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CROSS-CULTURAL NARRATIVES

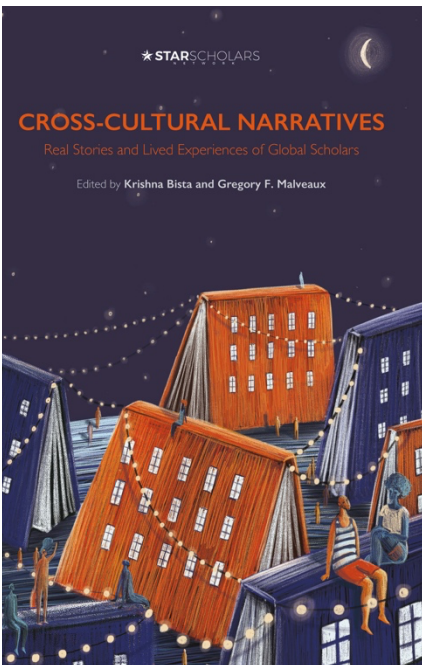
Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars

Edited by Krishna Bista and Gregory F. Malveaux



Cross-Cultural Narratives

Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars



**Cover Design by
*Costanza Lettieri***

On the cover illustration, I represented a sort of a city with book buildings: an allegory of a welcoming "university" through education and exchange - becomes everyone's home. A starry night here conveys a sense of tranquility and appurtenance. I drew deliberately not identifiable figures so everyone can recognize in the little characters. I add characters with different colors. I prefer to use "unreal" colors because I like to talk about "humans" and not to a particular race or gender. I would like everyone to be able to recognize themselves in the small figures.

Send me your thoughts at
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Cross-Cultural Narratives

Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars

This book provides an essential forum—giving primary voice to a group not often heard—for international students to share their unique experiences, trials, triumphs, and paths of acculturation in US higher education. In their own words and experiences, they detail how their world touches our American campus communities and academic settings. Filled with pathos, their narratives are steeped in angst and triumph, disappointment and humor, and loss and eventual victory. Selected international student narratives for this book bring a non-western perspective that allows for anyone involved in US higher education to gain increased insights into how we serve our students. This work contains 28 narratives written by international students and scholars from around the world. This book is a unique resource for faculty, students, and administrators interested in learning more about the lived experiences of international students and scholars.

EDITORS

Krishna Bista, EdD, is a Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy at Morgan State University School of Education and Urban Studies, Maryland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7893-8275>

Gregory F. Malveaux, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of English and Literature and is the College-wide Coordinator of Study Abroad and International Education at Montgomery College, Maryland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2456-6581>

Call for Book Proposals

The STAR Scholars Book Series seeks to explore new ideas and best practices related to international student mobility, study abroad, exchange programs, student affairs from the US and around the world, and from a wide range of academic fields, including student affairs, international education, and cultural studies. STAR Scholars publishes some titles in collaboration with Routledge (Taylor & Francis), Springer, Palgrave Macmillan, Open Journals in Education (OJED), Journal of International Students, and other university presses. Scholars interested in contributing a book to our current and future book series are invited to submit a brief proposal directly via this [form](https://www.ojed.org/index.php/gsm/Series). All chapters will go through the standard review process before a decision is made. <https://www.ojed.org/index.php/gsm/Series>

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Dr. Chris R. Glass & Dr. Krishna Bista

For questions and submission, email at Krishna.bista@morgan.edu

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Praise for the Book

Cross-Cultural Narratives: Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars offers a collection of timely, eye-opening, motivational, and inspirational essays for everyone who wants to enjoy cross-cultural conversations and either relate to or better understand the experiences of international students and scholars.

Masha Krsmanovic, PhD

Assistant Professor of Higher Education & Student Affairs
The University of Southern Mississippi, USA

Listening to the cross-cultural narratives of international scholars is the most important way to understand the meanings of their intercultural experiences. Stories can capture experiences in the most comprehensive and holistic way.

Wei Liu, PhD

Global Academic Leadership Development Program
University of Alberta International, Canada

Enclosed are beautiful stories of experiences both distinct in their multicultural complexity and common to humanity. They highlight the individual's unique struggles on cross-cultural terrain and the resilience that empowered their resolve. You will inevitably be left with an inspirational sensitivity and connection to people of all backgrounds.

Nancy Thomas, PhD

Assistant Professor, School of Behavioral and Social Sciences
Colorado Christian University, USA

Cross-cultural narratives catch our attention and engage us in an ongoing conversation with more profound understanding and empathy to bridge different cultural divides. The stories allow us to learn from other experiences in shaping, strengthening, or challenging our opinions and values. These stories need to be told and retold.

Tram Anh Bui

Research/Teaching Assistant
Brock University Faculty of Education, Canada

This is a great resource for researchers, university staff, and students to (re)situate themselves in the day-to-day reality of international students at U.S. universities. In our data driven world abounding with

Mei Jiang, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership
Texas A&M-Commerce, USA

This important collection amplifies student voices, offering a wide range of rich experiences. I found myself transported back to my time as an international student, reliving how central it was to my own development, and feeling newly inspired.

Elena de Prada Creo, PhD

Vice Dean for International Affairs
Facultad de CC. Empresariales y Turismo, Spain

I found the essays within the volume thought-provoking, and the essays often encouraged me to think beyond students' academic pursuits to consider their entire lived experience within a new country. The writing is often captivating and easy to read. Anyone interested in higher education, international students, and students' well-being will find this volume useful.

Brittany N. Hearne, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology
University of Arkansas, USA

Beautifully crafted reflections that provide a glimpse into the varied lived experiences of international students from around the world. At times painful to read, this book gives unique insight into the trials and triumphs experienced by those who bravely study in a country outside their home. A must-read for anyone who encounters international students!

Heidi Fischer, PhD

Visiting Assistant Professor, Dept of Educational Foundations & Leadership
Old Dominion University, USA

This book, using the narratives of international students and scholars through storytelling, provides a lens through which to have a deep understanding of their triumph in intercultural communication, acculturation, and interaction with local residents as well as their acculturative trials, isolation, stress and struggle in participating in international education and global student mobility. It is a valuable sourcebook for international students, scholars, researchers, and international education managers and providers.

Mingsheng Li, PhD

Associate Professor, School of Communication, Journalism, and Marketing
Massey University, New Zealand

Each narrative in this book is a journey through the challenges, lessons, and memories not only of educational and international experiences, but mostly of life-changing experiences!

Mateus José Alves Pinto

Department of Tourism
Universidade Federal do Paraná, Brazil

The powerful stories in this book reveal the courage and resilience of international students. The stories also demonstrate the importance of crucial connections with the host country and how students experienced support and kindness from individuals who reached out to be there for them.

Susan Drake

Professor, Department of Educational Studies
Brock University, Canada

Cross-cultural Narratives: Real Stories of Global Scholars offers first-person accounts of life journeys by international students. The book takes readers into the complex learnings and discoveries as well as intimate encounters of international students with others and with themselves as they reflect on their cross-border experiences. It is not only a timely material but an inspiring one that amplifies voices of international students across the globe.

Sarah Jane Lipura

University of Auckland/ Ateneo de Manila University

A much needed, in-depth look at the experiences of students engaging in cross-cultural education, this collection of essays highlights the complexity and diversity of students' stories.

Gudrun Nyunt, PhD

*Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, USA*

This is a wonderful book to read. It includes all the personal stories of cross-cultural experiences. After reading, you would be more aware of international people's struggles, inspired by their efforts, and proud of their triumphs!

Jing Hua

Assistant Professor of Management
Troy University, USA

Professors Bista Krishna and Gregory Malveaux's book includes a beautiful selection of study abroad stories from students and scholars from different parts of the world. This volume highlights the value of living and studying abroad for personal and educational growth. I recommend this book to faculty and administrators interested in learning more about the experience of international students.

María del Mar Gámez García

Assistant Professor of Spanish
Central State University, USA

These narratives are very interesting and enlightening. Understanding the challenges and struggles experienced by international students and scholars, especially when they first arrive in a different country, would help the host professionals and community members support them as they navigate their new situation. This understanding could help the internationals adjust more quickly and with less stress.

Virginia B. Vincenti, PhD

Professor Emeritus, Department of Family & Consumer Sciences
University of Wyoming, USA

Given the emerging threats associated with the rapid rise of nationalism and nativism, higher education stakeholders need to hear the stories of global students and scholars now more than ever before. The narratives in this impressive, timely volume significantly facilitate greater understanding and mutual respect.

Stephen P. Wanger, PhD

Associate Professor, Higher Education Administration
Don & Cathey Humphreys Chair in International Studies
Director, Joint Center for Student Affairs Research and Professional Practice
Oklahoma State University, USA

Cross-Cultural Narratives

Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars

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Morgan State University, Maryland, USA

Gregory F. Malveaux

Montgomery College, Maryland, USA



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Lanterns Across The Sky: Stories of International Students Across Diverse Global Landscapes

CALL FOR ESSAYS | Deadline: October 30th

Call for Essays

Everyone has a memorable story of studying or working outside the country of birth. What is your story about studying overseas? What are your cross-cultural experiences from exchange programs or study abroad? Are you a current or former international student? Tell your stories of exploring the words, the world, and the wonders.

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International Student Experience (long-term/degree seeking programs/experiences)

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Faculty/Staff Experience (International faculty, study abroad mentors, Fulbright scholars)

Languages

You can write your story/essay in any of the following eight languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Russian, Spanish

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Share a story: Focus on moments, encounters, and experiences that shaped your journey as an international student. Tell a story that no one else could tell. Your story can be about friendship, service, freedom, discrimination, injustice, activism, belonging, family, courage, resilience, citizenship, academics, spirituality, parenthood, discovery, inclusion, self-discovery, growth, etc.

Tell your challenges and lessons. Flavor your writing with idioms and figures of speech from your language. Paint the picture. Be concrete about what you have seen in your travels, academic encounters, woes, and wows!

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A story or essay of 1000-1,500 words; Typed in 12-pt size, Times Roman font; double-spaced; 1-inch margins on all sides; includes page numbers. We accept Microsoft Word files only.

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About the Editor

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Gregory F. Malveaux, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of English and Literature and is the College-wide Coordinator of Study Abroad and International Education at Montgomery College, Maryland. His previous books include *Study Abroad Opportunities for Community College Students and Strategies for Global Learning*, w/Raby (IGI Global, 2019); and *International Students at US Community Colleges*, w/Bista (Routledge, 2022).

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Foreword

Lanterns Across the Sky

Most of us in international education are still yet to grasp the magnitude of the negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. To justify to the administration why an international office needs more financial and structural support than ever during these difficult times, we turn to surveys, reports, statistics, and literature reviews to convince our colleagues why and how international education plays a vital role in fostering a culture of mutual understanding and empathy. Sometimes, in the midst of process, procedures, policies, and regulations, we deviate our focus from why we entered the international education to begin with: for the people, for the cultures, for the languages, for the cross-cultural narratives, and for the hearts. Very much like the lanterns across the sky that carry stories, cultures, and hopes, the book brings us back to the origin of our path—to create pathways for our students so that, through an education abroad experience, people embrace differences and comprehend, at a deeper level, the core of human connections. This book puts the “I” back into each of our story, the heart of education.

Divided into four parts—Intercultural Struggles and Triumphs, Essential Mentorships and Friends, Trials with Stress or Isolation, and Research and Career Paths through Graduate School—, this book reminds us the narratives that are all too familiar to us but we did not bother to put them down on paper; the stories that rise about paper work and regulations; and the stories that we hear all the time in our offices and classrooms. It documents raw emotions from exchange students’ internal struggle (“People Are People” by Nakano; “Finding Human Connections” by Balakerishnan; “I Don’t Belong Here” by Mocanu; “Transnational Study Abroad” by Richter); an honest gaze into power relations between professors and students when cross-cultural expectations complicate the interactions (“Power Hierarchy Between Teacher and Student” by Maurya; “Journey of Finding Myself” by Ren; “A Visit to My Mentor’s Class” by Dhungana); struggles to negotiate one’s cultural and linguistic identities with media-fed images (“Defying Expectation” by Gubbins; Tae Kwon Do in the Spiritual Capital of Morocco” by Anderson); strategies one needs to create a positive experience (“Social Isolation and Loneliness” by Neria-Pina; “Humans, Animals and Plans in Alaska” by Philip; “Back to Cuenca” by Zamora); and the resilience needed to survive and thrive so one can pursue a professional path in the host country (“An International Student Experience” by de Sousa; “It Was Not Just a Stomachache!” by Anand; “The Road Not Taken” by Koo).

With writers from more than a dozen countries, this collection of stories can be utilized in so many ways: as a daily reminder of why we do education, international education for that matter; as a testimony to the beauty and triumph of human spirit, despite of difficult cultural and political encountering; and as a starting point of

discussion with the next generation of young professionals the value of education abroad and how they can be the cultural ambassador for education diplomacy.

This collection is stories of the hearts. Open your heart and soul when you read it. You will come away full of hope and inspirations, rejuvenated with aspirations that brought many of us to international education to begin with.

Jia-Yi Cheng-Levine, PhD

Dean, International Affairs & Global Engagement

College of the Canyons, California, USA

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We would like to thank the following colleagues for their feedback on the early draft of this book as well as for their endorsements:

Masha Krsmanovic, PhD, *The University of Southern Mississippi, USA*
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Jing Hua, *Troy University, USA*
María del Mar Gámez García, *Central State University, USA*
Virginia B. Vincenti, PhD, *University of Wyoming, USA*
Stephen P. Wanger, PhD, *Oklahoma State University, USA*

Finally, we are grateful to the following judges for their contribution to the STAR Global Essay Contests including lead scholars: Rafiu Bello and Schnell Garrett from Morgan State University, Maryland.

Krishna Bista
Gregory Malveaux

Introduction

International students have left a phenomenal impact on US higher education and study abroad. Their presence has dramatically influenced the policies and practices of American colleges and universities, having brought eclectic, ever-evolving learning approaches that come from varied nations.

According to the Institute of International Education, 914,095 international students were enrolled at US colleges and universities in 2021/2022. As a result, US colleges and universities have been the beneficiaries of increased talent, resources, and good old-fashioned humanity. With the presence of international students comes increased globalization in the classroom and curriculum, the fostering of a diverse campus setting, a steady flow of the world's top talent pool, and, economically, the “best bang for the buck” (more net tuition revenue per student than US students).

This book provides an essential forum—giving primary voice to a group not often heard—for international students to share their unique experiences, trials, triumphs, and paths of acculturation in US higher education. In their own words and experiences, they detail how their world touches our American campus communities and academic settings. Filled with pathos, their narratives are steeped in angst and triumph, disappointment and humor, and loss and eventual victory. International students' narratives selected for this book allow for anyone involved in US higher education to gain increased insights into how we serve our students but through the lens of non-westerner.

The book includes 28 narratives written by international students and scholars from around the world. These narratives are organized into four major thematic parts: PART I: Intercultural Struggles and Triumphs; PART II: Essential Mentorships and Friends; PART III: Trials with Stress or Isolation; and PART IV: Research and Career Paths through Graduate School. This book is a unique resource for faculty, students, and administrators interested in learning more about the lived experiences of international students and scholars.

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Gregory F. Malveaux, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of English and Literature and is the College-wide Coordinator of Study Abroad and International Education at Montgomery College, Maryland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2456-6581>

PART I
Intercultural Struggles and
Triumphs

1

People are People

Rumiko Nakano
Osaka University, Japan

*"I was born and raised at a time when I was taught that Japan was my enemy.
My first contact with the Japanese was you."*

These were the first two lines of an autograph written by my social studies teacher, Mr. Ed, at a small U.S. public high school in rural Oregon. I was an international exchange student through a nonprofit organization exchange program in the 1980s. In this essay, I would like to share what I learned from my study-abroad experience.

ENCOUNTER WITH MR. ED, A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER IN A RURAL AREA IN THE U.S.

On reading his statement above, I wondered if I reminded him of Pearl Harbour. Did he want me to ask about my view on that attack and the atomic bombs on two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Having been born on the anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki made me acutely aware of that part of the history. I had somehow sensed at first that this teacher was distant and more formal to me. He did not seem to talk to me as much as he did to other international students. It might have been just because of my lack of English-speaking capability. In any case, he was professional enough to accept me in his class. He made no discriminatory remarks, nor did he act unfairly toward me.

Everything in the 1980s was different from now, and far less advanced, especially in information and communications technology. We had no cell phones, emails, internet, no free online video talks, or even personal computers. International phone calls were so expensive that I called my family only for special occasions.

Nonetheless, such a "low-tech" environment did not bother me so much because I welcomed immersing myself in the English-speaking culture as the best way for me to improve my English communication skills. I somehow feared that speaking in Japanese and/or with Japanese people would jeopardize my path to that goal.

A LITTLE OBSTACLE

I did have times when I felt isolated. Having been raised by a traditional Japanese family who considered reservation a virtue, I had no clue that in this new culture it is all right or even important to talk to people instead of waiting for someone else to initiate contact.

Life in a rural area in Oregon meant some inconvenience to me as well. While I was struck by the vastness of nature in my new setting, I was accustomed to the convenience of the big city life of Tokyo where commodities were within a few minutes of walking, and trains, which ran on schedule to the minute, would deliver me to wherever I needed to go. In Oregon, I had to ask someone for a ride. The closest tiny store to my host family was 6km or about an hour on foot.

THE OBSTACLES MEDIATED BY CONNECTEDNESS NURTURED BY PEOPLE'S KINDNESS, SMILES, ACCEPTANCE, AND SOME OF MY MOTIVATION

Regardless of the “negative elements” of inconvenience, the early aloofness of Mr. Ed, and feelings of isolation and loneliness, which are associated with depression and suicide when severe (Beutel et al., 2017; Hawley & Cacioppo, 2010), I recall my experience in the U.S. as very fruitful. It was probably because I began to feel connected to people, thanks to all the goodwill, kindness, support, and smiles I received as well as the stable daily life provided by my thoughtful host family.

There were teachers who kindly answered my questions when I asked. The school counselor helped me with an explanation regarding the courses I needed to take for graduation, including the course taught by Mr. Ed. She even introduced me to one student who would help me with English. Other friends patiently helped me with my English and general studies as well. Some invited me to their homes to spend weekends together. One friend invited me to various activities, offering me rides countless times. My experience as an international student taught me the importance of having someone to ask for help and to disclose my concerns and needs for sustaining my own well-being. Kindness and helping hands provided me not only with times of fun and refreshment but also the sense of connectedness. Connectedness is a well-being factor (Veenhoven, 2008). The sense of being accepted refers to integration to society, which is considered another well-being factor (Cohen, 2004).

I was also very motivated to fully experience the life in the U.S., which represented democracy and equality to my eyes. Given that I was a senior, I wanted to earn a diploma from my American high school. Participation in club activities and my study objectives kept me busy. I had to spend much time

consulting with a dictionary to study all the words unfamiliar to me, which also helped me focus.

A LIFELONG GIFT

As time went by, the teacher somehow became friendly. I remember he said jokes to me, and even complimented my English grammar in class. It was the very first time I admitted the value of Japan's English education policy, which was to focus extremely on grammar, reading and writing then.

Mr. Ed's autograph concluded:

“What you have taught me is that people are people regardless of where they live.”

This message made my eyes teary. I believe his open attitude toward me removed his first seemingly negative impression of me that must have originated in the history of our two countries. He allowed himself to see me as a person, one individual apart from the political hostility in the past. Also, it even created a friendly relationship between us. If Mr. Ed had been “imprisoned” by the past, my experience in Oregon would not have been as fruitful as it was, even with those people who made me feel connected with their support, kindness, and acceptance.

The message “people are people” has been one of my core education principals as an English instructor. English language education usually requires an understanding of “differences” between the students’ first language and English, and between the two cultures. It is, however, essential to teach the students that “people are people” who share some common features regardless of the differences. Kindness and care can bring us warmth and healing while we suffer from isolation and loss of loved ones.

The spread of COVID-19 has deprived us of not only human direct interaction but also study-abroad opportunities in person around the world. Some had to leave their host countries, while others permanently had to forego the opportunity. Even those International students who remained in the host countries would have a very limited opportunity to integrate with the local people.

Under such circumstances, I hope more people will offer a helping hand by using all kinds of technological development to connect to one another, especially when direct human interaction is not recommended. Such a small piece of action will help them not to feel isolated but more connected to people. I strongly hope international students and everyone around them will come to believe “people are people.” We can all make a difference with our compassionate, friendly action. A simple smile could be encouragement to serve as grassroots peacekeepers. “To have one good adult whom young adults can trust and confide in contributes to their well-being” (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012; Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Each of us can be such an adult for them.

I regret that I never had a chance to talk about this with Mr. Ed. Instead, I would like to dedicate this message to all the people who were good to me in the US, especially in Oregon and to Mr. Ed in Heaven.

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Culture, Personal Development, and Intercultural Differences

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My story focuses on culture, personal development, and intercultural differences. In 2007, I went to study for my master's degree in Psychology (Human Development) at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) as a beneficiary of the Norwegian Quota Scholarship Program. I decided to discuss two of my experiences during my time as an international master's student in Norway. Norway was the first country outside of Ghana, (my country of origin), that I sojourned. Irrespective of the orientation sessions, I was unprepared for some aspects of being in Norway. One example of this was my experience with being homesick. Personally, I don't like hot, humid weather even though I am from the tropics. I arrived in Norway in August 2007, and by October (I believe), I had experienced enough of the cold, wet, landscape of the Norwegian Fall. I called the International Student's Office (ISO) and told them I wanted to go back to Ghana. They were quite empathetic and said I could. However, going back meant that I had to pay back the funds from the scholarship. Well, let's say that was enough for me to decide that going to Ghana was not a good idea. Reflecting on this experience in hindsight, I learned that once the honeymoon phase of culture shock wears off, you need individuals who can understand what you are experiencing irrespective of whether they are from your background or not. I felt this was important to mention because most literature on culture shock and acculturation validates the notion that having other African mentors is important. In fact, my published journal articles and book chapters discuss the relevance of having mentors to guide and shape one's life experiences. However, in the absence of the aforementioned, someone who has the empathy to understand your experiences is also a vital resource.

The second aspect of my cultural experience that was most interesting (for me) was the fact that faculty at NTNU were addressed by their first names. Actually, I was quite surprised by this. The leader of my Master's program was over 70 years old and was a full professor. And the head of department was also near that age bracket. I couldn't understand their insistence on being addressed

by their first names. Actually, my Norwegian classmates were used to this and took no issue with this as it is a part of their culture and values. Other European classmates did not necessarily mind. My other African classmates and myself were the ones who found this practice exceptionally difficult. Almost all African societies are patriarchal and hierarchical; status and ranks are often clear and distinct. You certainly did not address individuals higher up on the hierarchy by their first name. Such was my conundrum. In my two years at NTNU, I know that I consciously made an effort to not address my instructors by name because I just couldn't. In emails, I would use their first names as that was the expectation. However, in person, I decided not to address them by their first names as it was such a breach of my own cultural norms. It didn't resolve my discomfort, but it helped me navigate the issue in a way that lessened my anxiety of being on a first name basis with them.

I chose to include the second experience I had in Norway because of my observations in my current position at Goodwin University. My personal preference is for my students to address me formally. Maybe it's my cultural background; maybe it's an expectation I have; who knows? When I was a faculty member at other higher education institutions (HEI's) in the US, students did not address their instructors by their first names. Most students at HEI's use the generic term of "professor" which connotes a recognition of the instructor's role, and not one's academic title/credentials. Therefore, it was also a bit strange to be at my current institution and find students on a first name basis with faculty. I do inform my students of my preference, even if other instructors do not abide by that. I have learned from these experiences that, personally, it is not just semantics. Embedded in these preferences is the notion of respect for the instructor's role; and the work they do, not necessarily an emphasis on cultural norms.

I find these experiences fascinating because outside of academic circles it seems American society in general responds to you differently based on how you present yourself. I actually conducted a social experiment on this and identified that in the same situation and place, I was treated differently when I presented myself with titles from when I presented myself without titles. In other situations, I have heard myself being labeled as a narcissist for choosing to be addressed in this way. The conclusion I have drawn for myself based on my experiences is that personal preferences trump cultural beliefs, especially if you are in a nation/culture that is different from yours.

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3

Power Hierarchy Between Teacher and Student

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*Have you been away from home?
I mean really far away.
Not just to your friend next door,
And not just for a day!*

*Another country, another world,
And all that for a year
You think it's easy? Trust me – it's not!
I know, 'cause I am here.*

(Poem by Conny Kaufmann)

I came to the US for my doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of Wyoming in Fall 2016. This was the first time I had left my country, India, and came to the United States for a doctoral program in counselor education and supervision. Everything was new for me—the cold and dry weather of Wyoming, the school, the town, and the people. I was both excited and nervous at the same time. As I had no prior experience of living in a cold and dry climate; Wyoming's sub-zero temperature was both exciting (because I had never experienced snow before) and hard (because winter was too long- from October to May) for me. People in the town were very welcoming, and I quickly made some friends.

During my first semester, I enrolled in a three-credit class on play therapy. In the final assignment, which was approximately a 10-page-long essay, I got a very low score. As this assignment carried more points, it affected my overall score, and I got a C in that coursework. It was a heart-breaking experience as I thought I did very well and deserved better than C in that course. However, I did not know how to react and what to do. It was the beginning of winter break when I received my grades, and most of my fellow graduate students were out of the town for holidays. I analyzed my submitted essay many times, trying to make sense of how and why I lost so many points. Although the professor had

made a few comments on some pages of my essay, I thought they were not enough to lose so many points.

I thought about talking to the professor, but she was not available in her office because of the winter break. I also ruminated on emailing the professor and asking for an explanation for the deduction of so many points. However, I did not do anything. I kept it to myself and felt horrible for a few weeks. One day, after winter break, when the university reopened after the winter break, I shared my experiences with a colleague. He was surprised why I did not talk to the professor and seek an explanation from her. At that time, I did not know why I did not do so. Now, in retrospect, I can see why I did that.

In India, the relationship between a teacher and student is more grounded in a power hierarchy. Teaching is considered a sacred profession and professors are highly regarded. This power hierarchy places teachers and college administration with a disproportionately higher power than what we see in colleges and universities here in the United States. Further, this power hierarchy stipulates behavioral expectations from both students and teachers. For example, eating anything during a class is considered distrustful to the teacher (I was surprised to see students in my cohort having breakfast during the class in the first semester). Greeting teachers whenever you see them is another behavioral expectation from students. On the other hand, teachers are expected to put their best self in and out of the college, i.e., consuming alcohol or watching movies that have steamy scenes is considered taboo (one of my teachers was very embarrassed as I saw him once purchasing liquor at a wine shop). Students are expected to show respect and regard to their professors no matter what. For example, if a student does not greet a professor, despite earlier greetings being ignored, the professor may feel offended and punish the student through indirect means such as humiliating or ignoring the student in the class. Regarding classroom behavior, arguing with a professor is considered being disrespectful. These behavioral expectations, if not followed, may have more negative implications for students belonging to Dalit or marginalized communities (Maurya, 2018). A student from a Dalit or marginalized community is extra careful in fulfilling these classroom behavioral expectations.

Although most of the educational institutions, at the policy level, have accepted student-centered experiential learning pedagogy, in practice, most of the teachers conduct their classes in lecture-focused teaching style (Deka, 2000; Jayapalan, 2005). Hence, students are more passive listeners in classrooms in India. Additionally, challenging the grade evaluation of a professor is generally considered challenging the authority, integrity, and judgment of the professor. In some cases, it might lead to further negative repercussions for the student such as losing scholarships, lack of coursework support and guidance, and other benefits which are mostly decided by the faculty. Therefore, students, in general, do not challenge the grade provided by the professor. Also, approaching a professor to discuss grades is perceived as a challenge to the authority and

integrity of the professor rather than an effort to obtain feedback regarding evaluation.

Another reason for my not contacting the professor is related to the fact that I am a first-generation college learner. As a first-generation learner, college often appeared to me like a foreign land during the first two years of my undergraduate due to low social capital. Social capital refers to the network of relationships that can support a student in managing an unfamiliar environment by offering information, guidance, and emotional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). However, as time passed, I developed a network of support and learned more about the higher education system.

However, coming to the US was a big change and it brought back those old memories of my initial undergraduate years again. I felt like an imposter (I don't deserve to be in the program and my good grades may be just a fluke) and experienced anxiety because of being away from home, family, and friends. During the first semester, I wanted to apply for some scholarships, however, I thought that it would be presumptuous if I put in my application in the very first semester. I thought that I should first perform very well in all of my courses and then my professors would ask me to apply for those scholarships. I also did not approach my professors asking them if I can work on some research projects that they were working on. I thought it would be presumptuous to ask before I demonstrate a high performance in all of my research courses. But when I saw some of my peers getting scholarships and research collaboration opportunities by reaching out to professors, I wished someone would have guided me about these earlier.

Later, during the spring semester, at the advice of my colleague, I talked to the professor and shared my experience. She was incredibly open and friendly. She was very sorry for my experience. She said that here in the US teachers encourage students to talk about their grades if they do not feel satisfied. This would be perceived as an effort to get more feedback rather than a challenge to the authority and judgment of the professor. This experience made me reflect on teacher-student power relations. Although the Indian education system has made changes in recent years by adopting a more student-centric approach to teaching, I think a lot more is needed to be done to move from power (over) relations to power (with) in the context of teacher-student relations.

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4

Defying Expectations of Heritage-Seeking: Forming Identity through Education Abroad

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While waiting to deplane, I told myself to remember this moment because as soon as I put my feet on the ground, my life would be changed forever. I was on a journey to learn about China, the country where I was born, and I believed that when I got off the plane, I would be home. I imagined what it would be like to walk down the streets and see people who looked like me. I couldn't wait to try foods that were local to the region where I was born and potentially even meet people who shared a common ancestry with me. From the stories I heard from other adoptees, it would feel like putting that last piece of my identity snugly into the puzzle where it belonged. As I look back on the photos from my journey almost a decade later, one of the first pictures in the album is a blurry image of the airport seen through the window of the transfer bus on the way to the hotel. The caption reads, "first glimpses of China." I wanted to be sure to take pictures of everything I saw so that I could remember the trip that would help me understand who I am.

While in Beijing, we visited significant cultural landmarks including the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and the Summer Palace; however, I couldn't help but feel like a tourist checking off the sights on her list. I reminded myself that we were in Beijing, so maybe the "click" that everyone talked about would happen when we visited the town where I was born, but when we arrived in the city which was supposed to hold the key to my identity, I still felt out of place. I was left with more questions than answers. Why did the locals try to speak to me in English rather than Chinese? Why couldn't I handle eating the spicy foods that are a local delicacy? How can this thriving city that is home to 11 million people not have a place for me? The images of rice patties and farm towns that I had always conjured when I thought of China were just fictional scenes in my mind. The rest of the tour proceeded similarly; I enjoyed the tourist attractions, but I felt no intrinsic connection to the land, and in fact, I felt more distant from my "homeland" than I had ever felt when I lived almost 7,000 miles away.

Fast forward eighteen months. I am a sophomore studying with Davidson College's education abroad program in Madrid, Spain, and I am standing in the

Museo Reina Sofía in front of Picasso's Guernica for the first time. I had learned about the painting's history and cultural significance in multiple Spanish classes, and I knew of its immense size (over 11 feet tall and 25 feet across), but to see its magnitude in person still took my breath away.

It was when I stood in front of this masterpiece and reflected upon my journey thus far, that I realized I was changed. I chose to go to Spain on this program as a sophomore, engage with local partners, and enrich my academic career by continuing my studies in the homeland of the Spanish language. I was no longer a student in a classroom but a scholar in the field. This metamorphosis did not happen by accident. I had previously believed that participating in a program that brought me back to China would magically change me when I stepped onto international soil. I believed that my identity was somehow innately connected to my heritage. But when I stood in front of Guernica, I recognized the changes that had already occurred within me. I realized that this shift in my identity was built on years of intentional academic exploration.

This exploration would be the foundation of my continued scholarship, and it would inspire me to continue to pursue my passion for international education. I was dedicated to developing these cultural and linguistic competencies, and I chose to study abroad again, but this time in Valparaíso, Chile. Since my focus had become more defined as a result of my time in Spain, I was able to do further exploration and ask more pointed questions that continued to help me contextualize my adopted identity. I conducted a comprehensive project in which I researched local adoption laws and surveyed university students' perceptions of adoption in Chile. I later shared my findings with the students who participated in my survey. This investigation not only helped me further contextualize my individual understanding of the topic of international adoption, but it also helped me gain a more culturally comparative view of the topic. I was empowered by my own capacity to question, research, and present my findings to a varied audience. This, in turn, inspired the confidence that I needed to pursue a year-long honors thesis in Spanish about human rights discourse in Colonial Latin America.

Through my education abroad experiences and my scholarship, I developed my own passion of searching for and uplifting the stories of those who have been marginalized and oppressed, and I continue to do so, today. I cultivate meaning from the research I conduct, and I advocate for those who find themselves voiceless or adrift. I aim to support students for whom our system was not originally created, but who deserve the opportunity to explore their own personal identities. Each person's journey is unique, and everyone deserves the chance to pursue their own passions. This opportunity helped me come to the realization that while I had previously believed that my heritage held the key to unlock who I was, in actuality, it was my own quest for knowledge that helped me understand who I am.

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5

Finding Human Connections

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I came into graduate school in the United States of America as a Fulbright scholar. There was a sense of pride coming into the academic program. Having worked for 5 years as an educator, I felt I had this new experience under control. In fact, the odds were stacked in my favor to excel. I did three years' worth of undergraduate studies in the UK - the University of Portsmouth - to be exact. So, living in a foreign country? Checked. Also, I did not go back home for the entire duration of the three years. Homesick? Checked. I fared fairly well in terms of academics— got an A for my thesis. Academic excellence? Checked. I also worked in the UK for a bit, so international experience. Checked!

So, by now, I had convinced myself graduate school is something I will not only excel in but also thrive. Classes started on August 27, 2018, I arrived in Chicago on August 25. With only a weekend to prepare for such massive changes - I was essentially setting up myself for disaster. And, in hindsight, if only I had prepared myself better pre-departure, things would have been so much better. Anyway, I headed off to my first class. Feeling a little bit nervous, I mustered enough courage to enter the classroom. There I was, completely frozen and lost in the sea of 30 humans speaking in an accent that I only saw in movies. But I have faced such situations before, right? I mean, I was in the UK for three years. As I tried to compose myself and started to participate in the class, that's when the real shocker came - people started discussing the reading materials and the professor facilitated the learning process. And here I was, having not completed my reading because I imagined the professor would guide us through the readings in the class. This is when I realized that education in the US is very dialogic.

My first class was a blunder - but did I bounce back? Certainly, not. The remaining of my first semester ended in me superficially participating in class discussions. I did my assignments well, but I barely completed my readings. In each class, I felt like an impostor sitting around intellects. Luckily for me, my grades of 4.00 somehow convinced me that I belong here.

So here I was - feeling unmotivated and dispirited. Graduate school was not like how I imagined back in Malaysia. I had naturally assumed that we would be attending classes in the morning, conducting research and holding discussion groups in the evenings, and casually talking about educational theories at night in pubs. I had envisioned a close-knit community of researchers and educators

sharing ideas and strategies to solve the world's educational problems. But, here I was attending classes at 4.15pm in the winter of Chicago, and taking the L at 9.30pm. Graduate school is a lonely and fragmented process, and if you are an international student, the experience can get rather isolating. I craved for deep human connection - beyond Tinder dates, and once-a-week reading groups. I came to realize human connection is what stimulates intellectual growth and emotional development. This is what I learned during this period.

The second semester came, and I knew I had to do things differently if I wanted to thrive. Human connection came through a conference, accountability groups, and a Mexican celebration. As classes started to resume, I made friends with Shelley Maddox, an American PhD student in my program. We both felt the lack of community in our program and started to become each other's, accountability partner. We started to learn and read together, going around to the different cafes in Chicago to facilitate our academic pursuits. As I tried to grapple with my learning, a proposal of mine with several colleagues got selected for a conference in San Francisco. It was through this conference that my relationship with Yver Melchor, a Mexican Fulbrighter, strengthened. As I attended the conference in April 2019, it gave me the doses of inspiration I needed. Meeting the people I only read about in journal papers was a surreal experience. I could see the trajectory of my career and future was shaping. As my relationship with Yver started to grow, we started having parties and the one event that stood out was the Dia de Los Muertos; it was here that I started to think about my own life and the importance of human connection. As the celebration suggests - we truly die when the last living human on Earth forgets our existence. This got me thinking about how I have been living my own life. This solidified the thought in me that human connection is not only meaningful but also rewarding. And as international students, we are also academic travelers, leaving our footprint at a specific period in our existence.

And when summer came, the people in my program saw the need for community, and this is when Max Crumley-Effinger created an official accountability group for the graduate students. And I took the opportunity to travel during the summer, meeting amazing people from the Fulbright community and beyond - Ayano, Kazuaki, Hadi, Samuel, Yayat, Melvi, Akif, Khalil, and many, many more - further informing me that human connection is what enriches life.

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6

Leaving Familiarity Behind

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“Forget New York, this is the city that never sleeps.”

It’s 1 am as I bellow out this epiphany to my travel companion, attempting to raise my voice above the incessant chatter and steady tune of live music that surrounds us. He is sitting on a short, embroidered stool just across the table from me, but my voice only makes it halfway before it’s swallowed up into the indistinguishable mixture of hums that fill the humid summer air. The small table between us is more nightstand than table, less than 2 feet high and about the same across, and yet despite its stature it is burdened by an assortment of curiously foreign and vibrantly alluring items.

A nargile, otherwise known as a water pipe to those outside of Turkey, sits on the corner of the table, stuffed with a surplus of wet tobacco infused with the sweet flavor of watermelon. So aromatic is the smoke that it tricks the taste buds into believing they are consuming a piece of fruit-flavored chewing gum, instead of inhaling a vulgar, if yet tasty, stream of dark, ominous smoke. Nargiles are quintessential Turkey and as I close my lips around the plastic straw-like mouthpiece to begin my first deep, prolonged inhale, watching the clouds rise enthusiastically from the water resting at the bottom of the pipe and feeling the warmth of the tobacco as it moves down my throat, into my lungs and seemingly every orifice of my body I feel so completely a part of my environment, so at ease with my surroundings that for that moment, I am a Turk.

My momentary transcendence is suddenly interrupted by the fury of my lungs as they reject the flavored smoke. Three minutes of incessant coughing ensue, a slap back into reality reminding me that while my spirit is embracing my surroundings, my body may not be so quick to adapt.

The remedy for a nargile induced cough is simple, and not coincidentally two glasses of it are sitting directly in front of me. Two glasses, filled to the brim with a cloudy, potion-like liquid that smells of black licorice. Appealing, not quite; intriguing, absolutely. The drink is called raki. It’s a famous Turkish alcohol known affectionately to the locals as “Lion’s Milk.” Made from grapes and aniseed, Turks will tell you that raki is the perfect drink for a nostalgic night— for a night of reminiscing, dreaming, and thinking of limitless possibilities. And though its taste is not always acquired, its effects are never failing.

Two glasses later, my travel companion and I are glued to our seats, mesmerized by the lavishness of our backdrop. The scene is set by twinkling lights and lanterns hanging from every imaginable pillar, illuminating the outside sitting area where couples lay on plush floor cushions, serenaded by the enchanting lullaby of a Turkish folk band playing instruments from an ancient world.

“Is this real life?” my companion yells to me. I hear him but don’t respond; to do so would be to break my trance; a trance that has me fixated on nothing but the pureness of the joy I feel in that moment. There are few times in life so profound in their clarity that they are overpowering in their impact. This was one of those times. I knew, at that moment, with that feeling, that my leap of faith to travel halfway around the world to study abroad in a country I knew nothing about was precisely the path I was meant to follow. I was right where I was meant to be. A feeling so uninhibited by worry or concern that my life fell perfectly in order, if only for a moment.

I walked back to my dorm room that night with nostalgia already growing in my heart from a night that had not yet passed. So extraordinary an experience that I yearned for the sensation of its return long before it had even left. So powerfully transformative are these experiences, made possible only by leaving familiarity behind and stepping out into the world.

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Intercultural Competence Development: A Journey of Self- Understanding and Perspective Transformation

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In the summer of 2016, after a twenty-hour flight from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, I landed in Canada to undertake my doctoral studies. My first doctoral course started three days after I arrived. As an international student, I encountered many challenges in navigating my life “in-between” cultures at the beginning of my doctoral journey. The story below depicts my feelings and emotions when I first received feedback on my writing from my doctoral supervisor, a Canadian Caucasian woman.

On a Tuesday morning in the winter term of 2017, I went to my supervisor’s office and waited for her. We were meeting to discuss my writing. Nervousness, fear, and worry – the feelings I usually had whenever I received writing feedback from her – were my dominant feelings at that time.

Finally, she came. I stepped into her office with these emotions. I opened my laptop and was ready to listen. She read my text from her computer. She started frowning and said, “It is not clear! It has no meaning to me! I don’t understand what you are trying to say!”

I tried different ways to explain to her what I meant. At that moment, I felt upset with myself and wondered why I could not write better and why I did not have the linguistic ability to express my ideas more clearly and understandably. I had been exposed to English for more than 10 years in my home country – why could I not write with clarity and concision?

I internalized these negative thoughts for a long time; this prevented me from seeking advice to improve my writing. At some points throughout the program, I thought my work was de-valued by my supervisor’s comments because I was an international student and English was not my first language. I felt upset and discouraged!

Amid the negative comments about my writing, I noticed my supervisor would give similar comments to domestic students in classes when she found something unclear in their writing. “She might be a direct communicator,” I thought. In retrospect, I was not familiar with taking direct criticism; possibly

because of my cultural background, which is known for its indirectness (Hofstede, 2001). Coming from a culture where open critique is avoided, I found it difficult to adopt a critical stance and encounter critical comments in the feedback process. In Vietnam, an open discussion between students and teachers would not be encouraged. In the context of hierarchical culture defined by higher power distance, it was challenging for me to communicate openly to articulate my feelings and my expectations to my supervisor since this might be considered disrespectful in Vietnam.

The feedback from my supervisor might have evoked culturally embedded emotional responses. I needed to change my mindset, shape it more positively, and be open to direct critique and communication. I started to learn how to remove the “invisible wall” behind which I could hide when I thought people might judge me because of my linguistic and cultural differences. If I did not surmount this, it could hamper my academic writing development and my personal growth as an emerging scholar. I eventually learned not to be so sensitive about my supervisor’s comments and kept in mind that her comments were for the sake of my academic progress. When my perspective shifted, I recognized she also gave me constructive feedback helping me improve and strengthen my work.

Over time, my initial nervousness and confusion in negotiating cultural differences helped to develop my intercultural learning strategies. I began observing (the same) people from different situations to understand their personalities and their communication styles. Instead of reacting impulsively and taking criticism personally, I am practicing listening and responding mindfully. I proactively seek first to understand then to be understood. I learn to describe what I observe about Canadians without judgement and to critically reflect, analyze, and relate. I also recognize the importance of evaluating my own assumptions and interpretations, which I do after observing, researching, and justifying my assumptions with other people in my host country (Taylor, 1994).

I shared this story with my supervisor as a part of the member checking process. We agreed that we did have a difficult time understanding each other due to our cultural and linguistic differences, but we learned from each other’s perspectives to develop trust, empathy, and understanding. Our efforts to build up an authentic relationship have carved the path for us to accept ourselves the way we are and embrace the differences within us. This intercultural understanding has contributed to manifold open academic and social conversations where we openly share our thoughts and understanding about our worldviews and ways of living. This intercultural and authentic relationship also helped me improve my academic writing and make progress in my doctoral studies.

The intercultural learning strategies that I have acquired in my doctoral adventure have contributed to shaping me as an intercultural learner. These skills

8

Overcoming Academic Challenges in the United States

Veronica Pereira
University of Arkansas, USA

I am from a tiny island in Southeast Asia called Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste recently won its independence in 2002, when I was 7 years old. Born and raised in a country that I am older than, it is hard to even understand what a dream is. However, as life continues to move forward, we learn every day. After graduating from high school in Timor-Leste, I was brave and confident enough to push myself to work long days and nights to apply for a scholarship to study abroad. Hence, in 2015, I was awarded a United States Timor-Leste Scholarship to complete my undergraduate studies at the University of Arkansas.

Studying abroad has not been easy for me. I was not academically prepared for college in the United States. I remember I failed a class during my second semester (while I did English language). I was extremely embarrassed, anxious, and fearful that I would lose my study abroad scholarship and be sent back to Timor-Leste. I cried for days. I did not want to face my friends because I was overcome with shame. I locked myself in my tiny dorm room without food. I was so upset and mad that I couldn't understand the lesson like everybody else in the classroom. I felt alone in my failure.

I remember the time I went to talk to a school counselor about the issue, because psychologically, I was not stable. The counselor asked me the following: "what happens if you fail?" I answered her- I might not be able to keep my scholarship and they might send me home. The counselor followed up with another question "what happens if you go home?"- I was sobbing and crying like a baby in her room with no answer to her question. She looked at me with shock because my anxiety took over at that moment. Those tears were a huge moment for me and forced me to realize how hard school can be. Back in Timor-Leste (in my time when I went to school), we would attend school for an hour or less (sometimes). Studying was optional and I usually felt no obligation to study because my siblings, cousins, and friends did not care about study. So, I still had the same mindset in my first semester in the United States. After failing, it hit me so bad to realize that I am in a different zone now. I also realized that studying was no longer optional, and I needed to face the challenges of college in the United States.

and strategies are always in my suitcase on my journey of becoming an interculturally competent learner, scholar, and citizen.

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I have to accept that I am no longer in Timor-Leste. The language that I use for everyday interaction is not Tetum anymore. The people with whom I interact everyday are from all around the world. The food that I eat is not the same as what I used to have back home in Timor-Leste. There is no one around me to call for an immediate need. I am currently the only person from Timor-Leste at the University of Arkansas. Every day for the first year, what I experienced was either enjoying my honeymoon period on campus or crying in my dorm room. I was scared of professors in the class.

To make matters more complicated, I was scared of my professors. My fears were rooted in the fact that teachers use corporal punishment as a method of discipline in Timor-Leste. For example, in Timor-Leste (especially in the time when I went to school) if you do not know the answer to a teacher's question, you could get slapped or kicked in front of your peers. I carry the fear in my higher education journey. Finally, one day I noticed a difference. In my college classes, teachers rarely call on students to answer any question in the classroom nor do teachers embarrass students if they do not know the answers. Slowly but surely, I noticed it was just my fear from past trauma. I wanted to overcome my fears, so I visited my professor during office hours. I really liked visiting my favourite professors during office hours just to talk and share my feelings. I then developed an interest in the research process and thought that I could complete a research project about school corporal punishment. I wrote the research for my senior writing. I then used the research I wrote to apply for graduate school. Lucky enough, I was accepted into the University of Arkansas, Sociology and Criminology department to complete my Masters' degree. Now, I am currently in my final semester of the graduate program. My thesis is titled: 'The Impacts of Corporal Punishment for Timorese High School Graduates.'

The process and journey of studying here in the United States has been difficult. I face academic challenges daily. The fear of teachers/professors' punishment or getting mad at me remains with me. Thus, I still struggle with it even in my graduate journey. I feel moments of exhaustion every month, especially during mid-term or finals. I also encounter a lot of challenges with time management. Sometimes, I would isolate myself from others, depending on how good my grades are (even before the pandemic). Moreover, it has been difficult maintaining relationships with people in Timor-Leste because of the physical distance between us as well as the time zone difference.

Overtime, I have learned to embrace my voice, to sense my energy level, and to see the beauty in nature I step in. I have learned to take a deep breath and face challenges such as time management for weekly goals. I ask questions when needed, and most importantly, I sleep at least 7-8 hours a night. By finding myself into the moment through doing these things, I feel healthier, and have found help for my academic needs. In the end, I learned that everyone faces challenges when studying abroad, but there is frequently help available for what we need.

The key is to ask for help when we need it.

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9

Tribute to My Jan

Jasvir Kaur Nachatar Singh
La Trobe University, Australia

“Jan is no more,” said Jan’s husband. I was getting ready to start work when I received the call on 24 September 2014. I could not take it in and I cannot recall what I said to Jan’s husband. All the flashes of memories, our conversations and laughter rushed in. “How can that be?” I told myself; I just met her a few months ago. I knew she was very sick but never thought she would go that soon.

MEETING JAN...

I was an international student from Malaysia doing my master’s degree in Public Policy and Management at Monash University, Melbourne. It had always been my dream to study abroad, influenced by American TV’s Beverly Hills 90210, when I was in my teens. I come from a humble home and the only way to seek international education was through a scholarship. I applied to numerous funding bodies and I am forever grateful to the Malaysian government for sponsoring me.

I was introduced to Jan by a Monash professor in my first year in 2008. The scholarship I received covered my master’s and PhD, but I had to do a mini-thesis/dissertation. I discussed this with a professor. He asked me what topic I was interested in. I responded, “International student’s experiences.” He replied, “You should meet Jan, for sure.” He also provided other names, but when I emailed all them only Jan replied. I was extremely happy that at least one did reply and we met.

Instantly we connected. We started discussing my research idea for my mini-thesis and that first conversation went for more than an hour. I was happy with her approach – very motherly but also practical. She asked me to think about if she was suited to be my supervisor. I immediately emailed her upon returning to my room with “YES, I would really like you to be my supervisor for my mini-thesis”.

JAN WAS MORE THAN A SUPERVISOR

We instantly became friends. We talked about personal and professional issues I was facing and she shared her experiences – personal and professional. I really liked her wisdom and honesty. As an international student, I felt she was

someone I could rely on and who I could also relate to. I was in awe at how she could shorten my paragraph to a sentence. I remember telling her, “When will I be able to do that?” She would just smile and say, “Practice and practice and you will be able to do so”.

I went back home for data collection at the end of my first year. Jan was supposed to visit Penang, my hometown, and meet my family. But she was unwell, and so could not make it.

On returning to Melbourne in February 2009, we started meeting up regularly to expedite my writing, as my submission date was in July 2009. During those months, we became very close. She would ask me about my experiences as an international student, and my career aspirations; she would listen and smile. We chatted for hours.

I cannot forget her words: “Jas, I don’t know why I’m doing this for you. I haven’t done this with any of my students”. I replied, “What did you do?” Jan responded, “I’ve printed off some journal articles for you”. I was over the moon! Jan also offered her office printer for me to print my final thesis – a big help because I could save money on printing. She even changed her printer cartridge and provided paper. She was that thoughtful and of course I appreciated her gesture.

Once my Master’s Degree was completed, she invited me and my friend for dinner. We went out. She was accompanied by her husband. We painted the town red sharing our differing experiences. She wanted to know more about Malaysia, my background, my beliefs and values. And vice-versa: I wanted to know more about Australia.

RETURNING HOME AND BACK AGAIN

I completed my Master’s Degree in 2009 and returned home. I was sure I would return to Australia in 2010. However, due to the financial crisis, my scholarship was withdrawn. I was devastated, because I really wanted to complete my PhD in Australia and with Jan.

However, I started my PhD in Malaysia and kept in touch with Jan. In 2010, our abstract was accepted for a higher education conference in Melbourne, and I was most excited because I could see Jan again. We had a paper in the pipeline that we discussed over my short, sweet trip to Melbourne. My mum and aunty followed me and they too met Jan. My mum and Jan had so much to talk about! That trip was the first time we took a few pictures together which I still have.

While doing my PhD in Malaysia, I still hoped for a scholarship to return to Australia. The Endeavour Scholarship call was opened, and I applied. To my surprise I GOT ACCEPTED! I remember telling Jan I was coming back to Melbourne. Jan said, “Well done, but I am in a different university now”. I said, “I follow you, wherever you go. I trust you with my PhD”.

I had the BEST-EVER time during my PhD. Jan was my co-supervisor and introduced me to a professor who was my main supervisor. Loveliest people to work with!

Jan once told me, “You are a dream student to have”. I was flattered and asked “why?” “Because you listen and work on our comments”. I said, “As a student, shouldn’t we do that?” For me, they were my gurus so I must follow their wisdom. I always became excited when Jan commented on my work and wrote “GOOD, VERY GOOD”, a confidence booster for me because English is not my first language. Jan would also never use RED ink; she believed that RED means danger or alarm. She would comment with a purple pen which is also soothing to the eye.

We used to have our PhD discussions in a Melbourne café. She would pick a different venue so I could understand and assimilate Melbourne’s culture. I so looked forward to these “outings”. They were not formal and we would spend hours discussing PhD work and other things. It’s a mechanism of bonding, I guess. Now I myself meet up with my research students in a café, just as Jan did with me.

I still remember this. When I had my first PhD meeting with her, she joked: “I’ll try not to die in these four years”. We laughed; I didn’t think for a second, she might die.

THE LAST MEETING

A year before I completed my PhD, she passed away. I knew she was unwell for two years or so. But she was feeling better after several rounds of treatments. She was a fighter. We still caught up with PhD work in cafés, but it was not that regular. She told me she would need to take a break and would no longer be my co-supervisor. I knew then she was not coping well.

I insisted on meeting her. I was constantly in contact with her husband for a visit. So, a few months before she died, I met her. I wrote her a handwritten letter. I purposely did not want to type it because I wanted it to have a personal touch. When I met her, she was looking frail but excited to meet. We talked for about an hour. She, as usual, asked what I was up to, what my plans were, and so on. I knew she was tired. I asked her if I could leave so she could rest. She said, “Not yet, stay a bit longer”. I stayed for another hour. That was the last time I saw her. My next contact was the call from her husband: “Jan is no more”.

JAN’S LEGACY LIVES

Jan presented me with a shawl as my birthday present just before she died. It is not an ordinary shawl. I lay the shawl on my couch in the living room and it reminds me of Jan and the memories we shared whenever I look at it.

As a PhD student I had to present my work at a student colloquium. My PhD work was her work too. It was my last presentation, because I was close to completion, and I paid tribute to her before I started. My tears started rolling. Even now writing this tribute, my eyes are teary.

Jan's legacy still lives through me, especially through my writing, through my PhD, through research, and through my contacts with students. Her memories will remain very dear to my heart all my life.

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PART II

Essential Mentorships and Friendships

10

A Canoe Engraved in My Heart

Meekyoung Jeung

University of British Columbia, Canada

It had long been a dream of mine to study abroad, specifically, in Canada because of the world-renowned education system and diverse culture. When the opportunity of studying in Canada came to me, I had an ambivalent feeling: thrilled and concerned. I was overjoyed because my childhood dream was finally about to come true. However, I hesitated to move abroad because of the uncertainty surrounding my future. I had to leave my stable teaching job and my family and friends. After careful consideration, I decided to move to Vancouver to obtain my master's degree in Education. After I started my studies in Vancouver, I encountered many unexpected and challenging situations related to my daily and professional life. Among them, a couple of events impacted my life significantly.

The first one was the unforgettable first day of my summer course in 2019. The day before I was in a car accident and because of that, I was emotional and anxious all day. To make matters worse, I faced a language barrier, and I did not clearly understand what the instructors and classmates were talking about in the morning class. Even though I had a good score on my English test, the real spoken English was different from what I was familiar with. I felt a lot of butterflies in my stomach. I sat in my car alone during lunchtime, regretting being there and wanting to give up on everything. When I came back to the classroom, I told one of my instructors that I was not able to understand and speak English properly. She responded with a warm attitude and shared my difficulties with the other two instructors. They said to me that if they were in Korea, they might have been more overwhelmed than me. They fully understood my situation and let me share it with them. Their warmth and kindness put me at ease and helped me confidently engage with my peers.

Another significant event in that summer semester was the canoe trip. When we talked about the activity, my classmates were excited about it. I, on the other hand, was not too enthusiastic about the trip. I was afraid of being drawn into the water because I was not good at swimming. The day arrived when we went canoeing. My class and I left McDonald's Beach in Richmond at 9 a.m. Before departure, I had to pack my luggage in plastic bags to protect it from the water. Then I listened intently to the safety rules in case I fell into the water. I became frightened and reluctant to get on the canoe, and it reminded me of my

hesitancy when I made the decision to move to Canada. Nonetheless, I did not want to show my nervousness to others. I hid my feelings, and I began rowing.

On the Fraser Valley River, people in the canoe were rowing, singing, and enjoying the beautiful scenery and the cool breeze, but I could not join in. Instead, I kept paddling silently with fear. Three hours later, we stopped and had a break on the riverbank. At that time, the instructor, who I had spoken to about my difficulties with English, came to me and said, "I have a swimming instructor's license. If our boat overturns and all of us fall into the water, I will save you first," she said confidently. She must have noticed my nervousness and fear and wanted me to feel a little more relaxed, which thanks to her I did. We kept canoeing into the Pacific Ocean, where the harsh waters forced us to paddle more vigorously. I remembered I was not alone and continued to paddle with my peers. I was able to act calmly because I opened my mind to the unknown and let the butterflies fly away over the sea. Eventually, my nerves abated even though I was in the deep sea with waves.

We arrived safely at Jericho Beach after about a total of eight hours of canoeing. Upon arrival, my sense of accomplishment was more prominent than my feelings of relief. When I got off the canoe and stepped ashore, I was happy to have made it alive. Moreover, the instructors and some of my peers said to me, "Congratulations on experiencing real Canadian things and finishing your first canoe trip in Canada!" Sharing the joy and excitement with them made me smile. I felt engaged with Canadian people and involved in Canadian culture through overcoming challenges.

A few months after the trip, while working on an art project related to decolonization, I came across a canoe metaphor of the Indigenous people in an article. It gave me a different perspective about the trip.

"... Our canoe has tipped over and we are lost at sea, along with ourselves and our treasures. As we gather ourselves together and turn the canoe back over, we need to decide what we will bring with us back to shore. We must take the time to consider what we need to bring to shore because that is when the rebuilding of our nations will begin..." (Restoule and Chaw-win-is, 2017, 18p).

A canoe is an essential tool for Indigenous people's livelihood. Furthermore, it symbolizes their existence. The canoe metaphor leads people to imagine the situation in which a canoe has capsized and the people in the canoe are losing their heritage and their property alongside them. Subsequently, it poses a question: if they have to decide to bring only one thing from the deep sea to the shore, what would they choose? An Indigenous woman answered the authors' question; she would bring "a skeleton of what we once were" to rebuild their nations. It means that even though they had their lands stolen, they will restore sovereignty and rebuild their nations' culture.

I found the canoe metaphor relative to my trip. The canoe trip meant embracing the new challenges that my new life abroad brought. Initially, the meaning of the canoe experience for me was symbolic of overcoming difficulties.

Then, it made me think that intentionally losing myself was the best way to adapt myself to my new world and align myself to a new culture. However, the canoe metaphor also resonated with me in regard to keeping my roots and being proud of my identity because it is the most crucial thing for survival and reintegration. The canoe metaphor engraved in my heart shed a different perspective on my path while readjusting to new ways culturally, academically, and professionally. Moreover, I decided to contribute to the community and help people using my own knowledge, skills and experience.



Following that, I led a couple of art-based environmental education workshops for international students. It helped them release any stress by increasing their awareness of nature. I proceeded with an online English conversation club for newcomers. This club helped to engage them with the Canadian society dealing with many topics related to Indigenous history and

reconciliation. Also, I have sharpened my academic career by exploring multiple issues related to social justice and sustainability.

I have faced many difficult and uncomfortable moments in Canada, such as dealing with cultural differences, language discrimination and academic challenges. Thankfully, my instructors' and peers' support, the experience of the canoe trip and the lesson of the canoe metaphor gave me the courage and resilience to gently overcome those moments and move forward.

I will graduate and achieve my degree in the upcoming month of November. I did not envisage how far I would come since that nerve-racking first day of school. However, I did not give up and continued my academic journey like I did while rowing through the rough Pacific Ocean. I have kept the canoe metaphor in my mind and pursued my way forward. I will actively seek out opportunities to do fulfilling things for myself and others for a couple more years in Canada. If I return to my teaching job in South Korea, I will apply my meaningful experiences to truly understand students' challenges and foster them to dream of a better world.

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The Exchange That Changed My Life

Nerea Pedreira
University of Vigo, Spain

My name is Nerea Pedreira, and I am a 20-year-old Tourism undergraduate enrolled at the University of Vigo, Spain. I would like to share my story of summer 2018. I had just been awarded a scholarship that enabled me to take part in an International Summer School, which took place in the city of Bremerhaven, located in northern Germany.

At that time, I had never had any kind of encounter with exchange students, nor did I know which kind of students I was going to share my experience with for the following weeks. Every day I was surrounded by people from all over the world, but to my surprise, I was the only Spanish speaker. To be more precise, our international group was formed by more than eleven countries.

I had enough time to get to know each and every one of them better, day by day. However, there was someone who would change my life forever.

I met a German guy, a year older than me, with a different religion to mine (he was an Orthodox, and I am a Catholic) and who, moreover, grew up between two cultures due to his family's cultural background: German and Ukrainian. At the time, Bogdan was studying in the city where I was doing my exchange. We met by chance during one of my scheduled trips that the University would organize for us every week. After some hours, we both realized how much in common we had, despite our cultural differences; in fact, this just made it easier to be able to communicate with one another, since we had so many things to discover about our different lifestyles.

During that exchange, everything was new for me and he was the one in charge of showing me what his country looked like, making an unknown country feel like home for me during my time abroad, and most importantly making sure this experience would be unforgettable for both of us.

When my exchange was over, letting him go was hard. However, it was what we had to do at that time. As my flight took off, we were both hoping we would be able to reunite soon. It did happen after some months and it turned into a committed relationship that is still ongoing to date.

He taught me many things while overseas. We both had to figure out how to overcome our cultural differences, which did not seem that serious at the

beginning, but as we got to know each other deeper and deeper, we could see how much we actually differed in certain aspects of our lives. He taught me how to be more patient, and to be hopeful about the things that are about to come. But, most importantly, he made me feel cared about.

As for myself, since then, I have learnt how to be more open minded towards other cultures. I always try to seize every chance I have to meet foreigners. I also got to travel through the world, with and without him, more excited than ever to see what those countries and their locals would have to offer. And last but not least, I have learnt that during your exchange, anything can happen.

He showed me that intercultural differences do exist. However, we all have many things in common, despite our cultural backgrounds. Interculturalism is a complex but beautiful path to discover, especially when someone is willing to show you how to acknowledge those differences from another perspective.

Thanks to him, I was more than willing to take part in several exchanges after that International Summer School. In fact, my last exchange was over only a few months ago. Every exchange experience I take part in, has enabled me to currently have many friends all over the globe. What's more, I am considering moving to Germany in the near future to continue challenging myself in a foreign place.

International exchanges do change you, but in the most gratifying way. It all starts with the shyest "hello," and it ends with the most heartbreaking "goodbye." Those memories will stay forever in one's mind and one will be able to look back at them and feel grateful for every single person met. Everyone that crosses paths with you will teach you something that will turn you into the person you are today.

NEREA PEDREIRA (originally from Spain) is a tourism undergraduate student at the University of Vigo, Spain. Her degree is focused on the area of intercultural communication, mobility, and travel experiences. She has taken part in many international exchanges programs and she has also helped international students to integrate better in her home country while completing their studies. Email: pedreiranerea@gmail.com



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A Memorable Class Experience

Linda Tsevi
University of Ghana

I am a native of Ghana in West Africa. My current institution is University of Ghana, a public higher education institution situated in Accra, the capital city of Ghana in the West African sub-region. The country that my most memorable class experience occurred in is the United States of America, where I had been freshly admitted as a Fulbright international graduate student at a research university located in the Midwest. As an international student then, I had this unforgettable experience with a colleague in class and it has impacted me ever since. This incident happened during the first semester of my graduate program. The class colleague involved in this narrative was a Caucasian American, who I later learnt had not travelled to West Africa or any other African country.

The incident happened during a class on “Understanding the College Student” which examined among others, student developmental theories and how college students experience and adapt to the higher education environment after graduating from high school. This course also offered ways in which administrators of higher education institutions can support and understand college students and enable them to persist in college. The professor of the class had an ice breaker session where each student was supposed to mention an alma mater’s mascot. As an international student who had arrived on Fulbright Scholarship and was trying to adjust to the challenges of being at a research university in the U.S., I did not know the meaning of a mascot then. Invariably, the International Student and Scholar Services’ office had become my second home because that was where I got answers to my numerous questions. However, I could not go there to make any inquiry as the answer was immediately required. I, therefore, quietly asked my class colleague, whom I was sitting next to, about a mascot. But because we were sitting in a horseshoe shape, I could not ask her further clarifying questions without drawing attention to myself. I noted the surprised look on her face when I asked the question. Since it was almost my turn, she whispered to me and said “Just say the name of an animal or anything.” I still had no clue about what she was saying and when she saw the confusion on my face, she quickly whispered to me again to say “a beaver.” So when it came to my turn, I blurted “beaver.” Later on, after the class, I decided to do a little research about mascots, and it was defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary as an animal, a person or an object accepted by a group or an institution and is believed to bring some form of blessing.

Interestingly, the animal “beaver” did not even exist in the West African environment where I come from. This animal lives in a temperate zone and I am from the tropics where there is nothing like snow. In my country Ghana, we only have two seasons namely, the rainy season and dry season unlike the North American environment that has four seasons known as Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer. And here I was, a black international student from West Africa blurting out “beaver.” The fascinating aspect about this incident was that the professor accepted my answer and moved on to the next student. She did not make any further inquiry about why I mentioned a beaver knowing that I am a black international student. Later on, I hilariously laughed at myself and this experience has stuck with me ever since. In fact, I use it as a joke to make my family laugh anytime I want to relate some of my experiences as an international student to them.

The lesson learnt is that in a foreign country, one will find help when confronted with a challenge. My classmate extended a helping hand to me in my uncomfortable situation even though the given answer was wrong. She was unaware that beavers did not exist in the part of the world that I come from. I also accepted the help so that I would not be found wanting. This experience further indicates that when we get into certain situations as international students, we could have native students of that country extending a helping hand to make us comfortable and accepted. Ultimately, one salient lesson I learnt was that I should not be shy to ask for an explanation of issues or request for clarity when I am clueless about something. A professor of every class is there to assist students irrespective of their race and ethnicity.

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13

The Road Less Travelled: My Story as an International Student

Mercy Ogbonne Umeri
Wichita State University, USA

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
Took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference*
(Poem by Robert Frost)

It is such a huge privilege to share my experience of studying and being supported as an international student studying in the United States. After months of planning, studying, writing, and passing the Test of English as a First Language (TOEFL) exam and going through the immigration processes, I got accepted into a US school. In January 2016, I left Nigeria for the US with three young children—ages seven, five, and 16 months. And after more than a 24-hour journey, and two layovers, I arrived in the US. I started my graduate studies at the Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

For me, this felt like starting life from scratch because this was a foreign land. One may want to ask, why do international students come to the US for an education? Studying abroad creates essential social networks, and it exposes students to empowering ideologies – especially for women or members of minority groups. In Nigeria, for instance, about 40 percent of women have never attended school; this has caused more harm than good. Women are always told to "function and be happy in their place," and I have always asked, where is the woman's place? The kitchen? Making babies, being married, or being a caretaker? These are some of the questions that are still begging for answers.

As a social innovator, I took the road less traveled by deciding to study in the US. I believe that success is less a function of inborn personality traits than behavior patterns that people adopt; I am comfortable with uncertainty, and I am biased towards action. As a child, I discovered my agency when I started

teaching other girls to read and write; they became successful and empowered in life. This achievement taught me to act on my ideas. I feel empowered to act on universal goals for girls and women. Through my graduate studies, I am on the path to being empowered to fulfill my life's purpose as an agent of social change. As it turns out, from what we know from the literature on international education, people like me—those from a remote rural area, members of an indigenous group, from a society where females have limited opportunities—have stronger commitments to social change and achieve greater impacts. This is why I decided to return to graduate school after fifteen years of working in the nonprofit and human capacity and development industry.

The learning and living experiences from studying abroad cannot be replicated electronically or necessarily in one's home country. International students come to the USA to get quality education, gain global exposure, create meaningful relationships, become empowered to be functional members of society, return to their home countries, and apply their knowledge to make things better. The education I am getting from the US will empower me, provide me the leverage and platform to lend my voice to issues that concern girls and women not just in Africa but globally. Such issues include access to affordable education, fighting harmful cultural practices such as genital mutilation in girls, childhood marriages, and so many other gender-based issues. Solving development challenges requires the empowerment of local people through education and creating awareness. Women who can learn and have the opportunity must do so because they can go back home and reinvent solutions for their own context.

Starting the graduate program in the US was a leap of faith. Being a first-generation international student made my situation unique; I did not have any family members to ask about what to expect or anyone to ask for advice or direction. I knew that the transition to academics and life in a new environment would not be “a walk in the park.” While I knew I would face challenges, I had hoped it would be easier. I looked for books that addressed the uniqueness of international students who had similar backgrounds as me or those who had gone through this journey, but I could not find any. I had to rely on articles about international students who had gone through graduate programs and how they thrived. Many of the articles were “academic” in nature and did not provide the students' true-life experiences, especially for non-traditional students like me. After 15 years of finishing my undergraduate studies in Nigeria, I was returning to school, far away from home. I was looking for information or a guidebook on how to cope in my new environment. I wanted to know how to rent an apartment, locations for where to buy food and my local spices, find good schools and resources to help my children situate easily and quickly. I did not find any book catered to my kind of student, a Nigerian who was a first-generation female student schooling with children abroad. The brief orientation provided by the school authorities for international students was not enough. I

had more questions than answers. As much as I was excited about the new journey, which I knew would change the course of my life forever, I was struggling.

There were so many days I asked myself if this was worth the trouble. Some days were better than others, but I always heard the voice of my mother saying to me in my Igbo dialect, "Mercy, jisike maka ife di oku ga ju oyi," which is an expression that means "Mercy, keep at it, everything will be fine, no matter how unfavorable a situation is, it eventually gets better." I drew strength from those words, and I also knew for a fact that other international students have succeeded on this "sojourn," and I will also succeed. Just as my mother's words lingered in my mind through those long days, help eventually came.

One cold January morning, I walked to the international office to make some inquiries about some concerns. It was so cold that the tears were flowing involuntarily from my eyes, my teeth were chattering, and I was shivering. Then I heard someone shout out, "my sister, how are you?" I was shocked because the voice sounded familiar, but I did not know anybody in Wichita, so who could be "my sister" in Wichita? I stopped, turned around, and saw a beautiful woman who looked like me and had an accent that could not be mistaken for non-African. We introduced ourselves; she was from Namibia, and I told her I was from Nigeria. We hugged each other, and it was so comforting. She had schooled and lived in Wichita for four years, so; she knew places and people. She connected me with other Nigerians, Africans, and other international students living in Wichita. We exchanged numbers and she promised to stay in touch. That meeting with the African "sister" changed my life for the better in the US. Through the new connections I made, it was easier to get enrollment information for my children because many of these people had young children just like me. I found resources that made my transition and adjustment easier. I got to know where to buy "African food," built a new community, and found a new support system for me and my children in Wichita.

My adjustment process, both academically and socially, would have been much more difficult without my new support system. As I reflect on my experiences, I am grateful for that cold January morning. I know that the only way I can show my gratitude for those who made my adjustment easy is to pay it forward. Apart from looking out for and reaching out to other new international students (especially those with children), I reached out to the international office executive director at my school to let them know that I would always be available to support new international students. I also made a case for different orientation programs for first-generation students, especially those returning to graduate school with young children. I advocated for informational materials that have a list of resources within the school. Furthermore, I intend to help international students transition easily into their new environment. The need for support for international students cannot be overemphasized. Research

has shown that international students managed cross-cultural adjustment better with a sound support system.

Coming to study in the US has presented me with limitless possibilities. I put to practice what I have learned through the work I do now as an assistant teaching professor, as a mentor and inspiration to other international students. I am a better person today; I have been empowered to go out there and be a voice of hope and courage to other girls and women who thought they could never become anything in life. When my daughters look at me, I want them to be inspired to know that they can be more. We are better when we can rise above our individual confines to address global issues and concerns. I am grateful for this once in a lifetime opportunity to have been an international student.

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A Visit to My Mentor's Class

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I got a new method and a new language of teaching and learning in one of my PhD supervisors or mentor's classes at the University of Norway. I, an international student, was inquisitive to know how my mentor would organize her class, teach and interact with her students. I was excited. I asked my friend to join me. He did. As soon as we reached the place, I saw her with her colleagues and students having snacks. She welcomed us. While having snacks, I wondered whether they begin every class with snacks. Later I came to know that unlike our classroom culture, they start the session with some food and coffee. After snacks, she took us into her class.

We went to the second to last row and adjusted. She introduced us and briefly told us about the class. It was not unexpected. I was ready to experience possible classroom cultural shocks. The first shock was the presence of the English language translator (her student), who volunteered to translate the Norwegian language into the English language for us as she was giving the class in the Norwegian language. Although she mixed the English language only for us, I wondered about having experience of encountering the two foreign languages. More than that, I was surprised to know from her (later) that all teaching in teacher education is conducted in Norwegian. All teachers in Norwegian schools teach their subjects in Norwegian. Therefore, all student teachers must master the Norwegian language, both written and spoken.

That encounter raised many queries in my mind. Could I give justice to my learning that I got in the process of contextualizing education by writing journal articles and my dissertation in (only) foreign (English) language? Why did I not find Nepali texts to understand my context before I went to the research site? Did I explore? What would happen if I get the opportunity to write my dissertation in the Nepali language? Can I articulate my experiential knowledge explicitly through the English language?

The shower of questions suddenly stopped when I noticed something unusual. Her colleague took over the facilitation role and began to facilitate the class. I held my breath in excitement. Since my school days, I never saw two teachers assisting the classroom harmoniously. For instance, although there were teacher educators supporting teachers to facilitate in Aurland (a place of Norway where I visited to see how education is contextualized) and in Dapcha (a place of Nepal where I engaged in the process of contextualizing education) I

observed teachers feeling discomfort in the presence of other colleagues in the class and out of the class through their body language (e.g. collaboration), the language of mutuality! I wondered for a long time. Later I explored that they were both mentors and learners to each other in their professional careers. According to her, after completing her PhD, they continued to be colleagues, teaching, doing research, supervising PhD-students and writing together and always learning from each other, from their mutual experiences, discussions, agreements and disagreements - reflections.

At times I heard interaction between my friend and the translator who was continuously translating. Still I was not giving my ear to her as my eyes were fixed to experience the inexperienced things. Perhaps it was my willingness to know the new way of teaching and learning. I liked the way the students engaged in group interaction. I did not understand what she said to the students. I saw them interacting in low voices sitting closely. That must be a discussion on the emergent issue, I guessed.

Then, suddenly I experienced amazement, another shock. What amazed me was the role of her colleague. He reached out to the students who seemed less engaging in interaction. Like the way my mentor of Nepal used a sense of humor in his pedagogy, he was saying something unusual time and again as he burst the class into laughter. I learned how to build mutual relationships with students and address monotony in university classes. Although I did not understand what he said, I laughed hearing their laughter. That was funny. The funnier thing was that I suspected the laughter thinking they were making fun of us and laughing at us seeing us in their classroom, unwanted guests. Perhaps it was my low self-esteem! Intending to be sure, I carefully examined their body language, whether they were making fun of us or not. I found no sign of that. I whispered to myself, "Stupid!" Then I realized body language was a universal language.

I still wonder what my friend was thinking while paying attention to the translations when I was wondering, suspecting, and experiencing sweet cultural shocks. I was not paying attention to the translator. What did the translator think about me, a less engaged learner?

Gradually, after spending about an hour, things seemed normal to me as I began to make sense of their co-teaching by observing the multiple forms of interactions: facilitator-facilitator, student-student, and facilitator-student. In the break time, I asked her in my wonderment, "Are all the classes having two teachers in Norway?" She said something like this,

"The co-teaching is fun and dynamic. We co-create the class together with the students, within a rather firm frame we have planned. Because we know each other well, we do not plan ahead who will say what, but often I keep the structure, and he often fills in more detail or discussion.... But sometimes we switch roles, and we both interact with the students. We are sensitive to when it is ok to interrupt and when to leave the other to fulfill an argument. And sometimes we screw up and have to apologize to each other for not being as

sensitive as we should, and then we try to learn from that, so we can be better next time! We discussed afterward, what went as we wanted, and what we wanted to change. We constantly learn together and from each other.” Satisfied with her answer I smiled.

From that short visit, I got a sense of participatory pedagogy. I was unaware of participatory pedagogy (Hedges & Cullen, 2012). Perhaps I did not experience learning with the teachers who had adapted participatory pedagogy. Or I might not have realized teachers’ participatory approach. However, I liked it. My attraction toward her pedagogy had a deep meaning that I did not realize then. Later while developing my living educational theory (Dhungana, 2020), I explored that we had a common living value, love, as her living values were love and critique (Gjøtterud, 2009). Influenced by her pedagogy and our common living value, I planned to engage in co-teaching and learning after returning to Nepal.

I began to facilitate my university class by adapting participatory pedagogy in which I collaborated with my colleague. I encouraged peer teaching, learning, and assessment. I deepened my understanding of participatory pedagogy and its strength by conducting a participatory assessment. I continued sharing the strengths of participatory approaches, participatory inquiry, and collaborative inquiry through academic writing, conference papers, and webinar presentations, including my class.

Recently, I explored a deeper meaning (i.e. Nepali socio-cultural) of the word ‘participatory’. The word participatory means sahabhagita in Nepali. In the compound word, saha-bhagita, saha means ‘co’ which appears in the words such as cooperation, co-learning to name some. I learned that participatory, by its nature, possesses the qualities of inclusion, openness, collaboration, cooperation, co-learning, and co-teaching. Then, while writing my dissertation, I went through the Sanskrit tantric text, Vijnana-bhairava tantra that deepened my understanding of participatory as a mantra. I discovered that in the yogic or tantric tradition, the first two phonemes or sounds ‘sa’ and ‘ha’ are the constellation of a mantra. I made sense of it in the state of inhaling and exhaling breath and realized this mantra is the mantra of existence or living.

From it, I got an insight that harmonious breath can enhance life. Humanly developed languages were insufficient for me to understand dis/harmony. Instead, I relied on the prakrit language (a natural language that existed before Sanskrit), such as gestures (e.g. smile, laughter). For Timalisina (2016), gesture is a tantric language. For me, it is a natural and/or universal language. From that insight, I realized that I got a mantra, a tool for facilitation, or participatory pedagogy as a harmonious method of teaching and learning. I also learned a new language, gesture, and natural teaching and learning medium.

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A Shining Bright Light at The End of a Dark Tunnel

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I was thrilled when I received a call from Human Resources in July 2016 about my successful contract employment as an Associate Lecturer (Level A) at a university in Melbourne, Australia. I did my PhD in Australia, and I was fortunate that, within 7 months of my post-PhD graduation, I was employed there. During my PhD I got married, and we decided to stay in Australia and not return home to our home country, Malaysia, at least for several years. Therefore, receiving the job offer mattered, because I will have a job which is equivalent to my qualifications. As an international PhD graduate, the job offer also endorsed my knowledge, skills and boosted my self-confidence.

I still remember when I attended a career development workshop for PhD students organized by a university in Melbourne, just a few months before I completed my PhD so that I could understand the Australian employment landscape. In the workshop, we were informed that we needed to have seven “things.” Truthfully, I can only remember the first three and the last one. The first three were completing your PhD (I mentally ticked that off), several publications (in my mind I was in a hot soup, as I only had two published journal papers), gaining Australian work experience like tutoring (A BIG tick as I was a casual tutor since starting my PhD) and the last one was likeability – and that’s when I frowned, because I did not know how to demonstrate likeability. I went away quite disturbed with the “things” wanted: as well as being an international student it was too mind-boggling to think BIG in entering the job market at Australian universities. However, I was reassured by family members and friends. They kept on saying, cross the bridge when you come to it.

FIRST TIME BEING EMPLOYED IN AUSTRALIA

So, when the bridge came upon PhD completion, I was alone, as my primary supervisor left for another university and my second supervisor died just before I completed my PhD. I was in the dark about how to navigate employment opportunities in Australia as a newly emerging international academic. I had no guidance on how to draft a cover letter, writing up a resume or even how to address interview questions. I had work experience in Malaysia as a professional

staff member at a university, but I had to write a cover letter and resume, and address interview questions, in ways Australia required. So, what did I do? – I asked “Mr Google!”, who certainly assisted me by providing cover letters and resume templates and even provided answers to some of the interview questions. But, still doubting Mr Google, I reached out to my late supervisor’s best friend who happens to be an academic. She was kind enough to send me her resume and cover letter and then I became more confident.

I applied for a position which was lower than my qualifications, but I was happy to do so to gain some related work experience. And so, I was thrilled to receive that call from Human Resources.

CHALLENGES AFTER CHALLENGES...

As I had limited guidance on navigating my career path as a new and emerging international academic, I faced numerous challenges related to research. I did not know who to turn to for research guidance, what I should do next in terms of research funding, what I should do to gain leadership positions, how I could join or develop my research team, where I could publish my work, how I should make time to publish because my teaching load was high – these questions constantly ran through my mind (and even now). But I was confident in my teaching capabilities because I had been teaching while doing my PhD and I had several teaching mentors to guide me.

In terms of research, I had to practically ‘run/sprint’ in learning on how to write grant proposals (by the way I learned from a rubbish bin: a grant proposal was left in the bin and I happened to pick it up and kept it in my research diary – that helped me a lot!), how to network with other colleagues, how to find a team to work with, how to locate funding, and how to navigate office politics.

Because my research interests were not aligned with those of colleagues in the department, it was harder to find a senior or even junior colleague I could work with. That put a lot of pressure on me because I knew that to succeed in academia you needed to build your track record, which I did not have – with my limited publications, no funding and no team members, no research mentors!

And what made it worse was I was a new and emerging early career international academic who now needs to navigate academic career in Australia on her own!

OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES...

From the get-go, I started going to workshops offered at the university for early career researchers. I found them extremely useful to understand the mechanics of Australian academia. I slowly started to network with other colleagues at the university and now I have an international academic colleague who also happens to be an early career researcher like me from the Public Health department and

with a similar research interest. We are a team now! We have several on-going institutional and international collaborative research projects with Scotland and the United Kingdom. Together we have also gained seed internal funding from the university, for which we are grateful. Now, we are confident to seek external funding. It was and still is hard work for both of us because we face challenges related to research. However, we have senior colleagues who are generous with their time to guide us in our research journey.

I also started looking outwards from the institution. I started making connections and rekindled links with my Malaysian academics at the university where I worked previously. I made long-lasting connections with them when I was invited to provide workshops related to international students and academics' employability, numerous research collaborations, research consultancies grants and many other research-related opportunities.

In my early years, I was not provided with any research-related opportunities by colleagues due to my limited research experience and output. I then started creating opportunities for myself. I was attending a workshop at my university on how to build your research career and one professor who happens to be an international academic, said, "I self-created opportunities in my early years as an international academic". I was so intrigued by his honesty. "No one was inviting me to present my research work or even be on a research team", he said. That resonated with me: I was in the same boat! Hence, I started this strategy too and it works. Want to know how? I usually email the academic who I want to work with because we are in the same research area, to talk about my recent research project. I will then invite them for a coffee (this was during pre-COVID times, currently it is via Zoom). In our talks I will create an opportunity for me either to present or conduct a workshop at their institution. This has happened with international universities as well, especially during COVID.

A SHINING BRIGHT LIGHT AT THE END OF A DARK TUNNEL

My mother always says that 'every cloud has a silver lining'. So true! It is not an easy journey for international academics; especially those who, like me, do not have a research mentor or sponsor. I had to be creative and think out of the box on how to navigate my academic career in Australia. I am extremely grateful to the institutional services offered to me and the generosity of many other academics in Australia and internationally who have guided my research. More importantly, providing me with the mentorship to succeed.

As an early-career international academic, one needs to have determination, resilience and passion to thrive in academia. Apart from winning several institutional and international teaching and research awards, one of the highlights of my academic journey is that I have recently been promoted as a senior lecturer (effective January 2022), just within five years of my employment in 2016. I am

over the moon with this achievement! The tunnel may be dark, but even with twists and turns tunnels eventually lead to the light.

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Back to Cuenca

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I am a student from Mexico. My area of training is education and I hold a master's degree in International Higher Education. My interest in this subject arose precisely from an exchange experience I had in Spain in 2016, because after it, I was interested in learning more about the process at the institutional level and the individual experiences of students. Additionally, during this, I was able to meet people from different backgrounds and eliminate some stereotypes and beliefs I had about other cultures.

Over that time, I had different experiences that contributed to the development of several skills and, at the same time, encouraged my interest in internationalization and what is related to this process, not just at an institutional or administrative level but at a personal level, especially the experiences that different students have and how they impact their careers.

The story I will tell happened in Spain while I was doing my academic exchange.

To begin with, I found it quite interesting that in two subjects of the four I enrolled, Psychology of Values and Education for Coexistence, and Interculturality and Education, professors asked me to share more about my culture and contrast it with the culture of the country where I was studying.

I have to say that in my classes, I was one of only two foreign students, and the professors from those subjects wanted us to share our experiences, which I found interesting because it helped me to interact better with my classmates. Also, that was so useful to be more conscious about the similarities and differences and helped me to integrate better into the institutional and city dynamic.

One of the most significant tasks for me was in the area of Interculturality and Education, because it was precisely in this area that we were assigned to find out from the people who lived in Cuenca, where I made my exchange, what their perception of migrants was, and additionally, we had to ask foreign students their opinion about the city and the opportunities it had to offer.

It was quite interesting because at the end of the day I was a person who didn't belong to the country, and even if my objective was to study, I found the different answers that were given very attractive.

Among the different points of view, the one I remember most was the idea that older people had since for them migrants came to "steal" the jobs of local people, so they were not well seen. In this regard, it is important to clarify that most of the people who live in this city were already retired or were students who moved to it because of the university, so their opinions were conditioned by their experiences with foreigners. This seems important to me because in the end it influences our perception of certain phenomena or people.

On the contrary, young students considered better that there were more and more people from other contexts, as this favoured the exchange of ideas and the awareness of the differences and similarities between different cultures.

Undoubtedly, the above mentioned made me realize that while one might think that there are countries more open to change and the integration of people from different backgrounds, this is not always the case, as in every context there are situations of rejection in the face of the unknown. However, this experience helped me to value diversity even more since by questioning the person directly, I was able to define a vision and establish a much more realistic view.

Another of the most significant experiences for me occurred when I joined an extracurricular journalism activity, which was open not only to locals but also to exchange students. So, when I entered, I introduced myself, and everyone was friendly. At that moment, some tasks were assigned to me, which allowed me to meet more people.

Collaboration in the organization of the visits of high school students to the university was one of them, and I also participated in sharing my experience as an exchange student.

It was great as it allowed me to meet many more people and break the stereotypes I had, as we worked collaboratively between local and exchange students, sharing our perspectives on the institution and why we chose it.

It also allowed me to learn more about how journalism was approached from other contexts and participate in other events that not only contributed to my professional but also personal development.

Additionally, by working as a team with people from other contexts, I knew their opinion, and this contributed to my appreciation of diverse points of view, beliefs, and experiences, which I continue doing today. This was because the team was made up of people from different countries and regions of Spain, each with a different perception of the country and with ideas that contributed to the work being carried out in the best possible way.

I think that it was in this team that I was most able to identify the benefits of working in a multicultural team, as we all shared experiences and opinions that led to a better result.

Without a doubt, this experience allowed me to realize that when I leave my country or meet people from other contexts, I did so with a predefined idea regarding how we will be dealt with, which conditioned the way I interacted with others.

It helped me to be a more open-minded person, capable of adapting to different contexts and working in different groups. Also, if there is one thing, I was able to verify during my exchange, it is that we all have valuable contributions to make, something that completely changed the way I related with others.

Finally, I have had the opportunity to collaborate in multicultural events, and thanks to these experiences, I have become more aware of how important it is to respect and value others' thoughts and how each of the differences contributes to the work together, something I applied during my master's and with other courses I have done, since I have had the opportunity to be in multicultural and international groups.

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Facing a Property Lawsuit Experience

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It has never occurred to me that I would need to deal with a courthouse in my life. As an international student at Texas A&M University, USA, avoiding issues with courts is a “must” to ensure the achievement of my graduation timeline. Nevertheless, we can never predict what is going to happen to us as humans. Thankfully, there is always “a good Samaritan” in every complex story. My personal experience with being supported in difficult times came from a stranger that I have never met in my life and in an unexpected time.

The unpleasant story began when my family and I decided to move out of a duplex property to seek a new apartment after our lease ended in July 2019 due to finding a closer apartment to my daughters' school. As an international doctoral student mother from Indonesia, closer proximity to their school is vital to help me manage my time between a student and a mother role. Upon exiting the property, I completed my responsibility as a tenant by leaving the apartment clean and in the expected condition as required by the landlord. Besides, leaving the property in an orderly condition was a requirement to get our deposit returned.

A month after moving into a new apartment, I received a letter from my former landlord, informing me that he would not return my deposit and asked me to pay a staggering bill for the duplex property repairs. Reading the letter and seeing such a large bill devastated my life. To my surprise, none of the damages listed in the letter was there when we left the property. Undeniably, the notification left me shocked because I have never been involved in any dispute nor broken any rules before. Nonetheless, I tried to resolve the issue by contacting the property agent via both emails and calls. The agent recommended that I reach out to the landlord as the agent was not aware of the cost as well as the damages. I reached out to the landlord. Sadly, he was not willing to communicate and insisted that I pay the bills. As an international student who lives on a graduate student assistantship living with a family in the USA, it was obvious that \$1000 was a huge amount of money for me and I could not foresee obtaining such an amount in short notice. At the same time, I was also worried

that encountering the issue with the court might affect my study in the USA. So, I ended up emailing the landlord and asking for a possibility for the payment instalment plan as I could not afford the bill as an international student at once. He refused and decided to serve me with the court papers.

As I did not know what to do, I consulted the university Legal Services Office to seek options. To my surprise, the lawsuit was not only addressed to me but to the other six tenants who left the property in the same month in 2019. What made it more shocking was that the university's Legal Service Office representative shared that the former landlord had previously been in similar cases and lost twice to the tenants. The representative was familiar with my issue as previous students have reported similar cases with the landlord. As the office only provides advocacy services, I was provided with several options, including filing a complaint to the district court. However, as an international student, I did not want to pursue a legal option as I did want to put both my education and family at risk in a foreign country. Furthermore, I realized the lawsuit process through the court will be time-consuming and costly, which will affect my focus on completing my academic degree. So, I contacted the landlord again and humbly requested a two-month window to pay the bill. Alas, he rejected my request and urged me to face him in court.

I was completely overwhelmed with the property lawsuit and did not know what to do to resolve the issue. Luckily, I found the contact information of the other former tenants who left the property at the same time from one of the emails the former landlord sent us. I reached out to them, who were all Americans, and learned that they received similar charges. Likewise, they felt the bills were incorrect and unreasonable. So, they decided to come up with a class-action lawsuit and asked me if I wanted to join them. I declined as I did not have enough financial resources as an international student mother. Unexpectedly, one of their mothers offered to pay for my lawyer's portion. I was so amazed by her kindness. I could not help to think of her rationale for financially supporting us, people who she did not even know before. It turned out that she had prior experience working with international students. That experience made her relate to the struggles and challenges international students face during their studies in a foreign country.

The case has been going for over a year now. Unfortunately, the court put our case on hold due to the covid-19 pandemic situation. Despite going through an emotional and confusing time due to the lawsuit, I felt both emotionally and financially supported throughout this experience. I am still in awe of the stranger's exceptional benevolence. Such extraordinary kind-heartedness is mind-blowing and, indeed, is something that I will pay forward. This experience has also made me aware of the importance of institutional support. The university has provided useful information about my legal rights and responsibilities that made me feel empowered in responding appropriately to my

legal challenge. Such support left me to feel welcomed, included and valued, despite being an international student.

As I reflect on my tenant-landlord dispute, I wished I had known these tenants when I was living in the property. But activities as a mother graduate student, whose graduation timeline is tight, made me occupied with my academic and family routines. However, due to the unforeseen encounter because of the lawsuit, I have a new friend that I will cherish forever now. Throughout this experience, I realize that the dispute has enhanced the idea of how things in common having brings people together. After all, there is always a silver lining in every cloud, and so is my lawsuit experience.

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Fifteen Years of Friendship Paid Forward

Kyunghee Ma
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As the theater doors swing open, the audience members rush in to find their seats. The theater is filled with side-stepping and jostling until everybody has settled into their place. Quickly, silence falls over the crowd like a dispersing mist. All the lights turn off and the curtain rises slowly. A female student from South Korea, who has rosy cheeks and dark brown eyes complemented by shining, premature gray hair, walks toward center stage. Lights turn on one by one, following her footsteps, and the audience holds its collective breath. The student, standing tall at the center, looks around as if searching the crowd for someone. As she clears her voice, her Coke-bottle glasses slip down her flat nose and she pushes them back up. She musters up the courage to tell the audience about a friend whose unconditional kindness opened her eyes to seeing the world as a good place to live in again. She now begins her story...

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Greg Arcaro is an American friend and mentor of mine who became vitally important during my journey of self-growth as an international student. We met in April 2005 through a professional development exchange program hosted by the Rotary International Club in New York. At the time, I worked for a Seoul-based non-profit organization that provides services to Korean adoptees who return to their motherland in search of their roots. Receiving a multitude of service requests from clients, I felt pressured to broaden my knowledge of intercountry adoption and bolster my self-confidence.

Greg and his wife Janice opened their home to me and made me feel welcome during my stay in New York. They were genuinely curious about South Korea and asked relevant questions with cultural humility, which made me feel respected and appreciated. Greg also molded the exchange program to fit my needs; activities included visiting the UN and UNICEF headquarters, as well as attending seminars about child sexual exploitation in war-torn countries and depression in intercountry adoptees. After completing the program, I returned to Seoul armed with newfound knowledge and continued in the field of social work feeling more assured. Over the following years, Greg and I kept in touch via email.

CORRESPONDENCE, FRIENDSHIP, AND TRANSFORMATION

Our friendship blossomed when I returned to school in 2014 to pursue a doctorate in social work. Greg, a former doctoral student, understood my workload and offered practical help and emotional support in every possible way he could from New York. Compared to Oregon, where I had previously studied and worked, the culture of South Carolina was more formal, reserved, and polite, yet simultaneously superficial, distant, and condescending. Because of this, Greg's support was crucial. Questions the locals generally asked me were on trivial topics such as food, weather, their distant Asian friends, and my English; I was perfectly capable of handling difficult topics, but these locals did not see that. I also observed that some White folks used the word "culture" in place of "race," perhaps because it felt safer. I wondered why they censored their words. Why were so many people walking on eggshells around discussions of race and culture?

My church experience also revealed that life in the South was an entirely different culture, especially when it comes to the conventions of Southern Christianity. Southern Christianity puts enormous pressure on people to focus on the positives while disregarding the negatives. For example, when I tried to share with them the ill-treatment I received at school, most at my church did not show keen interest in hearing about my experiences. They avoided the topic by saying, "People are created equal in God. As Christians, we must forgive sinners." As a Christian, I could not agree more, but my reality as a person of color was vastly different. My frustrations ran deep as our differences led to a lack of social and cultural connection and my inability to express myself. In retrospect, life in the South was much tougher than I expected. After spending six years on the west coast, I thought I had "nailed" American culture. I did not realize that another cross-cultural adjustment was underway. The cross-cultural adjustment was incredibly stressful, so in an effort to salvage my mental health, I began emailing Greg about my life.

Greg was a good listener. My emails were often negative and sarcastic, but he read them carefully and responded empathetically. He assured me my experience was real and his sentiments offset my negative experiences. When he gave advice, his words reflected his values for social inclusion and respect of all human beings. Greg and I always had much to discuss regarding social justice, privilege, and giving back because his mother was one of the first female social work professors in American history. When Greg flew to South Carolina to attend my graduation, he gave me a copy of his mother's book, published in 1970. *Selected Readings for Casework Supervisors in Public Agencies* presents social workers as change agents responsible for understanding the impact of relationships on an individual's functioning. Turning the faded first page of the book, I felt I had become a part of American social work history.

My happenstance acquaintance with Greg evolved into a 15-year friendship which included birthday cards, gifts, and shared holiday celebrations when I could not afford to travel home. Knowing how much I wanted to see *The Phantom of the Opera*, Greg took me to the show on Broadway in January 2015. As I was watching the spectacular performance led by world-class singers, I locked my hands under my chin, praying that this feeling would last forever and that I would be able to sing my own song on stage someday. At the end of the show, in total excitement, I looked over to tell Greg how much I enjoyed the show. His eyes were wet with tears.

Anyone can provide brief acts of kindness, but Greg was continuously (and selflessly) kind to me. His kindness permeated into my world of sarcasm and self-isolation like a drop of ink, spreading slowly and surely, and his encouraging words changed me for the better. I once harbored anger toward White Americans, and I was quick to criticize them for being culturally insensitive. Greg was different from most Americans I had met who seemed to pride their individualism above everything else, yet continued to group all Asians in one box. He was cognizant and respectful of both my personal and cultural identities. He also recognized his privilege as a highly educated New Yorker and used it for good. Greg's non-judgmental attitude and cultural humility encouraged me to look inward and foster the same humility. With my former vision blurred by anger and resentment, I had failed to see my privilege that enabled me to explore a new country, an opportunity inaccessible to many. While I convinced myself that being an international student automatically made me an intercultural person, I did not seek to understand and embrace differences. Thanks to my dear friend, I am unlearning and learning anew what I thought I knew before.

A SINGLE REQUISITE FROM MR. ARCARO: PAY IT FORWARD

Mr. Greg Arcaro has walked alongside me for over 15 years on my quest to find meaning and purpose. His unconditional kindness, active listening, and compassionate understanding helped me to heal, and his positive attitude led me to develop a desire to see people for who they are. Greg has taught me that self-improvement comes through intentionality with an effort to explore one's unconscious biases and assumptions. His help and support came with a single requisite: pay it forward. I work hard daily to fulfill his noble request as a social worker and mental health advocate by listening to people's pain, helping those in need with a willing heart, and most importantly, allowing myself to be vulnerable so that I can connect with the world.

—

Back on the stage, the Korean student concludes by saying her story has a beginning but no ending because her friendship with Greg continues to evolve, as will she. She confirms that acts

of kindness surely go a long way; they strip doubts and plant a seed of hope in people's hearts, like Greg did for her. On that note, she bows to the audience. One last time, she looks through the crowd and finds a familiar face. With unadulterated happiness, her dark brown eyes glow, as does her smile. She and the man who looks proudly at her exchange a warm smile. The student walks down the stage and the curtain falls...

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PART III

Trials with Stress or Isolation

The Road Not Taken

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*Two roads diverged in a wood
And I, I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference*
-Robert Frost

As a blessed person who has witnessed the beauty of taking the road not taken, my heart is pounding to share my experience as a former international student who took a less traveled road.

While I currently work as a faculty member in the field of education at a U.S. higher education institution, my journey as an educator began in fall 2003, the semester that I came to Michigan State University (MSU) from South Korea to pursue a graduate degree in counseling. Although I knew I was privileged to leave my home country to study abroad and I was filled with pride that I had decided to take a less traveled road by studying counseling in the United States, which was extremely rare for someone from Korea at that time, my first day was horrible and the second day was even worse. As a timid and inexperienced 23-year-old girl who barely spoke English and did not understand the cultural context or the U.S. educational system, I was invisible in all my classes and did nothing but complain about my limited ability and the regret I felt with my decision to study abroad. Since my major, “counseling,” required strong communication skills and advanced emotional and cultural understanding to identify difficulties and interpret stories shared by patients, following my classes and counseling practicums was extremely challenging and probably almost impossible for me while I was fresh off the boat. In addition to feeling inferior about my English proficiency and academic progress, I constantly experienced adjustment difficulties, acculturative stress, isolation, and emotional turbulence during my first semester (Koo, Baker et al, 2021; Koo, Kim et al., 2021). Although today I understand what those negative experiences and challenges are and even do research on this topic (Koo, 2021; Koo & Nyunt, 2020; Koo, Nyunt et al., 2021; Koo, Yao et al., 2021), back then, I had no idea why life was so hard. I thought it was my fault for making too bold a decision to take a less traveled road by studying abroad. I lost who I was and why I was there while striving to survive and failing multiple times.

On the last day of September 2003, on my way back to my dorm from a counseling practicum session, which was a low point because my assigned patient gave me the worst score on a counselor evaluation, I saw some students lying on the grass in front of the main library and reading happily. The sunshine was very beautiful, the air was so fresh, and the students looked happy and satisfied. I stopped walking and talked to myself: “The sunshine is beautiful, the air is fresh, and the students look so happy. But what about me? Am I happy?”

At that moment, I ran to my dorm, turned on my laptop, and opened the document titled Statement of Purpose, prepared for my application to MSU the year before. I read it quietly. In my statement, I cited a poem, “The Road Not Taken,” by Robert Frost—my favorite poem. I remembered how excited I was while I wrote the statement, how happy I was when I was admitted to American colleges, how cheerful I was when I bought the air ticket to America, how confident I was when I first arrived at MSU, and I remembered how proud I was of myself for taking a less traveled road by taking this journey of studying abroad. This poem reminded me that I wanted to take the less traveled road because this choice would lead to positive differences, like the line that road has made all the difference. Then, it occurred to me that the less traveled road will lead to adventures and not all those adventures have to be positive or pleasurable, but through some unexpected challenges and struggles, the road will lead me to make all the difference. I realized that I had forgotten my identity as a person who took the less traveled road while experiencing my struggles. This process took place in less than five minutes on the afternoon of the last day of September 2003.

After these five minutes of self-reflection, I suddenly remembered a special event for international students at MSU—the First International Writing Contest sponsored by the MSU International Office. Entries were due at 5 pm that day. This writing contest invited all international students to share any experiences they wanted to share. As I remembered this opportunity, I could not help but start writing right away. I still do not understand how I did it because I literally had only two hours to write and submit a 1,500-word essay. I poured out all my experiences, fear, feelings of inferiority, frustration, and identity as a less traveled road-taker in a foreign country during my first month at MSU. I poured out all my emotions, mixed feelings, determination, and reflections that afternoon. I remembered that I was desperate to express my emotions, and I noticed that I was excited and happy while writing. I finished at 4:45 pm, printed the essay, prayed for one minute, and rode a bike to the International Office carrying the essay in my backpack. At 4:55 pm, I arrived and submitted my essay titled “The Road Less Traveled By.” After that day, I gradually changed my attitude. I tried to focus on who I was and why I was here and what made me happy. I tried not to worry about my English, about my counseling patients who complained about me, about whether or not I could graduate, and about surviving at MSU. Instead,

I tried to do what I could and continued to think about my identity as a less traveled road-taker.

One afternoon, November 20th of 2003, I received a phone call. It was Dr. Peter Briggs, Director of the MSU International Student Office, announcing that my essay won first place in the International Writing Contest. I was speechless at first, then burst into tears. I asked him what made them award me first place, telling him that I do not speak English well. I even asked him, “Aren’t there a lot of grammatical errors?” The director answered, “Yes there were several errors, but the entire award committee was deeply touched by your genuine story. Your writing was so powerful, and we want you to be successful here at MSU.”

That day and the award were the turning point in my MSU life as an international graduate student. To many people, an award could be a positive outcome or a good reward, but for me that writing award was my motivation to stay and pursue my degree as I planned. The award helped me stop thinking about going back home or regretting my decision about taking a less traveled road. While I was still making a lot of mistakes and was far behind in many things, I pushed myself to work hard and did not give up. Instead of spending time thinking about excuses to go back to Korea, I practiced my counseling practicum, wrote class papers, and visited office hours to talk to professors. Now I think back on my own process of acculturation, and I am glad that I did not buy a return ticket to Korea. The writing process was itself a self-therapeutic session to heal myself as a counselor while I reflected and poured out my stories and emotions. The writing itself was a strong reinforcement motivating me to take charge of myself instead of being vulnerable. And the award was the final step that made my motivation become firm determination about my direction as an international student: the process will be difficult, but rewards will follow.

The lessons from this first and special fall semester of 2003 were carved deeply in my heart. For the past 17 years, I have not given up nor bought a return ticket to Korea (of course I visited Korea frequently for occasional work and to see my family) for good. During those 17 years, I have been privileged to take a road less traveled, and I witnessed that my decision made all the difference. There have been several incidents that put my life on edge and sometimes I had nowhere to run away to, but there were several surprising events that raised me up and helped me stay motivated and determined. I still fall and experience hopelessness sometimes, but I still remember my identity as a less traveled road-taker and remember the moment when I received a call from the Director of the International Student Office. Life still goes on and I am still taking a less traveled road.

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The Stranger

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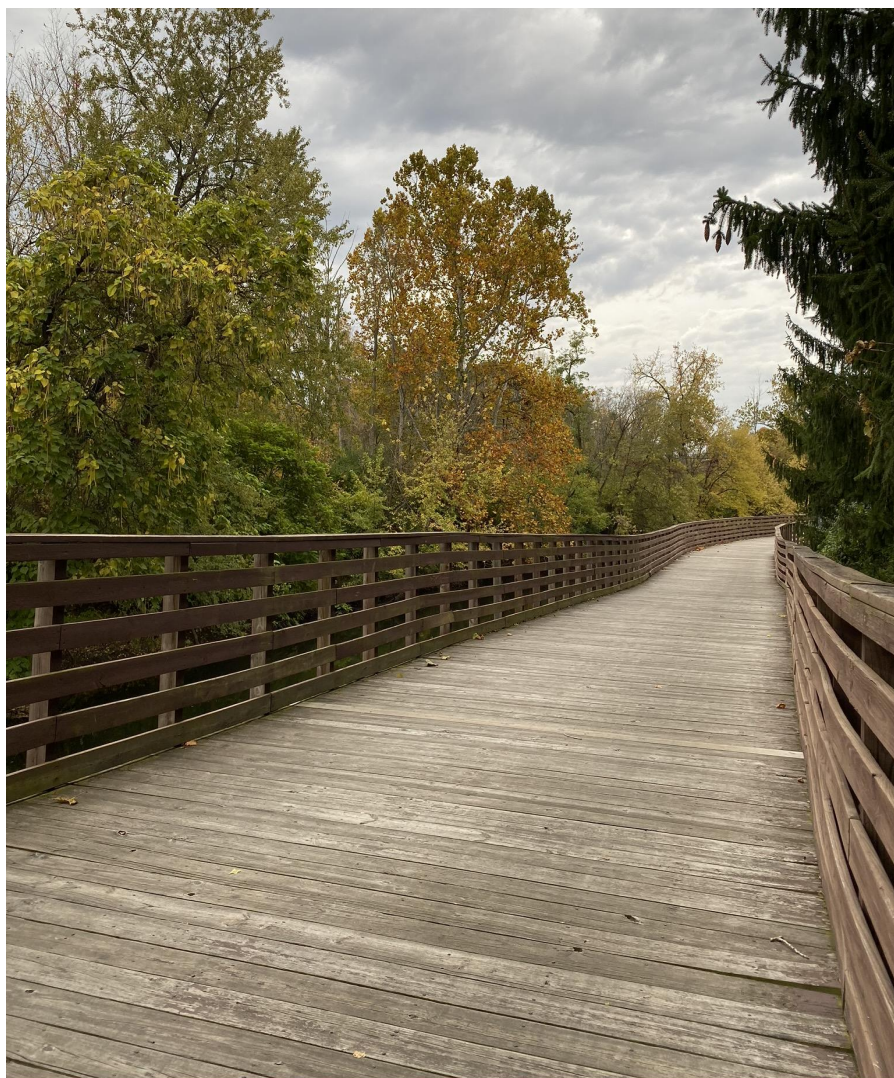
The parade ended sooner than I had expected. It was still early, and I didn't have the slightest idea about how and what I should fill the rest of the day with. Suddenly, time had become my enemy, and I didn't know how to beg for its mercy, to make it pass faster and especially not to let it poison every moment it was offering to me, which was passing as if it were a whole year. I joined the group of people who knew exactly that one of the restaurants in the university campus was offering food for free, so why shouldn't we all go there and take advantage of this? I didn't feel like doing it, but the perspective of loneliness, sister with depression, was really scaring me, so I followed them. They were noisy and funny, obviously feeling good, but my mind didn't have the strength to play their game or to draw their attention to something more serious. Only five minutes later, I ran away, aware that I was to face the danger.

Once in the street, I wandered randomly, accompanied by my loneliness and sadness, tenderly holding my hands. We were crawling among groups of happy young people laughing and having fun, who were coming from every direction. I realized I didn't look too good as I could see compassion and sorrow in their eyes when they met mine for a second. I had given up my sunglasses; I don't know why. I started walking towards the river. There was only one thought left in my mind: to walk along that path again as if it were that Sunday afternoon when I had been the happiest and most protected girl in the whole world. Deep inside myself, I found the strength to go to that place, an end and a beginning. I sat down on a bench. Sadness surrounded me. Tears were rolling down my face, and nothing could stop them. I don't know how long I had been sitting there, as petrified. After a while, a voice woke me up:

“Are you okay?”

I raised my eyes and I could see a young girl, dressed modestly. She was standing right next to me and she almost burst into tears when our eyes met. I nodded. My lips did not want to move and utter a single word, and my paralyzed brain could not control a single part of my body. I nodded again to make her understand that everything was all right. She got the message and started walking away. I sighed with relief. I wanted nobody near me, no matter who, a friend or a stranger, an acquaintance, or an ordinary local resident famous for being friendly and compassionate, and especially for being ready to give a helping hand when you really need it. In movies, I had seen scenes like the one I was living

then for real, but all the time I would think it was nothing, but a trick made up by the scriptwriter or the director. Yet, on that day, I had the proof that this is not invented, but it is for real.



When I realized I was on my own again, I lowered my eyes to the ground. The eyelids were too heavy under the burden of the many tears that were flooding my eyes.

“Are you sure you are okay?”

She had come back...

“How can I help you?” she continued, slowly bending towards me.

“Yes, everything is alright, thank you! I am a little sad, but it will go away. Thank you!”

“Be well!” she whispered, and she started walking away, without turning her back to me, as if I had been the queen or something. Actually, I was a queen... the queen of sadness. I am sure there was nobody in this broad world able to dethrone me... in that place and at that moment.

A stranger. For her, literally and figuratively, I was nothing but a stranger who was crying bitter silent tears, sitting on a bench next to a river, for reasons only she was aware of. A stranger whom she could not ignore and pass by indifferently. A stranger for whom she stopped to make sure everything was in order and to whom, if she needed it, give a helping hand. Only later did I realize the meaning of her gesture... the deed of an angel sent to me by the Universe, willing to reassure me that I was still being looked after.

Now, I can't stop thinking of the dozens of situations about which I know, when people in real need, in actual limit situations that required help, found nothing but indifference in their fellow strangers, like me then, who passed by without a single care. People, fallen to the ground, whom their fellow humans only photographed or filmed. People kidnapped in the middle of the day who were shown the back. People hit violently on the street in the daylight, whom nobody saw, nobody heard.

“It's not my business!”

“I stay away from this!”

“I don't want to be part of this!”

Or, we shrug. We pretend not to see them. It's not our business, but we complain that people are cold, indifferent, they are becoming meaner and meaner, they don't communicate any more, they don't know what common sense is, they are no longer respectful, “the world is becoming worse, oh my!”, they know nothing about respect and compassion... But do we? Therefore, we no longer know: we forgot how to care, what mercy is, we no longer remember that a tiny gesture of ours can make a huge difference for someone in need. We are good and empathetic only when the holiday season draws near, and we think that the poor need food and clothes only then. They exist only then. That is the moment when we remember to be good and show compassion, but it's compulsory to have some evidence of our good actions, so we take plenty of pictures which we post online for the others to see how good we are and how much we deserve appreciation and especially “likes”. Unless we do it, neither our good act nor ourselves exist!

The angel with the human face walked away slowly, but many times she stopped and looked back to see if I needed help. Somehow, I found the strength to wave at her and I managed to give her a sad smile. My lips uttered a faint thank you, and my mind repeated these words again and again, day after day, then and now, today, and tomorrow. She reminded me how it is to care, what a

kind word and a tiny gesture mean for the ones who are in need, no matter if we know them or not.

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Humans, Animals and Plans in Alaska

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It was March 2005. After taking two connecting flights through the crowded London and Los Angeles, my flight touched down at the snow-covered Fairbanks International Airport, Alaska. It is often said, March is when Alaskans begin to embrace the winter season. The scenery, mountains, and rivers blanketed with snow were stunning. It was a dream come true, and only later I realized Alaska has been a draw for dreamers and adventurers as it is well-known for solitude and outdoors.

THE DREAM

My husband and I had dreamed about pursuing our graduate degrees at a U.S. university. As ambitious as we were, we were also nervous about venturing out. Our dreams seemed wild when we said "yes," to an opportunity presented for my husband to pursue his master's degree in Fairbanks, Alaska. He reached the Last Frontier of the U.S. first, and three months after, I followed him. The University of Alaska, Fairbanks, was chosen based on his interest in disaster management engineering and geophysics. After three months of separation by geographic distance, the reunion was exciting and even more joyful for both of us.

THE JOURNEY

Having been born and partly raised in the tropical climate of Southern India and partly raised in the Arabian Peninsula of Oman, the land of negative degree weather, tundra, grizzly bears, moose, and caribou was captivating yet terrifying to me. I wanted to call myself an explorer, to be curious, and learn about the culture of Alaska. Nevertheless, I did not realize how intense the loneliness would be until a few days passed. The path that I chose to walk seemed steeper due to isolation and the bone-chilling cold. I longed for home.

Fortunately, the loneliness did not last long because a Christian church community welcomed us with open hands. Two families from the church considered my husband and me as their own family members and helped us acculturate smoothly into the U.S. culture, particularly the Alaskan community.

After a month of my arrival, one of them invited us for dinner at their house. They asked if we could wear our traditional Indian attire for dinner. To honor their request, despite the negative 10-degree weather, we put on our sherwani (a knee-length coat buttoning to the neck, worn by men from South Asia) and a fancy silk saree (a long strip of unstitched cloth, draped by Indian women). Upon our arrival, we were pleasantly surprised to see several people and a special table set for us with a note of congratulations and wishes. The guests wished us, "Tenth month wedding anniversary." After dinner, we realized that they threw us a party, which appeared as a wedding shower, to prepare us for the new life we were beginning in a new place and a new country. The gifts we received from those whom we did not even know personally not only warmed our hearts but also were sufficient for us to live comfortably through the remainder of the two years in Fairbanks. At that point I realized how much I felt like a part of that community.

In addition to this Christian love, which proved to have no borders, and the Indian community's love and care added spice to our enjoyment. Specifically, my husband's research advisors and their families lavished us with their love and care and held an extra place for us at their table. They fed us not only with good food but warmed us with their presence and friendship. We decided to stay the course and finish the climb of life and graduate studies despite the cold's harshness.

THE LESSON AND SUMMARY

Through this adventure, I learned how humans, animals, and plants survive and interact in the harsh arctic environment. Similarly, I became deeply aware of how humans could provide a home to those who leave their homeland and take adventurous trips overseas that sometimes grow to be adverse. I learned how to identify with outsiders and to treat them like insiders. This served as a reminder for me of the way the people of the host country can develop relationships with international students; a reminder that together we can learn to love and care for those we may not know or understand; a reminder to always leave a seat open at the table.

From the beautiful and generous people of Fairbanks, Alaska, to the mountains, ocean, glaciers, sunsets, and the abundant wildlife, presented us with an unfailing memory of a happy time, it was more than an academic experience. It was a real adventure of love and friendship that will last for a lifetime.

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Social Isolation and Loneliness: Strong Enemies or Great Allies?

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Living the experience of being an international student generates personal growth, although the process is not pleasant in all cases. When talking about being an international student, experiences such as cultural immersion, generating a global mindset, and practicing another language are highlighted. But little is said about other experiences such as isolation and loneliness during this journey.

From the beginning of my journey as an international student, I was aware that adaptation would take time and that some enemies could discourage me during that time, such as isolation and loneliness. Before continuing with my story, I want to emphasize the difference between isolation and loneliness. “Social isolation concerns the objective characteristics of a situation and refers to the absence of relationships with other people” (de Jong et al., 2006, p. 486). On the other hand, “loneliness refers to an individual’s subjective perception that he/she lacks close interpersonal relationships. An individual is lonely if he or she desires close interpersonal relationships but is unable to establish them” (Panda, 2016, p. 28).

I started being isolated because I had no friends, and my job and studies took up all my time. I knew that the isolation would end as soon as I started interacting with people, but it was difficult to connect with the place and the people. In a few weeks, isolation was not my only problem; loneliness began to appear. I knew that isolation would not be a danger to adaptation, but loneliness would be. Loneliness sucks energy, involving unfavorable thoughts and feelings, preventing new relationships. Loneliness hinders connecting with the place and the people. Being isolated is when nobody is around me. During the pandemic, this had been the situation of millions of people. On the other hand, loneliness is the feeling that nobody understands me, nobody is being empathic with me. Loneliness may occur when being alone or even when surrounded by other people. To overcome isolation and loneliness, it is important to build and nurture a support system, like family liaisons and friendship. I decided to stand up, to look for opportunities to meet new people and win the battle against isolation and loneliness, and I emerged victoriously.

CONNECTIONS CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE

During my journey as an international student, I learned that there are three basic points of connection with people: roommates, classmates, and faculty. There are other points of contact that will help to live this journey depending on personality and interests. Those points of contact may be religious, sports, artistic, or other activities. Through connections, valuable friendships can be built. For now, I will describe the three basic points of connection that served as a lever to combat isolation and loneliness.

FIRST POINT OF CONNECTION: MY ROOMIE

My first connection was my roomie. She introduced me to her friends. It is worth mentioning that all of them were Latin Americans and most Mexicans. It is true that international students usually gather with compatriots. Solidarity is emphasized when being away from home. Language and customs make it easier to connect with compatriots. Though this results in support, I think it can become an obstacle to connect with people from other cultures. It will depend on each person's willingness to have friends from diverse cultures. I decided to take the opportunity to know other cultures through international students. In addition to my Mexican friends, I have friends from several countries.

SECOND POINT OF CONNECTION: CLASSMATES

Another point of connection are the classmates. In such groups I found people with so many differences but with at least one interest in common which was learning and accrediting the course. That same interest creates a bridge to connect. One thing I learned is that it has been easier for me to connect with other international students rather than domestic students. This is due to the affinities among international students. For example, handling a second language and the inherent complications, learning the culture of the hosting country, the fact of not having family nearby and thus the need to create family ties with those who are close to us. I am not saying that domestic students lack interest in making international friends. My experience is that the connection process tends to happen organically among international students.

Even though the courses create opportunities to connect with colleagues, in practice it is quite difficult. The bottom line is the lack of time. With the amount of reading and work to be done, it is difficult to be available to hang out with classmates. In addition, several of the PhD students are married with children, which results in less free time. Coordinating agendas becomes a complicated task. However, when it comes to an assignment or teamwork, classmates must find the time to complete the goal. It was at those times that I

took advantage of and got to know my colleagues a little more. For example, asking them about their jobs, their interests, and their backgrounds. In such conversations, I discovered that my colleagues and I have more interests in common than I first thought.

THIRD POINT OF CONNECTION: PEOPLE AT A UNIVERSITY

There are several points of contact between the student and the university; the most frequent being the advisor. But the advisor cannot always give emotional support, at least not as a loneliness student requires. Is that part of the role of the advisor? I am blessed to count on an advisor who pays attention to my questions and doubts and gives me all the information and help that I need.

Other points of contact within universities are those areas where the students can get support for their needs, most of the time managed by Student Affairs. This includes mental health care, wellness, and housing. The problem is that many people cannot even ask for help or do not know how to ask for help. So, how to find such students? In my case, I am glad to receive information every week about the services that university offers through Student Affairs. At the beginning of the pandemic, I remember receiving such information every day.

Some PhD students share an office at the university facilities. That office is another point of contact. Sharing an office has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, for people who are introverted, sharing an office or workspace could create an opportunity to meet people. On the other hand, a disadvantage could be to often get distracted. I must confess that the first month at my office I felt weird, different from what I was used to. Mexicans interact constantly. Looking at the offices' doors always closed caused me ... I do not know how to express it... caused me a feeling of oddness. It is worth mentioning that this was before the pandemic. So, I used to leave my office door open, and from time to time, I would walk down the hall to greet some classmates and friends. Even when I consider myself an introvert, I do not have a problem meeting people. My problem is a lack of time due to the amount of work to do for my doctoral studies.

CONCLUSION

My journey as an international student can be seen as isolated, not only because of the pandemic but due to the workload of my doctoral studies, but never in loneliness. I am truly fortunate to have at hand the technology to be able to contact my family despite the distance. Also, I am blessed to be in a city where people are so friendly, even when at the beginning it was difficult to connect with them. I am blessed to be at a university that offers multiple opportunities to support diverse issues, and to have professors who deliver knowledge and humanity to their students. Reflecting on my journey as an international student,

I realized that social isolation and loneliness are not my strong enemies but great allies because they pushed me to build a support system, and more than that, a new family amid the pandemic.

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It Was Not Just a Stomachache!

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I began writing this piece on October 03, 2021. A year ago, that day, I underwent a sudden appendix removal surgery, one of the worst nightmares for any international student in a foreign land. Similar to the present day, it was also a gloomy weekend in Athens, Georgia, United States. I was returning to classes after the midterm of the first semester in my doctoral program. After lunch and a 10-minute afternoon nap, pain erupted in my stomach. I first thought it was a new chicken brand I bought last week that is not suiting me. It has happened to me before, thanks to my sensitive body. Feeling as if a lost needle was slightly poking in the right of my abdomen, I looked for my mighty bottle of Hajmola, an Indian brand of digestive tabs, I brought from Patel Brothers some weeks ago. After popping four pupil-sized tabs, I thought the pain would subside soon. Little did I know what wreathing pain was waiting for me.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAIN

While changing sides in my bed for the next few hours, I waited for some relief. In disappointment, I finally resorted to going for a walk within my apartment complex. I thought maybe I had eaten spicier food than usual or drunk less water during the day, causing me pain. God knows!

I am someone who finds emotional refuge in long walks to waterbodies. They had been a blessing in disguise for me, especially during the pandemic because I would walk to these lakes even during the scorching heat to inhale the smell of freshness of the water under my double layers of masks. The cools of water would refill my persistence and give me hope to wait for a light at the end of the tunnel during the pandemic. However, the evening of October 02, 2020, was unusual. I could not climb stairs down from my level 1 apartment and walk even 100 meters. I then realized it was something else than I thought it was, and I turned to home remedies.

CONTEMPLATING BETWEEN GOING TO HOSPITAL AND HOME REMEDIES

I climbed up the stairs to my apartment like a wounded soldier and went straight to the kitchen, putting my weight on the bookcases in the living room or walls of it. Usually, I enjoy looking for spices in the kitchen chest, but my pain

sucked all the joy I barely had that evening. I was looking for हींग, a Hindi word for Asafoetida. I recalled my mother repeatedly reminding me while I was moving from India in 2018 always to keep my stock for हींग replenished because it is a natural digestive, apparently. I finally found a small हींग [Heeng] bottle at the end of the chest. Clearly, I did not use it ever because I did not know how to use it. I checked the timing on my microwave and calculated how much nine and a half hours ahead of me would be the time in India, where my parents live. I realized it would be 5:45 AM, the next day.

I was not sure about calling my mom because she is borderline diabetic, and the doctor recommended her long stretches of sleep, but I knew my father would have been up by now. I called him, and I realized I woke my father up from his fast sleep because he could barely open his eyes and was trying too hard to speak.

"क्या हुआ?" [what happened?], my father asked. A bit anxious in his voice.

"पेट में बहुत दर्द हो रहा है। मेरे पास हींग है। लगानी कैसे है, पता नहीं" [I have a stomachache. I have Asafoetida. Not sure how to use it, though].

My father told me to take two pinches of Asafoetida powder, place it in a small spoon, add some water drops, mix both to make a thick paste, and apply externally on the belly button. The call concluded shortly after I assured him it was just a stomachache, even though I was not convinced myself. My father recommended waiting for some time after I applied Heeng. It takes a while to work. I really hoped this remedy would work because the throbbing pain would not stop.

I know I could have gone to the hospital, but I initially decided not to because this was also when COVID-19 cases were raging in the US, and both hospitals in Athens were full of COVID-19 patients. One of my graduate professors told my class that her daughter, who needed immediate medical attention, had to be without a hospital bed for hours to receive attention. I was so afraid to go to the hospital. I did not want to go to the hospital for one petty thing (as I thought it was) and get COVID-19. I ate a day-old खिचड़ी (Khichdi), the Indian version of beans and rice stew, popped a pain killer, and decided to go to bed. I thought maybe Heeng and Pain killer would give me relief overnight.

RUSHED TO THE "URGENT CARE"

I don't think I can ever forget that nightmarish night. The night was progressing slower than a snail, and the pain was progressing like a running cheetah. I saw no alternative but to call my friends, other international students from India. One of them had a car. I was a bit relieved about it because I did not want to call an Uber in the pandemic, even during an emergency. I also felt embarrassed to call my friends almost at midnight because I did not know what to tell them

about my condition. After all, it was just a stomachache (!!!). Appendix bursting was miles and miles away from my imagination. They came, tried to understand my situation, and helped me clean my place. Sunday is usually the cleaning day, but I could not bend to touch my toes, so mopping was out of the question, thanks to the acute pain. My friends enquired what I had eaten since morning and yesterday. Everything was usual homemade Indian food—no change in diet. One friend said it could be because of stress too. Yes, I was stressed. It was my first semester of my doctoral journey amid a pandemic. 2020 US election votes were just a little over a month away to conclude. So many F-1 visa-related uncertainties. It's been 18 months years then since I had been to India. A few of my students I taught at my former graduate school passed away. My grandma was not keeping well. Stress was at its peak.

IN URGENT CARE

I am sorry to say this, but Urgent Care in America is not urgent in nature. Perhaps I took the word "Urgent" quite literally. We do not have Urgent Care in India. We usually have walk-ins or Emergency wards. If one has an emergency, they are attended quickly by doctors. They don't ask to fill the 'how are you feeling today' questionnaire, sit in the waiting area, check weight, and-measure height. It makes no sense! That is what happened before I could finally put on a hospital bed. Though the nurse was very sweet, helpful, and soft-spoken, I had to wait for a few more hours within which a doctor visited me, blood was taken, pain killer was injected, and CAT SCAN reports came in. I did get relief from the pain, but the urgent care staff spoke in such diplomatic language that the anxiety of knowing the cause of my pain made me impatient.

Finally, I was informed by my doctor that my appendix had busted. Listening to the word appendix, I recalled reading about it in my Grade 7 science class as an organ the humans do not often use. The doctor advised me to get it removed via immediate surgery. Otherwise, it might rupture other organs, if bursted. After my approval for the surgery, for the next 3-4 hours, the urgent care staff began their surgery protocol. It included asking me so many additional questions, including if I had a will (really?) before shifting me to the Anesthesia room, giving me anesthesia, and performing surgery on by a doctor who told me he had done this kind of surgery more than 5000 times. That was relieving. However, during that time, all I was thinking was: how will I make up for my graduate classes the next day? For the rest of the week? Hoping my parents were not too worried back home? How much money would I have to pay from my pocket? What if I needed more rest than 6-8 weeks, as the doctor told me, post-surgery? What if I can't attend my class for the rest of the semester, and will that impact my visa status as an international student?

Post-surgery, the rest of the semester went in recouping bodily strength, being on high doses of pain killers, monthly doctor appointments, and requesting frequent extensions on my graduate assignments because uncertainties are the byproduct of international student lives, where you are the fighter, and persistence is your only weapon and option.

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PART IV

Research and Career Paths through Graduate School

An International Student Experience Unfolding into Professional Interests

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In 1981, almost forty years ago, I was dreaming of being an international exchange student in the United States. While my father was then very ill, my mother preferred that I did not travel and stayed at home with my family in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. But both my parents ended up allowing me to pursue this dream because they valued cultural exchanges. I took care of all the bureaucratic endeavours to travel. I would not lose an academic year with an experience of six months, I was determined to study and deeply motivated by the few friends and acquaintances who had been international students. Besides, this was not my first move. As a family, we have not only moved from Brasília to Rio de Janeiro, but also lived in Lebanon, Beirut. Yet, I was the first of a family of five children to travel to the United States.

PREPARATION AND EXPECTATIONS

I had some preparations meetings with the organization Youth for Understanding (YFU), which dealt with travel, visa status, bank account abroad and debated cultural lens differences, adaptation, and homesickness. We had to fill a list of choices, and I was not very selective about any issue asked by the organization such as living preferences, including living with animals and geographical location. Nevertheless, I expressed my fascination for the Great Lakes of North America. The amount of water within the limits of the earth seemed quite impressive to me. I was then selected to live in Illinois. I was first chosen by a family at Elmhurst, and we did exchange letters, but at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances, the family was unable to have me as an exchange student. I ended up being designated to live with another family at Carpentersville.

FAMILY BOUNDARIES

My host family had another international student from Japan, and this host sister was indeed a great companion to me. We shared many of our dreams as seventeen-year-olds and learned a lot about the differences between our families and growing up in Brazil and Japan. We had as host parents a Japanese American father and an American White mother, who belonged to the working class, and did not have any books at home. This social class environment contrasted with the experiences we both had back home. And as time went by, it became clearer that the expectations we had as exchange students and those of the host parents were quite divergent. It was hard for them, but especially for the American mother to accept that we were not as free as herself to play. She worked occasionally part-time and needed a kind of attention that we could not give her. In fact, often she pretended that we had a physician appointment and took us out of school before the scheduled time of three pm. Unhappy with the course of life, after two and a half months I decided to ask the organization to move from this family. With the help of a school counselor, I patiently waited for the staff responsible from YFU to understand the reasons I wanted to move because at first, the negative reactions were that: the family was not complaining about me, Brazilians only wanted to party, and the Japanese sister had lived months before I arrived without any complaints. I was offered by the organization to move to another family in a different town, but this would entail changing schools and I would then lose my academic year upon return to Brazil. Despite all of the behaviors that were not fit for teenage exchange students' daily lives, such as being taken out of school for excuses that were lies, the drinking behavior of our host father, and endless demonstrations of competition of our host mother towards us girls, I identified many good aspects of both the host parents. He was hard working, and both were often affectionate and demonstrated joy to us. Nevertheless, I was determined to leave because I did not trust my host mother. She lied to my parents on telephone calls saying I was not home during my father's health procedures. She also pretended I moved to Germany with a boyfriend. So, because I needed to breathe a healthier family environment, I decided to find another host family. My Japanese sister moved to Barrington, and I went to live in Lombard, also in Illinois, where I was nicely welcomed by another family. Unpredictably, after we moved, we learned that our host mother had a false name, forged my signature to cash a Brazilian check sent by mail to me, and deceived me concerning the use of our joint bank account. The detective made her return the money of the check and an amount she also owed to my Japanese sister. Even though we were relieved to recuperate the money, it was undeniable that we all suffered and the whole situation was very odd.

SCHOOL AND DIFFERENT TOWNS

The High School we attended was in Barrington. As an international student, I faced prejudice that could have affected me. When I started to attend school, I was not allocated to academic disciplines with the excuse that I, being a foreigner, would not do well. I discussed this with the school counselor. Since I was strong-minded to have equivalent credits upon my return to Brazil, I soon was able to tailor my selection of courses with the academic disciplines I needed, such as Mathematics, Biology, and History; I dropped the cooking class and an additional free break. At that time, I also noticed that class differences seemed to direct students' coursework paths. The students who lived and studied in Barrington appeared to be more directed to better prospects of academic experiences after graduation than their counterparts living in Carpentersville and commuting to Barrington. In general, Barrington's students appeared much more affluent than Carpentersville's students. Because Carpentersville did not have a High School, it is undeniable that the bus system provided us all as students, and to another extent, other social actors involved an opportunity to experience different life perspectives and to some extent, notice differences related to social classes.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS

During this anxious time as an exchange student while a teenager, I wrote in my diary the decision to study Psychology. The fact that I clearly identified what I did want to study next at the undergraduate level when I was a High School student abroad led me later in life to be willing to work with teenagers making their career choices. So, I have worked since 2005 in a Vocational Program for High School students at Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Brazil. Furthermore, the comparisons then between experiences in the two cities and in Brazil and the United States made me think more critically about educational systems in both countries. In fact, the issues related to equity in formal education and cultural background shaping life's paths started to be also part of my professional interests. Therefore, in the 1990s, I attended a graduate program in International Education/Intercultural Education at the University of Southern California. I identified the root of these interests during my exchange experience when I was very concerned about the great social gap among students in my home country, which seemed related to the ability to take part of the school system as well. Up until recently, a few Brazilian teenagers would not attend school at all and among those who did the diverse types of schools lead to discrimination as well since their structural differences are designed, to a great extent, to serve students coming from either privileged or poor cultural and economic backgrounds.

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When in Aotearoa Do as the Kiwis Do

Liping Xu
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Although five years have passed, what happened in the last trimester of my master's study in New Zealand has always reminded me not to take things for granted. Instead, always respect and follow the norms in the host country.

Unlike my previous courses which were lecture style, the last paper for me to complete was very self-directed. Students bore the responsibility of finding a host organisation to research and conduct their project. Even though there were clear instructions, the expectations seemed daunting. After a few days' consideration, I finally identified my research topic about Chinese parents' involvement in the early childhood setting in New Zealand. And it was soon agreed by the lecturer and approved by the University's Ethics Committee. So, the next step was to locate the host organisation to serve as a base for my research.

A charity group called "Plunket" attracted my attention. It is the largest provider in New Zealand, supporting health and wellbeing of children under five and their families. Plunket's community focus and brand recognition across New Zealand made me feel that it was the ideal research site for my project. I sent them an email introducing myself and my research project. I also mentioned that I was keen to do some volunteer work for their play centres, which would benefit them as well as my research.

A woman named Esther promptly responded. As a community coordinator, she is charged with the coordination and development of the centre's groups and volunteer activities. In the email, Esther said she was open to the research and suggested a face-to-face talk between us. I dressed up like I would for an interview and met her in Plunket's office. Esther was exactly what I expected – A woman in her 30's with a strong kiwi accent. She kindly slowed her speech so that I could better understand her. This helped ease my tension a bit. Esther showed genuine interest in my project and warmly welcomed my idea to start as a volunteer. She agreed that it would form a solid ground for my research. However, she also reminded me that Plunket did have its own ethics approval process for any study involving their members. This process needed to be strictly followed while doing the research. This sounded very fair. So, without hesitation, I agreed.

I began my new role as coordinator for a Chinese Parents' Group the next week. Under the guidance of Esther, I assisted in its community activities where Chinese parents/caregivers gathered with their children to meet and share information in the early learning setting. Esther was an incredible mentor. She showed me around different centres and introduced me to people either working or volunteering there, like me. I was completely taken by the environment and proud I would be contributing to it.

Until one day something unexpected happened. It was a normal busy weekday; the play center was packed with some Chinese grandparents together with their grandchildren. Just like back in my home country, young professional couples are always busy with their career. Unsurprisingly, their parents volunteer to look after the grandchildren. Due to the language barriers, most of them could not understand the instructor who was leading the activities. Very naturally, they turned to me. Although very happy to help, I got exhausted after several rounds of interpretation and explanation to different people involving the same queries. Suddenly, a "brilliant" idea came to me. Why don't I use technology? I considered as I looked at my mobile phone. I took out my smartphone and started filming the interaction between the instructor and a 2-year-old child. I thought it would save me time by showing the video when asked by the Chinese grandparents.

All of a sudden, I heard a harsh voice from my back: "Stop this!" I turned around to find Esther staring at me angrily. I was stunned and the phone slipped from my hand. Esther realized that everyone in the room was frightened. She lowered her voice and instructed me to switch off my mobile phone and asked if I would speak to her outside. Feeling nervous, I followed her to the backyard. After apologising to me, Esther began explaining, "Daisy, you know Children are considered a vulnerable group in New Zealand. Young kids are highly targeted by cyberbullies. Therefore, photographing or filming of children is prohibited in most places in New Zealand unless you obtain a special permit in advance." I reflected on how different things were from where I was from. In China, taking photos in places where people know you is warmly welcomed. Some are even honored to be in your photos. However, even if those participating were of the same culture, the situation was not the same here. I sincerely expressed my apologies then deleted the videos from my mobile phone.

Since then, I have become vigilant of this both in daily life and in the research field. When there is a possibility of breaching someone's privacy (like posting photos or videos on social media with visible faces), I would always ask for their consent first. And it's never been a waste of time. Most of the time, I got answers like "Go ahead; I don't mind." But there are some occasions, people would turn me down due to the concern of privacy disclosure. Doing so helps me win recognition of people I interact with in my daily life. As a famous proverb goes *when in Rome do as the Romans do*. This is a show of respect for your host culture.

Journey of Finding Myself

Rong Ren
Arizona State University, USA

I am an ITA. What is that? It is short for International Teaching Assistant – a group of courageous and competent international students who teach or assist in U.S. college classrooms. Being international students, we must navigate an entirely new education system in an unfamiliar language on our own. Being an ITA is even more challenging because we need to be knowledgeable about the subject we teach and have a strong and determined heart. When I first received the assistantship while attending my master’s program, I genuinely felt proud to be recognized as an international student without knowing the hurdles in front of me. I positively thought that speaking good English and being hardworking would make me a cool and competent teacher. However, things did not go as expected. After starting to teach, I experienced tremendous cultural shock and misunderstandings between my students and me. I was entirely lost and started to experience an identity crisis. Fortunately, I found myself in the end.

EXCITED FOR TEACHING

On the first day of the TA training session, our mentor started training by having us get to know each other. I was amazed by how interactive the classroom could be. All TAs were divided into groups to introduce themselves and then introduce their group members to the whole class. Knowing that this would be my first-time teaching, my group member recommended books to read and gave me a lot of tips. Growing up in an Asian country where classrooms were mostly serious and only about the study, I loved the fact that people could talk about themselves and show their personalities in the U.S. classroom. So, I decided to use this activity in my own class, thinking that this would energize my students and allow for them to quickly know each other.

FAILED IN THE FIRST CLASS

I will never forget the first day of my teaching. When I first arrived at the classroom, I could already sense that students were a bit surprised. After mentioning that I wanted them to group together and introduce each other, I noticed that nobody moved. In fact, all my students attended almost the same classes the whole day, and they had this activity so many times already, which I

did not know. A few students asked if they could have another activity. The rest were just staring at me quietly. Not knowing what to do, I demanded they finish the activity. Apparently, students did not enjoy this icebreaker at all, and the atmosphere turned out to be more awkward. I became stuttered and forgot what to do next. In the end, I decided to read the syllabus sentence by sentence and finished the class hastily.

The first day of teaching was such a failure. I could notice from my students' faces that they questioned my credibility as their teacher. Also, they were more straightforward than I expected and were not afraid of showing their opinions in public. That was the first time for me to realize that my students and I were so different. Our diverse values and beliefs conflicted in this classroom.

LOST MYSELF

Because of that embarrassing moment on the first day, I became more anxious and tried so hard to “please” my students. I spent hours and hours finding interesting activities for my class because I believed “American classrooms” should be full of activities, freedom, and laughs. This went to the extreme. Indeed, the class was full of activities; however, I utilized many cultural topics that I was not even familiar with. I encouraged students to discuss social injustice without even knowing what it meant to them. I asked students to make posters on immigration but could only contribute to the work by saying, “Good job.” I decided to have a debate in class but could not even explain the process clearly. On the other hand, I refused to talk about anything that I was familiar with because I thought those topics were too Chinese and would diminish my reliability as a teacher. The more I tried, the more frustrated I felt. Every single frown on their faces seemed to laugh at how unsuccessful I was.

The end of the first quarter became the straw that broke the camel's back. In the final evaluation, some students commented on my accent. Some noted that the in-class activities made them feel like kids. I was disappointed in myself for not being a competent teacher. In the meantime, I was confused because I did not know what students' real interests were. Those comments and reflections made me reach one point where I started to hate my language and culture. I blamed every miscommunication and misunderstanding for being Chinese. I did not like Mandarin because it gave me an accent; I did not like Chinese culture because it forbade me from knowing American culture. Since then, I fell into a vicious circle that I could not get out of. American TV shows became the only thing that I could watch during my free time. I forced myself to join clubs, even though I did not understand what people talked about throughout the gathering. I spent most of my time trying to socialize with American classmates, although we did not have much to talk about. I felt lonely, meanwhile hating myself more.

FINDING MYSELF

The feeling of powerless really made me reflect on what was going on with me. Not being able to connect with my students made me panic. But did I need to cater to them by losing my own identity? After exploring for a while, my answer was “no.” The U.S. is a melting pot. People coming together from diverse backgrounds bring unique experiences to this country. I could be one of them. My international background makes me where I am today. My culture shapes me into a caring, diligent, and responsible person. Also, my accent. It did make me sound different. But people all have accents, don’t they? These are the essential parts of my life, which I should not be ashamed of.

Looking back, the biggest mistake I had made during this journey was to pretend to be another person, a person who understood American culture, spoke fluent English, and managed the classroom in an American way. Unfortunately, this was not me, and my students knew that.

However, I was so afraid of being different because I never had this experience in my entire life. I did not know how to deal with this difference, especially when I was a teacher. That was why all this happened. I tried to either force students to take my opinion and instruction or entirely lose my identity to blend in. Nevertheless, being different was the fact that I could never change and should respect.

CHANGES ARE HAPPENING

It is easy to notice that, but it is tough to move forward. Six years have passed since my first day of being an ITA. I am still worried that students may think my international background will impair my credibility as a teacher, but I am trying little by little. First, I involve topics that I am familiar with in the classroom discussion, such as the power of English and the effects of using English worldwide. Surprisingly, students do not look down on me because of these questions. Instead, they are excited to look at things globally and expect my input as a foreigner in the discussion. To teach students rhetorical appeals, I show them how companies use different rhetorical strategies to approach the audience in Asian countries. Students are amazed by how the same product they are familiar with becomes localized under cultures’ influence. At the same time, I am learning from my students every day. I am intrigued by their growing up experiences, their beliefs, and their passion for societal issues. The differences that I considered a “threat” before are becoming an important portal to know them.

Being an ITA is a turning point in my life. I have never appreciated the beauty of diversity before. But now, I learn to be courageous and bring our diverse values and cultures to this melting pot to spark new ideas with other

people. Also, my identity crisis allows me to think about who I am seriously. After all these struggles, I feel more confident with my origin and understand who I want to become. This experience will be the treasure of my life.

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I Don't Belong Here

Gabriela Mocanu

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I felt so proud to be accepted on a full scholarship at a university in the United States to pursue my doctoral degree. I had a wonderful career of 10 years as a teacher in international schools in the Middle East. I had a good life, I had travelled to over 40 countries, I had all sorts of adventures; and somehow, for the life of me, I do not know what possessed me to start my PhD. Anyway, there was no time for regrets or looking back because here I was making it official, by attending orientation for new graduate students (or so I thought). I read that email three times, just to make sure I had the right time and place.

READ THE ROOM

I arrived at the meeting 10 minutes early, not just because my mom taught me not to be late, or because it shows one is punctual, but I left home early enough to give myself time to figure out where I was going to park. I did not have a parking pass; I had no intention of getting one because the price was too steep for my student budget. I drove around that parking lot several times, trying to figure out what to do. I probably do not have to tell you that I eventually parked illegally and all I could think of was how much shortened my budget was going to be for that month because of the parking ticket I was going to get.

I walked into the big building and close to the entrance was this cheerful girl greeting me. I was a bit of a grump (still worrying about the parking ticket) and as I was trying to open my mouth, she said: "Are you here for the orientation?" smiling and showing her white teeth. I barely managed to say yes, when she pointed and said: "You go down this hall, then take the stairs to the second level and it's the first door on the left." At this point, I saw a sign on her table which said, "New Faculty Orientation." So I try to open my mouth again: "Well, I am here for orientation, but not for faculty." To which she replies: "Oh, yes, there's been some changes, but you are in the right place." So, I was assured I was in the right place. Alright then. I did not think of the sign on her table since she was so sure I was in the right place.

The meeting was in a big room, with many tables covered with white tablecloths. There was a big podium up at the front and all I could think was: wow, they made quite the effort in welcoming the new graduate students. Right at the entrance, there was a big map of the world and this lady asked for my

name; she started looking for my name on a list, but my name was nowhere to be found. “Oh well, they probably did not give me the updated version. Please take a pin and put it on the map to indicate where you’re from” she says to me. I took a blue pin, and proudly put it on Romania. There weren’t too many pins on the map at that point (since I was early) but the existing ones were all on the U.S.

I dressed casually thinking this is a students’ meeting, and I didn’t want to overdo it. I usually like to dress nicely and professionally, but from my previous experiences I knew people in the States do not like to make the effort of looking “la patru ace” as we say back home, and they prefer comfort instead. I walked in and started analyzing the room. I don’t know anyone here Where am I going to sit? I could feel my anxiety hitting the roof. I joined a table on the right side of the podium, sort of in the middle. I didn’t want to be all the way in the back, but not too close to the front either. I was raised not to take the front seat ever, as a basic rule of etiquette. As I sat down, I noticed that most of the people at the table knew each other. There was a loud group of women in their early 40s and they looked like they belonged there. On the other hand, I felt totally out of place. The man sitting on my right probably felt the same way, but he displayed more bravery and started making conversation. I do not remember what we talked about, but I do remember he was also a foreigner. He was from somewhere in South America. I felt an immediate kinship of some sorts with him, and I thought to myself “Phew, I am not the only foreigner here.”

REALIZATION

We did not get much time to chit chat because this older man came onto the podium and got everyone’s attention. Next thing, he’s introducing the university’s president for a speech. I thought to myself: “The president is here for student orientation? That’s weird.” I sat in my chair quietly and then she asked one question: “What path do you want to take? Teaching or research?” She did this exercise where she had people standing, and I wasn’t quite sure to respond at the time, but I played my part and stood up. Then she proceeded to thank everyone for joining the faculty at the university and whatever she said next I do not recall, because my sense of hearing disappeared. I then realized I was indeed at the new faculty orientation and not the one for new graduate students. I looked around the room, yet again, analysing the people and realized none of them looked like students.

EMBARRASSMENT

It felt like I’d been hit by a train. So many thoughts started racing through my head, a wave of heat was surrounding my body, but the pressing question was: how soon can I get out of this room? I don’t belong here! I am in the wrong

place! Unfortunately, I had to stay until break because I thought people might think I am rude by leaving abruptly. Being raised in a culture of shame, you don't want to draw attention to yourself, you lay low. Imagine leaving your table abruptly when you're in the middle of an activity. "Suck it up, fake it till you make it, and wait for a break!" I don't remember any of the conversations at my table during that morning (because yes, break time didn't come until lunch). I was petrified the whole time and tried so badly to hide my embarrassment. When they announced the break, I gathered my things and ran for the hills.

I did not mention any of this to any of my peers because I didn't want anyone to think of me as the fool who had the nerve to show up to faculty orientation; as a PhD student, I felt like I am at the bottom of the academic food chain. I told this story three years later, and laughed with my advisor and colleagues at the situations we sometimes put ourselves in.

LESSONS

I could ask: What if I read the email for a fourth time? What if the lady with the attendance list did not let me in? What if the cheerful girl listened to my concern? But more importantly, what if I had spoken up? You see, I was raised in a different culture – one of shame where you don't question things and people, you are respectful, you are courteous especially when you are in foreign company. I could've probably just excused myself and left way earlier without having to drown in my own embarrassment for a full morning. But I was so sheepish, and more importantly, felt like such an outsider, like I didn't belong there (even if that would have been the graduate student orientation). The impostor syndrome was with me from day one. And I will probably never be rid of it completely.

Oh, and on the bright side, I never got a parking ticket!

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Tae Kwon Do in the Spiritual Capital of Morocco: Lessons of Linguistic Complexity

Roger W. Anderson
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“What do you call someone who speaks two languages? Bilingual. What do you call someone who speaks three languages? Trilingual. Okay. What do you call someone who speaks one language? An American.” This joke has been told to me in multiple countries. It is a poignant reminder to Americans that the United States is not an island, and that second-world language abilities matter. I learned experientially of the complexity of language as a U.S. student on a Fulbright fellowship in Morocco in 2010-2011. Morocco was the perfect place to learn some Korean, Japanese, French, Amazigh, Moroccan Arabic, Modern Standard, and Classical Arabic.

Modern Standard Arabic: “Al-Umam Al’MutaHida”

Interested in one religious, Arabic text from the 11th century, my ten-month fellowship allowed me to take classes in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Using MSA as a springboard, I envisioned myself jumping into Classical Arabic with the guidance of a scholar specializing in these ancient texts.

During the day I would study at a language center where Arabic classes were offered to foreigners. At night, the center turned into an English language school for Moroccan youth to learn and practice English. I remember picking up their self-published magazines that showcased students’ writing in English, reviewing movies and music, or writing poetry. How amazing, that one building channeled Arabic learning in the morning, and English learning at night!

Only later did I realize that jumping from Modern Standard to Classical Arabic was larger than I had anticipated. Between them, I used French as a stepping-stone.

Any second-language Arabic learners around the world who used the most widely adopted Arabic textbook series knows that “Al-Umam Al’MutaHida” means the United Nations. They were taught it within the book’s very first chapter. To many, teaching this complicated term so early seemed unnecessarily challenging for beginners of an already challenging language... almost cruel. Their instructors recognize the term provided the setting of a storyline in which vocabulary and grammar points were embedded: an Egyptian youth moves to

New York for her father's work in the U.N. Arabic learners may scorn learning the term, but ironically, they learn it!

French: "En tant que..."

Due to the colonial legacy of North Africa, French remains a language of prestige in many countries, including Morocco. Business, government affairs, and higher education are often conducted in Morocco in French.

As such, my collaboration with a Moroccan scholar-expert in medieval religious (Arabic) texts also utilized French. The goal of my project was to understand, then translate, a short, ancient text. During weekly sessions, the scholar explained to me the meaning of Classical Arabic words, moving from Arabic into French, a language that he knew in which I held a master's degree. Curiously, at no point did he ever speak Moroccan Arabic.

These sessions required me to set aside my Modern Standard Arabic studies and my emerging Moroccan Arabic, to focus on his spoken French and specifying its English equivalents. "En tant que..." ("in the capacity of"), was repeatedly used, indexing the sophisticated level of language he was using, and I was developing. Yes, in my capacity as an aspiring English-Arabic translator, I was sharpening my French comprehension.

Classical Arabic: "Ruh Wahid"

I realize that this seemingly small translation project required that I immerse myself not only in Classical Arabic, but in the language of this singular, ancient mystic. Amazingly, graciously, my collaborating scholar compiled xeroxed copies of every known piece of writing penned by the mystic who wrote the text in which I was interested. Possessing his full collection would avail cross-references against which I could compare the author's words of my text, to provide a translation that accords with this ancient mystic's body of work.

For example, only by reviewing all his uses of the phrase "ruH waHid" (a singular soul) did it become clear what he meant by it or could I translate the term with any certainty.

Nonetheless, the question remained open of how this mystic's writings continued with or broke from those of his contemporaries. This would require far more extensive study than my 10-month grant would allow.

Moroccan Arabic: "Dik shay magrmil bzaaf!"

A medievalist's mind may be engrossed in the past, but their body must live in the present. Living in the ancient city of Fez in modern Morocco, Moroccan Arabic is necessary for buying vegetables at the market, for chatting with folks at the bus stop, etc. Hoping to immerse myself in Moroccan culture, I opted to live with a Moroccan family. During this experience, I ate my meals with the family, lived in their spare bedroom, and enjoyed their companionship, watching television at night. Yes, I was far from home, but still felt at home.

Yet arriving in Morocco, I felt linguistically frozen. I thought that after two academic years and two summers of studying Modern Standard Arabic, I could

slide from MSA to Moroccan. Instead, I found myself basically incapable of communication. This shocked me. Luckily, my program prudently included five weeks of Moroccan Arabic lessons, to be able to navigate Moroccan society.

No metaphor perfectly describes the complicated relationship between Moroccan Arabic and MSA. In some ways it is like the difference between the English of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and that of contemporary American culture. In other ways, it is like the difference between English of the BBC and Jamaican Patois. Favorite words invert their standard meanings, like “wa-ir” (terrible) to mean “awesome,” or used ironically, like “la bas 3lih” (no harm upon him), to mean “he’s rich.” The best feature of Moroccan Arabic (and Tunisian) is that requisite handshakes between male friends or new acquaintances must be followed with a touching of one’s right hand to one’s heart.

Beyond my host family, I used my Moroccan Arabic proficiencies to befriend Moroccans my age, most importantly, those in my Tae Kwon Do class. We’d sit on the curb or on park benches, eating 25 cents-worth of peanuts – “kao kao” - bought from the corner shop. “Dik shay magrmil bzaaf!” (These are super crunchy!) would make nearby Moroccans laugh, hearing a foreigner using uniquely Moroccan adjectives.

Korean/ Japanese: “Oochagi!”/ “Manga”

After a full day of MSA exercises at a desk, I got my body moving by participating in a martial arts class. In the basement of an apartment building in the neighborhood, a brightly color-padded room would become jam-packed with kicking, sweating, and shouting youngsters. Three nights per week, sessions would be held for two hours for all men, women, boys, and girls who arrived in a gui (outfit), ready to drill.

Never having studied a martial art previously, my body imitated the actions of the Moroccan kids around me, and I parroted the words they yelled, rarely certain of which language I was yelling.

Tae Kwon Do is inseparable from the Korean language, from what I gather. The names of kicks and blocks were given in Korean, like “Oochagi” (right kick), yet the number of kicks were counted in French numbers. Instructions for performing the movement were given in Moroccan Arabic. “Traction,” a French word I now know well (and dread), means “pushups.”

Comprehension is not crucial when you are getting kicked in the ribs by pre-pubescent girls in headscarves. Unfortunately for my ribs, the youngest participants did not discriminate between inexperienced and experienced adults: all were taller, older adversaries against whom one must prove oneself.

It was also through this Tae Kwon Do class how I came to learn about “manga.” At that time in Morocco, a predominantly Muslim country located on the African continent, Moroccan youth were particularly fascinated by Japanese graphic novels, known as “manga”. From my perusing, manga’s

content seemed dark and heavy, which apparently captured the curiosity of my buddy, a high schooler who excitedly explained it to me, practicing his English.

Years later, as a doctoral student in the United States, I opted to take a Tae Kwon Do class. I found myself laughing when hearing these same Korean names, finally able to parse the Korean from the French and Moroccan Arabic.

Amazigh: “Etran”

Reflections on language in Moroccan cannot exclude some thought to the languages of the Amazigh people, who live in communities spread from the Canary Islands to Egypt and throughout the Sahara. Their language and people, distinct from Arabs and Arabic, remain a puzzle I am eager to study. As a tourist, I encountered their language, Tamazight, during a camel-ride through the desert, guided by young Amazigh men (with whom our American women became instantly smitten). At night, on the dune, they taught us the word for stars across the night sky: “etran”.

Months later in a café in a rural, mountainous area of Morocco, I found myself chatting with a retired school principal. Although I greeted him in Moroccan Arabic, he responded in French -flawlessly, and carried on in French. When I inquired about his language, he explained his refusal to speak Moroccan Arabic. Language as a socially sensitive issue, another puzzle piece that requires careful study to inform proper behavior...

Back in the United States: “Bonjour! MarHaban!”

I returned to the U.S., linguistically humbled. I realized that years of study remained ahead of me to gain advanced proficiencies in these languages and dialects. I needed to use the tools I possess, and not dwell on the tools I want to possess but do not. After much consternation, I put my translation project, the ancient text written by a medieval mystic, to the side. I put Classical Arabic to the side. The mystic’s words have not yet been published in English as I had hoped, but his words, his vision of humanity’s “single soul,” has propelled my life- my career, my free time, and my friendships.

I became an assistant professor of international languages & cultures, helping learners to learn French and Arabic. I want them to see the world as full of friends waiting to be made and fascinating stories to discover, rather than see a world full of foreign, incomprehensible people doing odd things.

One day, when I have time to visit back-burner projects, I will return to my collection of xeroxed ancient mystic writings. They’re in a desk, upon which sits a model sports car, given to me by a Japanese businessman whom I tutored in English, and a seal and inkpad with my name written in Korean, given by a colleague. These knickknacks remind me that one language is insufficient for the whole of humanity. They remind me that handling uncertainty and miscommunication is an acquired skill. They also remind me of that facile joke about Americans’ monolingualism. As Johann Goethe noted, s/he who knows only one language doesn’t even know that. This text is dedicated to my TKD pals in the ancient city of Fez, Morocco.



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Studying Abroad at Chonnam National University during the COVID-19 Pandemic

David J. Richter

Purdue University Northwest, USA

The first time I was able to do a study abroad program was in 2016, which I ended up doing at Purdue University Northwest (PNW) in the USA. Being that I am from Germany, it had been a dream of mine to live in the USA for a while and experience what I had only been able to see from afar in movies, TV shows, and books. My plan was always to go to the USA for one semester and scratch the itch that I had for years at that point. But things turned out differently than what I had originally thought. Instead of satisfying my need, that itch only grew stronger while in the USA, and every day after I returned home to Germany. I started to volunteer at my school's international office, held presentations for fellow students about why they should study abroad, and already planned how I could go abroad again, but this time for longer. The idea was to go back to PNW as a self-funded degree-seeking student and work towards earning a master's degree, working as a teacher assistant (TA) for fee remission and also at the international office to support any costs that would arise. When the time for my bachelor's thesis came in Germany, I unexpectedly got an offer to write it at Michigan State University as an exchange research assistant for one semester with all expenses covered. While I was back in the USA, I finalized all the things that needed to be done to return for my graduate degree at PNW.

During my first stay at PNW in 2016, I was also lucky enough to make friends all over the world, many of which were from east Asia. This led me to be more and more interested in the region and I started learning Korean. Just before my departure to return to PNW for my master's degree in 2019, I was awarded a scholarship for the summer of 2019 to go to Korea for a summer program to take Korean classes at Chonnam National University.

MY DEGREE SEEKING PROGRAM ABROAD IN THE USA

When I started my master's program in the USA in the fall of 2019, I realized a dream I had for years. Ever after doing my first semester abroad in 2016, I knew I wanted to experience life away from my home country for a longer period of time. A master's degree in the USA was the goal that I set for

myself primarily since it would be a multiyear affair and I would be able to finance it all by myself working on campus. Once I got accepted both into the program and also as a teaching assistant at the school, I was excited and ready to experience life in the greater Chicago area for the next two plus years. But then after just one semester of regular classes, COVID-19 struck and many things changed.

All classes moved to online “classrooms” and going out became a risk. This made me move back home to Germany for about six months and I had lost a lot of time and missed out on forming meaningful friendships like I had done before. This made me long for more time abroad, since I was sadly unable to experience life in the U.S. the way I had hoped for in the years prior. Since I had planned to go to Korea over the summer to attend the next Summer School at CNU (which was obviously also impossible), I started looking for the next best thing.

TRANSNATIONAL ONLINE SUMMER SCHOOL AT CHONNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH KOREA

Just before I started my master’s degree in the United States in the fall of 2019, I decided to attend the Chonnam National University International Summer School (CNUISS’19) in the summer of that year. I had previously begun to self-study Korean in my free time and wanted to take the next step and be more serious about learning the language. So, I signed up for a four-week intensive language class at Chonnam National University in Gwangju, a city in the Southeast of the country. The classes were great, and I absolutely enjoyed myself, so I knew I had to come back to Korea even before CNUISS’19 was over. Rather than me being able to satisfy the itch, it intensified just like it did before. Due to the pandemic, however, returning to Korea became impossible and the 2020 iteration of the program was scrapped entirely.

As 2021 came about, the staff at CNU decided to transition the ISS from an all-in person program to one that was held all online. This gave me the chance to register again and take the next level Korean language classes as a transnational study abroad student. With this program being held entirely remotely however, I was sceptical if it would be able to replicate the joy I had with it in 2019, or if I would be let down by the study-abroad-from-home experience. I only had very little experience with online study abroad programs and was therefore worried that I might not be able to enjoy the abroad aspect of it, as I would be alone at home throughout the entire program. Classes would be held synchronously for 3 hours at a time, 4 days a week. All my classes would be held late in the evening due to the time difference from PNW in the USA to CNU in Korea, which was another concern that I had prior to the program kicking off, because I really wanted to improve my Korean skills during this month of classes. All the classes being held remotely and late in the evening seemed as if it could become a hindrance for the learning process. Looking at both the academic calendar as

well as the cultural experience program, however, made me hopeful that registering for this program was the right choice. The school had put in an enormous amount of work to not just modify the teaching methods in a way that would allow for remote education, but also set up an entire months' worth of cultural activities that students could experience from their respective homes.

As the start date drew closer and closer, the first emails from the buddy program assignment reached my inbox. I wasn't sure how well this buddy program would work out, as we would never be able to meet in person. When I attended CNUISS'19, my buddy group would regularly meet for lunch, dinner or just to hang out together. In all online CNUISS'20, however, this would not be possible, due to us being in different places, and on top of that, in different time zones too. After we had exchanged contacts, me and my team started to communicate and to get to know each other. With it all happening through text messages, things started off slow at first and would remain that way until the first meeting where we would finally get to see each other through video calls on Zoom. The Buddy Program was one of the two weekly cultural sessions, where we would interact with Korean students from CNU as well as other international participants. The Buddy Program was held every Wednesday and focused on Korean experiences that were set up and provided to us through a care package sent by the school through the mail. The first week we learned about Korean pop culture, the second week we created Korean style stamps using a kit that was sent to us. The third week we made traditional Korean food (which was again sent by post to all students), with the fourth week being the award and farewell ceremony. Saturdays were set up to be Korean Language Exchange sessions, with yet another group of CNU and international participants and was a place where we could all learn from each other, be it to improve in English or Korean.

It was not long into the program that I realized that I had no reason to worry if this program was going to fulfil my expectations. The classes were engaging and interactive, even with all the barriers that COVID forced on us, and I learned more than I could have wished for. Not even the fact that I had to focus until late at night turned out to be a problem. As for the cultural side, which might have been even more challenging to get right, with none of us being able to go to the host country, I felt like they were just as well prepared and executed as the classes were.

I am extremely happy that I decided to take this step and give the online CNUISS'21 a chance. Even though I was able to participate in study abroad again, my itch remains unscratched, and I am now more than ever looking forward to returning to Korea in person, which I would argue is a good thing.

I am honestly surprised but very happy that I managed to academically improve my Korean skills considerably and make really good friends along the way. These are friends that I still talk to on a regular basis, even though the program is over, and we never got to meet in person. Throughout this process I

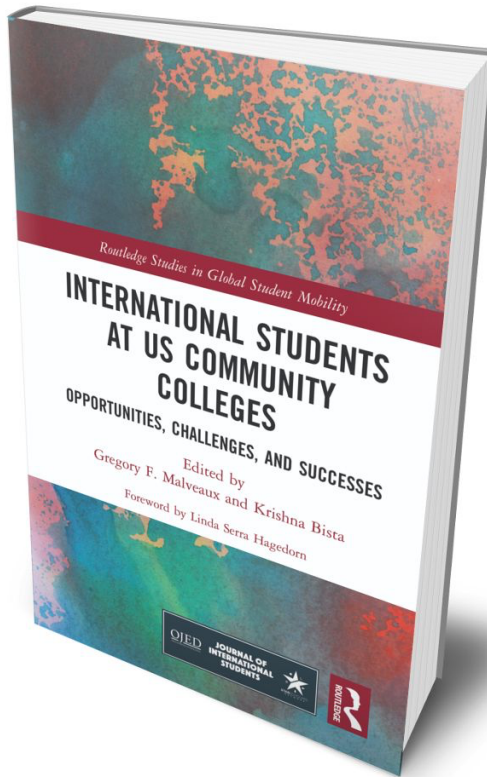
learned that while going to a country to learn the language and experience the culture is something I enjoy more than anything else, but there are also alternative ways of achieving similar results, which are in turn much cheaper, less time consuming, less difficult to plan for, and much easier to integrate into a full course of study, since you do not even need to leave your own apartment to participate in them. I am certain that this was not the last online study abroad program for me and I am excited to participate in them, instead of being sceptical.



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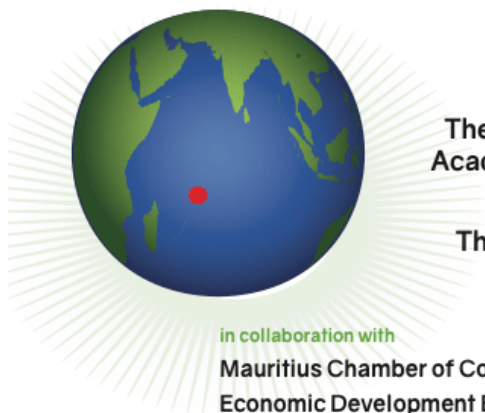


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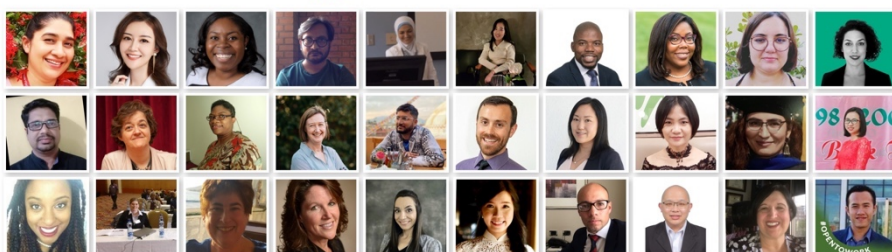
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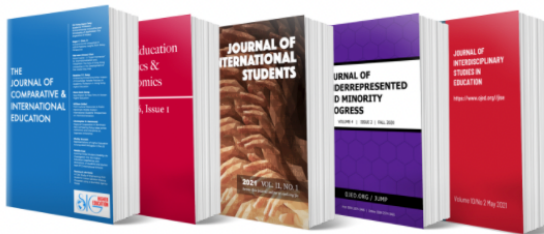
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Journal of International Students

Journal of International Students (JIS) is a quarterly peer-reviewed publication on international education (Print ISSN 2162-3104 & Online ISSN 2166-3750). The journal publishes research related to international students, student mobility, education abroad, and international education.

<https://ojed.org/index.php/jis>

Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education

Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education (JCIHE) is the official journal of the Comparative and International Education Society's (CIES) Higher Education Special Interest Group (HESIG). JCIHE (Print ISSN 2151-0393 & Online ISSN 2151-0407) publishes work from the complementary fields of comparative, international, and development education addressing these issues.
<https://ojed.org/index.php/jcihe>

Journal of Trauma Studies in Education

Journal of Trauma Studies in Education (JTSE) is an online open-access academic peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the generation of knowledge regarding mental health and well-being, with a focus on the impact of traumatic stress within the context of Pre K-12 and postsecondary education.
<https://ojed.org/index.php/JTSE>

Higher Education Politics and Economics

Higher Education Politics and Economics is an academic, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal on higher education featuring research from a range of perspectives, including education finance, political science, social science, policy, and law to critically examine dynamics in the nexus of social, political, and economic forces shaping major changes in higher education in the US and around the world (Print ISSN 2577-7270 & Online ISSN 2577-7289).

<https://ojed.org/index.php/hepe>

Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress

Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress (JUMP) is a refereed interdisciplinary publication (Print ISSN 2574-3465 & Online ISSN 2574-3481) dedicated to the educational, economic, and social progress of minority and underrepresented communities around the world. JUMP strives to provide space for a meaningful, intentional, and actionable scholarship that aims to advance social justice.

<https://ojed.org/index.php/jump>

Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education

The *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education* (Online ISSN 2690-0408, Print ISSN 2166-2681) is published bi-annually by the Center for Excellence in Education at Arkansas State University. JISE publishes interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary theoretical and empirically based-research articles and book reviews related to all aspects of teaching and learning in K-12 and Higher Education. The journal serves as an intellectual platform for the research community.

<https://ojed.org/index.php/jise>

Journal of School Administration Research and Development

The Journal of School Administration Research and Development (JSARD) (ISSN: 2470-850X, online & ISSN: 2470-8496, print) is an open-access, peer-reviewed academic journal that supports the development and dissemination of research and scholarship in the area of K-12 (primary and secondary) school administration and leadership. JSARD publishes scholarly articles on topics pertinent to school leaders, such as innovative practices and/or programs, professional development, hiring practices, leadership principles, equity issues, improving student achievement, and assessment and grading.

<https://ojed.org/index.php/JSARD>

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education (Print ISSN 2474-2546 & Online ISSN 2474-2554) is a scholarly publication that seeks to create conversations about education, especially policy, practice, and research of teaching, among scholars across the academic disciplines and across national and cultural borders. Behind this rigorously peer-reviewed journal is a vision that defines scholarship – its function, process, and view of quality – differently. We strive to foster a community of educators who need and value access, equity, and interaction across borders in educational conversation.

<https://ojed.org/index.php/jimphe>

About the Network

The Society of Transnational Academic Researchers (STAR Scholars) is a member-supported 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered in the State of Maryland, USA. STAR Scholars Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

MISSION

We leverage the power of transnational connections to build communities that support the advancement of new generations of scholars working across borders.



Mentoring

Upward academic mobility through mentoring across borders to support new generations of scholars.




Publications

Upward academic mobility through access to high-quality research and publication opportunities.



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Upward academic mobility through cross-border forums, exchanges, and partnerships.



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Upward academic mobility through leadership across borders to reimagine global higher education.

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SCHOLARS ACROSS BORDERS

We are a grassroots movement of scholars working across borders. Each letter of our name describes the values and commitments of the people who join our network: scholars who care about research for social impact, transnationally networked leaders, academically driven educators, and researchers with ethics and integrity.



115
Countries

15,000+
Scholars and Students

2,353
Universities

Cross-Cultural Narratives: Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars offers a collection of timely, eye-opening, motivational, and inspirational essays for everyone who wants to enjoy cross-cultural conversations and either relate to or better understand the experiences of international students and scholars.

- **Masha Krstanovic, PhD**
The University of Southern Mississippi, USA

Listening to the cross-cultural narratives of international scholars is the most important way to understand the meanings of their intercultural experiences. Stories can capture experiences in the most comprehensive and holistic way.

- **Wei Liu, PhD**
University of Alberta International, Canada

This important collection amplifies student voices, offering a wide range of rich experiences. I found myself transported back to my time as an international student, reliving how central it was to my own development and feeling newly inspired.

- **Elena de Prada Creo, PhD**
Facultad de CC. Empresariales y Turismo, Spain

This book, using the narratives of international students and scholars through storytelling, provides a lens through which to have a deep understanding of their triumph in intercultural communication, acculturation, and interaction with local residents as well as their acculturative trials, isolation, stress and struggle in participating in international education and global student mobility.

- **Mingsheng LI, PhD**
Massey University, New Zealand

A much needed, in-depth look at the experiences of students engaging in cross-cultural education, this collection of essays highlights the complexity and diversity of students' stories.

- **Gudrun Nyunt, PhD**
Northern Illinois University, USA

Given the emerging threats associated with the rapid rise of nationalism and nativism, higher education stakeholders need to hear the stories of global students and scholars now more than ever before. The narratives in this impressive, timely volume significantly facilitate greater understanding and mutual respect.

- **Stephen P. Wanger, PhD**
Oklahoma State University, USA



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