four themes and subcategories. At the focus group, the researcher presented the various subcategories and a few of the illustrative comments of each category. Although the majority of the content was verified by these students, there were a few exceptions that were noted and introduced within the appropriate subcategory.

Phase three consisted of the analysis of student artifacts. Artifacts that were reviewed included student mid-term and final self-evaluations, class syllabi, instructor handouts and assignments, and student final grade reports. In several cases, the information from document review, particularly self-evaluations, corroborated the student interview and focus group data, and was included in the findings.

The findings presented in this chapter, describe the themes and issues that emerged regarding the CSP experience for the nine participating students, and illustrate the trustworthiness of the study as marked by the articulated perspectives from students and triangulation of data sources.
Section Two: Presentation

The following section presents those findings that illuminate the perceptions and experiences of the nine international students enrolled in the Coordinated Studies Program. More specifically, based on an analysis of international student perceptions of the CSP, four broad themes inductively emerged from analysis of the data which included individual interviews, the focus group, classroom observations, and document review. The four major themes to be presented are Program Integration, Program Content, Program Structure and Program Faculty. This section is a direct response to the research question that guides this inquiry.

Theme One: Program Integration

In the first broad theme, Program Integration, students described the degree of connection they felt in the program. They gave examples of what helped them feel connected, or conversely, what aspects of the CSP were not conducive to experiencing program integration. This theme is divided into two main sections: Connectedness and Lack of Connectedness. Furthermore, the two main sections are divided into several subsections.

Connectedness

This section is divided into three subsections entitled, “Students are very supportive,” “Oh, look, there’s a hand back there,” and “Now I’m talking to everybody.” The Coordinated Studies Program provided a context for international students and American students to interact and communicate, both orally and cross-culturally. Although, in the beginning, many international students were reticent to participate in class, later, students felt more connected and comfortable in the CSP.
1. "Students are very supportive"

In this subsection, international students described how helpful and supportive many of the American students were in class, particularly with coursework. Several of the international students commented that they felt they could ask for and receive help from American students:

   If one student is not getting it, we need to support them and the CSP does this. Students are very supportive. Whenever I have questions about how to pronounce a new word, I go and ask for help from Americans. All of my little problems I have in class. If I ask about summarizing—I’m not very good—and they tell me step by step or photocopy their paper to help me. (R1; respondent #1 listed on Chart #1, Data Sources)

Some American students appeared to be more helpful than others. In the context of writing assignments, the following observations were made by international students:

   One American always helps me. Every time I ask him about homework, he gives me clear answers. When I ask him to check the contents and organization of my speech before giving a presentation in the class, he points out unclear sentences and other problems. (DR)

   Some of the internationals and Americans were supportive of each other. We could always go to Americans if we needed help. There was one American especially who helped everybody with writing. Her personality and voice was very big. In general, people were very helpful. (FG)

   People are friendly and supportive. There is one woman in the class who is very good at writing and explaining things. I love to ask her to look at my writing and she give me comments on my writing. Her comments are very good and she’s learned about writing and her skill is very good. A lot of internationals ask Americans after class, during the class for help and they help us.
From what I see, they are very friendly and supportive and don’t seem to be disturbed by the questions. (R8)

During a class break, two international students are sitting with an American student, going over their papers. The American student appears to be engaged in the task and is pointing out things on the paper. As the teacher calls the class back to attention, I overheard the American student make an appointment with one of the international students to look again at the paper later that afternoon outside of class. (CO)

2. "Oh, look, there is a hand back there!"

Not only were Americans helpful in assisting international students with class assignments, but several international students remarked that some Americans actually assumed a “bridging” or “translating” role to facilitate oral and cross-cultural communication between international students and the faculty, or between international students and “less supportive” American students.

Two international students commented on this facilitative role of American students in the context of classroom interaction:

International students quietly raise their hand, then American students just go, “Oh, look, there is a hand back there. Let’s hear what she has to say.” Those people try to help the other students understand what an international student might be trying to say—like “translators” almost. If we look confused, somebody will say, “Hey, so and so isn’t understanding”, or “Teacher, can you explain it a little clearer?”, or the American student will come over and explain it later. (R1)

The Americans are very friendly. They help the teacher a lot. It is about culture. If you are talking to me in Portuguese there are a lot of implied things. The Americans understand the
teachers between the lines. The Americans are playing the role of being facilitators and they get it better than we do. (R4)

International students sometimes took longer to communicate their ideas. Some of these special “facilitators” actively encouraged the international students to express themselves and not worry about language skills, and reminded other American classmates to listen patiently to non-native English speaking international students:

One classmate is very kind. He is always patient and pays attention to what other say. Every time I stammer, he patiently says, “It’s okay, keep on” and helps me finish speaking. Thanks to the very kind students in this class, I feel comfortable. (DR)

International students commented on feeling comfortable expressing themselves and that their opinions were valued because of the encouragement of these special American classmates.

The international students aren’t quiet anymore. They are okay to speak in front everybody. Even if it doesn’t come out exactly they wanted it to. And the Americans sometimes clap when somebody has tried really hard. The Americans say “we’re with you all the way” when it is my turn to present in front of everybody. Now they really want to understand us—they listen to what we are saying and not just “how” we are saying it. (R5)

I’m watching a seminar group. A student from Taiwan who was giving an opinion was interrupted by an American student who said, “We’re running out of time and need to get on.” A second American student said, “We have time to listen to everybody in this group. I want to hear his idea.” (CO)

I especially would like to appreciate one American student. She was very patient and kind. Once we made some small groups. I had to express opinions and I had lots of things to say, but could not translate them into English very well. All the group members except
me were Americans and they seemed bored of waiting for my opinions; nevertheless, this one American patiently waited for me and asked other to listen to me. I could not tell them completely what I wanted to say, but I felt happy. (DR)

3. “Now I’m talking to everybody.”

Several international students talked about the degree and quality of personal contact in the CSP experience, interacting on a daily basis with Americans and other international students. In addition, they commented on the importance of this interaction as an introduction to American culture and developing a support system in the USA.

Students contrasted the CSP experience with other classes they had taken at the college where they had little opportunity to interact with other students, particularly American students. Some students commented that in the CSP, they actually felt that Americans were interested in them and their culture.

"I’ve been in classes with Americans before and they kind of stay on the other side of the room normally. For example, I took, like, business and I never knew anybody in that class. It was boring and they didn’t want to be associated with me. In this class, we are always together, we have time to help each other and time to talk. In our class, everybody mingles around and we talk and everybody is interested in many different cultures. In my other classes, I had nobody to communicate with, but in this class, people really want to know about our cultures. (R5)

In other classes, they didn’t know I was from Brazil. I could have said, but I didn’t have the opportunity. There was very little interaction. This class helps you choose to talk to people more openly. The teacher makes sure you are talking to a person who is not from your country so you have to learn new things. They make sure you walk and talk with other people and get a good result from this experience. So maybe this is what this class is all about—having our say so. Maybe they accomplished a lot of things with this class. (R4)
After interacting with each other in the CSP over a period of time, several international students commented on feeling much more comfortable, connected, and “at home” in the class and with classmates.

In the beginning, everyone was closed and shy, but throughout the quarter students opened up little by little, and at the end there was only a group of people telling their more intimate secrets. (DR)

The more we interact in groups, the more we get to know each other and we feel more comfortable. The next time we see each other in the halls we say “Hey, what’s up?” But before, you just looked at each other. The groups force us to talk to somebody you don’t normally talk or sit with. Now, I’m talking to everybody. It is much better. It is like one community and one family. It’s like walking into a comfort zone. (R6)

Several international students commented also on the idea of relationship development. Specifically, they saw the importance of participating in this CSP experience in the beginning of their stay in the USA when they didn’t know anybody or have a support system in place:

When I first got here (to this class), I didn’t have friends, so this class gave me interaction with Americans and other international students and you will become really comfortable. If you just come into a new country there is a lot going on and a lot of changes and if you don’t even find any friends, you wonder why you are here? What are you doing? You need people to connect with. If I had started with the CSP (when I first came to America), I don’t think I would have had these terrible experiences. (R5)

The Americans have all been very friendly and helpful. I really didn’t know anybody before this class. So, I’m glad I had this class in the beginning, because you get to know people and have a chance to relate to others in the class and other cultures. I’m happy that I’m in this program and that I did it before anything else. I’ve had a chance to make friends and get to know the area. My new friends are showing me around the area. (R3)
One student focussed on the interaction in class as a tremendous cross-cultural experience:

*I met an African American woman during our group assignment. I told her about Brazil. We found out many things about each other which makes our relationship better. She's American and I'm Brazilian but we found our common points and it doesn't matter where we are from. If international students and Americans are open, (they'll) get to the common points to see that we are all different but only in culture and color. No matter what culture and color, we have principles, and when we connect with other people and find common points, oh my, oh my. For Americans, they realize they are not alone in the world. And for us, we know that we can learn a lot from them—people learn from each other. (R4)*

Lack of Connectedness

Not everybody in the CSP actively participated in discussions and other course assignments, interacted openly and freely, or was interested in being helpful. In fact, some aspects of the CSP experience were perceived as being detrimental to international students feeling connected and integrated. This second section is divided into three subsections entitled, “Hey, buddy, you’ve got to do it,” “Maybe they are just more comfortable with people who are the same as them?”, and “I think language differences are getting in the way.”

1. “Hey, buddy, you’ve got to do it.”

Apathy and lack of participation on behalf of some American students was not viewed in a positive light by international students. In fact, the following comments suggest that many international students were quite disturbed by the fact that some American students did not do their own work, expected others to “pick up the slack,” and seemed apathetic.
I was in a small group and we had to read each other's paper and write comments and answer the questions. I was actually the only one reading carefully and answering the questions. And the others, like, they aren't interested in reading the questions. They are saying, "It's a group, so we can just screw around." And one said, "I don't like reading," and he gave it back to me. I said, "Hey, buddy, you've got to do it." They thought, "Oh, I'll get the points anyway." Some people are like that. (R1)

I like the interaction, but it really depends on the students in your groups. Some students just don't care about anything. For ten minutes, all they talk about is their hair. I don't want to hear about their hair and what they did last night. We're getting graded on these talks. (FG)

I think there are students that don't even do the readings. Yeh, like, today in our groups, we had a discussion worth 50 points for our grade. The teacher asked the whole class about who had read one of the three papers, and two of the three papers. Only a few students raised their hand. The facilitator in my group said, "Who read the paper?" I raised my hand. I think there were only two of us who read it. They wanted me to tell the main idea of the whole reading. There are people who don't do the readings and just come to class. They say at the beginning, "Why don't we just do the reading out loud and then we can talk about it?" Or they want me to give them the answers. I don't know what to do about that. (R9)

Several international students were not only bothered by the attitude of these American students, but also the disruptions and distractions these students sometimes created:

Sometimes people didn't want to do their work, so we'd have to do their work too. They would just sit and talk to others and not do the work. They didn't do the readings so they can not make any comments in the group. I didn't like some of their attitudes. They just sat and talked to their friends. I couldn't concentrate. Then they'd get up and walk around. (FG)
Some times some students would be sitting in the back of
the room talking loudly and not being part of the group they were
assigned to. It really bothered me. (R2)

Two female American students are talking loudly in the back of the class
and visibly disturbing the small group discussion. The teacher glances back and
asks them to stop talking. They stop for about 10-12 seconds and then resume.
After another 2-3 minutes, the small group gets up and moves to the other side of
the room. The women continue talking and the instructor does not approach them
again. (CO)

2. "Maybe they are just more comfortable with people who are the
same as them?"

Not all American students actively engaged with all international students.
In fact, it seemed that some international students and Americans interacted a lot
and some international students and American students hardly interacted at all.

One student reflected on the idea that Americans might be more comfort-
able with international students if they perceive the international students as physi-
ically, linguistically, or culturally similar to them and less comfortable with interna-
tional student who are perceived as more different:

It might be that Americans talk more with me because I
look more like them. I'm not Asian. I'm more like them. That
might be true. Some international students are more quiet people
sitting in the corner. Just from my perspective. It is kind of hard
to talk to some. It is hard to make them communicate. Both
language and culture. They don't communicate with people they
don't know and stick together in a group. Me? I went to a party with some of the Americans over the weekend. (R3)

My own classroom observation during a ten minute break generally confirmed this perception:

I see three separate pairs of Asian international students talking together during break, and one Asian student sitting and talking to an American student about a homework assignment. The two Swedish students are talking to an American male in the corner. All of the other students are outside of the classroom. (CO)

One international student, in fact, expressed that some level of friendship was possible, but the “cultural gap” between some Americans and international students was too big to become close friends:

All of us are cool and get along together, but I think in our class more international students go together. Based on different background and culture, I mean, we can talk but it is difficult for us to talk deeply, you know, and sometimes we feel that there are not too many things in common and when there is not much in common then how can you talk? You can be friends but not good friends. (R7)

Another international student hypothesized early in the quarter that interaction between Americans and international students might improve later into the term when Americans began to get used to “us;”

So far, I think there is some interaction between American students and international students but I think it is just so-so. Not a lot and not very little...just in the middle...not as much as American students with American students. Maybe it is because it is the beginning of the quarter and they’ll be more comfortable
eventually when they get used to us, or maybe they are just more comfortable with the people that are the same as them. (R8)

3. "I think language differences are getting in the way."

In this subsection, international students commented on different aspects of language and linguistics as being important impediments to class integration and connectedness with other students. This subsection includes comments related to cross-cultural communication styles, overall English language facility, semantics, and other aspects of language.

One student commented that his lack of English language proficiency held him back from communicating freely, and that relationships with Americans would improve with his ability to speak and understand English well:

Some of the international students who are already here for a long time in the United States feel more comfortable talking to the American students. It is speaking skills and it is just a matter of time and I will be able to talk more to American students. I will have more connection with American students then. I think it is because when we talk to Americans, their English is very good and they talk very fast. Sometimes we don't understand. But it is not always like that. I think this environment provides a chance for me to get in touch with all kinds of different people. I don't know if it would happen if I went to other classes. (R8)

Even an international student who was a native English speaker felt that her accent was a stumbling block to interaction with American students, in addition to the obvious language problems other English as a second language international students have with each other and American students:

I think the American students have a hard time interacting with the international students. I think the language differences are getting in the way. They don't even understand my accent. "Where are you from?" "Oh!" They seem interested in where I am
from since I sound different. When we are trying to interact, it’s really a problem. I don’t understand some of the international students either. I try very hard to listen to what they are saying and not “how” they are saying it. (R6)

Some international students emphasized the difficulty to both express opinions—a concept which may not be encouraged in some cultures—and use a high level of English proficiency in a “real time” public forum. In addition, there was the added stress that they might be perceived as not having done the homework if they don’t actively participate:

Some of them (Americans) talk really openly and many international students get nervous in front of all those perfect English speakers. Talking about opinions in perfect grammar in English and speaking up in public is too big a step for many international students. It is both a language and culture problem. (R1)

In a large group, I could not express myself at all, although I could do in a small group. Thus, I first did not contribute to the seminar in a large group. This does not mean that I did not read weekly assignments. I read all readings, although some of them were difficult to understand completely. The reason why I could not give classmates my opinion is my poor English. I still need to translate my thoughts in Japanese into those in English, and it takes time. Therefore, while I was thinking, other classmates answered the questions, and the lecture went on. But I did do my work. (DR)

A Japanese student commented on the cultural differences in language communication styles between Americans and Japanese, and that she needed to learn to communicate more directly in America to prevent misunderstanding:

I feel that when I speak with diverse Americans and other international students, I need to express my opinion more directly and clearly than with students from the same country as mine. For example, I could see my classmates’ frustration with me when I spoke with them roundaboutly; it is a linguistic character of
Japanese, and I often use it when I speak with others. The way I speak might bring misunderstanding to my classmates and I think I irritate them. Thus, I realize that I need to adapt my communication style to the way most people use in order to make intercultural communication smooth. In my case, I need to speak more directly and clearly. It is difficult for people from my country. (DR)

A student commented on hearing a fellow international student reflect on the semantics of English in comparison to her own language:

During a seminar, a Japanese student described very well what it is like to talk a foreign language. She said something like, “The English language does not have a feeling in it for me. For example, if someone tells me that he loves me, that is so much more ‘deeper’ in my own language than it is in English.” I thought a lot of what she said and it makes so much sense to me. Sometimes English is just noises and not actual words. (DR)

One student observed that the instructors tried to accommodate second language learners, since they composed half of the class, by insisting that everybody speaks slowly and explains colloquial language:

I see that the teachers try to take care of helping students understand the English. They almost always make American students repeat what they say in a more understandable way. They (American students) aren’t being impolite, it is just the way they speak. But since 50% of the class is international, I think it is appropriate to slow down and not use slang, or explain it. (R4)

Summary: Theme One

In Theme One, Program Integration, students described the degree of connection or integration they felt in the program. They gave examples of what helped them feel connected, or conversely, what aspects of the CSP were not conducive to experiencing program integration. Therefore, this theme was divided into two main sections: Connectedness and Lack of Connectedness. Under the section Connect-
edness, students presented their perceptions of situations where they felt supported, commented on a special "advocacy" role some Americans were perceived to assume in order to assist the international students, and described their own transition from being reticent to speak to interacting more comfortably in group situations. The section called Lack of Connectedness covered international students' perceptions regarding the apathy and lack of effort in classroom participation on the part of some American students, and reflections on impediments to interaction and relationship development. A more detailed discussion of Theme One will be presented in Chapter Five.

Theme Two: Program Content

In the second broad theme, Program Content, students described their perceptions of the course content of the CSP, including the English composition course, the overarching program theme of "racism," and the interdisciplinary nature of the CSP. Therefore, this broad theme is divided into three sections entitled English Language Component, Topic, and Interdisciplinary. Furthermore, two of the main sections are divided into several subsections.

English Language Component

"The English level varies tremendously."

The CSP combined two levels of English, a level just below college readiness (English 096) and college level composition (English 101). Students felt dissatisfied and frustrated that it was combined and they perceived that their needs weren't being met. For example, students who were registered for English 101 felt that too much time was "wasted" on English 096 concerns and not enough on more
I think the problem is the level of the students is different. For example, for grammar problem, some students already learned many times and some students are learning for the first time and each student has a different level. So, it is kind of... if students know already what the teacher is teaching, it is kind of a waste of time. And also, for students learning for the first time, maybe they want to learn more. Especially for the grammar, they are teaching and doing the same stuff over and over. Like me, I want to learn more. They assigned us to read a book about grammar and MLA but I want them to teach us more with lecture, not just reading book. (R2)

We always seem to do things I’ve done before. It was hard for me, since I already did 096 and I didn’t want to hear the same things over again. It took too much time. That is okay if you are learning something new, but I haven’t been. I wasn’t so happy about it. At the beginning, I didn’t like it and I nearly quit it. (R6)

Because in this class there are students who are receiving 096 credits and there are students who are receiving 101 credits, so they are at different levels, so some students need how to use run on and comma, but I think lots of them don’t need these. They need other teaching about how to write more difficult. Because students are in different levels. (R7)

One student advocated separating the two levels:

The English level in the CSP varies tremendously. I don’t understand why we can’t separate at the beginning and one instructor take one group at a pace they are comfortable with and the other group move ahead at their own pace. I don’t understand it. (R5)

This second section, Topic, is divided into two subsections entitled “People just talk about racism too much” and “Now it isn’t just about black and white, but
more things that are relevant to us.” There were many comments which illustrated student discomfort and dislike of the strong focus on the topic of racism, particularly during the first few weeks of the course. Later in the quarter, more students saw the discussion as relevant and interesting.

1. “People just talk about racism too much.”

Several international students were bothered by the topic of racism and didn’t feel comfortable going into depth in discussion. One student just didn’t want to think about it:

About discrimination, I am a mix. This whole talk about racism. It bothers me too much. People just talk about racism too much. I don’t think you should talk about it too much, because the more you talk, the more problems you find. And you can’t make everybody happy. Don’t go too deep. We are not here to solve the problem, but to create a better environment, you know? When you go out of class you just try not to do those things you have read about or talked about, you now. I am seeing people being discriminated against here—a bad experience. How can you act like that? I didn’t know it could happen. I don’t even want to know about it. Just treat people nicely. (R4)

Some other students brought their displeasure to attention either by questioning the instructor about the topic, or by complaining and then dropping out of the class:

Two international students dropped out of the CSP, citing the topic as being “boring” or “uncomfortable.” (DR)

One international student went up to the instructor during the break and asked, “Why do we always have to talk about black and white racism?” (CO)
As indicated by the following comments, some international students in the CSP didn’t think racism was a problem in Seattle:

*It is very boring. They always talk about racism. I don’t feel any racism here, so I don’t know why we need to talk about it. I don’t feel so much discrimination in Seattle. Maybe another city where there is more discrimination. I don’t think we need this topic here. I feel more racism in Indonesia. In Jakarta especially. There is racism with Chinese people in Indonesia.*  (R8)

*I think the class is pretty focused on racism and talking about that and talking about different types of people and black and white and... yesterday they were really focusing A LOT on that (laugh). I wouldn’t want it to continue for a very long period of time, because I think that we should talk about it for awhile but not really emphasize it during the whole time. I don’t think that it is really that big of a problem here.*  (R5)

One student had the interesting perspective that the topic of discrimination as related to Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and other ethnic groups was not relevant to him since he himself was of a non-Western race and culture. He wanted to learn what the “Americans” would be learning, not about other people like himself:

*I think in this class they talk too many about stereotypes and too much about discrimination and some time I don’t like to talk so much about discrimination... My advice (is that) maybe the other students feel comfortable, but for me, I want to study what the American students would be studying. Maybe they can talk a lot of issues about this country. In our readings, they are from Asia, Mexico, not Native American. We have come here to learn the culture here. That is our main point. That is what we’ve come to learn. But I’m learning about “our culture” and I think it should be change some way. We want to know the culture of here, not the culture of ourselves. We already know about ourselves.*  (R7)
2. "Now it isn't just about black and white, but more things that are relevant to us."

Later in the quarter, the theme broadened to "discrimination" in general, as opposed to mostly racial issues, so students were able to discuss gender, socio-economic, generational, and other ethnic issues. In addition, several students had an opportunity to talk to the instructors about the theme of discrimination and, after these discussions, seemed to have more appreciation for the topic.

A couple of students expounded on the class readings and discussions:

I think the readings are good now. America is diverse so we read African-American culture, Asian American culture and others so I thought that was fair. We have, like, Asian and, like, gender, too. We are just... uh... learning that we make assumptions to people a lot unconsciously. So, now we are reading about a story and about two kids and one is black and one is white but the story doesn't tell which girl is black and which is white but the point is we are reading and making assumptions like "maybe this girl is white and this girl is black?" But I was talking to the teacher that the point is it isn't necessary to decide. So, what we are learning is seeing other people and how we pre-judge people. (R2)

Later on, it wasn't only about black and white, but about generations and other ethnicities and things we can relate to. More things that we want to learn about. (FG)

Another student commented that he now appreciated the topic of racism just because of the ethnic make up of the CSP class itself:

I asked the teacher and she explained to me it is kind of an important thing to study about racism in that class because there are so many cultures in that class, so it is important to study racism things. I think it is true. It is getting pretty interesting, too.
The new racism isn’t about black and white again; it’s changed like Japanese things and it’s getting pretty interesting. (R9)

A Japanese student felt that the topic was very relevant for her to learn about while here in the USA because the USA has big racism problems. She maintained that Japan doesn’t have racism problems like here in the USA. (My comment: Of course, racism would look different in Japan than the USA, since there are far fewer people of other ethnic origins living in relatively homogenous Japan.)

We talk about racism so much. We (in Japan) don’t have racism like here and it is hard for us to understand. It is about history here in this country, but we’ve got to keep going for the next generation. Most Americans are very negative and talk about racism. “Oh, white people are all like this and all black people are like that.” I like to learn about racism in the USA because the USA has big racism problems. They might all get tired talking about it, but it is a serious issue. It is hard for us to understand racist people. (R1)

Two students reflected on their own personal growth in relationship to readings and discussion on the CSP topic:

As I look back on the quarter, the readings inspired me to increase my knowledge of other cultures and races and ease racial views and tension. I learned not to stereotype and focus more on individuality. My mind has grown. This learning community helped me become more empathetic, sensitive, and accommodating to bridge the racial and perceptual gap between me and other people. (DR)

Talking about racism makes people see things from other people’s perspectives. It lessens the anger, if you are being discriminated against. If you talk about it, other people who were racist become less racist. I really liked the discussion. (R5)
Interdisciplinary

The third section of the broad theme called Program Content, is Interdisciplinary, which is further divided into three subsections: “What have I really learned?,” “The classes complement each other and encourage a new level of thinking,” and “Other English classes are boring.”

1. “What have I really learned?”

In this subsection, several students expressed concern that the interdisciplinary nature of the CSP did not provide a rigorous enough coverage of the concepts which would have been required in independent classes.

Two students compared the CSP to other individual classes and the CSP experience came up short:

If I go to separate classes, I can be very sure what I have learned because I have different examinations and papers and I know what I have learned. But in this class, I just ask myself, “What have I learned?” I don’t think that I learned enough for all the credits that I’ve earned. Because of the three hours, I don’t know, the teacher has to care about so many things. For example, as I talked to one of the teachers, she agreed that she had not enough time. She said, in this class, if I wanted to get speech or humanities credit, she has not covered all she teaches in an independent class. I think we learn less in the CSP than in independent classes. (R7)

I don’t think what we covered in any of the classes was as much as we could if it is separate classes. Not just the English, but also the Humanities and computers and everything. It is less, not just different. (FG)

Several students specifically commented that they did not learn as much in English 101 through the CSP as if they had taken a separate English class. The English 101 students were concerned that they did not get adequate preparation to take English 102 or do a research paper.
I am a little worried about what class I’m going to take in the future. For English 101 class, it is required to know MLA (Modern Language Association’s style of formatting) and other things. I have to know it for the next level of English class. But I didn’t really learn all requirements (in this class) for the (English 101) credits. At the same time, it is easier for less work? Did I really learn English 101? Am I really qualified to take English 102? If somebody asked me what I’ve learned, I don’t know if I learned. Some readings were pretty interesting and I enjoyed it, but I don’t know if I learned anything skill wise. (R2)

Yesterday, the English teacher was also disappointed in choosing the readings for the essay. Because of the different levels, she had to change the requirement for 101 and that is not the requirement in her other English 101 classes. She thinks the students get less challenge. (R7)

One student questioned the grading system and fairness that the assignments for both English levels (English 096 and English 101) were the same, and thought it was inappropriate that students earned credits for other classes that were rarely taught:

It wasn’t fair. (English) O96 and 101 had the same assignments and I don’t know how they graded. I don’t know what went into the grade? I don’t know what I learned. Some of the other classes that you could choose from like computers and English 299 we didn’t see much of—how could we get credit for it? (FG)

2. “The classes complement each other and encourage a new level of thinking.”

Although students struggled with the concept of making “connections” between concepts within the global theme of the class, some of them appreciated the call to a new level of thinking and found the exercise personally rewarding.

One student appreciated being “pushed” to make global connections:
The readings that we have are really interesting. For example, we are reading from different racial groups in America. It is real—that is what happened! We talk about what America really is since it is almost entirely international except the natives. I like the readings. They really push us to connect themes from readings, main points, linking and justifying. The classes complement each other and encourage a new level of thinking. (RS)

Another student commented on his struggles with the assignments:

The class allowed us to write about what we learned in the Humanities lectures in addition to all the readings. It was about relationships and connections. It was difficult to make the connections. I'm not used to thinking like this. I got a bad grade. Having to relate it all to the readings, too. Sometimes it was just hard work. We had to find one theme across all of these readings. (FG)

In a classroom observation, one of the teachers gave this direction:

“We are looking at connections, class. First person experience to third person, writing through the eyes of someone else”. Teacher calls on a student.

“How does this reading connect to the other readings and discussions?” A couple of minutes later... “I want to hear connections across the films, guest speakers, readings... Who wants to be Teacher of the Moment?” A student raises his hand and gives an illustration. (CO)

3. “Other English classes are boring.”

Several students specifically commented on the importance of including English as part of the CSP, as a means of providing an outlet (writing) for the new concepts they were learning, as well as a more interesting way of taking an English class.
One student compared taking the English courses included in the CSP with separate English courses:

I think this is really interesting. I've never done anything like this before, but I like it. I especially like that English is a requirement (for the Associate's degree) and people and regular English class is really boring. There, you just sit and listen to the English class and then go home and read and write and go to class again. Get the grade back, do it again. Yes, other English classes are boring (but required), but if it is combined with humanities class, we have more activities and more opportunities to talk and more ideas about what to write about. It is fun. The humanities class talks about communication, culture and gender differences, and it is important—everybody wants to know about it. You can be excited. It isn't just about listening and writing at home like other separate English classes. We do a lot of homework, but the class part is so fun! The humanities class helps bring up the good part of the English class and the English class brings up the good points of the humanities class. They complement each other and together they are really good. (R1)

Several students commented on the idea that using the CSP topics to illustrate “dry” grammar or punctuation information was a more interesting way to learn English:

When they explain grammar, they try to use the other subject to explain. Once there was a sentence about a communication principle on the screen and somebody said, “Oh, it is a run on.” They have spent a lot of time on writing. They want to make sure when you leave the class you know how to write. We write in describing the communication concept. We try to explain three communication concepts and try to avoid the overuse of commas. It is all combined. The last topic I wrote about was, “How do others perceive me?” So it was communication, English 101, and grammar. This idea is wonderful. I've seen other CSPs and you can do it. It is much better than taking separate classes. (R4)

It is usually the English class that is pretty stressful, because it is about writing and grammar, but the Humanities class we do more activities and more discussion and lots of topics, and
then go back to the English class and write about it what we discussed. So we have lots of ideas. (R1)

I've never had two teachers and two classes together before, but the topics relate a lot. We were talking about a paper for the English part and the way it connects and then the other humanities teacher talked about dialogue and communication. We saw connections in communication and expressed what we learned when we wrote a paper. It made it easier and it works. (R5)

Summary: Theme Two

In Theme Two, Program Content, students described their perceptions of the course content of the CSP, the overarching program topic of “racism,” and their perceptions of the CSP as a curricular model. The theme was divided into three sections entitled English Language Component, Topic, and Interdisciplinary. In the English Language Component, students discussed their impressions regarding including more than one level of English in the program, how the English component was delivered, and their perception of learning English as part of a CSP in contrast to taking a “stand alone” English course. In the section on Topic, students described their perceptions of the topic of racism and discrimination as part of the CSP. And in the section entitled Interdisciplinary, the dynamics of taking an interdisciplinary program as opposed to discrete courses was explored, including the concept of making “connections” across disciplines and student criticisms of the interdisciplinary model of instruction. A more detailed discussion of Theme Two will be presented in Chapter Five.

Theme Three: Program Structure

In the third theme, Program Structure, students commented on the way the CSP was structured including the logistics, the class make-up, and types and variety of class activities. This theme is divided into three main sections: Class Schedule,
Ethnic Composition, and Activities. Furthermore, two of the main sections are divided into several subsections.

Class Schedule

This section focuses on the concept of “Longer classes mean more time for relationship development.” Students appreciated having three hours together every day for in-depth discussion and getting to know one another.

“Longer classes mean more time for relationship development.”

Several students commented on the positive aspect of having three hours per day together to build relationships through in-depth discussions with fellow students and the faculty:

Here there is a large group spending 3 hours together. It is better for the student, I mean, between the students. In the Coordinated Studies, you have more time to communicate and it is good to make friends. We can make better relationships with students and teachers because the class is longer. (R7)

I really liked having a long 3 hour block of time together. You could do activities and wouldn’t have to think about the 50 minutes ending and running to the next class. You could dig down deeply in discussions. You could get to know each other’s meaning and build relationship and understanding. Longer classes mean more time for relationship development. (DR)

This has been a great experience. It is great for a first-timer. I was new to the college and it was good to get to know people through spending a lot of time together—3 hours a day! (R5)
Another student focused on the idea that one longer class session requires less homework (more time for other things) than three separate and distinct classes:

_If you have 3 separate classes, it is really difficult for me to concentrate and do my homework. And I won't have time for friends or anything but school._ (R3)

**Ethnic Composition**

This section is divided into two subsections: “Having our say, too,” and “It takes you faster into American society.” In this section, international students commented on the class composition in terms of the number of international and American students.

1. **“Having our say, too”**

Many students liked the fact that there was a fairly even number of international students and American students in the CSP. One international student reflected that with a larger majority of Americans in the class, international students may have felt “overshadowed” and without a “voice” in the class:

_Half international and half American feels like “home” and more comfortable. If there had been more American students, I think they would have taken advantage of that and international students wouldn’t have “had their say, too.” I don’t think the international students would have had a chance to express themselves. They (Americans) know that there are a lot of international students, so they try to mix more with them and not stick together. They have to communicate more with us._ (R3)

Another student commented that the composition didn’t have to be exactly 50/50, but also not dramatically disproportionate:
I don't think it matters if it is 50/50 or 60/40, but 90/10 wouldn't work very well. There would need to be more of the other group or one group would be overlooked. (R7)

A student wrote in his self-evaluation at the mid-term of the course about an experience being the only international student in a CSP group discussion:

I was the only international student in the small group with 5 Americans. I didn't feel confident to speak up because they were moving quickly through the questions (assignment). They are really enthusiastic. I tried to add a comment, but it took time and they moved on before I could finish. I like better having more equality in the group—international students and Americans. (DR)

2. "It takes you faster into American society."

Some international students felt that the class composition, with a significant number of American students, was a good introduction into American society, especially for an international student who was new to the USA.

Two students commented in their self-evaluations about the importance of the interaction with Americans in gaining useful communication and cultural skills:

This learning community is good, because of the equal mixes of international students and American students. It takes you faster into American society, even if the pace is sometimes fast for us international students. I'm sure these communication and cultural skills will help me everyday, to find a place to live, getting a job, make new friends, whatever. (DR)

As a new international student in this college, I think this class with half Americans and internationals was a good place to start and I am glad being a part of this class. I got to know people and made some friends and learned from them, and this was the most valuable experience to me. I think this first quarter was successful and I would like to use experiences and what I learned this quarter to improve myself to the next step. (DR)
In my classroom observations, I took the following notes:

*Several students are looking out the window at a protest rally on the street.*

*A Chinese international student asks an African-American student about why the people are protesting. The American student describes his interpretation of the historical significance and the current situation in Seattle. The Chinese student listens attentively and asks follow-up questions: “But are these people all from Seattle, or did they come from other places, too?” and “What does that sign over there mean?” (CO)*

*There are several clusters of 2-3 students sitting around the room during a temporary lull in class. Some international students and Americans are sitting together. I hear only English being spoken. A Japanese female turns to the African American female sitting next to her, “So, you’re going snow boarding tomorrow? Why is that so popular here in America?” (CO)*

Class Activities

This section is divided into three subsections: “This class is great for active participation,” “Some people feel more comfortable in small groups,” and “When you get out of class for an assignment, this is when you make friends.” In this section, students commented on their perception of the class activities included in the CSP.
1. "This class is great for active participation."

Students expressed positive comments about the wide variety of classroom activities and how conducive it was to stay engaged and have interaction with other students. Student gave an overview of the benefits of different types of activities routinely done in the CSP:

If we are doing seminars, we are divided into two larger groups which I think is good because we can hear many opinions from a lot of students. But for different things, maybe it is better with smaller groups. One time we had a group project where we met outside of school and talked about a reading and I thought that was really good. My group was all international students, but still we could interact more than in the class. (R2)

Sometimes they have seminars and groups. They divide the class in half and we have these seminars about the reading and we have some small groups and they always ask us to work with a person we don't know. It is really nice. (R7)

Every day it always different. Having different activities makes it interesting. (DR)

One student felt that the teachers strategically utilized these activities to encourage international students to share about their cultures and backgrounds. This student commented that he felt “validated” by the instructor when he shared:

Through lots of different types of activities, the teachers really try to get us to open up more and put the language barrier aside and say something anyway. Now I can see that some of the students who aren’t too comfortable with their English are beginning to speak more often. The teachers try to bring out different things from students’ different backgrounds. The way I look at things is different from other students. Nothing is wrong. They make you feel like your opinion is important, too, and I like that. They are really interested in finding out about our cultures—"they" means the instructors and other students. (R6)
Many students commented on the various classroom activities and games, about how much fun they were, and how they encouraged active participation:

This class is great with active participation because we have been placed in small groups sometimes, and we’ve participated in class activities for active listening like the telephone game where we passed phrases to and from one another, and many other activities and games. (DR)

All of the activities and games in this class make it so much fun. You make friends and it is great to active participation. This has helped me to socialize in a better way both inside and outside of class. (DR)

I like the activities. Sometimes we have games. Not just lecture. I like that better. For me, lecture is boring. We are sitting all the time. So, I think activities are a good idea to make the students feel active and not boring. (R2)

All of the different activities make you concentrate. If there is just one kind of activity, it is boring. When we do the seminar groups, we have one facilitator and one recorder and we have to prepare because we never know when it is our time so most people do their homework. (R3)

2. “Some people feel more comfortable in small groups.”

In this section, students discussed the activities they did in small groups. One student saw the small group activity context as less threatening than being in larger groups.

Sometimes when you are in small groups, it is better because it is smaller. Some people prefer small groups so they can freely give their opinion. They feel more comfortable. (DR)

A few students commented on small groups as a transition step to larger groups. The smaller groups allowed students whose native language wasn’t English
to get to know people and get used to expressing themselves—later they could move into larger group settings.

> I think it is good to have smaller groups of two, three, or four. Breaking into the smaller groups at the beginning instead of the big group gets everyone to participate and talking and then we bet back into the bigger group and we feel more comfortable. I think the small groups are helpful to get to know people. So far, I only know one or two people by name. (R6)

> They say that it is more comfortable for some people to talk in smaller groups and... yeh... that's how I feel (laugh). So, we start off in smaller groups and eventually move into bigger groups would be better. And, I think, I'm still getting used to it, but right now I can say that it's comfortable for me to pour the thoughts in small groups like that. I think it will take just a little more time for me to really feel o.k. talking out in the large class because, I think, you're afraid to give opinions because you are afraid they are wrong. You're afraid you'll say the wrong thing. There's two situations... either you're afraid that you'll say the wrong thing or you know you're saying the right thing but you're not going to say it good enough. So you hesitate and then somebody else says it. Not speaking out doesn't mean the student doesn't know. (R9)

Student comments below showed that they appreciated hearing others' opinions and arguments in the small group activity setting. Larger groups, they felt, didn't give people enough time or opportunity to speak.

> Everybody has different opinions. Everybody feels very comfortable speaking up. Especially in the small groups, everybody talks. Sometimes there are arguments. The activities and discussions in small groups are very helpful and really interesting. I've never taken this kind of class. We are assigned questions and we all work together to answer questions. It is a very good idea. In small groups, you need to mix all the Americans and all the internationals all the time into groups of maybe 4-5 people so everybody can have their opinion. (R2)

> Now we move more to small groups, so we're not all the time sitting and listening to the teacher. It is better than sitting
and listening. I think small groups are better because everyone is getting enough time to talk and in the big group sometimes there isn’t enough time for everybody to talk. (R5)

Seminars are big groups and there isn’t much going on. When they break us into groups with like 3, 4, it is really concentrated and this is what they are always doing. The teacher learned that with the bigger groups there is nothing going on. People are always participating in smaller groups. (R4)

The smaller groups also gave students a chance to meet and interact with other students, building relationships:

Twice a week we have big group discussions and every day we have small groups, like 2 people or 4-5 people. I like to get to know and talk to a lot of different people. The teacher try to make small groups with people you don’t know, so you get to know everybody in class and make friends. (R2)

Every small group seminar is a chance to speak. At the beginning, I was shy to speak in class. But after, I knew more classmates. I was getting used to communicating with my classmates from different countries. Some of them became my friends. We talked a lot and exchanged different personal and cultural information. I invited two of my friends to my apartment to have dinner. (DR)

3. “When you get out of class for an assignment, this is when you make friends.”

Students appreciated the opportunity to meet out of class for group projects, a class potluck and study groups. They felt that participating in these out of class activities was a very important component of relationship development in the CSP.

There was one particular out of class group project that made a lasting impression on several of the international students. They commented on their surprise at the strong level of participation and how meaningful—and fun—it was:
In my group, everyone showed up. We had real fun in the library and were almost kicked out because we were having so much fun. But we did a good job. One person was facilitator, one a note taker. Doing all that we understood the main point of the reading. We understood it real good. (R1)

At the beginning, I thought we’re not going to make it because I thought if we do something outside of the school, I mean, we’re not going to focus on the class but will just play around. But we enjoyed it and really talked about the reading. We spent almost 3 hours on it to discuss it. We think we have a difficult questions and still can not get the answer that satisfied. After 3 hours we still have not answered that we are satisfied. So we talked by phone. If everyone in the group is responsible for the study it is really good. (R7)

Some students also reflected on how their relationships with classmates deepened and became more personal as a result of having a less formal, but still focused, experience together without as many time constraints as in a formal class:

We met at a café on Broadway with people for the project. I thought everybody would only concentrate on their coffee, but it was really good. We did our job good. In class, we have a time limit, but at the café we could talk about other things, and discuss the book and could have a conversation about it. The relationship between us became more personal. We knew everybody already, everybody’s name and when we met out of class, I knew names. (R3)

I was with two Americans on the project and we talked a lot and people shared about personal things that happened in their life or someone they know. (R5)

Working with a partner or in a small group always gave me a chance to know other students. Especially I liked the group project outside of class because that was a great time to know other students and put us together to a goal, and I wish I had more outside projects. (DR)
The potluck was also cited by some students as a positive experience where they could get to know each other more personally, as the following comments taken from self-evaluation forms reveal:

*We had a class potluck. In the potluck, I enjoyed all kinds of food that everybody brought. But the most important thing was I enjoyed sharing such a wonderful time out of class with my teachers and classmates. Some of my classmates sang, some of them danced, and some of them gave a poem. They showed their styles and features. I got to know them better.* (DR)

*I have improved my English skills in such ways, as I am no longer afraid to ask questions if there is something I do not understand. The reason? We get to know our classmates pretty well in small groups and the group projects and the potluck. I especially enjoy meeting with classmates to work on assignments in coffee shops or anywhere outside of class. The potluck was so much fun to see what everybody can do. I have learned many more expressions and improved my listening skills.* (DR)

**Summary: Theme Three**

In Theme Three, Program Structure, students commented on the way the CSP was structured including the scheduling and class composition and the types and variety of class activities. This theme was divided into three main sections: Class Schedule, Ethnic Composition, and Activities. In addition, there were several subsections. Students reflected in this theme on the positive aspects of having longer sessions as leading to relationship development. In addition, they also perceived that the class composition of equal numbers of international students and American students was helpful both in gaining a quick introduction to American culture, and also feeling that they had a "voice" as international students, based on sheer representation. Finally, international students commented on how conducive the wide variety of activities in the CSP were in general toward active participation.
In addition, the students particularly enjoyed small group discussions and out of class assignments. A more detailed discussion of Theme Three will be presented in Chapter Five.

**Theme Four: Program Faculty**

In the final broad theme, Program Faculty, students described their perceptions of the instructors' teaching styles, how the students perceived the efficacy of the "team teaching" method, and how the faculty "managed" the classroom. Therefore, this theme is divided into three main sections: Teaching Communication Style, Team Dynamics, and Classroom Management. Furthermore, two of the main sections are divided into several subsections.

**Teaching Communication Style**

In this section, international students expressed their perception of the lecturing and communication styles of the instructors.

_"I have a hard time understanding indirect communication."_

Several students had strong feelings about the communication style the faculty chose for lecture and explanations. The comments that follow reflect the students' frustration with what they perceived as indirect and "roundabout" communication:

_If I ask the teacher, it makes me more confused. Yes, it happened yesterday. It wasn't me who asked, but there was an American student who asked the teacher and it made the class more confused when she explained it. And at the end, she just came back to the beginning. She talks about it again and again and never to the point. It is always in a circle. (R8)_

_The teacher talks in a round about way and don't give us the point. "Tell us the point. We are all confused." She is trying
to make it easier for international students to understand, but she talks in a roundabout way. She doesn’t have to go all the way around before coming to a point. (R2)

I had a hard time understanding the lectures and explanations. I wish it was direct and clear and to the point. I can’t understand my assignments. (DR)

One student reflected on her own personal mode of learning and that she had a “clearer channel” with one instructor:

I’m more used to one teacher’s style of teaching. I think I can learn... that channel is more connected and what she does I can usually understand more of her thoughts and her way of talking is clear. I can relate more to one teacher than the other. (R9)

Team Dynamics

This section is divided into two subsections called, “I like having two teachers” and “It’s better to give equal time to each teacher.” Both subsections focused on the unique dimensions of teach teaching in the CSP context.

1. “I like having two teachers.”

Several students commented on how much they liked having two teachers in the class. They felt that the two teachers complemented each other, interacting and even correcting each other during lectures and explanations to better communicate their meaning to students.

I like having two teachers and the first time of my life, I have two teachers in the same class. It is wonderful and they are always interacting and asking each other “Do you have any question?” and interrupting each other to add information. It is good because they share opinions, ya know, like, I don’t know if they plan it, but when one of the teachers is not sure she asks the other one, “Oh, am I right? Are you understanding me?” When one teacher explains grammar, she always asks the other teacher, “Any questions?” And she usually adds something. When a
teacher watches another teacher, they know what is missing and clarify. And it is nice because you don’t feel like dominated by one teacher’s style. I don’t know, but I think it is very nice. (R4)

The teachers are very organized and it runs smoothly. When one teacher has a difficult time making us understand, then the other teacher can step in and help us understand. I think it is good to have more than one teacher—they can help each other and help students. (R1)

One teacher starts the lesson and talks for a while. Then we have a break and the other teacher continues. It is easier to get all the information from two voices than one. Sometimes they interact. If one disagrees, one will say, “No, no, I don’t think so.” (R3)

In my classroom observations, I saw many examples of this, including the following excerpt:

The two teachers are “playing off” each other. One is lecturing, and the other inserts, “Let me give you an example of what she is talking about.” She writes up an illustration on the board. (CO)

2. “It’s better to give equal time to each teacher.”

One source of frustration was that students perceived one teacher taking more time in class than the other. Students felt it should be more proportionate. The following students didn’t feel they were able to learn the subject matter required from the instructor who didn’t have as much time to lecture:

One of the teachers is dominant and talking most of the time. One instructor only had ½ hour and explained very fast and students said “What? What?” Maybe it is better to have one
teacher and one class so this doesn’t happen. It happens a lot and always the same way. (R8)

There are two teachers in the class, and one is kind of English teacher and another is Humanities and Speech teacher or something like that. I think the part of English is too much in this class. Just like yesterday, we talked about English lecture for the whole almost 2½ hours and we just have ½ hour (for humanities and speech). It is supposed to be 1½ hours, you know, half and half because there are two teachers and most of the students are taking 5 credits of English and 5 credits of Humanities or Speech. And we don’t really learn the skill or knowledge in the Humanities or Speech part. (R1)

One student stated that he liked having two teachers because it is more interesting than just one instructor, but that they must communicate and manage their time. If one teacher has only a little time to cover a lot of material, the class can’t keep up, both listening and taking notes in a second language.

What they learn is just English. And sometimes the English part is too long. You know, too many corrections. For example, yesterday it was really in a hurry since there was only a little time to learn Humanities. I mean, she is teaching and also have to write down the notes on the board and when you are writing you cannot focus on listening to the teacher—even if you know English really well. If she has 1½ hour like half of the class, it is okay. I mean we can catch up. But, I think it is better to give even time to each teacher. I like two teachers in the class because it is boring to only have one, but they should keep their time balanced and not talk too long. Since the teachers don’t stop each other, they should have better communication between about time. (R7)

Classroom Management

This section is divided into two subsections: “Oh, how rude!” and “In my country, we respect more the teacher.” Students commented on cross-cultural differences in how students behaved in class and how instructors managed discipline in the class.
1. "Oh, how rude!"

Several student comments below reflect their surprise and frustration at how much the instructors put up with in terms of classroom discipline and the way their classmates sometimes acted in class, particularly related to cell phones and other distractions:

*Sometimes some of the students’ cell phones go off in class. I think, “Oh, how rude”. But the teacher doesn’t say anything about it. If I were the teacher I’d say, “Get out of the class or turn it off.”* (R1)

*Sometimes the teacher would tell the students to turn off the cell phones, and sometimes they didn’t tell them at all. One time one of the teachers got really mad. They (the students) just kept doing it. This didn’t happen all the time and they weren’t always so bad. Sometimes I think they (the teachers) should have kicked them out.* (FG)

One international student reflected on the behavior of some American students in class in contrast to international students:

*Some American students are mostly talking with friends in class and interrupting the instructors. The instructors don’t do anything. We (international students) are mostly quiet, more quiet than the Americans.* (R2)

2. “In my country, we respect more the teacher”.

Some international students specifically commented on what they perceived as a “lack of respect” for the teachers and classroom experience. One student tried to interpret why some of the American students behaved this way:

*In my country, we respect more the teacher. Sometimes I think they (the American students) are spoiled. I think it might be their first year of college and just came from high school. They are getting to know what a college class is like, and don’t know what they can’t do. Sometimes the instructors said something to
the students. I told one of the teachers that I didn't like this kind of thing. She said that was the way they were raised. In my country, even if we don't agree (with the teacher), we just be quiet because it is respectful. (R4)

Two students contrasted the student-teacher interaction in the CSP to classrooms in their home country and expressed frustration that students weren't reprimanded:

Students here are more direct and free. I am surprised about how the students treat the teacher. It is just different here. You don't switch on your cell phone in class. No eating. They don't have much respect for the teacher. Where I come from, teachers get respect. But here, students can say whatever to the teacher. The teacher doesn't say it is offensive. Where I am from, the student would get reprimanded for it. (R6)

I don't know if the Americans treat the teachers like this all the time, and it is different with Indonesian students. Indonesian students have more respect for the teacher. And in this class, some of the students just cut them (the teachers) off, too, and say what they want, but maybe this is American culture. And sometimes the teacher gets angry, too. But it happens again and again. (R8)

Summary: Theme Four

Theme Four, Program Faculty, was divided into three main sections:

Teaching Communication Style, Team Dynamics and Classroom Management.

Two of the main sections were divided into several subsections. In this Theme, students described their perceptions of the instructors' teaching and communication styles and expressed a strong preference for "direct" communication. Students also commented on their perceptions of the "team teaching" method, enjoying the interaction and complementary aspects of team teaching, but commenting on their frus-
tration when both instructors did not appear to have equal time in class to present material. Finally, international students perceived some American students as being “rude” in class, and commented on how this behavior would not be tolerated by faculty in their home countries. A more detailed discussion of Theme Four will be presented in Chapter Five.

Section Three: Summary

This chapter presented findings from the qualitative data collected throughout this qualitative study exploring international student perceptions in a coordinated studies program. Section One of the chapter provided a snapshot of the setting and the students enrolled in the CSP classroom, as well as describing the research process in regards to the trustworthiness of the data. In Section Two, the multiple data sources, including classroom observations, in-depth interviews, a focus group interview, and document review were reported, providing a portrayal of international student perceptions of the CSP experience. The findings of the study revealed several important factors describing the students’ experience. The factors were reflected in the following four broad themes: program integration, program content, program structure, and program faculty. These four themes are embedded with concepts cited in the literature on international student adjustment and on curricular learning communities. A summary and discussion of these findings are presented in Chapter Five, along with implications of the study and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study. The results presented in Chapter Four are reviewed and examined within the context of the research purposes and question. The data are also discussed in reference to the literature presented in Chapter Two and new literature that seemed appropriate given the nature of each theme. The chapter ends with a discussion of implications and a set of recommendations for future research. This chapter begins with an overview of the study.

Overview of the Study

This study presented an in-depth exploration of international student perceptions of a coordinated studies program at Seattle Central Community College. Although much research has been conducted on international student adjustment at U.S. higher education institutions and the benefits of participating in curricular learning communities has been clearly documented, there remained the question of how international students would perceive participating in a Coordinated Studies Program that provided opportunities for interaction with American students.

In response, the following research question guided this study:

What is the experience of international students in the Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?
Sub-foci included:

- International student perception of the CSP content and pedagogies
- International student perception of CSP classroom and extra-curricular student-student and student-faculty interaction.

Research Methodology

In conducting this research project, a phenomenological research methodology was used (Patton, 1990). Qualitative data were collected and analyzed in three phases. Phase one included participant observations and individual in-depth interviews. Broadly-based, open-ended questions were designed along with a list of more focused questions. The interview format was pilot tested on two students. Nine students who responded to the researcher’s request were interviewed in the final study. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The student interviewees reviewed their own transcripts and verified their intended meanings. The transcriptions were analyzed systematically for themes. Data were coded, categorized, and analyzed. Data were organized into the following four themes: (1) program integration, (2) program content, (3) program structure, (4) program faculty. Data within each theme were then grouped under sub-categories. Themes were presented with examples of student’s statements to illustrate each theme.

Phase two involved an interactive focus group which included six of the original nine students, and served to elaborate upon the themes and subcategories, as well as to verify the trustworthiness of the four themes and subcategories. The
third phase consisted of the analysis of student artifacts. Artifacts that were reviewed included student mid-term and final self-evaluations, class syllabi, instructor's handouts and assignments, and students' final grade reports.

The findings presented in Chapter Four described the themes and issues that emerged regarding the CSP experience for the nine participating students, and illustrated the trustworthiness of the study as marked by the articulated perspectives from students and triangulation of data sources.

Discussion From Within the Context of Related Literature

What is the experience of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?

As introduced in Chapter Four, the findings of this study revealed several dimensions to the experience of international students in the CSP. These data were presented through the following broad themes: program integration, program content, program structure, and program faculty. These findings are further discussed in the section that follows, with the subcategories interspersed in the text.

Program Integration

In the first broad theme, Program Integration, students described the degree of connection they felt in the program. They gave examples of what helped them feel connected, or conversely, what aspects of the CSP were not conducive to experiencing program integration.
Connectedness

In the introductory weeks of the college term, many international students were surprised by the overall CSP experience. They had never taken a class like this before. In comparison to other classes in the U.S. or in their home country, there was so much group interaction, student participation, and so little instructor lecture. Several students felt reticent to speak out in class due to their perceived lack of English ability, or their cultural background and past educational experience. They said that they would need a few weeks to feel comfortable enough to speak out, but that eventually they would, due to their sense of supportedness in the CSP. "Students are very supportive." Some students commented that in the CSP, they felt that Americans were interested in them and in different cultures. American students were singled out by international students as being approachable and particularly helpful. They were viewed as being genuinely kind, considerate, and interested in international students. These American students “didn’t seem to mind” being asked to help. The international students commented on the sense of “supportiveness” that the acts and attitudes of helpfulness established.

Not only were Americans helpful in assisting international students with class assignments, but several international students remarked that some Americans actually assumed a “bridging” or “translating” role to facilitate oral and cross-cultural communication between international students and the faculty, or between international students and “less supportive” American students. An American student might say, “Oh, look, there is a hand back there!”, pointing to the back of the room where an international student had timidly raised his/her hand to ask a question. Since international students sometimes took longer to communicate their ideas, some of these special “facilitators” actively encouraged them to express
themselves and not worry about language skills. These helpful Americans also reminded other American classmates to listen patiently to non-native English speaking international students. The Americans were bridging the communication and cultural gaps between international students and faculty and international students and other American students. In a study by Ike (1997), students commented on the "lagging behind" that comes when professors use examples very much familiar and common to domestic students but not to international students, and how important it is for somebody to intercede and explain these concepts to all of the class.

"Now I'm talking to everybody." After about the midterm, international students felt much more at ease talking to their classmates and participating in discussions. The class became a very comfortable environment because of this interaction, getting to know each other. The students all knew each other by name, had been involved in small groups and out-of-class activities with virtually all of their classmates, and had overcome much of their initial apprehension. Many international students called the class "comfortable," felt "at home," and one student described the experience of coming into class as like walking into a "comfort zone." Students felt that the CSP provided more interaction than other classes and that the interaction was "sincere," that students wanted to get to know each other and share cultures, and that their opinions were valued.

Several international students commented also on the idea of relationship development. Specifically, they saw the importance of participating in this CSP experience with its opportunities for interaction and relationship development in the beginning of their stay in the U.S., when they didn't know anybody and/or didn't have a support system in place.
Research by Tinto and Love (1995, p. 77) on students participating in a different CSP experience, found students saying that in the CSP, it’s easier to participate in class because, “I know everybody. They know me and I know them. We discuss everything and are good friends.” Many students in the study talked about getting help from their peers. The social support that they were able to build as a result of being in the learning community translated into academic support. The opposite may have been true, also. That is, these students in learning communities had many opportunities to provide academic support for each other, and that may have contributed to higher levels of social support. The CSP created a home base for students and gave them a group to belong to and care about, reducing feelings of isolation that many students experience.

The CSP at Seattle Central provided a sense of supportedness, according to the international students in the study. A lack of social support, feelings of alienation, and general dissatisfaction with life in the United States are often the experience of international students studying at colleges and universities in the U.S., particularly those who do not have significant interaction with American students. In a study by Hull (1978), the frequency of interaction and the nature of relationship with others and students’ satisfaction were assessed. The findings showed that satisfaction with the amount of social interaction with Americans and more and closer relationships with Americans were related to higher satisfaction with life in the United States. Schram and Lauver (1988) investigated a sample of 266 university international students with regard to their feelings of alienation. Results showed that higher frequency of social contact with Americans was negatively correlated with alienation.
Furthermore, Lam (1997) investigated friendship formation of international students from Taiwan who were studying in the U.S. The study found that opportunities to interact and shared experience and similarities with American students were two key positive factors for international students' friendship development. It was also revealed that language and cultural differences required extra effort and that time must be expended for Taiwanese students to interact with Americans, which made students feel these interactions stressful, but very worthwhile.

Several international students in this current study talked about the degree and quality of personal contact in the CSP experience, interacting on a daily basis with Americans and other international students. In addition, they commented on the importance of this interaction as an introduction to American culture and developing a support system in the U.S. The Coordinated Studies Program provided a context for international students and American students to interact and communicate, both orally and cross-culturally. Although, in the beginning, many international students were reticent to participate in class, later, students felt more connected and comfortable in the CSP community.

Lack of Connectedness

Not everybody in the CSP actively participated in discussions and other course assignments, interacted openly and freely, or was interested in being helpful. In fact, some aspects of the CSP experience were perceived as adversely affecting international students feeling connected and integrated.

Apathy and lack of participation on behalf of some American students was not viewed in a positive light by international students. In fact, international students were quite disturbed by the fact that some American students did not do their own work, expected others to "pick up the slack," and seemed apathetic.
“Hey, buddy, you’ve got to do it.” According to Liu (1996), the Asian cultural emphasis on obligation and responsibility could make an Asian student work twice as hard at lesson preparation to find out the answers to the questions in the book before being asked in class. Liu states that cooperative efforts by members of a group towards achieving collective goals are emphasized in Asian culture much more than individualistic competitiveness. These students, therefore, are surprised and upset when classmates are unprepared and apathetic in class. Several international students in the CSP were very bothered by the attitude of these American students.

In addition to the “apathy stressor,” some international students found that it was difficult to connect with American students across cultures. In other words, not all American students actively attempted to engage with all international students, and vice versa. “Maybe they are just more comfortable with people who are the same as them?” Some international students hypothesized that American students and international students that were more similar racially and culturally had closer interaction. In addition, some international students also commented that they, too, preferred interacting with other international students who were racially and culturally similar, than international students who were different. For a few international students, some American students were racially and culturally more similar than other international students, and these international students chose to interact mostly with Americans. In fact, it seemed that some international students and Americans interacted a lot and some international students and American students hardly interacted at all. One student reflected on the idea that Americans might be more comfortable with international students if they perceive the international students as physically, linguistically, or culturally similar to them and
less comfortable with international student who are perceived as more different. Another international student hypothesized early in the quarter that interaction between Americans and international students might improve later into the term when Americans began to get used to “us.”

In a study by Wilson (1996), some international students spoke about a wish for greater social contact with Americans, but found this difficult to initiate. Students expressed confusion about American students’ behavior. It was difficult for the international students to decipher the rules and norms of discourse and social engagement, and their efforts were compounded by language difficulties. Furnham and Bochner (1986) have referred to the anxiety experienced by a loss of familiar signs and symbols of social interaction.

Further, a study by Kusaka (1995) found that most Japanese students reported that their friends were other international students from Asian countries and/or Asian Americans. The reasons given for not being able to form friendships with Americans was value differences, and some students were apprehensive about intolerance of Americans toward their limited English ability.

Findings in a study by Cross (1995), also reported difficulty of students from Asia in developing friendships with Americans, and the researcher attributed this finding to differences in the relationship formulation and maintenance between collectivist cultures and those in individualist cultures. Other researchers pointed out that among all international students, those from East Asia tended to be the least involved socially with Americans, expressed the highest feelings of alienation, tended to associate the most with co-nationals and other international students, and reported the largest number of adjustment difficulties (Alexander et al., 1981; Church, 1982; Kang, 1972; Pederson, 1991; Schram and Lauver, 1988).
Furnham and Bochner (1982) pointed out that the country of origin was a significant factor to international students in their ability to adjust to the American educational system and society. The greater the differences between a students’ home country and the host country, the more difficulty the students would have in adjusting to the latter. This assumption coincides with other researchers’ claims on the effect of cultural distance (Huntley, 1993; Ichikawa, 1966; Klein, 1977; Pederson, 1991). In contrast, it has been found that, in general, European students adapt more easily to the American life than do international students whose native cultures, languages and academic institutions differ greatly from those in the United States (Huntley, 1993). It was also found that Europe as a home region, was negatively correlated with alienation (Schram and Lauver, 1988).

According to Sandhu (1994), while developing a meaningful relationship is especially important for international students, concerns about differences in values and customs which inevitably affect interpersonal relationships may arise. Differences in customs, culture and language are often the roadblocks to mutual understanding and friendships.

One noteworthy remark by Kusaka (1995) was that of the danger of making stereotypes toward international students. International students from a certain country or region may not necessarily behave stereotypical ways and should not be expected to behave similarly. Pederson (1991) stated, “There has been a tendency to confine international students to a rather narrowly defined role, isolated from their peers, when, in fact, there is probably as much difference between two international students from different countries as between either of them and any American student” (p. 14).
International students also commented on different aspects of language and linguistics as being large hindrances to feeling connectedness with other students. "I think language differences are getting in the way." One student commented that his lack of English language proficiency held him back from communicating freely, and that relationships with Americans would improve with his ability to speak and understand English well. Other students complained that even though they were native English speakers, having a different accent made communication stressful.

Wilson (1996) reported that English language skills were very important in integrating into the United States culture, participating in class, and completing written and reading assignments. Wilson's study also reported students feeling extremely frustrated in class, as they had difficulty understanding and being understood. This finding confirms those of Meloni (1986) and Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) who also reported the difficulties experienced by international students due to the lack of English proficiency. In a study by Ike (1997), international students indicated that they feared being ridiculed because of their poor English or their accents.

Kagan and Cohen (1990) surveyed 92 international university students to better understand their cultural adjustment to the United States. It was found that English speaking was the single factor that contributed to both cultural adjustment (acculturation) and to personal and social adjustment. Speaking English at home was a characteristic of students with good cultural adjustment, while students who did not speak English at home were described as poor cultural adjusters.

Dolan (1997) states that many international students feel that their inability to communicate in English acts as a barrier to all other adjustments they must
make. The difficulty to communicate in English prevents them from getting social support from American friends. A lack of social support from American friends can prolong the culture shock phase of acculturation. Another significant positive relationship was found between students' reports of perceived oral/aural English language skills and interest and success in building relationships with Americans. However, the authors noted it was not clear whether good English language skills produced the communication ability necessary to form such relationships, or whether having the relationships with Americans fostered the acquisition of higher levels of English proficiency.

Some international students emphasized the difficulty to both express opinions—a concept which may not be encouraged in some cultures—and use a high level of English proficiency in a "real time" public forum. For the shy or less-than-confident student, learning out loud, "doing it live," develops very slowly (Gabelnick et al., 1990). This may partially explain the hesitancy of some Asian students to participate actively in classroom discussions that may involve debate or disagreement. In addition, there is the added stress that the student might be perceived as not having done their homework, if they didn't actively participate. For Asian students, in particular, this possible interpretation would be negative since academic achievement is extremely important.

A Japanese student commented on the cultural differences in language communication styles between Americans and Japanese, and that she needed to learn to communicate more directly in America to prevent misunderstanding. Kusaka (1996) and Story (1982), in separate studies, also found that Asian international students seemed to try to assimilate into the American society by adjusting the way they behave and communicate. Story (1982), for example, comments that
Americans value openness and the ability to confront and criticize, but that such directness may be viewed as offensive and discouraged in other cultures, posing a great problem in cross-cultural interactions. Story further discusses that despite the inherent conflict between Americans students and students of other cultures, direct conflict rarely occurs between East Asian students and Americans, because the East Asian students are aware of this conflict and learn to accept and adapt to it.

Program Content

The actual courses in the CSP included English, Speech, International Communication and Computing. Students had some key concerns with the program courses and the manner in which they were delivered.

English Language Component

One of the largest sources of discontent for the international student in the study was the way the English component of the program was handled. Since there were two separate levels of English included in the CSP offerings, a level just below college readiness (English 096) and college level composition (English 101), students felt that the two groups of students should be separated during English lessons. "The English level varies tremendously." Students felt dissatisfied and frustrated that it was combined and they perceived that their needs weren't being met. For example, students who were registered for English 101 felt that too much time was "wasted" on English 096 concerns and not enough on more advanced English skills and content. Likewise, students registered for the 096 level felt that some of the content was too difficult and they wanted attention to more appropriate content and grammar. In general, students weren't happy with the arrangement.
The strong focus on the topic of racism, particularly during the first few weeks of the course, was also unpopular. "**People just talk about racism too much.**" Some students were simply uncomfortable talking about the topic in any depth or in some cases, even thinking about it. Some didn't recognize the relevance, since they didn't see that racism was a big problem in Seattle and they personally didn't experience it. One student questioned why he, an international student, needed to learn about the concerns of immigrants from other countries. Instead, he felt that he, as a student studying abroad in the United States, should be learning about "American issues" such as Native Americans. Students had interesting conceptions about who Americans were—as well as conceptions about what issues were problems in their own country. One Japanese girl commented that Japan didn’t have racism issues like America (my note: any foreigner living in Japan will strongly disagree with the concept that racism in Japan doesn’t exist). Many students expressed their concern about the topic and some even dropped the course, citing "the topic" as the reason.

Later in the quarter, the theme broadened to "discrimination," in general, as opposed to mostly racial issues, so students were able to discuss gender, socio-economic, generational, and other ethnic issues. "**Now it isn't just about black and white, but more things that are relevant to us.**" Another student commented that he now appreciated the topic and its relevance to their particular CSP class comprised of so many different nationalities and ethnicities. Many students commented on their personal growth as a result of examining this topic from multiple perspectives, becoming more empathetic, sensitive and accommodating toward others.
According to a study by Wilson (1996), whether or not international students experience racism varies tremendously. However, international students did appear to be aware of an “outsider” status, which is related to unfamiliarity with language and custom, and a sense that the host nationals do not have the time or patience for them.

**Interdisciplinary**

Several students expressed concern that the interdisciplinary nature of the CSP did not provide a rigorous enough coverage of the concepts which would have been required in independent classes and asked themselves *“what have I really learned?”* Students compared the CSP to other individual classes and the CSP experience came up short. One student questioned the grading system and fairness that the assignments for both English levels (English 096 and English 101) were the same, and thought it was inappropriate that students earned credits for other classes that were rarely taught. Several students specifically commented that they did not learn as much in English 101 through the CSP as if they had taken a separate English class. The English 101 students were concerned that they did not get adequate preparation to take English 102 or do a research paper.

In general, students perceived that the interdisciplinary nature of the CSP did not allow for any single course content included in the “package” to be covered to the full extent that an individual course would. They also questioned how to assess what they had learned in the CSP. In addition, some students did not recognize or value the more experiential aspects of the program, but instead felt that the CSP was a “worse” model of instruction than independent courses, not just “different.”
According to Finley (1990), there is a persistent concern about interdisciplinary programs regarding what happens to traditional content when it is adapted to a coordinated studies mode. This is particularly relevant in a community college, where transfer students and receiving four-year universities are concerned about course equivalencies. As Finley (1990) points out, “critics fear that in the attempt to integrate disciplines, important nuances of a field are abandoned” (p. 52).

In addition, there may be other preconceived ideas at work. According to Gabelnick et al. (1990), English as a Second Language faculty frequently speak about how some students believe that learning can occur only if the teacher is lecturing, and about how long it takes to convince these students to develop and articulate their own ideas.

Although students struggled with the concept of making “connections” between concepts within the global theme of the class, some of them appreciated the call to a new level of thinking and found the exercise personally rewarding. “The classes complement each other and encourage a new level of thinking.” The readings and assignments which students stretched to complete exemplified the interdisciplinary nature of the CSP. Students both appreciated and struggled with the exercise of drawing connections across concepts and disciplines. They enjoyed finding the linkages between courses, and some thought it helped them learn the concepts and material better by seeing it presented from perspectives that crossed content areas. In fact, the overlap of topics and assignments blurred the lines between courses so that students were not required to segment all the information they researched into separate compartments in their minds. They learned instead of just memorized.
The research of Tinto and Russo (1994) acknowledges that the degree of traditional content relinquished by adapting to a CSP mode is compensated for in the gains students make in learning “how to learn,” in learning to value the diversity of perspectives, and in increasing student ability to connect different disciplines. For some students, this trade off is viewed as a positive one. For others, not.

Several students specifically commented on the importance of including English as part of the CSP, as a means of providing an outlet (writing) for the new concepts they were learning, as well as a more interesting way of taking an English class. “Other English classes are boring.” Students perceived that the interdisciplinary approach of a CSP allowed English composition—with its “dry” grammar and punctuation—to be taught with a more dynamic approach. For those students who already had experience with separate English classes, the CSP was clearly a superior way to teach and practice English concepts. In fact, one student commented that without an English component in a CSP, there was really no point in running the program—it was integral and effective.

Tinto and Love (1995) found that the English Composition instructor could focus on the form of writing and research paper while the history instructor could focus on the content of the research paper—history. Students could hand in the same paper to both professors, but each was teaching different skills and information.

**Program Structure**

The Program Structure theme included the schedule of the classes, the ethnic composition of the class, and the types of activities found in the CSP.
Class Schedule

Students appreciated that all of the classes in the CSP schedule were required classes for their degrees (not electives) and that the schedule was a block of several hours at one time. "Longer classes mean more time for relationship development." Three hours together every day was very conducive for in-depth discussion and getting to know one another. This finding is consistent with the theories of relationship development which suggest a pattern of people spending time together and becoming involved in various activities as the relationship develops (Adelman et al., 1987). The time together increases the chance to exchange personal information and promote understanding and trust. The longer time together, as well as a strongly recommended block of time after class to work together on projects, were only possible because of the way the learning community was structured—that students went to the same classes together and, therefore, had the same schedules in class. A study by Tinto and Love (1995) also found that the competing demands of work, financial considerations, family obligations and commuting time combined in such a way that learning communities had to be structured so that they met degree requirements and anticipated students' schedules.

In addition, since the content of the courses overlapped, it freed up time because the students did not have to be reading entirely different things for each course. Having one longer class session each day required less homework (more time for other things) than three separate and distinct classes.

Ethnic Composition

Many students liked the fact that there was a fairly even number of international students and American students in the CSP so that the international students were "having their say, too." One international student reflected that with a larger
majority of Americans in the class, international students may have felt “over-shadowed” and without a “voice” in the class. Another student observed that the instructors tried to accommodate second language learners, since they composed half of the class, by insisting that everybody speak slowly and explain colloquial language. This may not have happened if the numbers of international students hadn’t been so large. Even with the relatively even numbers of Americans and international students, one international student resented the “overly” active oral participation of certain American classmates as a waste of time, class domination, and not respecting others’ interests by talking about something irrelevant to the content in the discussion. Most comments were very positive, however, and one of the most commonly heard remarks was regarding appreciation for the tremendous ethnic diversity in the class and the cross-cultural sharing that transpired on a daily basis.

Tinto, Goodsell-Love, and Russo (1994) reported on another CSP experience which also had a multi-ethnic (immigrants) class composition: “The CSP (demographic make up) encouraged students to express the diversity of their experiences and world views. The diverse ages, ethnic backgrounds and life experiences of students became part of the class content” (p. 19).

Some international students felt that the class composition, with a significant number of American students, was a good introduction into American society, especially for an international student who was new to the USA. “It takes you faster into American society.” Students commented about the importance of the interaction with Americans in gaining useful communication and cultural skills. Many aspects of the life experiences of international students studying in the U.S. require interaction with Americans, both in and out of the academic arena. Interna-
tional students typically must interact with American instructors, administrators, and students in the academic arena as well as know how to function in other contexts when they are shopping, banking, renting accommodations, accessing social services and other arenas.

MacCalla (1979) suggests that international students have left behind meaningful relationships in their life and would like to develop new stable relationships in the new environment. Most international students do not know anyone or know only a few people when they come to the U.S. There are practical reasons to get to know people—finding jobs, courses to take, where to get necessities—as well as emotional and psychological needs. The development of effective skills in interacting with members of the host culture may be utilized as a means of social support in resolving personal problems related to the adjustment process as well (Labor, 1965).

Research literature agrees that international student satisfaction and well-being in the United States are integrally tied to host country interaction and understanding American culture, in general, and the development of close friendships with Americans, in particular Locke (1988), Rohrlich and Martin (1991), and Searle and Ward (1990).

Social contact with in-group members (host nationals) gives out-group members the opportunity to observe and evaluate life from the in-group member’s perspective, thereby leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the out-group member’s way of life (Amir, 1983).

The unique ethnic composition of the class gave international students “voice”. In addition, international students who were new to the United States received the opportunity to interact with other American and international students
in this program, which helped them to develop friendships at a time when they had not yet developed a support system in this country.

Finally, according to a further research recommendation by Dolan (1997) in his dissertation on how to improve international student adjustment at an American university, institutions should:

. . . develop a cultural adjustment course that would be required of all international students during their first semester. The course would be offered not only to international students, but would seek enrollment of American students as an important aspect of the course. The course would. . . incorporate small group work, where international students and American students learn from each other. . . This would be an interdisciplinary course that would fulfill academic requirements from several departments in the areas of communication, human development, social studies, cultural appreciation and diversity (p. 132).

Class Activities

"This class is great for active participation." Students expressed positive comments about the wide variety of classroom activities and how conducive it was to stay engaged in the class and with other students. The class was genuinely "fun" for students. It was rarely dull or boring since the teachers employed so many different types of activities and learning strategies.

A Tinto and Love (1995) study reported that classes in learning communities are lively. Students often were placed in small groups and given questions to discuss, or professors led discussions with the entire class. In general, all students had the opportunity to express their views.
Additionally, according to a Tinto and Russo (1994, p. 19) study which compared students participating in CSPs with students in separate classes, "Students in the CSPs reported being substantially more involved in course (academic) activities and activities involving other students than did students in comparison, non-CSP classes."

One student felt that the teachers strategically utilized these activities to encourage international students to share about their cultures and backgrounds. The faculty members focused on cross-cultural topics or content from diverse perspectives to support the experiences of students who might not have been supported in classes that centered around European-American content. Students commented on feeling "validated" by the instructor when they shared experiences from their home country.

Students commented on the importance of the "small group activity" in the CSP classroom, in particular. "Some people feel more comfortable in small groups." The students recognized the small group activity as being critical, especially for the non-native English speakers or those not comfortable speaking out in class. Smaller groups were a transition step, less threatening than being in larger groups. The smaller groups allowed students whose native language wasn't English to get to know people and get used to expressing themselves—later they could move into larger group settings. Even for students who were comfortable expressing themselves in larger groups, the small groups were preferred as a means of allowing participants enough time to speak and hear others' opinions and arguments.
In a study of international student oral participation in American classes, Liu (1996) found that lesson type and class size were important factors and that seminars and small group discussion lessons usually facilitated oral classroom participation. Large class sizes and discussion inhibited oral classroom participation for many international students.

This finding is in agreement with that of Ferris and Tagg (1996), whose survey found that the frequency of the various interactive tasks were clearly correlated with class size or groupings; i.e. the smaller the class size, the more interactive the tasks.

Finally, the smaller, more intimate groups in the CSP classroom, were another way to build relationships with classmates. But, it was clear that students strongly felt yet another CSP activity was the overall best strategy for relationship development.

"When you get out of class for an assignment, this is when you make friends." Students overwhelmingly appreciated the opportunity to meet out-of-class for group projects, a class potluck, and study groups. They felt that participating in these out-of-class activities was a very important component of relationship development in the CSP. There was one particular out-of-class group project that made a lasting impression on several of the international students. They commented on their surprise at the strong level of participation and how meaningful—and fun—it was, and of the friendships that were formed or strengthened. Many mentioned that they wished there had been even more out-of-class projects to en-
hance the experience. It was clear that relationships with classmates deepened and became more personal as a result of having a less formal, but still focussed, task together without as many time constraints as in a formal class.

The study by Tinto and Love (1995) also found that although the in-class group may seem to be more directly related to the aim of the CSP, out-of-class groups served to solidify social ties that were begun in the classroom.

**Program Faculty**

In the final broad theme, Program Faculty, students described their perceptions of the instructors' teaching styles, how the students perceived the efficacy of the “team teaching” method, and how the faculty “managed” the classroom.

**Teaching Communication Style**

"I have a hard time understanding indirect communication." Several students had strong feelings about the communication style the faculty chose for lecture and explanations and just didn’t understand some of what was going on in the class. Not understanding the faculty well was very frustrating for students since the CSP was already a unique experience with many adjustments to be made. Students had to function in a new model of academic program (the CSP learning community) which encompassed several interdisciplinary courses and required different dimensions of thinking and processing. In addition, there were demands for active classroom participation from students whose native language wasn’t English and whose culture might not encourage active class participation. Students
felt very discontented at what they perceived as indirect and "roundabout" communication. One student described her own personal mode of learning and that she had a "clearer channel" of understanding with one instructor than the other.

Related to this, Liu (1996) found that the individual instructors' teaching style is also an important factor affecting students' classroom participation and learning. Lively, humorous, and "strategic" teaching styles are likely to encourage student participation. Liu (1996) also strongly recommended repeating key points, and usage of the black board, overhead projectors and handouts to clarify points and aid understanding.

In addition, Tinto and Love (1995), in a study on interdisciplinary CSP learning communities, found that it was very important in this context to give students clear instructions. Without these, students, in groups, were liable to drift off topic, or talk about the topic, but not in any focused, directed way. With clear instructions and goals, students accomplished much in their small groups. Consistent expectations, direct communication and organizing frameworks reduce the confusion of the competing expectations of multiple courses.

**Team Dynamics**

*I like having two teachers.* Students, in general, really liked having more than one teacher in the class. They felt that the two teachers complemented each other, interacting and even correcting each other during lectures and explanations to better communicate their meaning to students. The students provided
several examples of times when the instructors would tease each other or argue good-naturedly, and that this livened up and enriched the class immensely. For most students, this was their first experience with more than one teacher in the classroom.

This finding concurred with Tinto and Love's study (1995), where students commented on the professors communicating with each other, coming to consensus on some mutual assignments, and being aware of each other's expectations for other assignments.

However, the students had some stipulations for team teaching that they felt very strongly about. "It's better to give equal time to each teacher." There was a great deal of discontent expressed about the perception that one teacher was taking significantly more time in class than the other. Students felt it should be more proportionate. The students felt "short changed" and didn't think they could adequately learn the interesting content that the instructor who didn't have as much time was supposed to cover. The students felt that the two teachers should better manage their time so that all components of the program could be covered. Students also felt that, practically speaking, they were unable to take notes and comprehend a "rushed" lecture by one instructor, particularly since English proficiency was an issue.
Classroom Management

Students commented on cross-cultural differences in how many American students behaved in class and how instructors managed discipline in the class. Their general consensus: "Oh, how rude!" Students were surprised and sometimes upset at how much the instructors put up with in terms of classroom discipline and the way their classmates sometimes acted in class, particularly related to cell phones and other distractions. Some felt the student disrupters should have been disciplined. The students would spontaneously comment during interviews with me about the poor behavior of their American classmates, but then later in the interview would sometimes attempt to "soften" their comments, perhaps as to be "non-judgmental". One student, in fact, laughingly said, "See, I'm behaving exactly as the CSP is teaching me not to act."

"In my country, we respect more the teacher." Most of the international students commented on the differences between American classrooms and classrooms in their home country. They felt that American students had comparatively little respect for the teacher and for the classroom experience. The situations that occurred in the CSP were troubling to the international students emotionally, as well as distracting to them as part of classroom interaction. Several of them hypothesized on why American students behaved as they did. They felt it might relate to lack of maturity, family breakdown, and lack of focus.

Not to deter from the comments noted above which were made by a variety of international students from both Asian and non-Asian countries, but one partial
explanation of this reaction from Asian students might be that the cultural context from which they come is quite opposite to the American classroom context. A study by Buys (1993) found that Asian students traditionally and culturally place high value on the preservation of social harmony and avoid "...public argument, disagreement, unpleasantness, or offense" (p. 132). For Asian students, in particular, the concept of disagreeing with the teacher in a class setting is unacceptable and disrespectful. These findings are corroborated by other researchers (Vernon, 1982; Abbott, 1970). Further, in a study of Asian students' perceptions on classroom participation, Liu (1996) noted the following student comments: "not participating in class is a way to show respect for the teacher," "oral participation might be a waste of other's time in a big class discussion," "oral classroom participation is rude and egocentric if one asks too many questions," and "participation is only necessary when one doesn't understand and is desperate to get an answer." These perceptions reveal a general trend toward refraining from engaging in classroom participation. 

Observing American students actively participating in a "argumentative" or "debating" fashion, could easily be construed as "rude and disrespectful."

Further, in a study by Ike (1997), international students also found disrespect for faculty very troublesome. International students in his study generally agreed that many American students don't have enough respect for teachers. One example they cited was not coming to class on time. They felt that in many countries, teachers are more empowered to control their classes, discipline students, and maintain order in their classes as they see fit. In the United States, according to
Ike’s study, international students perceived that teachers do not seem to have this power. International students simply are shocked to see teachers and students having strong and heated arguments in class. The international students reflected that in most cases, these American students’ point of view is that they paid for the courses and, therefore, can do whatever they want in the classroom, including coming in and leaving whenever they want.

Discussion From the Context of the Researcher’s Personal Reflections

The results of this study hold several implications for community college educators. The most compelling implication is that international students can experience a tremendous amount of interaction with American and other international students in an academic learning community such as this, particularly when it combines a relatively equal mix of international students and American students. This coordinated studies program was effective in fostering interaction between international students and American students and faculty and introducing international students to the academic structures of a college; therefore, it was influential in enhancing the social and academic integration of international students in the campus community.

A second implication of this study is the realization that coordinated studies faculty play an integral role in determining whether students receive a positive or negative experience in the program. Faculty who understand cross-cultural communication, foster cross-cultural interaction in class, pay attention to their own
idioms, slang, and rapid speech, and have a direct communication style to prevent misunderstanding and are adept at managing small group interaction will have the most success working with international students. To that end, educators and institutions might consider investing in comprehensive faculty development activities that afford faculty members opportunities for growth, including cross-cultural communication and interaction, as well as how to effectively facilitate collaborative/cooperative learning.

Based on this study, faculty at institutions of higher education who have international students in their classrooms can consider utilizing small group discussion activities and out of class assignments. Small group activities are less threatening than large group interaction and more conducive to active participation and relationship development, particularly to those students whose native language is not English. International students find the small group activities strategic in furthering relationship development, whether the activities are out-of-class academic projects or social activities such as potlucks.

Another implication of this particular study draws attention to the impact the cultural and ethnic diversity of the class has in what students perceived as a positive learning experience. For international students, it is important for them to adapt to the host culture and function in it while maintaining their own cultural identity. The adjustment of international students will be enhanced if they are in a context which includes American students who respect and become familiar with their cultures. Faculty should be cognizant in the development of learning commu-
nities to exploit the contributions that a diverse student population provide, creating opportunities to explore and understand different worldviews.

English proficiency, cultural background, and personality are important factors with regard to the oral participation of international students in college classes. Students without strong English language skills will have difficulty interacting and participating in class. A student’s personality and cultural background can also influence whether or not he/she will participate in class. An outgoing personality can offset a lower English proficiency. Likewise, cultural values often inhibit even strong English speakers from oral participation.

International students will perceive the behavior of classmates in different ways and these differences can lead to distress and misunderstanding. Some of these behaviors and attitudes might be punctuality in coming to class, usage of cell phones, talking out of turn, not doing one’s own work in group assignments, or showing a lack of “respect” to classmates or the teachers. There are many reasons for these strong preferences toward classroom behavior, including the international students’ cultural background, prior educational experiences in their home country or the United States, and the classroom management practices of the instructors.

If I were to speculate based on this study, the related literature, and my experience in international education, I believe many of the determining factors to the tremendous amount of interaction and sense of supportedness reported in this study were a result of the following factors: (1) relatively equal numbers of international students and American students in the class so that neither group was a minority.
and both groups had "voice," (2) prolonged and meaningful engagement, several hours per day over the course of a term, with focussed discussion; (3) a topic and theme that was relevant, interesting, and capitalized on the tremendous global diversity in the class; (4) providing the types of activities in the course that stimulated interaction, such as small group work both in and out of class; (5) faculty who had cross-cultural communication skills and direct and clear communication, who promoted and motivated cross-cultural communication among the students, and who were skilled at facilitating effective collaborative/cooperative learning strategies.

Many other tentative implications could be drawn from this study, however, the data presented from the Seattle Central context is relevant primarily to that context alone, and before establishing any similar programs in other contexts, the site, students and overall program would need to be carefully studied.

Suggestions for Future Study

The topic of international student participation in cross-cultural curricular learning communities is replete with opportunities for further research. If we are to better understand how to enhance the international student experience in a community college setting through the venue of a curricular intervention, I suggest future research targeting three areas of inquiry:

1. Research that targets the student arena: Research can be conducted which studies curricular learning communities including different nationalities of
international students and different backgrounds of American students as well as different proportions of international and American students. Another study might be the perception of American students participating in this particular model of CSP which includes a significant number of international students. In addition, there could be research on the perception of international students toward the various communication styles of different faculty. Finally, there could be a study to determine if international students who have participated in a CSP, or a CSP composed of both American students and international students, have a differing level of overall satisfaction with the U.S. college experience than international students who have not participated in a CSP.

2. Research that targets the CSP faculty arena could include a study on the perception of faculty in a CSP setting which includes significant numbers of international students and American students and focusing on a global theme. There could also be a study on the perception of faculty in a CSP in other contexts, such as one which includes different nationalities of students, different courses, different class size, and a different college climate. Finally, another worthwhile study could be the efficacy of different modes of delivering more than one level of English within the CSP context.

3. Research that targets the CSP content arena might study the experience of international students in a CSP with a different theme or course selections to
determine which courses and themes will promote interaction with American students, an introduction to cross cultural or American cultural themes, and enhance overall satisfaction with the college environment. In addition, a further study might look at the various activities within a CSP in another setting to determine which are most conducive for international students to learning, interaction, and relationship development.

The results of this study reported here are important as they contribute to the understanding of international student experience within a community college setting, and specifically, whether participation in a curricular learning community with American students can enhance the experience of international students. In this period of increasing numbers of international students in American community colleges, there is a clear mandate for research of this type. It will hopefully lead to better understanding and more effective interventions, which will facilitate positive adjustment to the community college experience and, ultimately, personal and academic success and satisfaction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the following question:

What is the experience of international students in the Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?

Sub-foci included:

- International student perception of the CSP content and pedagogies
International student perception of CSP classroom and extra-curricular student-student and student-faculty interaction

To that end, a qualitative research strategy formed the design for this study, thus providing an explicit understanding of important insights relating to student perceptions.

Though the study did assess the student perceptions of the CSP experience, as articulated by the students, the study was not an assessment of the program itself. That is to say, this study was not intended to determine to what degree the CSP achieved its intended goals. Rather, the study’s goal was to characterize the student’s experience via participation in the program.

In response to the guiding question, “What is the experience of international students in the Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College?,” clearly, students found that the coordinated studies program provided for them a unique educational experience. Of great importance, students found that the experience addressed both social and academic arenas in their lives.

For most of the international students in the study, the sense of supportiveness and relationship development opportunities were the most important feature of the experience. These students were able to build relationships with both American students and other international students through prolonged cross-cultural interaction in and out of class. All international students valued the cross cultural learning and the introduction to American culture the CSP context provided.
The interdisciplinary nature of the CSP was, in general, viewed positively, though, for many students it was a big stretch since these types of learning strategies may not have been experienced in the past by many students. Of the various activities in the CSP, students appreciated the small group work as the most rewarding of the in-class activities, and also enjoyed the out-of-class group projects and social activities.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS FORM
Application for Approval of the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

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Project Title: Perceptions of International Students in a Coordinated Studies Program

Present or Proposed Source of Funding: None

Type of Project: Student Thesis

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Type of Review Requested: Exempt

Signed: ___________________________    Date: ___________________________

Principal Investigator
Purpose: This study focuses on the perceptions of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program at a community college. What we learn could help community colleges better serve the international students enrolled in academic programs. Prior research indicates that many international students have a difficult time with academic and social integration on college campuses. We would like to see how an intervention might change that pattern.

1. Procedures: During the quarter the Coordinated Studies Program is offered, subjects will participate in five interviews and be observed in class on three occasions by Andrea Insley. The following academic quarter, she will facilitate a focus group of the students who were interviewed and she will interview three faculty who taught in the Coordinated Studies Program. The first student interview will take approximately one hour. Participants will be given unstructured prompts related to their experience and perceptions of the Coordinated Studies Program. The other interviews will take less time and will be used to clarify what was discussed during the prior interview or to introduce a question which may have been raised during an interview of another participant or from a class observation. Faculty interviews will take approximately one hour. Andrea Insley will meet with each participant at mutually agreed time and place. Interviews will be tape recorded if the participant agrees, and participants may ask to have the tape recording stopped at any time. If the participants do not agree to be tape recorded, Andrea Insley will take notes by hand or with a computer. During interviews, Andrea Insley will also take field notes on such things as possible non-verbal messages being given by subjects and what may be happening in the surroundings. Andrea Insley will transcribe the interviews. Participants will be offered an opportunity to review transcripts of the interviews and what is written about them in the dissertation and may clarify what they have said or the impression they were trying to make. The classroom observations will take place approximately three weeks into the quarter and again at approximately the 9th week. During observations Andrea Insley will take field notes on the setting, verbal and non-verbal interaction between student-student and student-teacher. Andrea Insley will facilitate a focus group during the quarter after the Coordinated Studies Program, comprised of the students who were interviewed and wish to participate. The focus group will be another opportunity for Andrea Insley to clarify transcripts and correct or validate themes that have emerged from her analysis. Faculty interviews will take place after the Coordinated Studies Program, student interviews and focus group are completed.

1. Risks and benefits. There are no foreseen risks to or direct benefits for the participants.
2. **Subjects.** Andrea Insley will meet with up to 24 international students in the Coordinated Studies Program at ________ Community College to explain the study, and to determine interest in participation. Of those international students who express an interest in participating, Andrea Insley will choose eight to twelve students to participate in the interviews, observations and focus group. The faculty members who are teaching the Coordinated Studies Program will also be asked for an interview at the end of the program. All members will have been asked and will have agreed to participate in the study.

3. **Informed consent document.** The copy of the informed consent document is attached.

4. **Method by which informed consent will be obtained.** When a participant orally agrees to participate in the study, a time and place for the first interview will be arranged. The informed consent document will be explained to the participant at the first meeting, and the interview will start after the document is signed.

5. **Confidentiality.** Any information obtained from the subjects will be kept confidential to the extent the law allows. Participants will select their own pseudonyms and will be identified only by those pseudonyms in the transcripts and any reports or presentations. The only people who will have access to this information will be Andrea Insley and George Copa who will verify what Andrea Insley has written, if necessary. The audio tapes will be erased when the study has been completed. Participants will be allowed to correct the transcripts of the interviews and advise Andrea Insley on anything that she writes about them in the dissertation. This includes deleting information which could reveal the identity of the participants.

8. **Framing questions for the initial interview.**

   Key research questions are listed below. In a phenomenological interview process, themes which emerge from the transcribed data, or interpretations made by the student researcher during the analysis of the data, may result in additional interview questions.

   - Tell me a little about your prior educational background.
   - How would you describe the Coordinated Studies Program at ________ Community College?
   - What do you think is the purpose of the Coordinated Studies Program?
   - What is it like to be a student in the Coordinated Studies Program?
- What do you think of the instructor role in the Coordinated Studies Program?
- What are your perceptions of the class content, or course work?
- What kind of student is best suited to the Coordinated Studies Program and why?
- How is the Coordinated Studies Program the same or different from other classes you have taken in the past?
- What kinds of in class or out of class interaction do you have with your fellow students—both American and international?
- What kinds of in class or out of class interaction do you have with your instructors?
- Have you used what you are learning in the Coordinated Studies Program in other parts of your life and, if so, how?
- Of all the things you are learning in the Coordinated Studies Program, what has been very useful to you?

9. **Approvals.** The researchers will acquire a letter from the Coordinated Studies Program faculty and Associate Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences agreeing to participate in this study.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTS
A. **Title of the Research Project.** Perceptions of International Students in a Coordinated Studies Program

B. **Investigators.** George H. Copa, Associate Professor, and Andrea Insley, Doctoral Student.

C. **Purpose of the Research Project.** This study focuses on the perceptions of international students in a Coordinated Studies Program. What we learn could help community colleges better serve international students enrolled in academic programs. Andrea Insley explained the study to me, and I informed her that I would like to participate.

D. **Procedures.** I understand that as a participant in this study the following things will happen:

1. **Pre-study Screening.** I participated in an information session conducted by Andrea Insley in which she explained the study. I was asked if I might like to participate in the study. I indicated that I would like to participate and I set up an appointment for an interview with Andrea Insley.

2. **What participants will do during the study.** I will participate in five interviews, three in class observations and a focus group. The first interview will take approximately one hour. I will be asked about my general perceptions of the Coordinated Studies Program. The other interviews will take less time and will address things that may have been unclear to Andrea Insley. Andrea Insley and I will meet at a mutually agreed time and place. If I agree, interviews will be tape recorded, and I can ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. I will be offered an opportunity to review transcripts of the interviews and may clarify what I have said. If I do not agree to be tape recorded or ask to stop a tape recording, Andrea Insley will take notes by hand or with a computer. Regardless of whether or not interviews are tape recorded, Andrea Insley will take notes about the interview and our surroundings. In addition, I will be observed three times within the context of the Coordinated Studies Program classroom. I will also participate in a
focus group with 8-12 other international students during the quarter following the Coordinated Studies Program. I will be asked to review and correct the transcripts of interviews, observation notes and notes from the focus group session, and to advise Andrea Insley on anything she writes about me in her dissertation.

3. **Foreseeable risks or benefits.** There are no foreseeable risks or direct personal benefits.

4. **Confidentiality.** Any information obtained from me will be kept confidential to the extent the law allows. Andrea Insley will transcribe the tape recordings. I will be identified by a pseudonym that I choose in the transcripts of my interviews, notes from the observations and focus group, as well as in any reports or presentations on the study. My real name will not appear anywhere in the study. The only persons who will have access to my audio tapes and transcripts will be the investigators. The tape recordings of interviews will be erased when the study has been completed.

F. **Voluntary Participation Statement.** I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that if I withdraw from the study before it is completed all information that I have provided will be destroyed.

G. **If You Have Questions.** I understand that any questions I have about the research study or specific procedures should be directed to Andrea Insley, 11924 SE 217th St., Kent, WA 98031, (253) 630-1896; or George H. Copa, School of Education, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331, (541) 737-8201.

If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I should call Mary Nunn, Director of Sponsored Programs, OSU Research Office, (541) 737-0670.

My signature below indicates that I have read and that I understand the procedures described above and give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.
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APPENDIX C

MEMBER CHECK LETTER AND FORM
Dear xxxxxx

Thank you again for participating in my research project to explore the perceptions of international students in a coordinated studies program. Your input is very valuable and contributes greatly to the validity of this study. As I mentioned prior to the first interview, the next phase of the study requires your additional assistance, particularly as it relates to the review and validation of your comments from the interview as you recall them. Please find enclosed a copy of the transcribed recording conducted last month.

When reading through the script, please keep in mind that I am mostly interested in the substance of what you said, not grammatical correctness. Please feel free to make any comments in the margins or on a separate piece of paper. In addition, please complete the enclosed sheet for my records.

Please bring the transcript and enclosed sheet to our next interview on ___________. At that time, we can discuss any points of clarification.

Thank you so much for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Andrea Insley, Doctoral Candidate
MEMBER CHECK FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW

Please check any that apply to your review of the transcribed data for the individual interview:

- I have reviewed the document and find it acceptable as is.
- I have reviewed the document and have noted changes in the margins.
- I have reviewed the document and have supplied additional comments on a separate sheet of paper.
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM ADMINISTRATORS

AT SEATTLE CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
October 5, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my support for the research project Andrea Insley is planning this year, involving International students in our Coordinated Studies Programs (CSPs).

Seattle Central has set the trend for community colleges in establishing and supporting curricular learning communities, in particular the Coordinated Studies model of learning community. Our commitment to CSPs at Seattle Central has served as an excellent strategy, both for faculty renewal and enhancing student academic and social integration.

Seattle Central also has one of the largest International student enrollments of any community college in the United States. Our International students often have a difficult time integrating into campus life and building relationships with American students. Our American students clearly benefit from interaction with students from other regions of the world.

This project involves establishing a CSP with 50% American students and 50% International students, and then conducting a qualitative study of the perceptions of the International students. It is our hope that the experience will be a positive one for both the International students and American students, and that the information gained through the study will assist us in refining future programs to enhance the success and academic enrichment of International students.

Sincerely,

Rosetta Hunter, Associate Dean
Humanities and Social Sciences
September 30, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the research project involving international student perceptions in a coordinated studies program (CSP) this fall quarter 1999. Seattle Central has been committed to offering CSPs as a learning community model across the curriculum for the past 15 years. International students have not traditionally enrolled in CSPs in significant numbers. This pilot program draws together an equal number of American and international students in a 13-credit, interdisciplinary program including three instructors teaching English, speech, intercultural communication, and computer applications. Our demonstrated experience with CSPS, combined with our high percentage of international students and our initiatives to globalize our campus and curriculum, contributes to making this a compelling study.

Sincerely,

Ron L. Hamberg, Ph.D.
Vice President for Instruction

RLH/j