

CHALLENGES FACED BY AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A  
METROPOLITAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE  
STUDY

by

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## ABSTRACT

LORETTA GBEMUDU EVIVIE. Challenges faced by African international students at a metropolitan research university: A phenomenological case study. (Under the direction of DR. COREY LOCK)

The number of international students coming to the United States has increased from 48,486 in 1959-1960 to 623,805 in the 2007-2008 academic years (Open Doors, 2008). These students contributed \$15.5 billion to the United States economy, making education the nation's fifth largest service export (Open Doors, 2008). The literature has focused on Asian international students, who make up 61% of the international student body. African international students however make up only about 6% of the international student body; with Kenya and Nigeria regularly making the top 20 list of sending countries (Open Doors, 2008). There is a gap in the literature on the phenomenological essence of the challenges faced by these students and the factors they attribute to their success. Six students from Western Sub-Saharan Africa were interviewed in-depth. The findings indicate that financial challenges were the greatest for these students, followed closely by cultural challenges. The financial challenges were responsible for their feelings of homesickness, psychological stress, alienation and isolation, reduced time for study and social activities given the need to work. Cultural differences were responsible for their perceptions of a lack of social support. Surprisingly racial discrimination and stereotypes were not considered a challenge.

Africa is currently the most under-developed continent and African universities have received renewed attention by philanthropic organizations and universities in the United States seeking to support them by developing long-term partnerships in critical

fields (Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; “Africa,” 2009). Inadequate equipment, facilities, finances and the resultant loss of its best and brightest students has had a negative effect on Africa’s economic development (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2006; Doss, Evenson & Ruther, 2003; Erinosh, 2008, Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Ndulu, 2003; Ramphela, 2003; Sall, 2003; Sawyerr, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

The findings have implications for the university, faculty, incoming students, current students, international agencies and non-profit donor agencies seeking to improve economic development in Africa by adapting support systems to meet the needs of these self-financed students who wish to return home and make a difference in their communities.

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my children Ogaga, Efe, Edade and Oreva with love.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Success is not measured by what a man accomplishes, but by the opposition he has encountered and the courage with which he has maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds” (C. Lindberg, as cited in Maxwell, 2000, p. 61).

### Overview

The main goal of international students is the attainment of higher education in a foreign country, which often provides a higher quality education compared to what can be obtained in their country of origin (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Marcketti, Mhango & Gregoire, 2006). Receiving one’s education in a different setting allows many international students to gain a deeper appreciation of the culture, values, and beliefs of their host countries and to serve as cultural ambassadors between their home and host countries (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Marcketti et al., 2006). These students are typically the best and brightest in their countries of origin and are often seen as experts in their fields with strong job prospects back home upon completion of their studies (Marcketti et al., 2006).

The number of university-level foreign students coming to the United States increased from 48,486 (1.4% of total enrollment) during the 1959-1960 academic year to 623,805 (3.5% of total enrollment) in the 2007-2008 academic year (Open Doors, 2008). This increase in enrollment of foreign students reflects the competitive edge that universities and colleges in the United States have in the global environment with respect

to dynamism, diversity, and excellence. Open Doors (2008) research indicated that these students contributed approximately \$15.5 billion to the U.S. economy in 2008, making higher education the country's fifth largest service export. It is important to note that 62.3% of this \$15.5 billion came from personal and family funds, 25.9% from college and university funding, 4.7% from current employers, 3.4% from home government or universities, and the remaining 3.7% came from U.S. government and private sponsors, foreign private sponsors, international organizations and others sources (Open Doors, 2008). The U.S. government is taking proactive steps to welcome foreign students given the significance of their financial contributions to the U.S. economy as well as the increased global competition for talent and expanded higher education options in their countries of origin (Open Doors, 2008). The U.S. Department of State supports EducationUSA advising centers around the world by providing international students and their families with information about opportunities offered in American universities and colleges (Open Doors, 2008). The United States is the top destination for international students in the world, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Australia (Open Doors, 2008).

Presently, most foreign students in the United States come from Asia (61%) (Open Doors, 2008). India presents the largest contribution (15.2%), followed by the People's Republic of China (13%), and the Republic of South Korea (11.1%) (Open Doors, 2008). Students from North America made up 7.1% (Canada, 4.7% and Mexico, 2.4%) and African students made up 6% (Open Doors, 2008). In 2007/2008 Nigerian students made the top twenty list. Nigerian and Kenyan students have often been included in the top 20 countries of origin of African international students and thereby represent a

significant number of African international students in colleges and universities in the United States (Open Doors, 2008). Africa sent 34,000 students and 2,300 scholars to the United States in 2000 (Damtew, 2002).

In the 2007-2008 academic year, 10.5% of these foreign students were at the associate level, 39% were undergraduates, 44.4% were graduate students, and 16.6% were listed as “others” (Open Doors, 2008; Appendix H). With reference to their course of study, 19.6% of these students majored in business and management, followed by engineering (17%), physical and life sciences (9.3%), social sciences (8.7%), mathematics and computer science (8.2%), fine and applied arts (5.6%), health (5.1%), humanities (3.1%), education (3.1%), agriculture (1.6%), and other disciplines (10.1%) (Open Doors, 2008).

#### African International Students

With 61% of the international student population being Asian, it is understandable that the literature is rich with the experiences of these students in their host countries (Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Open Doors, 2008). As a result of their significant economic contributions, universities actively recruit these students and adapt their support systems to meet their needs (Campbell & Mingsheng, 2008).

African international students, on the other hand, make up 6% of the international student population in the United States (Open Doors, 2008). The literature on their experiences is comparatively less and when mentioned they are often included as part of studies on international students in general. An electronic search of the Proquest database on doctoral dissertations conducted between 1960 and 2008 revealed that approximately

78 studies on African students were conducted in 41 years (see Appendix A). Almost all these studies referred to African students in general.

Africa is the oldest, second largest and second most populous continent in the world (“Africa,” 2009). Most paleo-anthropologists believe the African continent is where humans originated (“Africa,” 2009). Egypt, located in North Africa, is believed to be the source of ancient civilization, and at its apex, African civilizations and kingdoms were reported to be comparable to their European counterparts (Diop, 1974; Dubois, 1965; Rodney, 1974). The continent of Africa consists of 54 countries with climates ranging from the northern temperate to the southern temperate zones (“Africa,” 2009). It boasts natural wonders like Mount Kilimanjaro, the Kalahari and Sahara deserts, and Lake Victoria to name a few. It is also endowed with oil, precious stones, metals and minerals (“Africa,” 2009). Africa has four language families and its people are of different ethnicities, cultures and religions (“Africa,” 2009). Africa is therefore not a monolithic continent; the literature will be enhanced by studies that focus on African international students that come from specific regions and individual countries.

In addition to quality and prestige, African students are also motivated to study abroad by socio-economic and political factors (Kishun, in press; Marcketti et al, 2006). They tend to pursue higher education in the countries of their colonizers and study courses similar to those set up at the time of colonization (colonial legacy movement) (Bessong, 2000; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Kishun, in press.). Four centuries of the slave trade, the scramble and partition of Africa by the colonialists, colonial rule, decisions made by international developmental agencies and corrupt leadership has left Africa the poorest and most under developed continent plagued by economic, social and political

crises (Coombe, 1991; Erinosh, 2008; “Africa,” 2009; Piyushi, 2004; Rodney, 1974; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). These weaknesses have had a negative impact on higher education in Africa, which was originally developed by religious entities, philanthropic organizations and colonial governments (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). With approximately 300 universities, Africa has the lowest enrollment in the world (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Varghese, 2004). Higher education in Africa has suffered a decline in quality due to lack of funding, anti-intellectual leaders, weak regional security, strained relationships between the government and the universities and students and universities (Coombe, 1991; Erinosh, 2004; Henk & Metz, 1997; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). This has had a negative impact on intellectual and pedagogical activities, facilities, research, and faculty resulting in brain drain. Brain drain is the loss of talented pre-Ph.D students who have the discipline, commitment, talent and drive to understand and master their fields of interests (Coombe, 1991; Erinosh, 2008; Johnstone, 2004; Ndulu, 2003 ; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The decline in the quality of higher education in Africa has also resulted in a proliferation of private universities, which may not meet accreditation standards (Erinosh, 2008, Thaver, 2008; Varghese, 2004). As a result of the afore-mentioned international developmental agencies, donor agencies and American universities have a renewed interest in higher education in Africa now acknowledging that higher education is critical to national development (Bessong, 2000; Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Bloom & Sevilla, 2003; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Doss, Evenson & Ruther, 2003; Evenson, 2003; Erinosh, 2008; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Mamdani, 2008; Ramphele, 2003; Samoff & Carol, 2002; Sawyer, 2004; Schultz, 2003).

## Challenges

The literature is replete with studies that cover the challenges faced by international students. These challenges include differences in climate and living conditions, alienation and loneliness, personal, discrimination and stereotypes, language proficiency, cultural, academic requirements and expectations and financial concerns (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Huang, 1977 Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; McClure, 2007; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2006; Nannes, Aitchison & Klaus, 1999; Selvadurai, 1991; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). International students are able to overcome these challenges by using the following coping mechanisms: flexibility, familial support, local support systems, school support systems, hard work, self-determination, motivation, as well as other factors such as sleep and exercise (Cadman, 2000; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; McClure, 2007; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2006; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005).

### *Climate and Living Conditions*

Studying in countries with time zones and weather conditions that are very different from the climate in their home countries is a challenge for many international students. Their bodies must readjust to the sun's rising and setting. Many international students experience feelings of disorientation, confusion and spiritual displacement during this period of adjustment (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey,

2005; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2002). Additionally, difficulties associated with becoming acclimated to the food may cause them to become thinner (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2006).

### *Alienation and Loneliness*

International students have identified social challenges as a major difficulty (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomegah, 2006). Most of these students have experienced a profound sense of loss from separation of their shared identity with family and peers. This sense of loss has often resulted in loneliness, loss of confidence, tension, less time for leisure, and confusion on how to have fun in their new environment (Gareis, 2000; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Marcketti, Mhango & Gregoire, 2006; McClure, 2007). In response to this difficulty, international students have created strong in-group ethnic communities; over time, they join several different social networks, each serving a particular psychological function (Gareis, 2000; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hume, 2008). Monocultural networks are formed by students that come from the same country (conationals) and serves to embrace ethnic and cultural values. Secondary networks are created with host nationals for specific purposes such as academic and professional assistance and a tertiary network that consists of other international students for recreational needs (Gareis, 2000). While these cultural subgroups have enabled international students to develop a sense of belonging with others that have similar values and belief systems, they have the disadvantage of isolating international students from contact with host-country nationals (Hayes & Lin, 1994). According to John Arthur (2000) as cited in Hume (2008) first

generation African immigrants engage selectively with the host society to achieve economic and academic goals, they do not perceive cultural integration as important.

### *Personal*

The extent of these social challenges has varied with respect to differences in individual personality, sex roles, and stigma or prejudice experienced (Hayes & Lin, 1994). International students that exhibit more extraversion have experienced more success in developing and maintaining relationships and social support networks. Extraversion is characterized by openness and creativity, stable self-image, sensitivity towards others, social maturity, assertiveness, persistence, social intelligence, and instrumental competence (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Gareis, 2000).

Whereas students that exhibit shyness, low self-esteem, pessimism, cynical attitudes, intergroup anxiety and rigid and habitual personalities with regards to cultural definition have experienced less success in developing and maintaining relationships and social networks (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Gareis, 2000).

Women generally have been brought up to be more warm, compassionate, and nurturing than men (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Therefore, women have had more superior support systems than men, who generally have not been labeled as needing support (Hayes & Lin, 1994). As a result, female international students have experienced comparatively fewer social challenges than their male counterparts (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

### *Discrimination and Stereotypes*

Prejudices and stereotypes that host-country nationals have toward international students have further impeded the ability of these students to develop or maintain relationships and support systems with the host-country nationals (Constantine et al.,

2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994). For example, in Ray and Lee's (1989) study of Nigerian international students, the researchers determined that the students' race and identification with African Americans had a negative effect on their interaction with others (Hayes & Lin, 1994). This study also found that other international groups like Iranian, Taiwanese, and Venezuelan students believed that being a foreigner was the most significant barrier to integration as opposed to their race (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

Foreign students who are not of Western and Eastern-European descent have normative behaviors and attitudes that differ from those in the United States (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982), and hence are at most risk for alienation (Schram & Lauver, 1988). Those most at risk for alienation are Asian students followed by African students (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004). African students were found to have significantly higher depression scores than those students from Asia (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004). In another study, African international students linked discrimination to their reported lower satisfaction with life (Sam, 2001).

Racial discrimination and stereotypes have been difficult for international students, especially those from racially homogenous countries; they may not have encountered racial discrimination until they became ethnic minorities in the United States (Constantine et al., 2005; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Traditional racial discrimination (based on color) and neo-racism (based on culture) are examples of such negative stereotypes that have affected African international students (Lee & Rice, 2007). Members of the host society often have negative perceptions of the home culture of these African students as a result of the marginal position of their countries in the global economic environment (Lee & Rice, 2007). African American students have generally

struggled with low school performance, as they are most negatively affected by structural race and class inequalities in the United States public school system (Wiggan, 2007). Explanations for low student outcomes of African Americans have been attributed to various schools of thought in the literature, such as genetic deficiency, social class and culture, low teacher expectations, student oppositional identity, differential treatment of students (Wiggan, 2007), teacher encouragement (Flaxman, 2003), low educational levels of parents, white-collar versus blue-collar parents (Lavin-Loucks, 2006), and academic tracking systems (Berlak, 2001).

While most African international students have a basic knowledge of the history of slavery in the United States, its current impact on African Americans is a shock to most (Constantine et al., 2005; Takougang, n.d). Even more disturbing is the fact that these students now find themselves facing the aforementioned stereotypes. This is especially difficult for established, well connected, and well-to-do international students who find themselves “a nobody” on arrival to the United States and feel reduced to stereotypical statistics (Huang, 1977). In fact, “many foreign-born African American<sup>1</sup> [researcher-inserted footnote] males find themselves entangled in the web of racism, prejudicial perceptions, xenophobia, discriminatory generalizations, and problems of adjustment to their new environment” (Obiakor, Obi, & Grant, 2000, p. 138). As a result, many African immigrants who are diverse in their cultural orientations and backgrounds do not like being viewed as African Americans because of the societal stigma and negative images seen in American media (Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007). These students find themselves straddling the difficult worlds of “African immigrant” and “African

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, “foreign-born African American” refers to African Americans who were not born in the United States and who spent a portion of their lives in the countries of origin before coming to the United States.

American,” autonomous minority and caste minority (Ogbu, 1978), or voluntary and involuntary immigrants (Ogbu as cited in Traore & Lukens, 2006) in the United States. This has resulted in identity negotiation and formation based on race, class, nationality, and sociopolitical and economic backgrounds (Manyika, 2001).

### *Language Proficiency*

Finally, their inability to speak the host language fluently makes it difficult for international students to become socially involved in their host country (Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Hayes & Lin 1994; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997). Most international students are able to pass standardized proficiency language tests but are unable to understand lectures, express ideas, or write reports (He & Shi, 2008). Language proficiency is a major determinant of academic success for international students (Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Selvadurai, 1991).

### *Culture*

Oberg, a world-renowned anthropologist, first introduced the term *culture shock* in 1954 to describe cultural challenges faced by those transplanted in a culture where most familiar cues are nonexistent. He described culture shock in terms of cultural adjustments in an unfamiliar environment and defined it as “anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (as cited in Oberg, 1960, p. 177). Oberg (1960) suggested that culture shock occurs in four stages: fascination with novelty, hostility, beginning of adjustment, and acceptance of the customs of the host country. It is important, however, to note that these stages are not sequential; it is possible to experience more than one stage at a time or revert to an earlier stage during times of difficulty. Symptoms of the stress and anxiety caused by culture

shock include homesickness, depression, sadness, dependency on others, irritability, inability to eat, sleep, and work well, excessive drinking, hostility to others, and extreme concerns about sanitation, healthcare, or safety (Oberg, 1960).

#### *Academic Requirements and Expectations*

Academic challenges, also described as *education shock* (Eng & Manthei, 1984), arise from difficulties that international students have regarding differences in academic requirements and expectations, classroom culture, and faculty-student relationships in their host countries (Wong, 2004). These challenges are the result of differences in educational systems, language proficiency and culture between the United States and the countries of origin of international students.

#### *Financial*

International students have also experienced loneliness and financial concerns related to the adjustment difficulties (Lin & Yi, 1997). Many international students must attend school full time to remain in status and do not have the work permits required to earn additional income (Lin & Yi, 1997). They have to pay higher tuition fees, and the amount of financial aid from the federal government and private and international agencies has been reduced (Selvadurai, 1991). As a result of the stress brought about by social, cultural, academic, personal, and financial challenges, international students have experienced alienation, social isolation, and homesickness for loved ones and cultural aspects. These feelings manifest in performance anxiety, depression, and other psychomatic complaints such as the inability to sleep, eating problems, stomachaches, and headaches caused by psychological stressors (Lin & Yi, 1997).

## Strategies for Success

In order to ensure the success of international students, universities and colleges have created offices of international programs that address the various needs of international students. These needs include the administrative paperwork required to ensure that they remain in status and academic programs like the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, academic advisors, and tutors to assist them academically. Colleges and universities have also incorporated cultural programs that help students assimilate into their new culture. Examples of cultural programs include offering workshops on American culture and norms, assigning senior international students as mentors to freshmen international students, having host family programs, and organizing monthly “coffee hours” so that international students can meet, develop friendships, and have a community within the university where they can share experiences and advice (Klomegah, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

### *Schools of Thought*

All of the preceding information begs the question of how African international students are able to succeed despite facing these social, cultural, academic, personal and financial challenges. Reasons for their success include family values, motivation, no shared history of slavery or institutional racism, and school support systems for international students (Obiakor et al., 2000). Other schools of thought have described the patterns of adjustment that international students experience. For example, the U-curve pattern (Adler, 1975) described the positive feelings that foreigners have on arrival (honeymoon stage), the frustration and negative feelings they experience when faced with social, cultural, academic, and financial difficulties (hostility stage), the easing of these

negative feelings on gaining an understanding of the culture and environment (humor-critical stage), and finally the positive feelings they experience as customs, foods, and the new culture are embraced (home-recovery stage). The U-Curve pattern therefore assumes that the challenges international students face occur when they are in the hostility stage of adjustment which is a natural process of adjusting to a new environment. If they remain in their host-country long enough they will eventually experience the humor-critical and home-recovery stages where they eventually embrace the new-culture.

#### Purpose of the Study

This study sought to determine the critical factors that African international students believed to be their main challenges and those they believed contribute to their success. The literature is replete with generalized studies on international students and their challenges; however, international students are not a homogenous group. International students from Europe, Canada, and Latin America have comparatively less difficulties adapting in the United States than students from Asia and Africa, who come from very different cultures. Moreover, African students have been found to experience the most challenges (Wehrly, 1986), therefore studies focusing on their specific challenges are necessary in order for schools to make culturally sensitive adaptations to their support systems to mitigate these challenges for African students who make up 6% of the international student population in the US.

Six African international students from a metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States were interviewed in depth to determine the phenomenological essence of their challenges. The resultant findings will be useful to universities that admit African international students and provide their offices of

international programs and faculty with information that enable them mitigate the challenges these students face. These findings will better inform new African international students on the challenges they face and strategies used by others to overcome these challenges. The findings will also be useful to international developmental agencies and donor foundations concerned with the declining state of higher education in Africa

The research questions framing this study were:

1. What challenges did African international students face as they pursued their studies?
2. What strategies did they use to overcome these challenges?

#### Significance of the Study

University administrators who believe in the value of an educated workforce for the economic, political, and social development of emerging countries welcome international students. Educators that believe sharing knowledge enhances international understanding and goodwill also welcome international students (Campano, 2007; Klomegah, 2006; Marcketti et al., 2006). These international students are not only able to achieve their academic and personal goals but are also a source of cultural diversity, enlightenment, and revenue for these universities and colleges (Selvadurai, 1991).

Despite the number of studies on international students and the schools that enroll them, it has been difficult to generalize their experiences or the characteristics of the schools that enroll them (Selvadurai, 1991). As such, this phenomenological case study sought to enhance an understanding of the challenges faced by African international students and enable this urban metropolitan research university to tailor its support

systems to meet their social, cultural, academic, and psychological needs by providing culturally sensitive and appropriate programs. This researcher believes that the in-depth interviews revealed pertinent information often lost in larger quantitative studies. These findings also have implications for faculty with regards to the deeper psychological challenges of living conditions, academic requirements and expectations, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial concerns, cultural differences, and language proficiency as it affects these students. According to Johnson (2003) as cited in Klomegah (2006) international students in the United States are an important foreign policy asset as a result of the goodwill they have for the United States. Such goodwill in today's competitive global environment is valuable in attracting more students, research grants, and foreign government contracts. These relationships eventually lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures, with positive ramifications for global political, economic, and social alliances.

#### Delimitations

This phenomenological case study was conducted at a metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States. The sample of participants was limited to six African international students that attend this university. These African international students had some experiences that were unique to the southeast and may not have been applicable to the other parts of the United States.

In conducting this study, this researcher made the following assumptions:

1. African international students have challenges.
2. The participants interviewed had the ability to articulate these challenges.
3. The participants answered the questions posed honestly and truthfully.

To address these limitations, the participants were asked the same question in different ways, and their responses were triangulated. From the in-depth interviews, this researcher sought out common threads subject to inter-rater reliability, on the students' perspectives regarding the challenges of tertiary education in the United States and the methods by which they are able to overcome these challenges. This study was limited to the accessible sample of African international students at this metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States. Information obtained from the in-depth interviews was limited to what these students felt comfortable sharing.

### Definitions

1. For the purposes of this study, an African international student is one that pursues higher education at the undergraduate or graduate level in a foreign country with the intent of returning to their country of origin after completion of their studies. In the United States, these students have either an F-1 or a J-1 visa status. Students that are permanent residents and have been in the United States less than 5 years were also eligible to participate in the study.
2. Culture is a way of life of a group of people. It consists of their behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
3. Culture shock is the feeling of isolation and anxiety experienced by a person on first coming into contact with a culture very different from his or her own.

4. Acculturation is a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviors of another group.
5. Adjustment is adapting, modifying, altering, or settling.
6. Brain Drain involves the loss of a country's educated populace to advanced and industrialized countries where they seek economic, political and social well-being (Damtew & Altbach, 2004).
7. Being in status requires students to meet the visa requirements established by the immigration authorities for their visa classification. For example F-1 students have to enroll by the date specified by the school, are unauthorized to work, have to leave the United States after completion of their studies and have to maintain a full course load (US Immigration Support, 2009).
8. Stress is a feeling of anxiety, frustration, or anger.
9. Success for an international student encompasses their social, cultural, academic, personal, and financial well-being while in the United States. Success involves being able to overcome the various challenges faced in their social, cultural, academic, personal, and financial well-being to achieve their main objective of coming to the United States: the attainment of higher education.
10. Challenges are difficulties faced in adjusting to climate and living conditions, academic requirements and expectations, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial constraints, cultural differences, and language proficiency.

## Summary

This study sought to determine, from six African international students at a metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States, what challenges were faced as they pursued their studies, how they were able to overcome these challenges, and to what factors they attribute their success.

This study was designed as a phenomenological case study. A survey was issued to all African international students at this metropolitan research university located in the southeastern region of the United States to determine what their challenges were, what methods were used to overcome these challenges, and to what factors they attribute their success. The Office of International Programs (OIP) at this metropolitan research university was the point of contact for these students.

The participants were interviewed in depth, and a panel of raters grouped the common themes in their responses to ensure inter-rater reliability with respect to the findings. In addition to the sample of participants, family members and staff at the OIP at this metropolitan research university located in the southeastern region of the United States were also interviewed to either clarify or obtain more details on information given by the participants.

Chapter 2 of this study includes a comprehensive review of the current literature on international students in the United States and African international students in the United States regarding the challenges they face, their methods of overcoming these challenges, and to what factors and strategies they attribute their success. Chapter 2 also includes a brief geographical and historical overview of the African continent and the state of higher education in Africa. Chapter 3 provides a description of this study's

methodology in detail, which encompasses the theoretical framework, research design, research site, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, limitations and justifications of qualitative research and the researcher's subjectivity statement. Chapter 4 presents this study's results concerning the specific research questions in the form of participant profiles and thematic analysis. Chapter 5 includes an overview of the study, its significance, a discussion and interpretation of results, conclusions drawn, and presents recommendations for the university and future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“To read without reflecting is to cram the intellect and paralyze the mind”  
(Honor Books, 2005, p. 40).

### International Students

There are many benefits associated with the increasing number of international students in the United States. These students increase the diversity of student populations, add new perspectives to classroom discussions, increase awareness and appreciation for other countries and cultures, and arrive with knowledge and skills, especially in the sciences (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). They return home with goodwill and affinity for the United States, thus enhancing international relations. They are also an important source of revenue to the United States economy; education is the fifth largest export of services in the United States (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Open Doors, 2008). Great Britain and Australia are strong competitors for these students, and international student recruitment agencies have become commonplace in the global market influencing whether and where a student will obtain international education (Lee & Rice, 2007).

The benefits, however, have caused some institutions to view international students in terms of economic revenue and as cheap skilled labor, especially in engineering and the sciences (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). Other schools of thought, fearing dependence on international students, view these students as threats to United States economic self-sufficiency (Lee & Rice, 2007). While most universities and

colleges have support systems for international students, these differ and range from administrative offices that cater to the completing and filing of the necessary paperwork to ensure that the students remain in status to more comprehensive programs offering academic, administrative, and personal support.

Non-European international students experience psychological processes and face challenges that are different from American ethnic minorities (Haiwen, Steven, Cleborne, & Marlowe, 2006). These international students from Asia and other developing countries face greater challenges than international students from Western Europe in regard to language, teaching and tutoring, finances, housing accommodations, friendship development, and homesickness (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Most of the literature has been dominated by the challenges and coping mechanisms of international students in Europe and Australia (these international students are mainly Asian), and studies in the United States have focused primarily on Asian students who make up 61% of the international student body in the United States (Open Doors, 2008). The international student body and the cultural contexts of their host countries, however, are not homogenous (Cadman, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007; Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to determine what challenges African international students at a metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States faced and the factors or strategies to which they attribute their success despite these challenges. Findings from similar studies have enhanced the understanding of the challenges faced by international students, especially the negative impact these challenges have had on their academic performance (Cadman, 2000; Campbell &

Mingsheng, 2008; Constantine et al., 2005; Gareis, 2000; Grey, 2002; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Holvikivi, 2007; Klomegah, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Marcketti et al., 2006; McClure, 2007; Myburgh, et al., 2002; Ninnes, Aitchison & Kalos, 1999; Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008; Sam, 2001; Selvadurai, 1991; Thompson & Heng-Yu, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). These studies have also have been fundamental to the design of support systems and the creation of conditions conducive to international students at universities and colleges (Lee & Rice, 2007).

To set the context for this study, the literature review first covered research studies conducted on the challenges faced by international students and the factors and strategies to which they attributed their success. This was followed by a review of the literature that pertains specifically to African international students in the United States. To place their challenges in context a historical and geographical overview of the continent Africa and its people was covered. Finally the declining state of higher education in Africa was covered because most African international students are at a point where their options for quality tertiary education within the continent are declining. Gaps in the literature were noted and formed the basis for the need and significance of this study.

### Challenges

The number of international students at colleges and universities has continued to increase as these students seek to improve their qualifications and expertise, broaden their life experiences and perspectives, and gain a deeper understanding and acceptance of themselves (Myburgh, Niehaus, & Poggenpoel, 2006). International students in the United States face immigration challenges almost immediately in the application process.

This has become increasingly difficult since the terrorists' attacks in 2001, and many students are now looking to study in countries such as Australia and Canada where regulations are not as rigid (Lee & Rice, 2007).

When students from different cultures are grouped together in a foreign country with cultural customs and traditions different from their own, challenges emerge. How these challenges are perceived and dealt with by international students is a function of their culture (Myburgh et al., 2006), and students are oftentimes left to adjust or adapt on their own (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). The literature identifies the challenges as climate and living conditions, academic requirements and expectations, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial concerns, cultural differences, and language proficiency. Ranked highest are tuition costs, language proficiency, and feelings of isolation (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Selvadurai, 1991). These challenges are addressed below.

#### *Climate and Living Conditions*

Climate is a challenge for international students who study in countries with very different time zones (hemispheres) and weather conditions from their home countries. Their bodies must readjust to the sun's rising and setting, and this creates feelings of disorientation, confusion, and at times spiritual displacement (Myburgh et al., 2006). Acclimatization takes 1-2 years (Constantine et al., 2005; Myburgh et al., 2006). This is especially pronounced when the order of the seasons to which the students are accustomed is reversed or when students from tropical climates who study in temperate climates experience winter and snow for the first time (Myburgh et al., 2006; Selvadurai, 1991). These differences in climate result in difficulties in obtaining appropriate clothing.

This is an added expense, especially when the cost of living in the host country is higher than in the student's home country (Myburgh et al., 2006). International students frequently keep exchange rates in mind when making purchases and express difficulties obtaining personal grooming items like hair care products as well as food (Myburgh et al., 2006). These students report difficulties getting used to the local food and become thinner during the course of the semester (Lee & Rice, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006).

#### *Academic Requirements and Expectations*

International students are often excited at the prospects of vast learning opportunities for gaining knowledge and developing relevant skills via technology (e.g., computers) and the library (e.g., books and research tools) (Myburgh et al., 2006).

However, they begin to experience immediate difficulties in the United States because support services do not adequately cater to their challenges with admission, registration, residence life, and dining (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). Improper academic advisement has been cited as a reason for international students not graduating on time, being placed in unsuitable programs of study, or even being placed in two-year colleges as opposed to four-year institutions (Selvadurai, 1991). These placements give rise to complications in transfer processes from two-year to four-year institutions of higher learning and also result in international students changing majors (Selvadurai, 1991).

In a study of international Ph.D. students by Myburgh et al. (2006), students reported challenges with respect to the academic requirements and expectations of the host country, which had different teaching and learning approaches. These challenges included lengthy lectures without visual aids or handouts and independent learning, neither of which were the structured approach to which most of the students were

accustomed. The students reported feeling overwhelmed by the lengthy lectures which sometimes contributed to feelings of depression (Myburgh et al., 2006). Other students reported being overwhelmed by the variety of learning opportunities and faculty expectations (Myburgh et al., 2006). In addition to attending classes, international Ph.D. students are often hired as teaching assistants at the university level. In this role, they face difficulties due to a lack of understanding of the United States educational system concerning testing, grading, and the academic norms and culture of undergraduate students (Lin & Yi, 1997). This challenge is compounded when American students complain about the international students' foreign accents, English language proficiency, or both, which, in turn, negatively impact communication and comprehension of the materials presented (Lin & Yi, 1997). These challenges are associated with feelings of alienation, especially when these international students face resentment from their American counterparts, who also seek these teaching assistant positions (Lin & Yi, 1997).

In order to gain group acceptance and respect, many international students work very hard to fit in. In Myburgh et al.'s (2006) study, Ph.D. students stressed the importance of faculty knowledge of different cultures and skill sets of the international students they teach in order to better meet their needs (see also Lee & Rice, 2007). A study in Finland of international students in information technology had similar results with respect to laboratory experiments (Holvikivi, 2007). These students reported not understanding what was expected of them, finding the directions and instructions unclear, and being unable to convey this lack of understanding to faculty due to their cultural orientation (Holvikivi, 2007).

A qualitative case study of Chinese students taking online classes in the United States revealed that differences in culture and language proficiency make online learning a difficult task (Thompson & Ku, 2005). Based on Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions of culture, Americans have been described as having smaller power distance and weaker uncertainty avoidance. This description includes being individualistic, masculine, and short-term oriented. Asians have been described as having greater power distance and stronger uncertainty avoidance, suggesting that they tend to embody such characteristics as collectivism, femininity, and long-term orientation. American students have been described as verbal-analytical learners that favor abstract analysis while Asian students have been viewed as visual-holistic learners that observe first, gain competence, and then perform. As a result of these differences, the Asian students (Chinese) posted only the minimum number of responses required for their online class, were daunted by having to respond promptly and frequently without the benefit of tutors to read over their grammatical errors, and concurred with students to maintain harmony even though they disagreed with their viewpoints. The American students were more critical and opinionated than the Chinese students (Lin & Yi, 1997; Thompson & Ku, 2005). These findings were replicated in a study of Chinese students in Singapore, which has an educational system structured like the West (McClure, 2007). The students found adjustment to their new learning environment difficult; they felt marginalized by the student teacher relationship, the academic organizational relationship and socially as a result of their previous educational and cultural experiences (McClure, 2007).

Another study on the worldviews of Chinese international students determined that the Chinese culture, rooted in Confucianism, emphasizes hierarchy based on

generation and age; parental opinions are very highly valued, and they influence decisions such as career choice and marriage (Haiwen et al., 2006). As a result, Chinese international students view their advisors as authority figures whose opinions they accept without question; consequently, students might not form their own opinions or take the initiative that is required in American education (Haiwen et al., 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997). They expect their American professors to give them more guidance than they may receive because they view their professors as authority figures; thus, these students are more dependent and demanding. The professors also felt that these students needed more time and attention (Haiwen et al., 2006; McClure, 2007). Chinese students have been taught to be compliant, remain quiet, and withhold expressing their thoughts or asking questions until invited to do so by their professors (Haiwen et al., 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). This information is important for academic advisors and faculty, so they may better prepare these students for academic success in American universities (Haiwen et al., 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997, McClure, 2007; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005).

An interesting perspective to the aforementioned studies on the learning styles and educational systems of international students (specifically Asians) was in a study by Ninnes, Aitchison, and Kalos (1999). This study challenged the stereotypes of Indian international students' prior educational experiences as it related to Western requirements (specifically Australian). The researchers emphasized the heterogeneity of international students, stating that students from one country come from different socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, they have had different educational

exposure prior to traveling abroad. The authors challenged the perception that international students come from educational systems that are culturally deficient. These educational systems have been described in the literature as favoring rote, reproductive, surface, teacher-centered, and dependent approaches to learning (Ninnes et al., 1999). These educational systems have also been described as lacking analytical and critical perspectives occurring in cultural contexts that are dominated by examinations, highly respected teachers, an emphasis on academic achievement, and schools that lack resources (Ninnes et al., 1999).

Ninnes et al. (1999) suggested that these students' homegrown learning strategies are useful and can be adapted to meet the Western university requirements of working independently, as they have the critical and analytical skills required to engage in debates, discuss, argue, and apply and manipulate knowledge (Durkin, 2008; Ninnes et al., 1999). Asian students, the researchers argued, are not passive and do not focus exclusively on rote memory; rather, they are active and strive to obtain a deeper understanding of course content as they internalize and ensure accurate recall of well-understood material (Ninnes et al., 1999).

In summary, the academic challenges faced by international students stem from differences in educational systems, language proficiency, and cultural differences relative to classroom atmosphere and faculty-student rapport. Most international students have been trained to listen rather than speak in class, and the collegial, informal atmosphere in Western nations serves to impede rather than facilitate their learning processes. In addition, most international students are accustomed to taking essay-type examinations at the end of the semester as opposed to frequent multiple-choice and short-essay

examinations that require quick thinking. These differences in test-taking techniques, course structure, course content, and academic standards have resulted in stressful psychological difficulties for international students (Selvadurai, 1991).

### *Alienation and Loneliness*

International students often arrive in the United States with certain expectations and hopes about their social life but quickly discover upon arrival the difference between their social expectations and the social reality of life (Klomegah, 2006). These difficulties result in a profound sense of loss, isolation, alienation, and loneliness that, in turn, results in losing self-confidence, gaining tension, working harder than usual, and taking little time off for leisure (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Marcketti et al, 2006). To help alleviate these feelings of alienation and loneliness, offices of international programs and international student advisement centers at colleges and universities have counseling programs, networks of host families, picnics, and other social events. International students, however, have still reported that university officials seldom reach out to them and that they have to rely on each other for support (Klomegah, 2006).

International students have also reported resentment and treatment as uninvited guests by local students who they believe are resentful because international students are taking away their opportunities (Lee & Rice, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006). This resentment results in local students' unwillingness to interact with international students who then feel lonely and isolated (Myburgh et al., 2006). Missing family and friends, facing invisible cultural barriers that make joining social circles or cliques difficult, and having different understandings and reactions to issues of discussion also contribute to feelings of loneliness and discouragement (Constantine et al., 2005; Klomegah, 2006;

Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006; Selvadurai, 1991).

In their study “*Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination,*” authors Lee and Rice (2007) found that international students reported being ignored in lessons and excluded from study groups and social events by fellow students (Lee & Rice, 2007). Others in the same study felt distanced from faculty because of their limited English proficiency and felt an aversion on the part of faculty to support them, despite how hard they worked (Lee & Rice, 2007). This undermines these students’ confidence, especially those that come from cultures where the professors are dominant figures. These students, therefore, lack trust in the professional support services provided to them (Lee & Rice, 2007).

In a study of international students in Australia, the Australian students blamed the international students (Asian) for the difficulties in making friendships, faulting the Asian students for not talking (Grey, 2002). This study was unique because it required its participants to draw pictures of their experiences and concerns during a 12-week semester (Grey, 2002). At designated intervals (Weeks 2, 7, and 12), the participants shared their drawings with faculty and classmates; the goal of sharing their experiences was to provide the host nationals with insights and deeper understanding of these students’ experiences, challenges, and perceptions so as to create a more conducive environment on campus for learning (Grey, 2002).

### *Discrimination*

Non-European (Asian and Latin American) and African international students that grew up in homogeneous cultures are less likely to have faced racial discrimination prior

to coming to the United States. This has made discrimination an extremely difficult topic especially since college campuses mirror the society within which they exist. Most international students are members of a majority group in their countries; adapting to minority status is difficult (Constantine et al., 2005; Haiwen et al., 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). This discrimination has taken place in the classroom; one African international student reported that a teaching assistant called her a stupid nigger in front of other students, which led her to drop the class (Constantine et al., 2005). Discrimination also manifests itself in the perception that Americans view themselves as intellectually superior to people from other countries, especially Africans (Constantine et al., 2005). African international students face the stereotypes of Whites being considered genetically and intellectually superior to Blacks while they (Africans) have purported athletic superiority to Whites (Constantine et al., 2005). African international students also face discrimination from African American students. African Americans believe that the color of their skin is too dark to date, and Asian students have been afraid to share the same room with Africans (Constantine et al., 2005; Gareis, 2000). International students have also stated perceptions of discrimination by faculty who reportedly give them lower grades than they do local students. This is particularly challenging for students that come from cultures where high grades are stressed (Myburgh et al., 2006).

In a qualitative study of African female graduate students by Beoku-Betts (2004), White professors questioned the students' abilities, asked them to take remedial classes, and criticized their accents. These students felt excluded and a lack of support (as cited in Lee & Rice, 2007). These discriminatory attitudes reflect race, gender, and the position of their home countries in the global environment (Lee & Rice, 2007).

In their article on international students' perceptions of discrimination, Lee and Rice (2007) described *neo-racism* as a mask for "biological racism" (Lee & Rice, 2007 p. 389). This occurred through encouragement of exclusion based on cultural attributes or national origin, cumbersome and ineffective foreign-student tracking procedures, increased hurdles in some countries to get visas to the United States, and fingerprinting and profiling with respect to national security (Lee & Rice, 2007). In colleges and universities, this takes the form of rejection of admission, subjective academic evaluations, loss of or inability to obtain financial aid, negative remarks from faculty or students, and barriers to forming interpersonal relationships in the host country (Lee & Rice, 2007). Even before the terrorists' attacks in 2001, women who wore veils or saris had difficulty integrating with campus life in the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007). Students from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East reported considerable discrimination while students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not report any direct negative experiences because of their race. International students also reported experiences of verbal discrimination when faculty, advisors, or local host nationals made negative comments about their home countries or culture (Lee & Rice, 2007).

### *Stereotypes*

While most African international students are knowledgeable of the history of slavery in the United States, they find its current impact on African Americans shocking (Constantine et al., 2005; Obiakor, Obi & Grant, 2000; Takougang, n.d). Even more disturbing is the fact that now they, too, face the aforementioned stereotypes. Established, well-connected, and well-to-do international students find it difficult to be labeled as a subpar, stereotypical statistic in the United States (Huang, 1977). Also,

“many foreign-born African American males find themselves entangled in the web of racism, prejudicial perceptions, xenophobia, discriminatory generalizations, and problems of adjustment to their new environment” (Obiakor, Obi & Grant, 2000, p. 138). Recognizing this discriminatory barrier, African immigrants that are diverse in their cultural orientations and backgrounds do not want to be tied to the African American image because of the societal stigma and negative images seen in American media (Lee & Rice, 2007; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007).

Mexican international students at a university in Arizona also experienced stereotypical discrimination because of national border issues and negative media coverage (Lee & Rice, 2007). Students from Islamic countries faced negative stereotypes after the terrorists’ attacks in 2001 (Lee & Rice, 2007). A student from the Gulf region was asked by fellow students why she spoke like a White person; they thought she was Black (Lee & Rice, 2007). This reflects the stereotypes that exist with regards to linguistic patterns between the races in America.

### *Financial Concerns*

International students face financial constraints concerning basic living expenses as well as school tuition (Constantine et al., 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007; Marcketti et al., 2006; Myburgh et al., 2006). This is due to the fact that most students are required by immigration laws to be full-time students in order to remain in status (Selvadurai, 1991). In addition, many do not have work permits making self-sufficiency very difficult. The federal government, as well as private and international agencies, has reduced financial aid for international students (Selvadurai, 1991). Further reductions have stemmed from pressures placed on universities to support minority students who also need this aid.

International graduate students are often in better positions than international undergraduate students are because they have access to scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships (Selvadurai, 1991).

### *Cultural Differences*

Culture is a way of life and cultural differences encompass value systems, beliefs, rules and institutions. Culture also includes social structures, education, aesthetics, religion, manners, customs and language (Nickels, McHugh & McHugh, 2008). These differences are revealed in the various political, economic, social, and legal systems around the world. Some of the cultural challenges faced by international students include different tastes in food, views regarding sexual openness, perceptions of time, and gender roles (Lee & Rice, 2007). In a study by Myburgh et al. (2006) international students face challenges adapting to the different culture of the host country and yet, interestingly, gain an awareness of weaknesses in their home countries (e.g., domestic violence and discrimination against females). In the study by Myburgh et al. (2006) some of these international students reported the uneasiness of the quiet environment; the barking of dogs replaced the sound of children playing in the streets (Myburgh et al., 2006).

Cultural differences have also been noted in group discussions, where the politeness criteria are different (Myburgh et al., 2006). Asian students reported being surprised at heated discussions involving their European counterparts who joined in conversations by cutting the speaker off, as opposed to waiting for the speaker to finish. These students also reported experiencing reentry problems when they returned home for holidays, as they found themselves caught between two worlds (Myburgh et al., 2006).

Haiwen et al. (2006) conducted a study on the changing worldview patterns of Chinese international students living in the United States for up to four years. The study showed that these students held onto their cultural values (Haiwen, et al., 2006). The implications of this study were that cultural challenges are not experienced only by new arrivals but are still experienced by those who have been in the United States for a period of time. This suggests that support systems that focus on new students at orientation need to continue because certain cultural values are very strong and persist (Haiwen et al., 2006).

A study of African international students found that conflicts in cultural values between the home and host countries made academic and personal adjustment in college settings difficult (Constantine et al., 2005). In addition, the African-centered perspective to life stresses community and group over individual and focuses on harmony, collective responsibility, commonality, cooperation, expressive individualism, oral tradition, and social time perspectives. These differences make it difficult for these students to adapt and define themselves away from home (Constantine et al., 2005).

A study of 10 Ph.D. students from culturally diverse backgrounds who enrolled in a first-world country university reported that these students perceived shallowness in the friendliness of locals from their host country (Myburgh et al., 2006). For example, the locals would ask how they were doing but did not appear to have a sincere interest and were therefore perceived by these students as not being interested in the details. The locals were not perceived by these students to be available emotionally, physically, or materially to help with difficulties (Myburgh et al., 2006). These students also expressed disappointment at the inability to visit others at any time (Myburgh et al., 2006). This

case study illustrates cultural challenges with respect to differences in relationship and friendship patterns.

Gareis (2000) conducted a qualitative case study on intercultural friendship with five German students and found that feelings of isolation and lack of friendship with host nationals stemmed from differences in culture, specifically differences in the meaning and nature of friendship. The United States has the largest population of international students in the world, and research findings by Locke (1988), Rohrlich & Martin, 1991 and Searle & Ward (1990) as cited by Gareis (2000) have shown that student satisfaction and well-being is impacted directly by interaction with the host country and the development of close friendships (Gareis, 2000). This is a major factor in changing international images (Gareis, 2000). In studies by Furnham & Alibhai (1985), Hull (1978) and Trice & Elliott (1993) as cited by Gareis (2000) foreign students have reported disappointment with their lack of American friends (Gareis, 2000). American friendship patterns have been described as friendly and warm during initial contact; however, close friendships are rare, and if they do occur, these friendships are intense, short-lived, and center on academic and professional activities as opposed to intimate and personal concerns. Americans have also avoided commitment and obligation, and foreigners do not feel that they can call on Americans for help (Gareis, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Friendships with U.S. citizens are high spread, low obligation, low duration, and high trust (Gareis, 2000). This causes difficulties for international students that come from high-obligation and high-duration cultures. Americans in need of help obtain professional help rather than make demands on friends. In the literature, reasons for these

characteristics of American friendship patterns revolve around independence, self-reliance, and mobility patterns of those whose families have changed residence every few years (Gareis, 2000). This mobility hampers practice in developing close friendships and causes Americans to develop self-protective habits of keeping relationships casual, in order to avoid being hurt by repeated separations (Gareis, 2000). Germans generally, on the other hand, typically have a more holistic view of friendship. German friendships generally involve the whole person, which encompass not just the public layer but also the private layer. Many Germans tend to be consistent, predictable, and exhibit the same personality in different roles in life (Gareis, 2000). Gareis (2000) however notes that the English word for friend encompasses relationships which range from acquaintances to close friendship whereas in other languages different terms are used to describe these relationships. This difference in terminology could therefore also be responsible for the difficulties that international students face in forming friendships with their American hosts (Gareis, 2000). The aforementioned findings on friendships mirror the experiences of African international students who believe that in addition to differences in cultural values, friendships and social support networks on campus are difficult to establish because of racism and discrimination (Constantine et al., 2005).

Cultural differences have also prevented African international students with marked adaptation distress from seeking mental health services to address their concerns (Constantine et al., 2005). These cultural differences include the students' beliefs about mental illness, their strong levels of commitment to their families, and a lack of familiarity with counseling services. What makes this situation worse is that friends and families who can better relate to these students are abroad (Constantine et al., 2005).

### *Language Proficiency*

Challenges in English language proficiency include the general meaning of words, the different pronunciation of words by locals and international students, and the different contextual meaning of certain words in different countries. These challenges create communication barriers that result in misunderstandings or misinterpretations. This, then, creates academic challenges and difficulties in interpersonal communications and relationships with locals of the host country (Myburgh et al., 2006). This is especially difficult for Asian and Latin American students who may be very sensitive and may not seek help when needed (Lee & Rice, 2007). In efforts to improve their academic performance, students who were not proficient in English have tutors, yet studies have shown that university staff was not empathetic and criticized them for not taking responsibility for their academic advancement and critical thinking. Those students that were proficient in English but that had distinct accents also had communication difficulties (Lee & Rice, 2007; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

### Strategies for Success

International students have developed different coping mechanisms to overcome the challenges they face in order to succeed in their educational pursuits. The following represents the primary characteristics associated with success for international students in the literature.

#### *Flexibility*

International students have developed critical thinking and negotiation skills to help them adapt to the different academic requirements and expectations as well as

improve their interactions with locals of the host country. They take their time alone as an opportunity to engage in soul searching, reflecting on their lives and asking the critical but profound questions of: who am I and what am I doing? (Myburgh et al., 2006). This is a maturation process whereby self-sufficient human beings acknowledge their self-efficacy and worth (Myburgh et al., 2006). They also pamper or treat themselves intermittently (e.g., preparing their native foods and nurturing their religious beliefs). Many have assumed the expressed characteristics of the host culture they perceive as necessary for survival, such as adopting the individualistic orientations of the Western host cultures (e.g., treasuring their time alone) (Myburgh et al., 2006). They have also become more open-minded about learning about the host culture and teaching and sharing their cultures with others (Myburgh et al., 2006). As an example, Asian international students pursuing their Ph.D. have perceived obstacles as surmountable challenges and have stood up for their professional standards when grading Western students' papers (Myburgh et al., 2006).

### *Family Support*

Reaching out to family and friends by telephone and the Internet has enabled international students to deal with their feelings of loneliness and insecurity in a foreign environment (Myburgh et al., 2006). Writing about their experiences and feelings in e-mail messages to family and friends has been acknowledged by international students to be therapeutic (Myburgh et al., 2006). Reading local news from their native locales on the Internet and available local mediums has also helped to alleviate negative feelings (Constantine et al., 2005; Myburgh et al., 2006).

### *Local Support Systems*

Local support systems made up of old friends from their home country have enabled international students to cope with feelings of loneliness, isolation, and insecurity (Myburgh et al., 2006). These local support systems have also been comprised of relationships with locals of the host country, fellow international students, immigrant associations, ethnic groups, community centers, and religious or church groups (Constantine et al., 2005; Gareis, 2000; Hume, 2008; Marcketti et al., 2006; Myburgh et al., 2006). These immigrant associations, ethnic groups, and community centers exist to provide support to immigrants, refugees, and international students. African immigrants seek help at these community associations rather than at those offered by the government or government-sponsored agencies (Hume, 2008). These associations offer a variety of services that enable newcomers to navigate or bypass the bureaucracies in the host society. In addition, international students can share their adaptation frustrations with others who have experienced this process (Hume, 2008).

African international students in areas such as Washington D.C. are able to maintain material and nonmaterial aspects to their culture, including language and religious traditions (Hume, 2008). This is due in part to the large presence of Africans in that area who have established restaurants, dance clubs, ethnic churches, African grocery stores, cafes, and music stores (Hume, 2008). In contrast, African international students in Eugene, Oregon have been able to maintain the aforementioned cultural aspects by getting together and throwing their own parties as well as bringing books and artifacts from home when they travel (Hume, 2008).

### *School Support Systems*

According to Hayes and Lin (1994) the environment in a university or college campus has a direct impact on the success or failure of international students. With this knowledge, universities constantly review the support systems they offer international students for effectiveness and recognition of areas for improvement. This quest for improvement in the successful acculturation of international students has economic and international relations ramifications (Cadman, 2000; Campano, 2007; Fischer, 2008). One example of a unique program is the Integrated Bridging Programme at the University of Adelaide, Australia (Cadman, 2000). This program focuses on acclimating international students to Australian culture as well as exploring how Australians can make changes to meet the needs of their international students. International postgraduate students meet with their supervisors to explore the cultural relativity of the skills they bring from their culturally diverse environments and the skills they currently need. Moreover, they discuss the development of a common culture different from the culture of both students and teachers (Cadman, 2000).

Luzio-Lockett (1998) conducted a study in Britain with the realization that an international student's self-concept has an impact on his or her academic success. International students are in-transit—they are dealing with adjustment to different educational systems, teaching approaches, language proficiency, and a constantly changing cultural environment (political, legal, economic, and social). This makes adjustment into the frame of reference of the host culture difficult because international students' self-concept is not static; rather, it evolves over time (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Therefore, the study suggested support systems in the form of guidance and counseling as

well as personal and academic support for international students. This study also suggested language entry requirements for international students (Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

Studies conducted by Perrucci and Hu (1995) and Schram and Lauver (1988) (as cited in Lee & Rice, 2007) suggested accommodation changes in the host culture institutions. These studies recommended that school support systems should be tailored to the specific cultural backgrounds of international students such as Asian or African. Most of the literature on international students has focused on their ability to adapt and cope, placing the responsibility on the student to overcome these challenges and integrate into society.

#### *Other Methods and Factors*

International students have reported that self-determination and motivation have enabled them to work and study harder to overcome academic challenges and gain acceptance and respect from peers and faculty (Constantine et al., 2005; Grey, 2002; Li & Stodolska, 2006; McClure, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006; Thompson & Ku, 2005).

African international students have also reported keeping problems to themselves so as not to burden others (Constantine et al., 2005). They have also engaged in activities such as exercise or sleep to avoid problems (Constantine et al., 2005). However, they have also confronted problems such as discrimination directly and then they forgot about it. Spirituality, prayer, and humor have been cited as playing a great role in overcoming the aforementioned challenges (Constantine et al., 2005).

## African International Students

The literature on international students at the college and university level is rich. A review, however, of this literature reveals that most of these studies have been conducted in Europe and Australia and have focused on Asian international students. Even studies conducted in the United States and Canada have focused mainly on Asian international students (Durkin, 2008; Haiwen, et al., 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Ninnes, et al., 1999; McClure, 2007; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). This is understandably so because Asian international students make up the majority of the international student body in these countries; they comprise 61% of the international student body in the United States (Open Doors, 2008).

An electronic search of the Proquest database on doctoral dissertations on African international students (see Appendix A) revealed approximately that 14 studies were conducted between 1960-1979, 22 studies that were conducted between 1980-1989, 21 studies that were conducted between 1990-1999, and 21 studies that were conducted between 2000-2008. This totals approximately 78 studies in 41 years. Almost all of these studies have referred to African students in general; less than one third focused on specific parts of Africa: South Africa (6), West Africa (7) and East Africa (5). No study that focused on North African students was found. Like Asia, Africa is not a monolithic continent; it is made up of 54 countries. Therefore, the literature will be enhanced by studies that not only focus on students from East, West, South, and North Africa, but that also focus on students coming from individual countries. Such differentiations are important because each African country has different ethnicities, languages, and religions. In addition, there is also the influence of the English, French, Portuguese,

Dutch, and Spanish on the culture of Africans they colonized. This will also have an impact on the challenges African international face and determine how they are able to overcome these challenges. In a study on the effects of colonization on the career choices of African students in the United States, Bessong (2000) found that colonization has an effect on the career choices and occupational decisions of these students. The language of instruction in African universities is the language of the colonizer; the curriculum was restricted to law and fields that would help the colonial administration. These fields were not expensive to set up, and there was no emphasis on the sciences. (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). The table in Appendix G reflects the "colonial legacy movement," where African students tend to study in foreign countries that colonized their countries of origin (Kishun, in press). For example, Southern and Eastern Africa have a British colonial influence, West Africa was largely colonized by France, and Central and North Africa were colonized by France and Germany. As a result, France and Belgium are the preferred countries for Francophone students from Benin, Gabon, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and Senegal (Kisun, in press). These countries send more than 2,000 students abroad every year. Students from Lusophone countries like Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique go to Portugal (Kishun, in press). Students from Anglophone Sub-Saharan countries like Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa go to South Africa and the United States (Kishun, in press). The Anglophone countries send more than 1,900 students annually. Students migrate to these countries because of derived cultural capital, language, and a shared history (Kishun, in press). Studying African international students on a country-by-country basis will enhance an understanding of the people that come

from these different countries, and thereby mitigate a homogenous stereotype of the indigenes of a particular country.

In contrast to the literature on African international students in the United States, the literature on Asian international students has been broken down into students that come from countries like China, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and India; these studies have enhanced awareness of the culture and prior educational experiences of these students. This has led to support systems offered by colleges and universities to meet their specific needs (Durkin, 2008; Haiwen et al., 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Ninnes et al., 1999; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, et al., 2005).

#### Studies on African International Students

The dissertation studies relating specifically to African international college and university students have focused on these students' cultural adjustment experiences with regard to faculty attitudes, academic performance, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes, communication difficulties, religion, identity formation and negotiation, coping strategies, and relationships with Whites and African Americans (see Appendix A). A review of these dissertation studies in Appendix A on African international students revealed that they face challenges similar to the general international student body. Such challenges include differences in food and eating habits, financial constraints, obtainment of part-time jobs permits, academic requirements and expectations, climate and living conditions, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial constraints, cultural differences, lack of understanding of the African culture by professors and students, language proficiency, inadequate orientation programs prior to

arrival, inadequate help after arrival, and practical application of their training in their home countries (Hume, 2005; Goyol, 2002; Manyika, 2001; Molestane, 1995; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997). Factors attributed to these students' success are also similar. These include flexibility, familial support, local support systems, school support systems, hard work, self-determinism, motivation due to accountability to self, family and the larger community, and other methods such as sleep and exercise. While challenges like discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes appear similar on the surface, the true impact of these challenges on African international students differs from other international students (Bateki, 2001; Bessong, 2000; Cisco-Titi, 1991; Goodlett, 1990; Hume, 2005; Mabunda, 1996; Maphinda-Lebbie, 1989; Molestane, 1995; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997).

#### *Discrimination, Prejudice, and Stereotypes*

While most non-Western-European international students cite challenges like discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes, these challenges take on a different meaning for Black African International students, due to their race they are presumably identified with African Americans (Constantine et al., 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lee and Rice, 2007). Apart from Black South Africans, Black African students have on average grown up in racially homogenous societies where being Black is the norm and discrimination based on race is less likely (Constantine et al., 2005). However on arrival in the United States, which is a predominantly White society race becomes an important factor affecting their ease of cultural adjustment (Constantine et al., 2005). These students are involved in identity negotiation and formation based on race, class, nationality, and sociopolitical and economic backgrounds (Manyika, 2001). The essence, however, of this challenge has been best captured by research studies conducted on adjustment challenges

of immigrant African children in elementary and secondary school settings in the United States. These research studies have focused in detail on discrimination, stereotypes, cultural differences, language proficiency, and difficulties of identity formation. These studies have also examined the strained relationships between African Americans and immigrant Africans because of negative stereotypes each group has of the other. The work of authors such as J. U. Ogbu (1974, 1978), R. Traoré and R. Lukens (2006), S. Lieberson and M. C. Waters (1988), and M. C. Waters (1990) have given rise to further research on how best to support immigrant children in adapting to and succeeding in U.S. elementary and secondary school classrooms. Extensive research by authors including C. A. Utley and F. E. Obiakor (2001), R. Algozzine, D. J. O'Shea and F. E. Obiakor (2009) has been completed on multicultural education and culturally responsive literacy instruction. These studies, however, have focused on elementary and secondary school education and not college and university level tertiary education. A study by Obiakor, Obi and Grant (2000) on the adjustment difficulties of foreign-born African males into mainstream America leaves no doubt that African international students face challenges (Obiakor et al., 2000). With this comes a need to conduct further studies that will guide university and college programs and faculty in easing the adjustment problems of African international students at the tertiary level.

The literature provides detailed insight into the adjustment challenges and strategies employed by immigrant African children to overcome these challenges at the elementary and secondary level of education in the United States. The experiences of African immigrant students at the elementary and secondary school levels are considered a relevant part of this literature review because while certain themes may be replicated at

the tertiary level, they may manifest or be expressed differently due to the difference in age, maturity, and prior life experiences of students at the tertiary level.

In their book *This Isn't the America I Thought I'd Find*, authors Traoré and Lukens (2006) provided a thought-provoking analysis of the experiences of a typical African immigrant student in an inner-city urban public school in the United States. Their analysis included perspectives from the students, their fellow students, teachers, school administration, and parents. It is important to note that their sample did not include any Black South African students.

On arrival, African immigrant students immediately confront social challenges that take the form of negative myths, stereotypes, and misperceptions that Americans have about Africans (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). The media (e.g., televised charities such as Save the Children and Christian Children's Fund as well as the Discovery Channel and National Geographic), the curriculum in school, and the home environment of their fellow students perpetuate these myths, stereotypes, and misperceptions. Typecasts include Africans being perceived as savages or hungry and starving people, suffering from AIDS, engaging in constant war or military conflicts, and living in a jungle with exotic animals. Furthermore, these students, due to the color of their skin, are faced with the prejudice endured by African Americans (Basford, 2008; Constantine, et al., 2005; Njue, 2004; Takougang, n.d; Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

This prejudice comes as a shock to African immigrant students from racially homogeneous countries who are not accustomed to being externally judged based on the color of their skin (Constantine et al, 2005; Takougang, n.d; Traoré & Lukens, 2006). In Africa, identity is based on ethnicity, nationality, family lineage, or the part of the

country from which one comes. Prior to arrival, most African international students had positive perceptions of America based on movies, magazines, and newspaper articles that depict America as the land of opportunity, freedom, and fairness (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). This has led them to believe they would be welcomed the way foreigners are typically welcomed in Africa; yet, they do not find this to be true. What was most disturbing to these students were the strained relationships that exist between African immigrant students and African American students in inner-city urban schools. Both groups of students have negative perceptions and stereotypes of the other that prevent them from interacting and getting to know and understand one another. This results in aggression and violence between the groups. African immigrant students are often called “gay” or “faggots” (Njue, 2004; Traoré & Lukens, 2006). When they complain to school authorities, they are placed in detention, which leads to further aggression, disillusionment, and school dropout. African American students see African immigrant students as people that stink, have accents that make them subpar, have very dark complexions or are of mixed race if light complexioned (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). African American students also see African immigrant students as people who come from the jungle and walk with lions on the streets, wear leaves, are stuck up, and were responsible for selling their ancestors into slavery (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). In contrast, African immigrant students view African Americans as being part of large families headed by single mothers on welfare, being rude, being bad influences, having violent-prone attitudes, and poor work ethics (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). Media images portraying young African American men as dangerous and violent gun-toting gang members add to the negative perceptions. African immigrant students who act out are described by their

fellow African immigrant peers and teachers as acting Black or becoming Americanized (Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

Traoré and Lukens (2006) noted that during the course of their study the African immigrant and African American students were never invited by school authorities to speak about their experiences or give the reason for their anger towards one another. They were simply placed in different classes and were only allowed to come together in the hallways and in the cafeteria (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). Even in their African studies class there was no interaction between these students. The African immigrants were not invited to speak and dispel the aforementioned myths, and the African American students became bored memorizing names of kings, dates, and countries. In addition, in this African studies course, the African immigrant students did not seem to know much detail about slavery and its impact on African Americans. The African immigrant students believed there was a lack of interest in life in present-day Africa and saw their teachers and fellow students as ignorant about them and their continent (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). Further, there was no interaction in sports; the African American boys played basketball, and the African immigrant boys played soccer. The African immigrant girls had a more difficult time creating dances during gym time to hip-hop music (Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

Traoré and Lukens (2006) found that some African immigrant students worked on changing their accents, the types of clothes they wore, and their behavior in order to fit in (identity crisis); however, their names still gave them away as Africans. As a result, the African immigrant students kept together for familiarity and safety and were pressured by their parents to disengage, walk away, and avoid confrontations no matter what was said

or done to them. Traoré and Lukens (2006) referenced studies by Fordham (1988, 1996), Ibrahim (1998), Ogbu (1974, 1998), and Solomon (1992) where African immigrant students cited racism as their main difficulty. In efforts to assimilate to their new environments, African immigrant students “create[d] their own space to dominate [e.g., sports or academics]” (Traoré & Lukens, 2006, p. 82) in order to define themselves in the face of racism. In Fordham’s (1996) study, Black students that strived to succeed in school were accused of “acting white [*sic*]” (as cited in Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

These findings are similar to other findings. Goodlett (1990) analyzed the influence of verbal and nonverbal communication on the perceptions of African American and English-speaking African-Caribbean students at the college level. In her study Goodlett (1990) noted that even though the two groups shared a common history, ancestry and culture there was a communication breakdown between the two groups. In a study on stereotypes, social distance, and language attitudes among African, African American, and African-Caribbean college students, the authors found that African Americans were the most negatively stereotyped, and African-Caribbean’s were the most positively stereotyped (Cisco-Titi, 1991).

African immigrant students face challenges academically as well. The students in Traoré and Lukens (2006) study expressed disappointment at the relaxed-lower academic expectations and felt that they were pushed harder and learned more back home in Africa, regardless of the physical states of their schools. They were also very disappointed at the lack of respect or reverence shown to the teachers by the African American students. They described the African American students as rude, disruptive, unruly, and suggested that they did not pay attention in class—all of which inhibited their ability to learn. Many

African immigrant students did not raise their hand in class to ask or answer questions or to express an alternate view in fear that African American students would make fun of them. The teachers, however, spoke positively of the foreign students in their class, who always greeted them with a smile and did their homework (Traoré & Lukens 2006).

Most parents of African immigrant students were preoccupied with making a living and worked up to two or more jobs to make ends meet. These parents were also unaware of the inherent prejudice in American society—based on racial inequality, exploitation, and humiliation—that presented these students for the lowest jobs in society (Traoré & Lukens 2006).

African immigrant students are very diverse, they not only come from different countries they also have different socioeconomic backgrounds, religions, and have different prior experiences in Africa. Some of these countries had political difficulties and others like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Sudan have experienced war. Those from prominent families had attended prestigious schools and, in addition to their native language, learned how to speak other languages like English and French (Traoré & Lukens 2006). Some arrived in the United States as babies and toddlers, while others arrived as teenagers. The older teenagers had more problems adjusting in high school. As a result of their different backgrounds, they employed different coping mechanisms on a personal and individual level. Those who had experienced the horrors of war were, on average, more aggressive and got involved in fistfights. In contrast, some simply did as they were told, others tried to be invisible, some disengaged themselves from the hostile and unchallenging environment, and others tried to find teachers or friends help them understand concepts they did not understand in class (Traoré & Lukens 2006). The older

teenagers and students who did not have supportive home environments found it difficult to cope and eventually dropped out of school (Traoré & Lukens 2006).

Collective coping mechanisms that these African immigrant students employed to overcome their challenges included the presence of family members, the ability to return home, and the African Students Association. However, some of these African students gave up in the face of these challenges, dropped out of school, and ended up with low paying jobs. Others turned to drugs, got involved in prostitution, faced teenage pregnancy, and ended up in jail (Traoré & Lukens 2006).

The parents of many of these African immigrant students in urban schools are college educated in their home countries, but they arrive in the United States without the financial security or support to live in more affluent neighborhoods; they work blue-collar jobs and find it difficult to integrate into mainstream America. These parents have sacrificed to bring their children to the United States so that they can achieve a good education, but they often are disappointed at the loss of their children's African values (e.g., respect) and the appearance of their lack of learning. Despite such setbacks, these parents still cling to the hope of their children achieving the American Dream (Traoré & Lukens 2006).

With this in mind, an important question must be asked: Why are African American students stereotyped as having violent tendencies, being rude, lacking respect, and being disinterested in school? The answer could lie in Nigerian anthropologist Ogbu's (1998) cultural-ecological theory of school performance. As cited in Traoré and Lukens (2006), Ogbu classified minority groups as involuntary and voluntary immigrants. Involuntary immigrants are the descendants of slaves who view school as

part of the dominant White culture of oppression, while voluntary immigrants come to the United States on their own accord and generally have the ability to return to their homelands. Voluntary immigrants are perceived as being able to assimilate easier into American society because they chose to come here and are willing to adapt to the expected difficulties faced by newcomers. Yet, not all African immigrants fall into the category of voluntary immigrants; Ogbu (as cited in Traoré and Lukens, 2006) describes those escaping from war or seeking asylum as refugees. Whether voluntary or refugee, African immigrants do find it difficult to integrate into mainstream America, due to factors such as their accents and the color of their skin (Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Obiakor et al., 2000; Takougang, n.d.).

A historical perspective of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes of Blacks in America is important at this point because it provides answers to the belief systems, attitudes, and behaviors that make up the culture of a people. For African international students to comprehend fully the depth of what it means to be Black in America, it is important to glance back through history. Most African international students are educated in curriculums that still closely mirror those created by their European colonialists, these curriculums focus on African and European history (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). Therefore, while African students learn about the history of Africa and Europe, not much depth is covered regarding the history of the United States and how this history still has an impact on the social institutions that make up the fabric of the American society. If this history was covered, then African immigrants would not be taken aback by how deeply ingrained these stereotypes are in American society (e.g., in the educational system and the professional workforce). While these students may be perceived as

hardworking, they are constantly straddling the worlds of African immigrant and African American.

This weakness, among others, has attracted the attention of American universities, foundations, and donor agencies. They have recognized that the curricula in African colleges and universities are irrelevant to workforce needs and they are now working toward involving Africans in determining what these needs should be instead of relying on their own preconceptions of the needs of these foreigners (Fischer & Lindow, 2008).

Ogbu (1978) related the differences in education and socioeconomic achievement between Whites and Blacks to the social stratification that exists in American society. This reveals the deeper issues of race as it affects immigrant African students, immigrant African adults, and African international students on arrival in the United States (Constantine et al., 2005; Takougang, n.d.). While they are aware of racial discrimination, these groups are not only continuously shocked at how deeply entrenched it is in the structural fabric of the institutions that make up social life in the United States, but also at how they now find themselves facing a battle that has no clear strategy for success (Obiakor et al., 2000; Ogbu, 1978). However, it is important to note that this generalization does not apply to Black South African students who have experienced apartheid and its continuing effects in their homeland.

In his books *The Next Generation* (1974) and *Minority Education and Caste* (1978), Ogbu acknowledged that inequality exists in every society as a function of the group into which an individual is born (e.g., race, caste, ethnicity, language, or religion). Members of the dominant majority, through myths and legends or even the law, often rationalize these inequalities, for example, the laws that supported apartheid in South

Africa against the Black Africans. One way to reduce the inequality over which individuals have no control is through formal education; this avenue provides similar skills to all, so that if inequality persists, it exists as a function of one's ability, or lack thereof, as opposed to the societal group into which one was born. Despite there being a public education system in the United States, the gap in school performance between Whites and Blacks remains as large as the difference in their socioeconomic lives (Ogbu, 1978).

According to Ogbu (1978) Americans have been working to reduce this academic achievement gap since the 1950s, through programs like compensatory education, which was designed to compensate for deficits that Black children were believed to take to school because of inadequate home training or cultural deprivation. Other programs introduced at this time included school integration, increased funding per student, better trained school personnel, and allied reforms like the performance contract system in which a contract was signed with an educational firm to teach these children; the firm was only paid if the children's learning improved (Ogbu, 1978). Variations of these programs still exist today (for example the No Child Left Behind Act enacted in 2001 by former President G.W. Bush); yet, more than 50 years later the academic achievement gap is still being battled with no signs of improvement. The book *This Isn't the America I Thought I'd Find* by Traoré and Lukens (2006) reveals this problem startlingly.

As early as 1970, Ogbu (as cited in Ogbu, 1978) believed that the failure of these programs existed in the theories on which they were based: politics, a lack of pragmatism, and conflict over the relative weight of each of the factors social scientists believed were the cause of the achievement gap. At the time of writing his book, Ogbu

stated that these factors were the school environment, the home environment, and heredity (genetic deficiency). As early as 1890 mental testing between the races began and it was believed that there was a relationship between light skin pigmentation and cognitive ability, that skull capacity was related to intelligence and that intelligence was passed down on familial lineage (Wiggan, 2007). It was also believed that people of European descent were superior to all others (Wiggan, 2007). These beliefs formed the foundation for the genetic perspective in which academic performance was explained in terms of biogenetics (human development and individual differences) (Wiggan, 2007).

Ogbu began his research in response to Jenson's (1969) heredity hypothesis (genetic deficiency of Blacks), which sought to explain the reason for the failure of the programs that strived to reduce the Black-White school performance gap. He proposed, however, that a "common-sense" reason for this gap lay in the roles that adults have in the contemporary post school world (as cited in Ogbu, 1978).

Ogbu (1978) believed that the main cause of the lower school performance of African American students in the school system was the result of the racial stratification (caste system) that exists in American society. He stated that this social stratification is not unique to the United States; it even exists in other societies where the dominant and minority groups belong to the same race. These societies also have similar differences in school performance. If true, then race or genetic differences were not the cause of the difference in school performance between the races in the United States. In other words according to Ogbu, Jensen's heredity hypothesis of Blacks being genetically inferior to Whites was false and therefore one of the reasons for this academic achievement gap was the racial and social stratification that exists in the United States. Ogbu studied the Indian

society, which has the high caste and scheduled caste (function of the family into which a person is born), Israel, which has the Ashkenazim and Oriental Jews (ethnicity), and Japan, which has the Ippan and Buraku outcastes (function of the family into which a person is born) and found that these societies also have academic achievement gaps based on social stratification (Ogbu, 1978).

In his studies, Ogbu (1978) found that Black students and other minority groups reject academic competition with the dominant group because academic success has not benefited members of their group with respect to social and occupational rewards, as compared to the dominant group. The educated members of the minority group have also been unable to live where they want and have not been evaluated as individuals based on their training and ability. From this, Ogbu concluded that racial stratification, underfunded schools, and the minorities themselves were responsible for this school performance and the subsequent socioeconomic gap that exists in society. This has a negative effect on generations of African Americans with respect to exclusion, segregation, and the patterns of linguistic, cognitive, and motivational skills. Ogbu (1978) did not believe that the perceived difference in intelligence was the result of African American resistance to acculturation, home training, or biological differences between the races. He noted that some minority groups that have a position similar to that of African Americans in the United States are able to do better in schools outside their place of origin where they do not perceive their social status as the basis for their social and occupational roles. This has been proven by studies on the increased performance of Black South African students in countries outside of South Africa as well as their identity development (Low, Akande, & Hill, 2005). In the United States even though these Black

South African students experienced racism they succeeded academically because their professors treated and graded them fairly and saw them as capable and hardworking students (Molestane, 1995). In South Africa however the Black South African students believed that their professors saw them as disadvantaged and weakly prepared high school graduates (Molestane, 1995).

In essence, Ogbu's (1978) main point was that, all things being equal, if Blacks were given the same opportunities as Whites, they would be interested in school and do better academically. The gap will decrease if educational equality is redefined in terms of equality of access to post-school rewards of formal education; that is, remove all barriers against Black youth and Black adults in post-school society.

Ogbu (1978) also differentiated class stratification from racial stratification. He suggested that class stratification is based on achieved differences, while racial stratification is based on ascribed differences. These ascribed differences have made upward social mobility for Blacks difficult despite their societal class. In fact, the higher the educational qualifications of Blacks, the more difficult their social mobility resulting in a higher difference in their income attainment as compared to Whites. As a result, the strategy for social mobility of Blacks has been collective (e.g., protests and boycotts) as opposed to individual because the group encounters this difficulty.

According to Ogbu (1978), the three main factors responsible for the gap in school performance between Blacks and Whites were inferior education, subtle devices used in school to differentiate their training, and the job ceiling. Achievement and behavior were determined by the prevailing system of social mobility. The dual nature of education in a caste-stratified society is expressed through complete segregation, tracking

within same schools, classrooms or courses, watered-down curriculum for caste minorities, biased textbooks and learning materials, and differences in educational identities (such as stereotypes, treatment and expectations, different evaluations and rewards for the same academic skills of the two groups) (as cited in Ogbu, 1978). Ogbu stated that parents encouraged and raise their children to achieve success in societies where success is perceived as achievable. Therefore, to reduce this gap the main questions should be:

To what extent is the present allocation of roles of the adult members of the minority group based on education? Is the relationship between formal education and role allocation in the minority group the same as it is in the majority group?

What are the motives of education for the minority group? (Ogbu, 1978, p. 25)

The answers to these questions will enhance an understanding of the behavior of parents, pupils, teachers, counselors, school administrators, and other school personnel.

A question may now be asked about other minority groups: Why do their attitudes differ from African Americans? Ogbu (1978) classified minorities into three groups. Autonomous minorities are small in number with distinct racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural identities. They may live in certain geographical areas. They experience prejudice and discrimination but do not see the dominant majority as their reference group and do not strive to assimilate with the dominant majority. With this group, the ideology of innate inferiority may be absent in the relationship between them and the dominant majority.

The dominant group views caste minorities as inherently inferior in all respects. This, in turn, sharply defines the political, economic, and ritual roles they have in society.

While members of this group do not endorse the aforementioned rationalized ideology, they are affected and influenced by it (Ogbu, 1978); this includes Blacks, American Indians, and Mexican Americans.

Immigrant minorities who fall between autonomous and caste minorities comprise the third group. They live in groups and operate effectively outside the established definitions of social relations, superiority and inferiority as defined by the social hierarchy of the host society. They have local hierarchies where they are not defined by the occupational positions that they occupy in the host society, which are often the lowest positions with little or no political power or prestige. Their attitudes toward the host society are instrumental, which enables them to anticipate and accept prejudice as the price of achieving their objectives. Their main objectives are economic attainment for themselves and those back home; they do not seek equality with the dominant group. They have the ability to move to other societies or back home. As a result, caste and immigrant minorities react differently to the same social situations (Ogbu, 1978). Black African immigrants, unlike Chinese and Japanese immigrants, are in a peculiar situation because they are treated like caste minorities due to the color of their skin. According to Shelby Steele (1990) as cited by Obiakor, Obi and Grant (2000) the Black race has a reputation of inferiority and Black skin has more dehumanizing stereotypes associated with it as compared to any other skin color in America.

Africans have been described as having a spiritual connection to all things, having an interdependence and commitment to community, and cooperating and finding harmony with a vibrant social and community life (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). They have a varied and rich heritage, with a history of empires and kingdoms that were disrupted by

the mercantile colonialists that viewed the material and spiritual worlds as separate (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). As a result, African immigrant students have knowledge and experiences that can enrich classroom discussions and enhance an understanding of Africa and Africans (Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

The African educational systems were modeled after their colonialists and prepared the people for low-level jobs with the colonial government (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). Those who traveled abroad for tertiary education prepared for higher-level prestigious positions. The colonial legacy is responsible for the perception of prestige and value that is accorded education abroad to this day and is the reason many still aspire to travel abroad to study at the tertiary level (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). It has been suggested that researchers studying immigrant Africans use an Afrocentric approach as opposed to a Eurocentric approach to collect and analyze data (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). This will enable the use of codes, paradigms, and symbols that reinforce African ideals and values. In addition, this will form a valid frame of reference to use for acquiring and examining the data collected on immigrant Africans (Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

To enable a smooth transition for these students, Traoré and Lukens (2006) suggested that they have orientation and transitional exposure to life in the United States, an introduction to the system of schooling, and diversity training. This will mitigate some of the disappointment that immigrants encounter (e.g., when they see poor or homeless people in the United States). They also suggested that the Afrocentric worldview of life (i.e., sharing their connection to the earth, one another, and the community) be taught in American and European schools as an alternative to the materialistic and individualistic view of life. This multiculturalism will have an impact on the negative myths,

stereotypes, and misperceptions that abound. In addition, it will enhance the understanding of teachers and school administrators of the unique needs and learning styles of students of color in order to reduce the education achievement gap.

Multiculturalism will also enable schools to provide these children with culturally appropriate teachers, methods, and curriculum that connect their education to their home experiences (Traoré & Lukens, 2006).

Ninety-seven percent of the United States population has been made up of immigrants who differed in culture, social organization, power, economic position, prestige, education, urban and industrial background, and kinship structure (Lieberson & Waters, 1988). These immigrants differed in the reasons or forces that caused them to immigrate: slavery, famine, starvation, political upheaval, social oppression, military conscription, war, religious freedom, a sojourn with plans to return, the avoidance of the law, superior professional opportunities, temporary employment, higher standard of living, and better opportunities for themselves and their children (Lieberson & Waters, 1988). These early immigrants also faced discrimination, difficulties with social mobility, and lower academic performance (from those that were discriminated against). For example, immigrants from Western Europe discriminated against early immigrants from Eastern Europe (Waters, 1990). This is important because currently in America, the discrimination between Eastern and Western European immigrants appears to be nonexistent; the academic performance of American students with Eastern European ancestry is not differentiated from those students whose ancestors came from Western Europe (Lieberson & Waters, 1988).

Given the above it is possible that a time may come when the educational achievement gap between African American and White students may cease to exist.

### The Continent and the People

Given the aforementioned the researcher believes it is important to give the reader relevant background information on the literature of the continent, its people and higher education in Africa. This will enable the reader place the literature review that pertains specifically to African international students in the proper context.

The name Africa comes from the Latin word “Aprica” (sunny) and the Greek word “Aphrike” (without cold) (“Africa,” 2009 ). It is the second largest and second most-populous continent occupying 6% of the earth’s total surface area with 14% of the world’s human population (“Geography,” 2009 ). Africa is made up of 54 countries and has a climate that ranges from the northern temperate to the southern temperate zones. Its natural wonders include Mountains Kilimanjaro, Kenya, and the Atlas Mountains, the Great Rift Valley, Lakes Victoria and Tangayika, River Niger, the Kalahari, and Sahara deserts and the Serengeti Plains (Du Bois, 1965; “Geography,” 2009; “Climate,” 2009).

There are four major language families in Africa (“Demographics,” 2009). The Afro-Asiatic is made up of about 240 languages spoken by 285 million people in East and North Africa, the Sahel, and Southwest Asia. The Nilo-Saharan family is made up of about 100 languages spoken by 30 million people in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and Southern Tanzania. The Niger-Congo family covers most of Sub-Saharan Africa and is the largest language family in the world. Most speakers of the Niger-Congo family are Bantu and of the Khoisan language family, which is made up of about 50 languages spoken in South Africa by about 120,000 people. The Khoi and San people are

believed to be the original inhabitants of South Africa; their language is considered to be endangered (“Demographics,” 2009). After colonialism, however, most African countries adopted the languages of their colonial powers as their official language. These official languages became English, French, Arabic, Portuguese, Afrikaans and Malagasy (“Africa,” 2009).

Africa is the world’s oldest landmass and believed to be where humans originated according to most paleo-anthropologists. Fossils and evidence of human occupation found in the twentieth century by anthropologists date human existence on the continent to 7 million years ago (“History,” 2009). In *The African Origin of Civilization – Myth or Reality* (Diop, 1974), author Cheikh Anta Diop traces the known origins of civilization to the Egyptians in Africa who were described by ancient writers like Herodotus and Gaston Maspero as being Black and belonging to an African race. Count Constantin de Volney described the Egyptians as having bloated faces, puffed up eyes, flat noses and thick lips (Diop, 1974). In his writings, Herodotus, a Greek, described Egypt as being the “cradle of civilization” (Diop, 1974, p. 2) from which Greece borrowed the elements of civilization including the cult of gods. Their light tan complexion came as a result of a policy of assimilation between White Greeks and Black Egyptians when Alexander conquered Egypt. After being conquered by the Persians in 525, the Egyptians were consistently inhabited by foreigners like the Macedonians under Alexander (333 BC), the Romans under Julius Cesar (50 BC), the Arabs (7<sup>th</sup> century), the Turks (16<sup>th</sup> century), the French under Napoleon and finally the English (end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) (Diop, 1974). The sculpture of the first Pharaoh Narmer has the features of a typical Black man. Pharaoh Tuthmosis III was the son of a Sudanese woman, and Pharaoh Taharqa was Sudanese.

Even the shapes of their helmets were similar to the Watusi hair-do for men (the Watusi come from Burundi in East Africa and are known as Africa's tallest tribe) and the Egyptian wigs Djimbi and Djere were very similar to that worn by married Senegalese women (Diop, 1974, p 11, p 25). Egypt is accepted as the oldest culture in Africa (Rodney, 1974). The Sphinx, which was found during the first French expedition to Africa is Bantu and not Greek nor Semitic (the Bantu make up 2/3 of Africa's population occupying eastern and southern Africa) (Diop, 1974).

Apart from the civilization of Egypt, prior to the arrival of the Europeans, there were the kingdoms of Oyo, Ife and Benin in Nigeria and the kingdom of Dahomey in West Africa. There were also the Eastern African kingdoms of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and numerous smaller kingdoms that made up Tanzania, and the Zulu kingdom of South Africa (Rodney, 1974). Other African kingdoms included the kingdoms of the Congo, Ghana, Mali, Kanem-Bornu, and the empires of Ethiopia, Sudan and Songhai. (Du Bois, 1965; "Early Civilizations and trade," 2009; Rodney, 1974).

Much research has been done on the people and the structures that the early Africans built during this time. These structures include the pyramids of Egypt and the principal structures in Great Zimbabwe (14<sup>th</sup> century). The principal structures in Zimbabwe were built of flaked granite on granite hills by laying bricks upon one another without lime to act as cement; many of these ruins are still standing today (Rodney, 1974). Similar styles of building have been seen in northern Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Sudan (Rodney, 1974). In Zimbabwe, it was noted that many streams were diverted to flow around hills, indicating an awareness of scientific principles of the movement of water and the fact that the people knew where to look for gold and copper in the sub-soil.

By the time European colonialists arrived, they discovered that almost all gold-bearing and copper-bearing strata had already been mined by the Africans (Rodney, 1974). The first Europeans to reach East and West Africa by sea described the African civilizations as being comparable to that in Europe. For example, the Dutch described the ancient city of Benin as follows:

great broad street, not paved.....seven or eight times broader than the Warmoes street in Amsterdam....the king's palace is a collection of buildings which occupy as much space as the town of Harlem...there are numerous apartments for the Prince's ministers and fine galleries.....as big as those on the Exchange at Amsterdam. They are supported by wooden pillars encased in cooper, where their victories are depicted....and are carefully kept very clean. ....The houses are closed to one another and arranged in good order...these people are in no way inferior to the Dutch as regards cleanliness; they wash and scrub their houses so well that they are polished and shining like a looking-glass. (Rodney, 1974, p 69)

The trade of gold dust between the Portuguese and the Ghanaians between 1450 and 1530 resulted in thousands of Blacks being taken to Lisbon (Du Bois, 1965). At one point the Blacks outnumbered the Whites and the royal family became more black than white (Du Bois, 1965). The intermingling of the races is responsible for the Negroid characteristics of the Portuguese people today (Du Bois, 1965). For four centuries, the slave trade of Africans to Europe, the Americas, and the Atlantic islands took place. Captives were sold and resold as they made their way from the interior to the coast.

These slaves were obtained through warfare, trickery, banditry and kidnapping. The effects of the slave trade are still being felt in Africa today in the areas of social violence and dependence on imported products including fashionable African and Indian cloth patterns copied by the Europeans which has negatively affected the African cloth manufacturing industry (Rodney, 1974).

In the late nineteenth century, the European powers sought to take over African territory by colonizing these territories. This is known as the scramble and partition of Africa (“Colonialism and the scramble for Africa,” 2009). The only nations that were not colonized were Liberia and Ethiopia. With colonialism, the Europeans drew borders around their territories, these borders separated otherwise congenial groups and placed adversarial groups in the same territories. Most of these borders have remained unchanged today. In addition to drawing these borders, Europeans altered the balance of power by creating ethnic divides (“Colonialism and the scramble for Africa,” 2009; Rodney, 1974).

Tunisia was the first country to gain its independence in Africa in 1956 (“Post Colonial Africa,” 2009). After independence, most countries made initial progress in the field of education. The number of post-secondary institutions such as colleges, research institutes, professional associations, and professional associations grew. Unfortunately, however, this progress was short lived, and many African countries have suffered political instability, corruption, deteriorating economic conditions, violence, authoritarianism, military dictatorships, and war (“Post Colonial Africa,” 2009). The cold war between the United States and the former Soviet Union and even policies of the International Monetary Fund has contributed in part to this post independence conflict

(“Post Colonial Africa,” 2009; Samoff & Carrol 2002) after independence, the independent African nations were expected to align with either the United States or the Former Soviet Union. As a result, countries in Northern Africa received aid from the Soviets while countries in Central and South Africa received aid from the United States and France (“Post-Colonial Africa,” 2009).

The adoption of the structural adjustment program in the 1980s resulted in the devaluation of the currencies of many African countries, thus preventing them from achieving their goals (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The infrastructure of schools and hospitals and conditions of service for public service personnel deteriorated and the number of skilled workers leaving Africa (brain drain) increased (Damte, 1997; Erinosh, 2008; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

As a result of these various instabilities and despite its natural resources (e.g., oil, precious metals, and agriculture), Africa is the poorest and most under-developed continent (“Economy,” 2009). This poverty and relative state of under-development as compared to the western world has had a huge impact on the state of higher education in Africa (Fisher & Lindow, 2008; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyer, 2004). Walter Rodney, in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1974), describes human development as multi-faceted and being made up of different parts. When referring to the development of an individual, it encompasses an increase in skill, capacity, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being; however, societal development refers to the ability to effectively manage internal and external relationships (Rodney, 1974). Africa is described as underdeveloped because comparisons between the development of its individual citizens and its ability to

effectively manage relationships both within and between its countries to its counterparts in the West indicate that Africa is far behind (Rodney, 1974). It is important to note that the weaknesses, which prevailed at the time of his writing, are still prevalent today (2009). These weaknesses include stagnation and reduction in agricultural outputs, low life expectancy, and malnutrition, prevalence of diseases, limited social and health services and lack of industry. Other weaknesses include the mismanagement of public funds by officials in the civil service, business, soldiers and entertainers who provide auxiliary services and are not directly involved in creating the wealth (Rodney, 1974). Most of the public funds are used to purchase material goods for personal use, stored in personal savings accounts abroad and not reinvested in the community, agriculture or industry (Rodney, 1974). The public funds remain in the hands of a privileged few, who in the opinion of Walter Rodney, are more than necessary to provide efficient service (Rodney, 1974).

Africa consisted of empires and kingdoms that were at the apex of civilization at one point in time in history. It is a huge landmass that consists of many people with different cultures and hundreds of languages and is, therefore, not monolithic in any aspect. Because it is not monolithic, there is still much to be learned about the challenges that African international students who come from different countries within Africa face; one should not attempt to place all of these students within a single category.

#### Higher Education in Africa

The preceding overview was designed to enable the reader to place the current plight of Africa and hence the experiences (challenges) of African international students in context. In other words, in order to understand a person's perspective and reactions to

an event or situation, it is important to know about that person's prior experiences or history. The state of higher education in Africa is relevant to this study because it will give insight into the options that most African international students have, why they are seeking higher education abroad, and why an in-depth knowledge of their challenges is relevant especially with regards to their potential contribution to the development of the continent. According to Teferra (2002) as cited by Marcketti, Mhango & Gregoire (2006) international governments view study abroad opportunities for African international students in the United States as a means to improve academic scientific and technological infrastructure in Africa.

It is important to note that generalizations are difficult because of the size and diversity that exists in Africa however there are certain common broad themes that impact higher education in Africa (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). Africa is a continent with 54 countries and 300 institutions of higher learning that meet the definition of a university (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). It is also the least developed region with regards to higher education institutions and enrollments. While countries like Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, and Egypt each have 45, 26, 21, and 17 universities, respectively, countries like Cape Verde, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Seychelles, Sao Tome, and Principe do not have universities at all (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). The opportunities for higher education are limited and competitive; as a result there has been a steady flow of African immigrants to the United States to pursue higher education (Damtew, 1997; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Fischer & Lindow, 2008). In 1986/1987 31,000 students traveled to the United States to attend universities and colleges; 48.2% of these students came from West Africa, 20.9% came from East Africa, 17.3% came from North Africa and 16%

came from South Africa (Damtew, 1997). During the 1987/1988 academic year approximately 41% of these African students were studying at the graduate level and 55% were studying at the undergraduate level (Damtew, 1997).

Higher education in Africa was developed from the support of religious entities, philanthropic organizations and colonial governments (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The University of London was responsible for appointing academic staff, approving syllabi, examinations and awarding degrees for universities established in the British colonies in Africa (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). African universities that were part of this relationship with the University of London (Asquith Colleges) include Gordon College, Khartoum founded in 1946; University College, Ibadan founded in 1947; University College of the Gold Coast; University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and Makerere College founded in 1949 (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). In the French colonies, missionaries provided education, and as a result of their restrictive policy, there was only one teacher training institution in all of French West Africa called Ecole Normale William Ponty (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The Medical School of Dakar was later established, and the French provided scholarships for African students to study at French universities in France (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Like the British, French-based institutions of higher learning in Africa were linked to universities in France, examples include the Institutes for Higher Studies in Tunis founded in 1945, Dakar founded in 1950 and Tananarive founded in 1955. The Belgians, on the other hand, focused on primary and technical education, which was heavily influenced by the Catholic Church (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The Louvanium University in the Congo was sponsored by the same university in Belgium and followed its curriculum, standards and constitution (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The

Europeans controlled higher education in Africa by ensuring that these institutions adhered to their university standards, curriculum and appointing the teaching staff (Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

During the period 1950 to 1960, many countries in Africa became independent (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Their economies and the number of higher institutions were growing, and there was a move to replace foreign faculty and staff with qualified Africans. During the period 1970 to 1980, Africa experienced political and economic crises (e.g., rising import prices, fiscal imbalance, falling commodity prices, and the inability to pay back foreign debt) caused by local and external policy errors (Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Varghese, 2004). In an attempt to bring about reforms, many African countries entered into structural adjustment programs with the International Monetary Fund in addition to implementing their own adjustments (Erinosho, 2008, Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sall, 2003; Varghese, 2008). The World Bank was very involved in education in Africa and believed at the time that higher education was not contributing to development because in the poorest countries university graduates were unemployed. The World Bank, therefore, based on rate of return analysis, shifted emphasis from higher education to basic education (Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003; Varghese, 2004). The World Bank also had a strategy of conditional aid requiring expatriates to fill positions as technical experts in these universities. The technical experts were paid from the aid given to African universities (Mamdani, 2008).

The 1990s brought about a renewed interest and support for higher education in Africa, apartheid ended, and at this point it was acknowledged that higher education was critical to national development (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Coombe, 1991;

Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Erinosh, 2008; Evenson, 2003; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Johnstone, 2004; Mamdani, 2008; Ndulu, 2003; Ramphele, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sall, 2003; Sawyerr, 2003; Schultz, 2003; Thaver, 2008; Varghese, 2004).

Different interest groups such as Partnership to Strengthen African Universities (made up of the Carnegie, Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur Foundations) worked to bring about change in Africa for a number of reasons ranging from humanitarian to factors impacting the national security of the industrialized world (Coombe, 1991; Henk & Metz, 1997; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Additional reasons for investment of various interest groups included regional stability, access, information and warning, safety, a region free of weapons of mass destruction, a region free of sponsors or havens for transnational threats freedom from suffering, humane, competent and accountable governments, sustained economic development, and a protected natural environment (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Coombe, 1991; Erinosh, 2008; Henk & Metz, 1997; Kotecha, 2004; Ndulu, 2003; Ramphele, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003; Schultz, 2003; Varghese, 2004).

The United States support for higher education in Africa was limited to private foundations like the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Rockefeller Foundation, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund, which spread the Tuskegee philosophy of black education (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The United States also established scholarship programs for African students to study in the United States (Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

Higher education is important because it determines teacher training, development of curricula, research, the type of leadership a country has, and how citizens develop the choices that make democracy meaningful (Mamdani, 2008). This is especially important

in a global economy driven by knowledge-based competition where higher education is fundamentally essential to boosting innovation and performance in the economy. Higher education is essential in physical infrastructure development like building roads, railways, power plants and telecommunications (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Doss, Evenson & Ruther, 2003; Schultz, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Higher education has private and public benefits. Private benefits include better employment prospects, higher salaries, and the ability to save and invest. Public benefits of higher education include economic expansion through technological catch-up, reduced population growth, improvements in the health and agricultural sectors, strong leaders, and training a local workforce to compete globally (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Doss & Ruther, 2003; Schultz, 2003). Enrollment in tertiary institutions of higher learning in Sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest in the world and has increased by only one percent between 1965 and 1995 (Bloom et al., 2006). Research has shown that Africa's production level is 23 percent below its production possibility frontier and that a one year increase in the tertiary education level of the citizens would lead to an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita by about 12% after five years. This will be achieved by increasing the use of technology at all levels, decreasing knowledge gaps and reducing poverty in the region (Bloom et al., 2006).

As a result of the concern about the state of higher education in Africa, research funded by the World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Donors to African Education (DAE), and foundations like the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation have been conducted so as to determine the causes of the decline in the quality and presence of institutions of higher education in

Africa (Coombe, 1991; Doss & Ruther, 2003). Other areas of concern include the relationship between higher education and employment, the administrative management of universities, the financing of higher education, and the development and retention of faculty in order to determine practical intervention strategies (Coombe, 1991). Once these studies were conducted in specific regions, it was important to realize that the findings could not be over-simplified and generalized across the entire continent because conditions differ across and within countries as well as across and within universities. The factors that determined these conditions include civil peace, wealth, the economy, the political culture, how policies affecting higher education are determined, and the extent of external assistance (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991). This decline is believed to be responsible in part for the current state of under-development in the continent with regards to infrastructure, healthcare, education and technology.

### Problems with Higher Education in Africa

#### *Finances and Cost of Higher Education*

In sub-Saharan Africa, most universities are impoverished due to lack of funds, dilapidated buildings, and overcrowded classrooms. In some instances, there is standing room only; students on the outside look in from the windows where it is difficult to hear the lecturer or see the board where notes are being written (Coombe, 1991; Sawyer, 2004). Lecturers sell handouts to supplement their salaries and often books lecturers refer to during class are not available in the library (Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003). In the students' hall of residence, a room originally meant for two can have up to eleven students living there (some are squatters) and often times electricity and water supply (municipal services) is

not constant with students having to stand in line for hours with buckets to retrieve water when it is available (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Johnstone, 2004; Sawyerr, 2003). There is no equipment or chemicals for laboratories to conduct experiments (Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003; Sawyer, 2004). Many of these students also have personal financial difficulties such that many potential candidates cannot attend school (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Johnstone, 2004). In many African countries such as Guinea the governments pay students stipends and living allowances (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). Additionally, many of these students can only afford to have one meal a day and must decide whether that one meal is breakfast, lunch or dinner (Coombe, 1991). In Mozambique, less than three percent of the national public administration personnel have a tertiary education due to limited access to education. The universities do not have the facilities to accept all qualified candidates (Bloom et al., 2006; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Johnstone, 2004; Sall, 2003).

In order to mitigate these financial challenges, studies have focused on decreasing reliance on state governments and increasing reliance on cost-sharing measures that focus on parents, students, philanthropists and businesses in paying for tuition, lodging, and food. Studies have also been done on the effectiveness of student loans in Africa (Johnstone, 2004). There has, however, been resistance to these ideas due to the Marxist ideologies prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa where governments are expected to provide education, healthcare, pensions, and other social services to their people (Johnstone, 2004). It is unclear how schools fairly determine how much a family can afford to pay and therefore how much loans they qualify for. Student loans have also been unsuccessful

since most of these students do not repay the loans, and the governments do not have proper collection and cost recovery procedures in place (Johnstone, 2004). Studies have also been done on providing a general subsidy for higher education in developing countries, which is believed to have private, public, and social benefits for society as a whole (Bloom & Sevilla, 2003).

The lack of finances has had a negative impact on lecturers who teach without the advantage of technology (e.g., chalk and board) and who have very limited income and resources with which to conduct research leaving them to search for additional income in order to meet their financial needs (Coombe, 1991; Johnstone, 2004; Sawyerr, 2003). In some countries, a dean's monthly salary (\$60 in 1991) and a faculty member's monthly salary (\$30 in 1990) was so little that it lasted no more than two weeks (Coombe, 1991; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). As a result, many academic staff supplement their income by growing bananas, keeping chicken and zero-grazing cattle in their backyards, privately tutoring students, driving taxis, trading, and combinations of the above (Coombe, 1991; Fischer & Lindow, 2008, Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003; Sall, 2003). This has resulted in a loss of professional self-esteem for many academics (Coombe, 1991; Sawyerr, 2003). Although many work hard to remain optimistic, they often become cynical, make compromises, engage in psychic or actual truancy, do not carry out their duties, and engage in opportunism (Coombe, 1991). At present, in Africa 70% of faculty posts are filled (Fischer & Lindow, 2008). This has had a negative impact on the level of intellectual and pedagogical activities in many of these universities. In Mauritania, curricula is based on theory and not skill competencies, the curricula does not meet the needs of the labor force, which results in high graduate unemployment (Bloom et al.,

2006). Many senior professors in the older universities are grieved by the current state of higher education in Africa compared to its state 20 to 30 years ago and lament the perceived inferior experience that the students and lecturers now have (Coombe, 1991). Many feel out of touch with the international community as a result of limited or no foreign exchange with which to obtain books for the libraries, journals, and personal subscriptions to international scholarly associations, current technology needed to teach and conduct research, and materials needed to teach the sciences. There has also not been any investment in emerging areas of knowledge like telecommunications, biotechnology, and materials science (Coombe, 1991; Ramphele, 2003; Sall, 2003).

The problem of finance has also had a negative impact on post-graduate education with regards to faculty and available research facilities and libraries (Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003). The number of admissions has fallen yet the need for these intellectuals has risen in industry and the educational systems in these countries (Bloom et al., 2006; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Sawyerr, 2003). The option of obtaining graduate education abroad has been reduced due to its increased costs and a decrease in the number and value of scholarships. The number of academic papers published in Africa is very low; in 1995, the region was responsible for 5,839 published papers compared to 15,995 published in South Asia and 14,426 published in Latin America and the Caribbean (Bloom et al., 2006; Damtew & Altbach, 2004).

The aforementioned difficulties are responsible in large part for the brain drain problem faced by many universities in Africa and also frequent student unrests, which results in university closures (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Erinosho, 2008; Fischer

& Lindow, 2008; Ramphele, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Also news of government suppression of dissidents discourages African international students who are abroad from returning home (Damtew, 1997). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has estimated that about 30% of university-trained Africans live outside of Africa and that there are about 50,000 African-trained Ph.D.s working outside Africa. Brain drain is a serious problem among medical professionals (Bloom et al., 2006; Takougang, n.d). Botswana had a short-term relationship with the University of Pennsylvania to train nurses and doctors to deal with the HIV and AIDS epidemic, but many students never returned back to Botswana (Fischer & Lindow, 2008). Brain drain involves the loss of a country's educated populace to advanced and industrialized countries where they seek economic, political and social well-being (Damtew & Altbach, 2004). Brain drain is costly and detrimental to African countries because these potential leaders are the best pre-Ph.D. students and are very talented and creative with drive, energy, and discipline (Ndulu, 2003). The pool of candidates possessing all of these characteristics is very small, and, therefore, losing them to the developed world will have a significant impact on the economic development of Africa (Ndulu, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). There are knowledge gaps on who is leaving, what their skill sets are, and how they obtained their education. According to the early literature (1960 to 1970) on brain drain, emigration could benefit Africa by exporting skilled workers and receiving remittance payments but too much is detrimental (Doss & Ruther, 2003). According to Altbach (1998) as cited in Samoff & Carrol (2002) brain drain is a complex phenomenon because scholars who traveled abroad did not necessarily sever all ties with their countries of origin. Some returned back home or maintained contact with the academic

communities in their home countries. It is interesting to note that African international Ph.D graduates from Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon have lower rates of return when they return to their home countries while Ph.D graduates from Zimbabwe and South Africa have higher rates of return when they return home (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). It has also been noted that African international students who fund themselves have a lower rate of return as compared to students who are primarily supported by foreign government scholarship programs (Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

While African students can be sent abroad, most do not believe that this method would be adequate to increase the skill set of the people (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The presence of a university it is believed can achieve that purpose (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). However limiting study abroad and restricting the flow of ideas and publications between Africa and the industrialized world in the current global climate would be detrimental to Africa (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). According to Damtew (1997) initiatives involving strict regulations to mitigate the loss of scholars and students to the industrialized world discouraged prospective returnees.

American universities are now developing renewed relationships with African countries to improve critical fields such as agriculture, healthcare, teacher training, institutional management, fundraising, and faculty and curriculum development (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). African Virtual University in Kenya had a contract with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia to provide coursework for a computer science course (Kigotho, n.d). African Virtual University was unable to pay and had the enrolled students transferred into computer science programs in their local universities. These students

were angry because they lost the prestige that a degree from Royal Melbourne would bring (Kigotho, n.d). In efforts to aid African universities, the international panel on the Commission for Africa has made a commitment to provide African universities with \$5 billion over the next 10 years (Labi, n.d).

The United Nations Development Program and the International Organization for Migration has developed the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKEN) program. The TOKEN program recruits foreign professionals in developed countries to volunteer short consultancy assignments in their countries of origin (Damtew, 2002). Some African governments are providing incentives to attract their scholars living abroad by providing free housing and other benefits (Damtew, 1997).

State governments fund government secondary schools and public universities (Coombe, 1991). These governments are, therefore, responsible for the state of affairs in these universities which have been unable to secure their fair share of budgetary funds. These universities are also unable to control student intake, and have become targets of various frustrated stakeholders (Coombe, 1991). The crisis that these universities face is structural and mirrors the economic and political crises in many African countries (Coombe, 1991). Yet many higher-level administrators are optimistic and are able to manage these institutions in very complicated political, social, and economic environments (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991). Reform can only be achieved within each country's political environment by determining the priority that should be given to human resource development, the rate of access to higher education, the employment rates of higher education graduates, the significance of research and post-graduate

education, how higher education should be funded and the management of higher education policies (Coombe, 1991).

While there are donors that are interested in contributing financially, African academicians want these donors to be pro-active in supporting civil rights, civil liberties and intellectual freedom and also want these donors to monitor the government and university administrators (Coombe, 1991). The African Association of Universities (AAU) is an integral part of the process of reform of Higher Education in Africa because it has the capacity to represent its members and be a point of contact with organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Bank. Part of the reduction in funding received by African universities is the result of research and policies made by the World Bank, which focused funding on primary and secondary education in efforts to reduce the levels of poverty (Coombe, 1991).

#### *Government-University Relations*

Many African universities are intricately linked to political and security regimes in which governments can decree increases in student intakes without providing the resources or engaging in proper consulting and planning with university administrators (Coombe, 1991). There are government police, security agents, and informants on campuses. In some instances, student and academic staff unions are banned, faculty members can be jailed or forced to retire, and students can face expulsion or detention for expressing their opinions (Coombe, 1991). This highly centralized system of policy making reduces the autonomy of universities, politicizes them, and hinders their ability to be responsive to changes in knowledge, the labor market, and economic development

(Bloom et al., 2006). In some systems, the head of state is the university chancellor, and in others like Nigeria, the chancellors are well known traditional leaders while the head of state is named as a visitor to the university by statute (Coombe, 1991). In order to mitigate feelings of political bias in the allocation of resources, countries like Nigeria have set up an intermediary body to handle budgetary resources for its universities. Most members of this intermediary body are university staff members who can make their case for their needs and who advise the government on matters concerning universities and interpret governmental policies to the universities. This intermediary body then divides the budgeted resources to all universities based on criteria known to all (Coombe, 1991). In addition to this intermediary body, Nigeria has established the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board, which is responsible for university admissions examinations and applications, the student Loans Board, and the National Manpower Board, which is responsible for monitoring skilled and high-level employment trends (Coombe, 1991). Kenya has just one body responsible for all of the above, and at present, due to the proliferation of private universities, accreditation is one of its main priorities (Coombe, 1991). Ghana has a committee on tertiary education reforms which meets quarterly to review the government's actions, and Zambia does not have an intermediary body but does have a governmental policy document, which allows it to make changes under government scrutiny and observation (Coombe, 1991). In Benin, Cameroon, Madagascar, and Tanzania, the governments supervise most aspects of the university's operations. In Angola, on the other hand, universities have full autonomy in decision-making, and in Guinea and Liberia, public institutions have a considerable amount of legal autonomy. In

many of these countries there are no laws governing higher education (Bloom et al., 2006).

#### *Student Affairs and University Management*

Student unrests have become commonplace, and many universities have had to close down as a result (Coombe, 1991). The relationship between students, university management, and government is fundamental and fragile (Coombe, 1991). Between 1970 and 1990, student protests had taken place in 29 countries; between 1980 and 1989, 25 countries had experienced riots, strikes, and protests (Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

Governments, in turn, were hostile towards universities, sending soldiers to campuses, arresting and killing students, and closing universities. Academic freedom was limited with professors who spoke out being censured and in some cases killed (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). African students have been known to speak out on national issues on behalf of the populace and as a result find themselves in conflict with the political authorities who suppress them. Their experiences on campus mirrored the living conditions of the average citizen (Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

#### *Regional Security*

National security strategies in Africa are either associated with a regime, group or individual leader as opposed to the nation as a whole, which preserves the power of an individual or a group (Henk & Metz, 1997). Personal relationships, religious, ethnic, and regional considerations determine interests, objectives, and partners of specific countries (Henk & Metz, 1997). As a result, there are frequent conflicts in Africa, which give rise to refugee problems and humanitarian disasters (Henk & Metz, 1997). The political and

social instability, conflicts, high debts, and increasing populations have all contributed to the declining economies of many African countries and have had negative effects on the finances available for tertiary education in Africa (Johnstone, 2004).

### *Leaders*

Anti-intellectual leaders who see education as a commodity and not as a public good worthy of investment also contributes to the problems facing institutions of higher learning in Africa (Adesina, 2006, Prewitt, 2003). Higher education was viewed as expensive and inefficient and only benefitting the wealthy and privileged with a minimal role in reducing poverty even among members of international development communities. Higher education was also seen as having the ability to cause social unrest and political instability (Bloom et al., 2006). This view point has had a negative impact on the amount of money invested in higher education. While explanations for this reduction have centered on balance of payment issues, it had more to do with the socio-economic and political crisis that many African countries were going through and the strained relationship between those in academics and the political leaders (Adesina, 2006). Between 1985 and 2000, there were 16 military presidents in Africa, one president with primary education, five presidents with secondary education, 18 presidents with tertiary education, and nine presidents with professional qualifications (Bloom et al., 2006).

### *International Development Community*

The international development community had encouraged African governments to invest in primary and secondary education as opposed to tertiary education (Bloom et al., 2006; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). The World Bank reduced its spending on higher

education in Africa from 17% between 1985-1989 to 7% between 1995-1999 (Bloom et al., 2006; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). During the 1970's and 1980's the World Bank published four education policy documents that recommended that funding be shifted from higher education to basic education (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). This recommendation was supported by studies by World Bank economists that indicated that returns on investment in primary and secondary education were higher than those for tertiary education (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). To promote equity, emphasis should be placed on widespread access to education (Bloom et al., 2006; Doss & Ruther, 2003). These studies were often administered by non-governmental organizations (NGO) and did have the advantage of having personnel with Ph.D.s or technical degree skills (Doss & Ruther, 2003). Even with the focus on primary and secondary education, many of the students admitted to institutions of higher education are not properly prepared for university-level work (Bloom et al., 2006; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). However, more recent studies show that the rate of return for tertiary education (20%) is similar to that for secondary education, these findings led the World Bank, in conjunction with UNESCO, to conduct further research on higher education resulting in the following published reports: *Knowledge for Development* (1999), *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (2000) and *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* (2002) (Bloom et al., 2006). These reports emphasize the importance of tertiary education in the areas of technical and professional capacity as well as the role of tertiary education in primary and secondary education (Bloom et al., 2006; Doss & Ruther, 2003; Kotecha, 2004). Tertiary education was also found to result in a reduction in corruption, ethnic tensions, and bureaucracy. To monitor the progress of

its new findings, the World Bank created the Knowledge Economy Index (KEI), which benchmarks the performance of countries in four areas – education, innovation, and information and communications technology. Most African countries are near the bottom of this KEI index scoring less than 3 out of 10 possible points (Bloom et al., 2006).

### *Private Universities*

As a result of the aforementioned challenges, a number of private universities now exist in Africa. Concerns surrounding these universities include their ability to meet standards and quality, regulation, which ranges from weak to extremely rigid, the courses offered and the quality of their faculty. Most of the faculties at these private universities are part-time while some of these universities do not have a single regular faculty member. These part-time faculties work full time at the public universities or work in industry. These private universities also target students from wealthy families that can afford to pay their fees. If so, then public universities will be left with poorer students in fields that have lower returns (Erinosho, 2008; Ramphele, 2003; Sall, 2003; Thaver, 2008; Varghese, 2004). There are three types of private universities: state supported, not-for-profit, and for-profit higher education institutions (Varghese, 2004). They also have different ownership patterns: transnational, which are owned and operated by or affiliated to foreign universities, those that collaborate with foreign institutions, and those that collaborate with universities within the country, and finally those that are religiously affiliated (Thaver, 2004; Varghese, 2004). There are also virtual universities, which have the problem of inconsistent internet service. The courses offered by these universities either have a profit motive with less investment in infrastructure or a religious

orientation. They also focus on teaching as opposed to research (Thaver, 2008; Varghese, 2004).

### Summary

The main goal of international students is the attainment of higher education in a foreign country, where they can either obtain a superior education compared to what exists in their country of origin, or experience education in a different setting, thus gaining a deeper appreciation of the culture, values, and beliefs of their host country (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Marcketti et al., 2006). These international students, on average, are often the best and brightest in their countries of origin and have strong career prospects on returning home after their studies (Marcketti et al., 2006). They are also seen as experts in their fields and cultural ambassadors between their host countries and their countries of origin (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007).

African international students come from the second largest and second most populous continent in the world. It is believed not only to be the oldest land mass but also where humans originated according to most paleo-anthropologists (“Africa,” 2009). Egypt, in North Africa, is believed to be source of ancient civilization, with their elements and knowledge base adopted by the Europeans who conquered them (Diop, 1974). At its apex, African civilizations and kingdoms were reported to be comparable to that of their European counterparts who first set foot on their soil (Rodney, 1974). With 54 countries and climates that range from the northern temperate to the southern temperate zones Africa boasts natural wonders like Mount Kilimanjaro, Lake Victoria, The Kalahari and Sahara desserts and the Serengeti Plains to name a few and natural

resources like oil, precious stones, precious metals and numerous minerals and metals (“Geography,” 2009).

Slave trade, the partition of Africa by the colonialists, colonial rule by the English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, and Belgium has left Africa the poorest and most under-developed continent in the world today (“Colonialism and the scramble for Africa,” 2009; “Post Colonial Africa,” 2009; Rodney, 1974). The structural Adjustment Programs instituted by the International Monetary Fund in the 1980’s to devalue currencies and restructure debt had no positive impact (Bloom et al, 2006, Doss & Ruther, 2003; Samoff & Carol, 2002). Africa is currently plagued with a reduction in agricultural output, low life expectancy, malnutrition, diseases, limited health and social services, lack of industry, corruption by those in power, war, and social unrest. Most of these ills have been attributed to the state of higher education in Africa which has now been acknowledged as being critical to national development (Bloom et al., 2006; Doss et al., 2003; “Economy,” 2009; Mamdani, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Schultz, 2003)

As a result of the aforementioned socio-economic and political factors, most African international students in particular seek to obtain tertiary education outside of their countries of origin because of the declining quality of tertiary education in Africa (Bloom et al., 2006; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Higher education in Africa was developed from the support of religious entities, philanthropic organizations and colonial governments who appointed academic staff, approved syllabi, examinations and awarded degrees (Samoff & Carrol, 2002). It is interesting to note that many African students pursue higher education in the countries of their colonizers and pursue courses similar to

those set up at the time of colonization. This is known as the colonial legacy movement (Bessong, 2000; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Kishun, n.d.).

The decline in the quality of higher education is due to a reduction in funding (reduced support from international and donor agencies), economic and political crises and social unrest. This lack of funding has resulted in dilapidated infrastructure and buildings, overcrowded classrooms and halls of residence (Coombe, 1991; Sawyer, 2004). The lack of funding has also resulted in inconsistent electric and water supply, libraries with outdated books, a decline in research capabilities and laboratories without equipment and chemicals needed to conduct experiments (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrl, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003). As a result of the reduction in funding many students cannot afford to go to school and those who can often cannot afford to have three meals a day having to choose whether their sole meal is breakfast, lunch or dinner (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Johnstone, 2004). Efforts to reduce dependence on government funding and donations from international agencies and donor foundations through the use of loans and subsidies have been met with stiff opposition by Marxist ideologies embraced by many African countries (Johnstone, 2004). Student loan programs have failed due to unsophisticated collection and cost recovery systems (Johnstone, 2004)

This lack of funding has also had a detrimental impact on faculty who earn salaries that are so meager that they cannot take care of their basic needs and have to sell handouts, grow bananas, keep poultry and zero-grazing cattle, drive taxis, and tutor students to supplement their income. This has resulted in a loss of professional esteem, cynicism, dereliction of duties, feelings of being out of touch with the international

community of scholars. This lack of funding has also resulted in a reduction in admissions to graduate schools, a reduction in published research and the brain drain of these faculty members to the industrial world. This has had a negative impact on the intellectual and pedagogical activities on campus (Coombe, 1991; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003; Sall, 2003).

Other weaknesses faced by African universities include strained relations between the government and the universities, strained relations between student affairs and university management which has resulted in several riots and university closures, regional insecurity and anti-intellectual leaders. Other challenges faced by African universities include the international development community which has varied its support for higher education in Africa and the proliferation of private universities which may not meet accreditation standards. This state of higher education in Africa had a negative impact on the economic development of Africa (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Albach, 2004; Erinosh, 2008; Henk & Metz, 1997; Rodney, 1974; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyer, 2004).

Despite the advantages of tertiary education internationally, the journey of these African international students is made difficult by the various challenges they face, which impede or hamper their academic progress. In extreme cases, they do not attain their goal of higher education.

The literature is replete with studies that cover the challenges faced by international students. These challenges include differences in climate and living conditions, differences in academic requirements and expectations, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial concerns, cultural differences, and

language proficiency (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Huang, 1977 Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; McClure, 2007; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2006; Ninnes, Aitchison & Klaus, 1999; Selvadurai, 1991; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005).

International students are able to overcome these challenges by using the following coping mechanisms: flexibility, familial support, local support systems, school support systems, hard work, self-determination, motivation, as well as other factors such as sleep and exercise (Cadman, 2000; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; McClure, 2007; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2006; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005).

In addition to the aforementioned, additional challenges faced by African international students include lack of understanding of the African culture by professors and students, inadequate orientation programs prior to arrival, inadequate help after arrival and the inability to practically apply their training in their home countries. The factors they attribute to their success are similar to the general international student population (Bateki, 2001; Bessong, 2000; Cisco-Titi, 1991; Goodlett, 1990; Mabunda, 1996; Manyika, 2001; Maphinda-Lebbie, 1989; Molestane, 1995; Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997).

Discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes take on different meanings for African international students in the United States due to the color of their skin (Obiakor, Obi & Grant, 2000; Takougang, n.d). African immigrant students are faced with negative stereotypes that Americans have about Africans that are perpetuated by the media,

curriculum in schools, and in the home environment of their fellow students.

Additionally, they are faced with the prejudice that is endured by African Americans and are also discriminated against by African Americans (Traoré & Lukens, 2006). This gives deeper meaning to the additional challenges faced by African international students.

African international students are often not prepared for the deeply entrenched social and economic stratification that exists in the United States based on race. Their academic curriculums prepared by their colonialists focus on African and European history (Traoré & Lukens, 2006) and do not cover America history in-depth. These students therefore find themselves straddling the difficult worlds of African immigrant and African American, autonomous minority and caste minority (Ogbu, 1978) or voluntary and involuntary immigrants in the United States (Ogbu as cited in Traoré & Lukens, 2006). This has resulted in identity negotiation and formation based on race, class, nationality, and sociopolitical and economic backgrounds (Manyika, 2001).

Most studies on international students have been based primarily in Europe and Australia and refer to Asian students. The studies that have been conducted in the United States are also mainly done on Asian students and have been broken down by country for example China, Japan, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and India. While this is understandable (because Asian students make up 61% of the international student base in the United States), it is important for similar studies to be done on international students from other parts of the world. International students come from Asia, North America, South America, Central America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. African international students are not a monolithic group; they vary widely in race, culture, religion, prior educational experiences, language proficiency, socioeconomic

backgrounds, political beliefs, financial constraints, and experience with local support systems.

Studies on African international students have been general with a few focusing on regions (West, East and South Africa). The literature will be enhanced by studies that focus on African students that come from the 54 different countries. These countries which have different ethnicities, languages and religions have also been influenced by their English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish colonialists. With these additional studies, universities and colleges will be able to make culturally sensitive adaptations to their existing support systems that specifically meet the needs of these students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine, from the perspective of African international students, what challenges they faced and how they were able to overcome these challenges. This researcher believes that the findings from this study will enhance an understanding of their challenges, thus enabling this metropolitan research university located in the southeastern region of the United States to make culturally sensitive adaptations to its support systems to meet the needs of these students. At present, African international students make up approximately 10% of the international student body of this university. This study will also enhance the understanding of their challenges by the faculty who are the primary source of their academic learning. This will enable faculty to make appropriate and fair accommodations to assist these students in their transition process. The study will be useful to new students; they will be better prepared for what to expect in studying abroad and thus be equipped with effective coping strategies. And finally this study will be useful to international agencies and donor

agencies concerned with the state of higher education in Africa. Chapter 3 provides the methodology for this study and the researcher's subjectivity statement.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“The only reconstruction worthwhile is a reconstruction of thought”

(Honor Books, 2005, p. 24).

### Introduction

This study sought to describe perspectives of the challenges faced by African international students and the strategies or factors that enabled them to overcome these challenges. These students attended a metropolitan research university located in the southeastern region of the United States. This study gave a voice to African international students by providing information that enhances an understanding of the challenges that impede their academic success and the strategies they currently use to overcome these challenges. These findings will be useful to students, faculty, the university community at large, and international agencies concerned with the state of higher education in Africa.

African international students who are new to the university will be better prepared to face these challenges by employing strategies known to work. Current students that are not new can use the results of this study as a platform for discussions on solutions to these challenges and present recommendations to the university on how support systems can be better adapted to meet their needs.

The findings will also enable faculty to have an enhanced understanding of the challenges faced by this particular group of students and learn how these challenges affect students' academic performance.

Finally, the findings will enable the OIP, which provides support services to the entire international student body, to make culturally sensitive adjustments, where necessary, to meet the specific needs of these students.

This chapter includes a discussion of qualitative research methodology, the theoretical framework for the study, the research design, the research site, the selection of participants, the data-collection standards, and the data-analysis methods.

### Qualitative Research

In order to understand the challenges faced by African international students, it is important to listen to their stories and experiences in their own words. Qualitative research is based on an interpretive epistemology where social reality is based on the meanings constructed by those that take part in that reality (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999). Social phenomena do not exist independent of their participants; therefore, different participants have different meanings for social phenomena. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to discover the nature of those meanings through an in-depth study of the phenomenon in its natural context (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999).

This study used a qualitative methodology to obtain a wide range of rich data from the participants in the form of in-depth interviews. This data reflected the perspectives of these students (insiders) as opposed to the perspectives of the researcher (outsider). The insiders' perspective is described as the emic perspective while the researcher's perspectives on challenges and strategies or factors contributing to these students' success is described as the etic perspective (Gall et al., 1999; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In-depth interviewing enabled the researcher to understand the challenges faced by these students and the meaning they make of their experiences

through language (Seidman, 1998). According to Heron (1981), language involves cooperative inquiry and is the primary method by which humans construe and make their intentions known (as cited in Seidman, 1998). In-depth interviewing is a mode of inquiry that enables a researcher to place a participant's behavior into context based on the participant's subjective understanding of why he or she behaved in a particular manner (Seidman, 1998). Interviewing "is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education" (Seidman, 1998, p. 7).

This study is a phenomenological case study that is intrinsic, descriptive, and problem based. Phenomenology is defined as "reality as it is subjectively experienced by individuals" (Gall et al., 1999, p. 309). The phenomenological foundation was best because the researcher sought to explore, by interviewing different African international students, the meaning or essence of being an African international student in terms of challenges faced and the factors to which they attribute their success.

This study is classified as a case study because the researcher asked "how" and "why" about contemporary events over which the researcher has no control. It also investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident (Yin, 2009).

It is intrinsic because the goal of this study was not to examine or create a theory or to generalize the findings to the entire population of African international students in the United States; rather, it was to learn more about the challenges faced by these students and the factors they believed contributed to their success (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The researcher assumed that these students had common characteristics and

common threads in their experiences; this design, therefore, enabled the researcher to explore and investigate these commonalities through in-depth interviews (Constantine et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hume, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2007; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Obiakor et al., 2000; Sam, 2001).

The organizational framework is descriptive because the information was collected to describe a group of students; it cannot be generalized to the entire population of African international students in the United States. It is problem-based research because it is concerned with addressing a problem or issues—in this case, the challenges faced by African international students and factors related to their success (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

The challenges faced by African international students are a contemporary phenomenon. However, there are no clear boundaries between these challenges and what African international students perceive their challenges to be, based on their differences in personality, language proficiency, gender, age, socioeconomic, political, and cultural backgrounds (Hayes & Lin 1994).

Most dissertation studies on African international students were recent—approximately 78 dissertations were found in Proquest dating from 1960 to 2008. The quantitative studies recommended further qualitative studies to obtain the rich data that is often lost in quantitative studies (Bateki, 2001; Goyol, 2002; Maina, 2001). Qualitative researchers investigate inner experience (human thoughts and feelings) and can, therefore, share the meaning of that experience from the perspectives of their participants. Quantitative researchers ignore the study of inner experience (Gall et al., 1999); yet, quantitative researchers have expressed an interest in knowing whether the findings from

subsequent qualitative studies will support their findings (Bateki, 2001; Goyol, 2002). Such support will have an impact on the support systems offered by colleges and universities to African international students.

Case studies are “an intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 11) or “in-depth, field-based studies of particular instances of the phenomenon” (Gall et al., 1999, p. 289). The single unit in this study was the African international student body at one metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States (space) in 2009 (time). The phenomena were the challenges faced by African international students and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges.

In addition, this study had a sociological disciplinary orientation. It focused on society, social institutions (universities), and social relationships between African international students and their fellow students, faculty, and university staff. It also examined the interaction and collective behavior of these students to the aforementioned groups. Research topics with a sociological disciplinary orientation include topics on race, gender, age, families, religion, politics, healthcare, urbanization, and demographics (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guides the literature review and at the same time the literature review determines the theoretical framework for the study. A review of the literature revealed that international students face numerous challenges as they adjust to their new environment and embark on their studies. These challenges arise because of differences in climate and living conditions, academic requirements and expectations,

alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial constraints, cultural differences, and language proficiency. The literature also described their strategies for overcoming these challenges in terms of flexibility, familial support, local support systems, school support systems, hard work, self-determinism, motivation, and other methods such as sleep and exercise.

The themes from the literature review regarding the challenges faced and the factors international students attribute to their success are phenomenological in nature. They describe the essence of their challenges and make meaning of these experiences through interpretation. According to Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) interpretivists believe that people respond to one another and their surroundings based on the meanings that they assign to the settings of their experience and other people with whom they come in contact. Interpretive researchers seek to understand human behavior by examining real world situations by using qualitative or descriptive methods of inquiry (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Phenomenology is therefore an interpretive social theory and also a methodology.

For this reason the theoretical framework for this study will be based on a phenomenological methodology. The researcher read the interviews in their entirety, extracted significant statements from each interview, formulated these statements into meanings, clustered these meanings into themes and finally integrated these themes into a narrative description for each participant (Creswell, 1998).

According to Yin (2009) this generalized interpretive social theory is an analytical generalization instead of a statistical generalization because cases are not sampling units (Yin, 2009). “The trouble with generalizations is that they don’t apply to particulars”

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 110). This is because while African students may have similar experiences there will be peculiar situations that will make each story slightly different.

In this study of African international students at this particular metropolitan research university in the southeast region of the United States, the findings were not context free nor of enduring value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, this does not negate the importance of this study which is based on an analytical generalization because when dealing with human emotions, feelings, and thought processes, theoretical and statistical generalizations have the following limitations:

1. Dependence on the assumption of determinism (fixed and reliable linkages among elements);
2. Dependence on inductive logic (absolutes and truths);
3. Dependence on the assumption of freedom of time and logic—what is current today becomes history in the future;
4. Entrapment in the nomothetic-idiographic dilemma—generalizations do not apply to every member of the population;
5. Entrapment in a reductionist fallacy—all phenomena cannot be reduced to a single set of generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Stakes (1978) as cited in Lincoln and Guba (1985), case studies as a form of research cannot contribute much when generalizations sought are rational, propositional, and law-like. Case studies, however, do result in naturalistic generalizations that are useful to their audience when provided in the form that the audience generally experiences. These naturalistic generalizations involve intuition, empirical findings, and direct personal experience.

There are four types of case study designs (Yin, 2009). There are single case studies and multiple case studies, and each of these can be holistic or embedded. A single case study is used when a critical single case tests a well formulated theory, when the case is extreme or unique, or when the case is revelatory, revealing a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation. A multiple case study is used when different cases are required to achieve the aforementioned. The different cases studied should be selected carefully and each should be studied in the same manner. The cases should serve the study the same way multiple experiments serve an investigation: having either similar results or contrasting results as explicitly predicted at the onset of the investigation (Yin, 2009).

Single case studies and multiple case studies can be either embedded or holistic (Yin, 2009). A case study is embedded when there is more than one unit of analysis to investigate a phenomenon being studied. Holistic case studies examine the global nature of a phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The present case study was a single embedded case study design because, while it was concerned with one issue or phenomenon, (i.e., the challenges faced by African international students), different students completed in-depth interviews to determine their personal perspectives on what their major challenges were in this particular university.

### Research Design

A research design is an action plan or blueprint that logically links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to initial questions of the study (Yin, 2009). It sequences the steps to be taken from “here” (i.e., research questions) to “there” (i.e., conclusions drawn from the study); these steps include the data that is relevant and how

the data is collected and analyzed. This ensures that the data collected can answer the research questions (Yin, 2009).

Unlike other forms of research, such as experimental and quantitative studies, case study designs have not been codified and do not have set steps to follow. According to Yin (2009), however, there are five main components to a case study research design:

1. The study's questions;
2. The propositions, if any;
3. The unit[s] of analysis;
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions; and
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings.

The processes for the fourth and fifth component are not well defined in case analyses; pattern-matching has been suggested as the best approach (Yin, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described pattern matching as making a determination of the following: a focus for the study, fit of paradigm to focus, fit of paradigm to the theory that guides the study, where and from whom the data will be collected, successive phases of the study, instrumentation, data collection and recording modes, data analysis procedures, logistics, and trustworthiness.

In this study, the researcher drew on the phenomenological processes of coding and identification of common themes from the responses of respondents to link the data collected to the proposition that African international students succeed in universities, despite the challenges faced. These common themes were also used by the researcher as a basis for the interpretation of the findings.

To ensure the quality of the case study, it is important that there be construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2009). Construct validity involves establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied instead of relying upon subjective judgments. Internal validity involves establishing a causal relationship; this is necessary for explanatory or causal studies and not descriptive studies. External validity involves establishing a domain to which the findings can be generalized. Reliability involves demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2009). These forms of validity and reliability are important because of the following perceived weaknesses of case study designs:

1. A lack of rigor in which researchers have been sloppy and have allowed biased views to influence findings and conclusions;
2. Little basis for scientific generalizations (How can one generalize from a single case?);
3. The length of time involved, with resulting massive and unreadable documents;
4. No way to test a researcher's ability to do a good case study (Yin, 2009).

To avoid these pitfalls, Yin (2009) advocates the development of a theory to guide the design of a case study instead of diving into data collection in an exploratory fashion, which is akin to researchers involved in ethnography or grounded theory research. This theory should cover the research questions, propositions, units of analyses, logic connecting the data to the propositions, and criteria for interpreting the findings. Such encompassing theories are obtained from previous research on the topic and can be descriptive (Yin, 2009).

Given the aforementioned, the research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What challenges do African international students face as they pursue their studies?
2. What strategies do they use to overcome these challenges?

Based on the literature, the researcher proposed that these students faced academic challenges that could impede or hamper their academic progress. Six African international university students at a metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States comprised the unit of analysis for the present study. The logic linking the data to the propositions was based on research in the literature. The literature relating to this study has discussed challenges faced by international students as being cultural and education shock, financial difficulties, alienation, health issues, and racism (Constantine et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hume, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2007; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Obiakor et al., 2000; Sam, 2001).

Students in previous research studies cited reasons for their success as strong family values, intrinsic motivation, no shared history of slavery, and social support groups (Constantine et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hume, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2007; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Obiakor et al., 2000; Sam, 2001). Therefore, the themes from the literature are that while African international students face many challenges as they pursue their tertiary education in the United States, they are able to succeed and complete their education.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher and two professional peers (doctoral students of international origin) interpreted the findings in order to mitigate the element of human bias and the researcher's subjectivity; this enhanced the quality of the study and

its findings. The professional peers worked with the researcher to develop correct operational measures for challenges faced and factors and strategies responsible for success, triangulation of data collected, and interpretation of the findings. This ensured external validity and inter-rater reliability.

#### Research Site

This metropolitan research university located in the southeastern region of the United States was founded after World War II to satisfy the demands of returning veterans for higher education. It has grown from its initial offering of evening classes to 278 freshmen and sophomore students on the facilities of a high school to having a student enrollment of more than 22,300 students in the fall of 2007 on a 1,000-acre campus. In 1964, through bills approved by the legislature, it became a four-year state supported university. This university currently has seven professional colleges and offers 18 doctoral programs, 62 master's degree programs, and 90 bachelor's degrees. It employs more than 900 full-time faculty and has more than 75,000 living alumni ("Metropolitan research university history" 2009).

The OIP at this university was established in 1975 and is the main point of contact for international students with the university. The OIP offers the following support services for international students:

1. International coffee hour twice a month where international students, faculty, and staff meet to socialize;
2. International Friendship and Culture Exchange Program where American and international students spend an hour together each week engaged in one-on-one conversation sharing ideas, customs, and concerns of their countries of origin;

3. “Be A Cultural Ambassador” program in which international students give presentations in a panel-discussion format, educating students, faculty, and staff about their culture and experience as international students in the United States;
4. Host Family Program, which gives international students the opportunity to develop friendships with an American family in the local community. It is not a live-in situation and is intended for first year students;
5. International Festival (IFSET), 30-year tradition celebrating music, dance and food with participants from over 50 countries around the world;
6. Phi Beta Delta International Scholars Honor Society, which recognizes experience in international exchange and international scholarship and also encourages interdisciplinary exchange (“Office of International Programs” 2009).

In addition to working closely with international students, the goals of the OIP are to strengthen international education at the university and the surrounding community by making international understanding and global awareness a fundamental part of the curriculum and campus (“Office of International Programs” 2009). It also maintains international linkages with institutions of higher learning in other countries. In order to achieve its mission, it has an English Language Training Institute, education abroad, international exchange, cross-cultural training, world affairs training, and an International Students and Scholars Office (“Office of International Programs” 2009). The International Students and Scholars office also provides international students with individual counseling and advising, immigration advising, and processing of documents and referral on issues related to academics, health, finances, housing, tax assistance,

employment opportunities, and campus programs (“Office of International Programs” 2009).

### Participant Selection

According to Patton (1989, 1990), the sampling technique used for case study research can be described as purposeful sampling, each purposeful sample is based on the rationale that guides the research (as cited by Gall et al., 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 1998). The goal of purposeful sampling is to select participants who have special knowledge or perspectives that provide emic information that is rich with regard to the researcher’s purpose. The purposeful sampling strategies used in qualitative research include extreme, intensity, typical, maximum variation, stratified, homogenous, purposeful random, critical, theory-based, criterion, politically important, opportunistic, snowball, and convenience (Gall et al., 1999). The strategy used in this study reflects a conceptual rationale best met by a criterion-based sampling strategy in which invited participants will have to meet the criteria outlined below (Gall et al., 1999; J. H. Lim, personal communication, July 22, 2008).

African international students come from diverse national origins with cultures based on different economic, political, legal, and social systems. They also come from different socioeconomic backgrounds with varying levels of English proficiency. Eligibility criteria for this study was that participants must be African students that have come to the United States on an F-1 or J-1 visa to specifically pursue tertiary education with the intention of going back to their home country on the completion of their program or permanent residents who have been in the United States for less than five years. Two permanent residents were included in the in-depth interviews and survey as a control

group, which enabled the researcher to see if the data collected from them corresponded to the data collected from students on F-1 visas. This also enhanced the triangulation of the data collected.

Students eligible to participate in the in-depth interviews were undergraduate students or graduate African international students that completed their undergraduate education in a country other than their country of origin on either an F-1 or J-1 visa. These students had to be at least 18 years of age and attend this metropolitan research university in the southeastern region of the United States. Participants were also required to have proficiency in English to participate in the in-depth interviews. For this study, six African international students were selected based on availability and a willingness to participate from a sample of African international students who met the aforementioned criteria.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants were able to withdraw at any time. Participants did not have to answer questions they felt uncomfortable answering. Their names, addresses, and countries of origin were not revealed because the population of African students at this southeastern university is small; revealing such information could identify the actual student. Actual courses of study were also not revealed, where appropriate, pseudonyms were used.

#### Data Collection

Data sources included a survey given to the African international student population at this university; documents; and in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the selected participant students. Survey topics included: (a) choice of coming to the United States as opposed to other countries, (b) country of origin,

(c) gender, (d) age, (e) marital status, (f) student-level status, (g) program of study, (h) length of stay in the United States, (i) challenges faced, (j) support systems, (k) attrition of students unable to cope with the challenges, (l) plans to return to country of origin, and (m) whether or not the student has family in the United States (See Appendix D).

The interviews were carried out at a time and place convenient for the students on or close to the university campus. This process was followed because the participating students “take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 189); the construction of reality is time and context dependent. Questions asked during the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview were divided into warm-up questions, choice of university, challenges faced, factors responsible for success, and closing wrap-up questions where the participants were asked what advice they would give an African international student coming to this university. Four participants were interviewed three times to enable them to reconstruct their experience in the context of their lives and the lives of others around them. Two were interviewed twice. While the three-interview structure was preferred, it is possible to get good results from two or even one interview (Seidman, 1998). The first interview sought to establish the context of the participants’ experience by focusing on their life history and asking “how” questions instead of “why” questions (Seidman, 1998). The second interview enabled the participants to reconstruct their experience in the context in which it occurs by focusing on the concrete details of the participants’ current experience. In the second interview, participants were not asked for their opinions, but rather for the details of their experience that form the basis for their opinions (Seidman, 1998)—for example, they were asked to describe a typical school day or a typical Saturday during the semester.

The third interview focused on reflections of the meaning of their experiences by addressing emotional and intellectual connections between the challenges they faced, the strategies they used to overcome these challenges, and the impact of the aforementioned on their academic and personal lives (Seidman, 1998). During the course of the interview process, warm-up sessions involved a recap of issues previously discussed to verify information given and ensure that responses were understood in the proper context. The three-interview structure was utilized to achieve the advantage of interactive and cumulative sequence of exploring the past, describing the present, and reflecting on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 1998).

Each interview was scheduled to last 60 to 90 minutes, after which the researcher turned off the tape to avoid diminishing returns even if the participant was willing to continue talking. This ensured that each interview had a chronological beginning, middle, and end. This timeframe also ensured that the participant's time was respected (Seidman, 1998).

Questions asked included: (a) country of origin, (b) age, (c) year of arrival in the United States, (d) choice to study in the United States, (e) family and friends' perception of the United States, (f) knowledge of the United States prior to arrival, (g) expectations, (h) visa status, (i) course of study, (j) choice of university, (k) challenges faced, (l) and how challenges are overcome. Attrition of students who were not able to overcome these challenges will also be discussed (See Appendix F).

Administrative documents from the university (OIP and office of international admissions) on the demographics of the international student population and formal studies (e.g., dissertations) on topics related to this study at this metropolitan research

university in the southeastern region of the United States, in addition to any newspaper clippings and articles appearing in the mass media, were collected. The advantages of using data sources other than those collected from the survey administered and the in-depth interview is that the data from the outside sources was used to verify the data collected from the survey and in-depth interviews, a method known as triangulation. Other advantages of using outside data as a source of data collection include stability and unobtrusive, exact, and broad information. The weaknesses of using outside data include problems with retrievability, biased selectivity of documents, reporting bias of author, and lack of access (Yin, 2009). The researcher worked closely with a panel of peers in analyzing all data collected to mitigate the weaknesses of using outside sources. The panel of peers included other doctoral students who agreed to take part in the analyses.

In-depth interviews were targeted and focused on the case study topic; they were also insightful because they provided inferences perceived as causal to the participants. Weaknesses of interviews include bias due to poorly constructed questions, response bias, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity, which occurs when the interviewee gives the interviewer information that he or she wants to hear (Yin, 2009).

The researcher in this study did not work in isolation; the doctoral committee reviewed the interview questions. The questions were structured in such a way that prompts were not given to the participant until after he or she had finished speaking. That is, when asked about challenges faced, no prompts were given, so as to find out from the participant what the challenges were perceived to be. It was only after he or she had stopped speaking that the researcher offered prompts on challenges not mentioned but discussed in the literature. The same process was conducted for the factors and

strategies the students perceived to be responsible for their success. The researcher did not expect poor recall to be a weakness because the students were currently involved in the experience of being an African international student or had just graduated that semester. The researcher did not have a fiduciary relationship with the participants. The researcher was not an authority figure in the lives of the participants nor did she have an undue influence over their academic grades or personal lives. Therefore, the participants had no incentive to give responses that they believed the researcher expected to hear.

The open and in-depth interview questions were designed to obtain detailed and thorough data of these students' experiences as international students in the United States and focused on the experience itself and the emotions attached to it (J. H. Lim, personal communication, July 22, 2008). The questions did not have leads and allowed the students to describe their challenges in their own words as opposed to preclassified challenges that the participants will have to fit their experiences of challenges into or factors to which they attribute their success.

Four participants were interviewed three times, and two were interviewed twice. The interviews were scheduled at a time and place most convenient to the student participants, lasted 60 to 90 minutes, and were audio taped. Audio taping the interviews provided a record of the interview data and allowed for verification of the information given by the participants. The researcher clarified any information in the second and third interviews. Information revealed by other participants that the initial participants did not discuss or share was also discussed. In addition to the audio tapes, the researcher collected field notes during the interview on facial expressions, hesitations, and gestures. Together with the audio tapes, these gave a full picture of the participants' perceptions of

their challenges and factors they attribute to their success. The semi-structured approach of the interviews provided the researcher with a specific set of questions to be addressed, but also allowed the researcher the flexibility to probe participant responses as she saw fit. One researcher collected all of the data.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis involves organizing and interpreting what the researcher has seen, heard, and read to make sense of what has been learned (Glesne, 2006). Data can be analyzed in three ways: interpretational analysis, structural analysis, and reflective analysis (Gall et al., 1999). This study employed structural analysis in which a precise set of procedures for analyzing the data was followed. However, the patterns identified did not have to be inferred from the data because they were inherent features of the events being studied (Gall et al., 1999). Challenges faced by African international students and strategies they used to overcome these challenges were inherent parts of the interview discussion.

Data collected from the demographic survey was analyzed with respect to status, gender, age, marital status, undergraduate or graduate student status, program of study, length of stay in the United States, factors that led participant to come to the United States, challenges faced, and factors attributed to success. The data collected from this survey was coded and compared to the literature. It was determined that the data fell into categories that already exist; therefore, these categories were used to code the data from the in-depth interviews. The categories for challenges faced by international students that exist in the literature included climate and living conditions, academic, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial, cultural, financial, and language related.

Categories for factors that international students attribute to their success in the literature included flexibility, family, local-outside social support, school support, hard work, self-determination, motivation, and other factors.

After the interviews were completed, each audio tape was transcribed. The transcriptions were checked against the tapes to ensure accuracy, and any necessary corrections were made. The researcher and her panel of professional peers then coded the interview transcripts and field notes and categorized responses based on comments and statements into relevant themes based on the research questions (Seidman, 1998).

Finally, data from the survey, documents, field notes, and in-depth interviews were triangulated to develop converging lines of inquiry. Information from each of these data sources was coded as described above based on categories that already exist in the literature. The data from the present study was not different from that which exists in the literature; there was however a difference in what was considered major challenges. Triangulation limits problems of construct validity because multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon, thereby providing assurance that the researcher's descriptions were true. Case studies using more than one source of data collection are rated more highly than those that use one data source (Gall et al., 1999; Yin, 2009).

The data from all sources were then analyzed with data analysis tables using predetermined categories for challenges faced and factors the students attributed to their success. To place the stories of the participants in context, profiles in the form of narratives in the participants' words were crafted and organized based on relevant information. These profiles were written in the first person point of view (Seidman,

1998). As a qualitative study, the analysis involved an in-depth interpretation, discussion, and narrative on the perceptions of these students. Pseudonyms were used for the students' real names and programs of study. Conclusions were drawn, and recommendations for further research given.

In qualitative studies, the advantages of using the researcher as an instrument of data collection and analysis include responsiveness, adaptability, holistic capabilities, knowledge-base expansion, processual immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and the opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses. To ensure trustworthiness concerning internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity described as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, the researcher employed the following strategies: (a) member checks with a panel of doctoral students, which will involve referring data and interpretations back to the source data for correction, verification, and challenge, (b) debriefing by non-involved professional peers, which involve discussion of experiences, findings, and decisions, (c) triangulation of multiple data sources and data collection techniques, which occurred by cross-checking of data and interpretations, prolonged engagement, and persistent observation of participants by interviewing each participant three times for 60 to 90 minutes, (d) the use of reflexive journals that reflected the researcher's mind process, philosophy, and basis for decision making, and (e) an independent audit that ensured that the research followed good professional practice and that the products were consistent with the raw data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Researcher's Subjectivity Statement

It is important for researchers to acknowledge the fact that subjectivity is inevitable and, therefore, seek out their subjectivities while the research is in progress instead of after the data has been collected and analyzed. This enables the researcher to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes (Peshkin, 1988). It is also important for the reader to know of the subjectivities of the researcher so as to be able to place the interpretative findings of the study in their proper context.

The data collected describes the experiences of everyday life as internalized in the subjective consciousness of these students and also the researcher's first hand experience of being an African student in the United States. The challenge, therefore, will be bracketing the personal experiences of the researcher (Lim, J, H, personal communication, 2008).

As an African American citizen with dual nationality, the researcher may have subjectivities that could interfere with her objectivity. The researcher was born in the United States to a West African father and a Central American mother who met and married in the United States while international students. She left the United States at the age of seven to live in West Africa with her parents after they had completed their education. With an undergraduate degree in accounting and two years professional experience in public accounting, she returned to the United States to obtain a graduate degree in Business Administration.

Listening to the perspectives of others on a topic experienced on a daily basis in her personal, professional, and academic life was an enriching experience. Even though a

United States citizen, the researcher's experiences on arrival in the United States mirrored that of her participants. An important difference, however, is that while her participants had a defined path with knowledgeable family members she had to begin the process of adapting to life in the United States before applying for graduate education. She worked several blue-collar jobs and white collar clerical jobs before getting a job as a tax auditor which was at a level comparable to her job in public accounting in West Africa.

She faced culture shock and could identify with the U-Curve after having been here in the United States for 18 years. She faced academic challenges due to differences in requirements and expectations; other challenges faced included, financial difficulties, alienation, rejection, and racial discrimination. Despite these challenges, she obtained a Master of Business Administration degree and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership while juggling the roles of wife, mother, student, small business owner, and adjunct college instructor. The researcher attributes her success to the social support of her family and her extended family in the greater West African and Central American communities. She believes that she is intrinsically motivated with a strong sense of self.

The researcher belongs to a majority ethnic group and grew up in a part of the country where her ethnic group was in the minority. Here in the United States, however, as an African American she belongs to a minority group that is truly in the minority. The researcher grew up in an upper middle class home in a university community where her parents held senior administrative positions. On arrival to the United States, she found herself on the other side of the socio-economic ladder due to financial difficulties and

also not having an established social support network. As a result of her background she was subject to certain subjectivities as a qualitative researcher interviewing people who may have her shared history and common experiences in the United States.

The four types of subjectivity that she believes that she experienced according to Peshkin (1988), are ethnic maintenance in which being African shapes her life; she identifies with Africans and African culture obtaining warm feelings from familiarity. She may have also experienced community maintenance, which involves maintaining close links to the African international community and justice-seeking subjectivity in which the findings of this research should be used by the university to design support programs to mitigate the challenges faced by these students. Finally she experienced the non-research human, which has a by-product of affection reducing the distance between herself and her participants, which is necessary to learn and write about their experiences.

According to Peshkin (1988), acknowledging these subjectivities will result in tamed subjectivity as the researcher's enhanced awareness of these subjectivities will enable her to formally and systematically monitor herself so as to avoid perceptions from untamed sentiments. Untamed sentiments can result in a research study of others being almost autobiographical or presenting a study with assumed authorized statements.

### *Limitations*

Qualitative research has certain limitations or weaknesses. In their chapter entitled "The Disturbing and Disturbed Observer," Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the dualism of the investigator and the object of investigation and the difficulty in qualitative studies (naturalistic inquiry) of separating the interaction of the two. In other words, "the inquirer and the 'object' of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower

and known are inseparable” (p. 94). This interaction results in three weaknesses in qualitative research designs: reactivity, indeterminacy, and interaction.

Reactivity refers to how participants react to the research stimulus. Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) referred to this as the “error from the respondent” (as cited in Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 94). Error from the respondent includes awareness of being tested, role selection, measurement as a change agent, and response sets. Awareness of being tested relates to how participants alter their reaction to the investigator when they know that they are involved in a study, which poses a threat to internal validity. Role selection refers to participants responding to questions truthfully based on their different selves and displaying behaviors that are proper. Measurement as a change agent refers to pretests biasing respondents’ behavior in subsequent testing. Response sets refer to typical biasing behaviors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Indeterminacy refers to the fact that the method of research used by the researcher can distort or shape the outcomes and thus lead to false conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interaction refers to the perceptions and expectations that the investigator and participants have of each other. These perceptions affect the questions that are asked, how the questions are asked, when the questions are asked, and whether the participants will respond, why they respond, how they respond, and when they respond. Thus, in the course of interacting, the researcher and the participant influence one another. This creates the data for the research based on their interaction, which involves mutual shaping (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*Justification*

Despite these weaknesses, Lincoln and Guba (1985) justified the inclusion of interactions in qualitative research, recognizing them as opportunities rather than intrusions, which result in error. It is impossible to eliminate this interaction in human research and equally difficult in physical sciences that do not involve human interaction. The researchers offered the following six justifications for inclusion of interactions:

1. Facts and theories are not independent. Facts taken alone have no absolute meaning. Facts are interpreted by theories, and there is no conclusive theory without an infinite number of facts. As a result, nothing in life can be known with certainty. Yet, while indeterminacy has been cited as a weakness, nothing is determinate. However, through interaction between the researcher and the participant(s) over time, the judgment of the researcher can be used to determine when enough facts support a theory and when a theory does not over determine the facts. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), striving to be totally objective will detract from the purpose of the research rather than support it.
2. Purposeful sampling and research design is impossible to achieve without continuous interaction between the researcher and the participants.
3. To make conclusions at the end of a research project, the researcher has to be able to go beyond objectivity to mature judgment, which is achieved by continuous interaction between the researcher and the participant(s). Mature judgment involves going from the primary level, referred to as naïve inquiry, which involves one-sided subjectivity to the social level, which involves one-

sided objectivity to the realized level, which is objectively subjective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Human research is inherently dialectical because the human experience involves a multitude of dualisms in the form of conflict and contradictions.

According to Rowan (1981), three principles are involved in the human experience: (a) the interdependence of opposites, (b) the interpenetration of opposites, and (c) the unity of opposites. A researcher who is in constant, sensitive, and dialogical interactions with his or her participants can synthesize and make sense of these contradictions in the human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5. Meaningful human research is impossible without the full understanding and cooperation of the participants.

6. The quality of the interaction provides the human researcher, the instrument, with the possibility of exploiting its own natural advantages. Even though humans are imperfect, their problems do not lie in imperfection but in unrealistic expectations of perfection. However, humans are adaptable and able to conduct research in ways that maximize rather minimize the benefits of interactions.

To deal with the element of human bias, there are techniques that a researcher can use to ensure balance and fairness. These techniques include:

1. Member checks, which involve referring data and interpretations back to the source data for correction, verification, and challenge.

2. Debriefing by noninvolved professional peers who will be involved in discussions of experiences, findings, and decisions.

3. Triangulation, which involves cross-checking data and interpretations through the use of multiple data sources, data collection techniques, and multiple researchers.
4. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation.
5. The use of reflexive journals that reflect the researcher's mind process, philosophy, and basis for decision-making.
6. Independent audit that ensures the research follows good professional practice and the products are consistent with the raw data.

#### Summary

This chapter outlined and explained the purpose and need for this study. Topics explored included an explanation of why qualitative research is the preferred methodology. The theoretical framework for the study was described, as well as the research design, research site, participant selection, data collection and data-analyses methods. The researcher's subjectivity statement and the limitations of qualitative research were also discussed including techniques employed to ensure fairness in qualitative research.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study in the form of participant profiles followed by a thematic analysis and discussion of the results.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

“This chasm has been studied and restudied by generations of geologists. For as grandly simple as this place appears...we continue to be presented with new facts, new interpretations, and new lessons” (Earle Spencer, as cited in the Grand Canyon Yadaoka Observatory, 2009).

### Introduction

The first section of this chapter introduces the reader to the participants describing how they were met. Their profiles, which are vignettes written in first voice, follows the introduction. These vignettes are composed of selected passages in their interview transcripts that tell their story. A vignette is a short narrative that covers a limited aspect of the participant’s experience, in this case the students’ challenges as African international students and the factors that they attribute to their success (Seidman, 1998). According to Seidman (1998), a profile should be written in the words of the participant in the first person as opposed to the third person, which distances the reader from the participant. Glesne (2006) described the qualitative researcher as a translator, an objective middle person that struggles to represent the meaning of their participants’ experiences by reflecting on their own experiences, knowledge, theoretical dispositions, and data collected from the research. The first person format was chosen so that the reader can connect with each participant personally. In creating these profiles, the words of the participants have been used and in some cases the researcher has used her own

words while making transitions between passages. Characteristics of oral speech like “ehh,” “uhms,” “ahs,” “okay” and “you know” were omitted. According to Seidman (1998), this is necessary to maintain the dignity of the participant in presenting their oral speech. The material was also presented in the order in which it came except when material in interviews two and three fit better with material in interview one, in these instances the researcher transposed the material. The participants were also found to be more comfortable with the researcher during the second and third interviews and shared more detailed experiences or expanded upon experiences shared during the first interview.

Interviews enable people to tell their stories and others to make meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 1998). Interviews also enable others to understand the perception of the participants by seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon and determining the meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 1998). Four participants were interviewed three times while two were interviewed twice. While altering the three-interview structure is not recommended, it has been acknowledged that there are no absolutes in interviewing, and it is possible to get good results from two or even one interview (Seidman, 1998). The first interview focused on the participants’ personal and family background, the second interview focused on the details of the challenges faced as African international students and factors they attribute to their success, and the third interview was a reflection on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 1998). The interviews were spaced from three days to one week apart, and six participants were deemed a effective sample size because sufficiency and saturation was achieved by the

time the researcher spoke to the last participant, nothing new was being learned, and the emerging themes were repeated (Seidman, 1998).

A short summary of each participant's country of origin follows each profile. This will enable the reader to have a holistic view of the participants and place their responses in the proper context. Following the six profiles is the thematic analysis, which categorizes their responses and examines the emerging themes that support each category.

### Participants

The six participants were all students of the southeastern metropolitan research university. They were accessed through two highly respected gatekeepers. A recent doctoral student at the university introduced the researcher to Emeka. Eyele a member of the African Students Association at the university introduced the researcher to Kofi, Mohammed, Achalle, and Fatou. A professor on the researcher's doctoral committee introduced her to a professor in the Africana Studies department who serves as an advisor to some of the African International students at this university. This professor gave the researcher Eyele's contact information. All six participants were from Western Sub-Saharan Africa and were homogenous enough to provide emerging themes on the essence of the challenges faced by African students at this university and the factors that they attribute to their success. The sample was also heterogeneous enough to provide differences in perceptions

Table 1

*Participant Profile*

Participant	Gender	Status	Age	Country of Origin	Family Background	Major	Finance Options
Kofī	M	PR	24	Ghana	MC	UG-Science	Self/Grants/Loans/Scholarship
Fatou	F	PR	21	Gambia	MC	UG-Science	Self/Grants/Loans/Scholarship
Mohammed	M	F-1	22	Guinea	MC	UG-Social Science	Parents
Eyele	F	F-1	21	Cameroon	MC	UG-Science	Parents
Achalle	M	F-1	27	Cameroon	MC	G-Social Science	Extended Family/Friends
Emeka	M	F-1	35-40	Nigeria	MC	G-Science	Self/Research Assistant

*Note:* M = male; F = female; PR = permanent resident. MC = middle class. UG = undergraduate. G = graduate

## Kofi

Kofi is a dark skinned moderately built young man of about 5 feet 5 inches from the central part of Ghana in the Asante region. The researcher obtained his contact information from Eyele an official of the African Student's Association at the University. After both Kofi and the researcher left each other repeated voice mail messages, contact was eventually made and the first meeting was scheduled for a Tuesday afternoon at 1:30pm after his lectures at a café near the university campus. He arrived at 1:15pm and called to let the researcher know that he had arrived. Kofi was extremely prompt for all meetings and did not express any frustration at the tardiness of the researcher. When asked what he would like to eat at the first meeting, he hesitated, contemplated, and refused to have anything. He did eventually, however, agree to have a Coke. At each meeting, he was extremely respectful, polite, and soft-spoken. This set the precedent for all meetings.

### *Kofi's Profile*

My name is Kofi, and I come from Kumasi, the Asante region of Ghana. It is the central part of Ghana. I speak Akan and English. I am 24 years old. My parents are both from the Asante region, and I have four other siblings: two boys and two girls. I am the last but one child. My first sister is a trader, the second is a lady, she is a trained teacher, my older brother is national service personnel, and he just graduated from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. He studied Educational Foundations and works for an educational foundation in Cape Coast for his National Service. My younger brother, who has graduated from high school, wants to go to a training college to become a teacher.

I began my university education in Ghana in the physical sciences, and during my third year in school, I won the green card lottery in 2006 to come to the United States as a permanent resident. My father didn't know much about what was going to happen to me, he didn't know whether I was going to work or how I was going to support myself, he was worried and wanted me to complete my degree before coming. My mother was happy, and my brothers and sisters believed it was a good opportunity for me to be able to come to the United States. It [USA] has a good economy and educational system, and they speak English. Europe would have been okay but it depends where I get a chance. I didn't plan to come here but got a chance to come.

I arrived in January of 2007 and stayed with my uncle. I did not go to school for a year so as to get residency and pay in-state tuition and avoid out-of-state fees. After a year, I applied to [southeastern research university] and was given admission in a professional science program as a sophomore. They transferred 30 of my credits. If I had remained in the same course [single subject science course], I would have transferred to the third year but because I transferred to a professional course I was placed in the second year. The World Educational Service placed my grade point average [GPA] at 3.1. I learned about this school from my cousins and family. I also chose this school because my family lives here in this city, and if things get difficult, I can always move back in with one of my relations so it is a home school for me. After I started, the Dean called me because of my performance and offered me a double major. I have been given financial aid, loans, scholarships and grants.

I did not know much about America or Americans prior to my arrival. I also did not know of the strained relationships between White Americans and African Americans.

America is very different from Ghana. In Ghana, students focus on education unlike the United States where you have bills and have to work hard to pay the bills. Life here is different from Ghana. I didn't expect to work and go to school. My uncle promised to support me and cater for all my needs but after nine months, he asked me to get my own place because of the economy. He said that he could not afford to continue to take care of me. I then had to live with another uncle, and now I share an apartment with a church member.

My typical school day is really hard because I am occupied throughout the day. I have lectures and labs throughout the day and normally end at 9pm. I have a one-hour break and then a two hour break. A day with labs starts at 9am and ends at 8:15pm; a day without labs starts at 9am and ends at 6pm. I have decided to take 18 credits a semester since after [above] 12 credit hours, any amount of credit hours you get is free. I plan to take 18 credits in the spring and fall and 12 credits in the summer. This way, I can graduate in 2011. After class I work the 3<sup>rd</sup> shift at a local grocery store so as to make money to pay rent, utilities, car note and feeding. I cook my own food; I do not like to eat out.

I work on Saturdays and Sundays, too. I cut my Saturday night hours to 4 hours so that I can rest and go to a Ghanaian Pentecostal church on Sundays. The extra money is not worth it; you can't pay any bills with it. I am not saving, everything just goes towards bills.

### *Challenges*

I am always very tired because of my course overload and work. I do not get enough sleep. I don't work on Friday nights because I have to type up my reports. I feel

like I am missing Friday nights and the daytime on Saturdays and Sundays. I have no social life, and I have no time for myself even to watch television. I feel like I am losing because I am working. Even when there are social events, I stay; I don't go anywhere. I start my morning in the day at school and end it at work at night.

I have no problems with my core classes except for my electives. Like English, I face some difficulties with the way they have their educational system with English, or when they are discussing issues about American systems that I don't have any idea about or liberal studies that they [Americans] have already studied in high school. They will be making contributions, and you don't know what they are talking about. They get the extra credit because it is so easy for them. I am also uncomfortable with project work and the peer review portion of some of my classes because my classmates know themselves; they do not understand me and do not rate me fairly. I feel violated, and my grades in these classes are disappointing, they are not stellar. I feel very isolated in these classes because, when a student comes, he will sit down [next to me] but when his friend comes he will leave and go there [next to his friend.] So if you don't know anybody, you just feel like asking somebody that you know. There is one Black guy in my program.

The classroom atmosphere in the United States is different from Ghana. In the United States, students are free but in Ghana, students listen to the professors. My classes are not very diverse; we have a few Spanish, Indian and Africans. Most are Americans [White Americans] and Asians.

Culturally, I am trying to adjust, when in Rome do as the Romans do. In Ghana, if you tell somebody that you are crazy, they will take it as an insult, but here they take it like nothing. When you call somebody's name, you don't add anything to it [title.] The

professors are very informal. I do not like to eat out; I prefer my own food and cook myself.

Financially, because I am a permanent resident, I get benefits like tuition assistance, grant and loans. If you deserve it, they will give it to you. They are very fair.

I have not experienced much racial discrimination in the school. I have experienced it outside of school but it doesn't bother me, it is due to ignorance. It is their problem not my problem. When I first came, my uncle took me to a job fair and we were all waiting. Then a White lady came and the White lady conducting it gave her a permit to enter. All the African American ladies there were very disturbed. So my uncle told me, "You see, this is what we are talking about in this country." I don't want some of these things to affect my life. Not all people are like that because I have some other white people who will work with me. Yeah, I have good friends. My manager, we work very good, we share everything. So I mean individual differences, I don't have much problem with that.

I feel alienated in class because the students know themselves. I have to ask to be included. It is easier to relate to other international students as opposed to American students, they are not very friendly.

I am lonely and homesick; I am trying to make friends. Even though my roommate is from Ghana, it is not the same. In Ghana, when they give you homework assignments and you don't understand, you can just go to a different room or hall and share ideas with your colleagues but here as soon as you finish you have to go to work. If you are not going, then your friend is going so you don't have time for each other. Even with project meetings, it is the same way. If a group has three people, two people will

meet on one day and then two others meet the following day, yeah, that's how it is. I have not been home since I came in 2007. I hope to be able to go back next year. I speak on the phone often with my family members.

I am affected by the cold weather. I get feverish in the spring but I don't get sick often. I only went to the health clinic for some injections [immunizations].

I know of African students who have changed from full time to part time status as a result of financial difficulties.

#### *Factors Responsible for Success*

The school supports me financially with grants and loans, that's all. I have no family support here; I speak to my family in Ghana on the phone. I have friends, everybody is my friend but I don't have specific friends. My life is centered on church and school. I am very focused on my plans and very determined. My belief system helps me. The church is morally supportive. I don't feel like I am lacking social support. My main challenge is financial; it is definitely financial. No matter how much money you have from your home country, you have to get a loan, and you will have to work, and when you complete school, you will have to work to pay off the loan. We are all here for school, its all about concentration, if you have to work then you don't have 100% support on your education.

I am not a member of the African Students Association; it's my own decision not to join. I have been there before but time is a factor. I don't have time for that kind of meeting. The North Africans have isolated themselves from the Black Africans, in all situations even when it comes to soccer. The religion is different but they share common ideas.

*Recommendations to the School*

No amount of money is sufficient here, so you have to work all the time. The main area of assistance is financial for example, provide free accommodation, tuition and ask students to render service after education. Or subsidize tuition and accommodation. Figure out what these students need. Students don't always get loans; make them more accessible to international students. We don't have enough time for studies because you are working all the time and getting tired. If you have financial support then you can focus on your education.

*Advice to New International Students*

Have a strong financial backbone because everything is money, there is no free food or accommodation and the tuition is very costly [expensive]. You will have to take care of everything. It's not easy, part time work cannot take care of it and you cannot work full time. You just need support.

*Kofi's Future Plans*

I plan to get a Master's degree in an area related to renewable energy and power systems; this will give me good job prospects at home. I would, however, like to work first before going back to school. I am taking a full load so as to remain at the same level with my former classmates in Ghana. I don't want to be working at a grocery store when my friends come to the United States to pursue graduate studies.

*Ghana*

The country Ghana was formed by the merger of the British Gold Coast and the Togoland trust territory (The World Fact Book, 2009). It was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain its independence in 1957. Its capital is Accra. Until Lieutenant

Jerry Rawlings took over in 1981, Ghana suffered from numerous military coups. Its legal system is based on English common law and customary law. Ghana has twice the per capita output of the poorest African nations. Its economy depends on agriculture (The World Fact Book, 2009).

Its climate ranges from tropical to hot and humid to hot and dry in the north. Its natural resources are gold, timber, industrial diamonds, bauxite, manganese, fish, rubber, hydropower, and petroleum. Its natural hazards include the dry and dusty harmattan winds and droughts. It is home to Lake Volta, the world's largest artificial lake. Its population is 23.83 million with 59.1% of its population between 15 and 64 years. Fifty percent of the total population lives in the urban area (The World Fact Book, 2009).

#### Fatou

Like the other students, the researcher was only able to get in contact with Fatou after sending e-mail and text messages. When contact was made, she was very eager to help out and take part in the study. She began talking about the challenges faced before an interview date was set and was disappointed when she learned that a pseudonym would be used instead of her real name in the study during the final interview. Fatou was a very bubbly and outgoing young lady. She is dark complexioned and about five feet four inches tall. The first meeting was scheduled at a café at 7:30 pm. She was working full time and was available after 4pm.

#### *Fatou's Profile*

My name is Fatou, and I come from Latrikunda in the part of western Gambia. My native language is Wollof; my grandfather, however, originally comes from Sierra Leone. I am 21 years old. I am the first child of my parents and the only girl. I have two

younger brothers. My father is from a family of eight; my mother's brother is here in the United States and lectures in a university in XX. Both of my parents are in this southeastern city. My dad won the green card lottery and came to the United States 12 years ago; my mother joined my father two years later and has been here for 10 years. My brothers and I remained in Gambia with my grandmother while we waited for our filing status to go through. We arrived in the United States in 2006 as permanent residents. My father works in the agricultural field in a governmental agency, and my mother is self-employed. She did not work in Gambia but has a hair-braiding salon here. I help her out on the weekends and socialize with my friends there on the weekends.

Before I came to the United States, I felt it was paradise on earth, the last destination but reality hit soon after I arrived. It's not easy here; you are kinda disappointed and shocked. Life is in the fast lane. You have to work and go to school. When we were in Gambia with my grandmother, my parents sent money home often. My brothers and I went to private schools. I used to admire African Americans dancing on MTV but now that I am here, I am disappointed and shocked. They do not know what they have and do not take advantage of opportunities; most do not care and just have babies...they have no morals, they act crazy. A lot of Africans want to come here. I don't interact with African Americans, and I draw a line when it comes to relationships.

I took the General Certificate of Education [GCE] examination at home before coming here. After I arrived, I stayed at home for a year so as to get residency before starting the program. I am an undergraduate science major planning to go to pharmacy school in the future. I applied to this school because it is close to my parents, and it is very diverse.

My typical school day involves a lot of time in the laboratory; I am always in the laboratory. I take between 14 and 18 credits a semester and also get financial aid. I am enjoying school. On weekends, I hang out at my mum's hair braiding salon or go on movie outings with other African students at [southeastern research university].

I was part of the group that reenergized the African students Association at [southeastern research university]. I always talk to people, and I was speaking to a white guy who told me about the previous Association for African students. So me and a group of other African students restarted the association in the fall of 2008. It was extremely hard to get funding from the school, so to raise funds, we had an African student's night where we acted plays, had a fashion show, cooked food, etc. It was featured in the school newspaper. We also raised funds by attending a Ghanaian picnic. They gave us \$100, and we were really excited. We had a great turnout during our African student week. They placed flags [African] and served coffee in the school tower; we had a speaker and a movie night. We also have African movie and game nights on a regular basis. The mission of the African Students Association is to share culture. An African American sorority group invited us to a panel discussion on stereotypes discussing perceptions of African Americans by Africans and vice versa. It was very useful because we were able to have honest and frank discussions. Now other organizations on campus are approaching us to collaborate on events. We definitely have plans to have an African student's night next year.

*Challenges*

It is really difficult for francophone students; they first have to learn the English language and sometimes have to spend two years or more learning the language before they can start a university program. Spelling is really a problem for these students. Technology was a huge problem for me. Just using a scientific calculator was difficult for me. Africa is backwards with regards to computers; students here download information from their computers into their calculators and take into the examinations. Without technology, you cannot make good use of resources. Teaching styles here are different so I have to work hard to keep up with continuous assessment and homework.

Culturally, it is just hard to adjust to the American way of life because you see things you don't expect. For example, here in the United States, in dealing with adults, it is done on a first come, first serve basis; they do not give chance to elders or seniors. Babies making babies and taking the kids to class. At home, shame and disgrace won't let you come out. They get support and welfare. They do not have a culture. You do not have elders giving guidance. There is no parental guidance, and there is not much respect. As a result of these differences, Africans keep to themselves. Some African students do get carried away with the American lifestyle especially those that don't have parental support and have the wrong peer group.

Finances are really very hard for African international students; their parents have to send school fees and because most families cannot support these students they are often unsure if they will be able to continue their education the following semester. This university does not have a lot in terms of financial support. The fees are out of state and expensive. These students can't work except babysit. Permanent residents can get

financial aid and student loans. Students on F-1 visas have a lot of restrictions. I am shocked by the credit and loan system here; it is a challenge that will take time getting used to.

I have not had any negative experiences so far with regards to racial discrimination. I have not experienced it at the university but I deal with it at work. I do not feel alienated; I have friends but I do not hang out with a lot of people. My parents are here so I do not feel lonely or homesick. Most African international students are young and face difficulties adjusting. They face financial challenges that limit how often they are able to call home, and sometimes they eventually end up with the wrong peer group as a result of no adults in their life monitoring them.

All Africans support each other; at the end of the day we are all Africans. You have to accept yourself. I get stressed out over examinations but I don't have to worry about bills. Even F-1 students go to the health center on campus to meet their vaccination requirements.

Many African students have had to drop out of school due to financial reasons; they have no jobs and lose status because they are not enrolled in schools. Some of them work in gas stations. F-1 students can only work on campus with a permit.

#### *Factors Responsible for Success*

I am able to overcome these challenges because of my mindset. I am not easily distracted; I am upbeat and get help when I need it. My parents support me. I also have social support. My mother's brother is very supportive and keeps up with my schoolwork and is always giving me advice. Because I am a permanent resident, I don't pay much in school fees.

I do not know much about the Office of International Programs but I feel that they could have done more for the African Students Association and also help the F-1 students with financial aid.

My uncle, who is a lecturer in XX, is my main source of social support. He came to the United States many years ago as an African international student and now has his Ph.D.; he mentors me and other African students. He often takes the students at his university on study abroad trips to South Africa and Botswana. I wrote a paper on my uncle's challenges as an African student for a project in school [she brought the paper to share with the researcher during the third interview].

My friends are a great source of support; they are Africans. I prefer to socialize with other Africans because we all think alike, and we limit our interactions with Americans.

It is important to have spiritual and religious beliefs. I am pleasant and outgoing, and my personality has helped me get jobs and many other opportunities. I am motivated and persistent. Never feel too good to ask for help, everyone needs people.

#### *Suggestions to the school*

Provide more financial opportunities to African International students. They pay a lot more than United States students. They pay more and should, therefore, be given opportunities.

The school should help the organizations get involved and help the students to be more involved. By helping the organizations, more students will join and share their cultures. Africans, by nature, do not reach out and interact with others so the school does not come out with themes that affect them. If, for example, African students have a forum

on the challenges they face, more will be aware of these challenges. For example, the forum held by an African American sorority on breaking the barrier between Africans and African Americans was very useful.

The school should provide more job opportunities on campus so that students can work for money, provide more scholarships. Get mentor Africans to speak to students and encourage them to break out of their cocoons. Also have a special orientation program for African international students. French speaking West Africans have problems speaking English language.

#### *Suggestions to African International Students*

Do not pay attention to racial stereotypes, expand social networks, reach out to others, do not keep to yourself and let cultural barriers get in the way. Africans have to reach out to one another and help each other out. Not everyone can handle all the difficulties; they have to work with the school to get support.

For the young and new African international students, you will face challenges - financial, cultural, discrimination, academic, and technology. I am not sensitive to it [discrimination] though. How you react to these challenges is important. Utilize resources available and take charge of the resources available.

#### *The Gambia*

The Gambia, which is the smallest country in Africa, gained its independence from Britain in 1965 (The World Factbook, 2009). Its capital is Banjul. Surrounded by Senegal, it formed a short-lived federation called Senegambia from 1982 to 1989. In 1991, the two nations signed a friendship and cooperation treaty but intermittent tensions led to a military coup in 1994 that overthrew the president and banned political activity.

Its legal system is a combination of English common law, Islamic law, and customary law. Its natural beauty and proximity to Europe has made it an area for tourism in Europe (The World Factbook, 2009).

Its climate ranges from the tropical hot, rainy season to the cooler, dry season. Its natural resources are fish, titanium, tin, zircon, silica sand, clay, and petroleum. Its population is 1.78 million, and 53.6% of the population is between 15 and 64 years. Fifty seven percent of the population lives in the urban areas, and the life expectancy is 55.35 years. The ethnic groups are 99% African. The three religious groups are Muslim (90%), Christian (8%), and indigenous beliefs (2%) (The World Factbook, 2009).

### Mohammed

Eyele gave the researcher Mohammed's name. Like the other participants, phone contact was finally made after a number of phone and text messages. The interviews were held at the coffee shop near the library, which is a very good place to record interviews. Mohammed is a dark complexioned young man of about five feet 10 inches tall. He can be described as an F-1 student success story.

#### *Mohammed's Profile*

My name is Mohammed. I am 22-years-old, and I come from Guinea, which is a French speaking country in West Africa. I grew up in a city, which is well known for mining bauxite near the coast of Kamsar. Prior to coming to the United States, I was fluent in my native Fallah and French. My English was okay. My father is an engineer who obtained his graduate education in the United States. My mother is an accountant who obtained her degree in Guinea. Both my parents work for an American company in Guinea. My parents have four children; my older sister attended this southeastern

research university and graduated with a double major in the social sciences this spring. I, too, just graduated this spring with a degree in the social sciences. My younger sister is studying communication in a university in France while my younger brother is in high school in France. We don't have any family in France; my younger brother is living with friends of my parents.

I first came to the United States in 2001 for a two-month vacation and then came back in September 2004. My parents want all their children to obtain their college education outside of our country of Guinea. My father prefers the American educational system to that of Europe and, for this reason; both me and my sister were encouraged to study here as opposed to France. My father studied here in the United States. We came to this part of the country because my father's cousin lives in this southeastern city with his family. My parents, however, have decided that my younger two siblings will obtain their college education in France.

My family was responsible for the decision to have my sister and I study in the United States and have been very supportive. My friends were happy for me and hoped that they, too, could have the same opportunity.

There were quite a number of Americans in the mining city where I grew up, and by virtue of my father's position, I interacted with a number of them. I was pretty young in 2001, so most of the stuff I knew about America and Americans was from TV. When I came in 2001, and I learned that people work very hard in America, it's a struggle every day and that it was not really everything that you see like in the music videos. It was hard, so that prepared me before I came back. I knew what I had to be prepared for.

I spent my first year in the English Language Training Institute at this southeastern research university. The teachers did not just teach the English language but they also focused on the American culture and taught the students what is acceptable and what is not. After my first year, as a result of the high tuition, I left and went to the local urban community college and completed an Associate of Arts degree in two years. After I completed my Associate's of Arts degree, I reapplied to this [southeastern research university] in 2007 for the final two years of this program. My older sister did the same thing; she studied English Language for a year and then transferred to the local community college to get an associate degree and then reapplied to the university to complete the final two years of undergraduate study. Even though my father's cousin was the reason we came to this city, this university was also comparatively cheaper for international students than the other universities in the area.

My typical day involved class, studying and working. I had classes all day three times a week sometimes in the evening. I took an average of 12 credits a semester. My weekends involved going to work, and towards the last six months of my program, I was able to get an internship with a major financial institution in the city.

### *Challenges*

It's hard for us to integrate because we spend so much time working and studying that we can't really have the typical campus life that everybody has here. So when they are talking about it [campus life], you don't really have the materials to participate in the conversations and stuff. One thing I appreciate at the ELTI [English Language Training Institute] is that they really work hard not only to teach us English but also to teach us how to live more like an American to help us integrate ourselves. Everything they used to

do was always using an example of real life here in the US of how people will react if you did certain things and how you should not react badly if you see certain things. That helps. The differences I noticed were not shocking but interesting. I noticed a few interesting differences. For example, why is it that people smile at you even if they don't know you? I still do not understand that. I will smile back but will not smile first.

To be honest, most of the challenges for me and my sister were financial. My dad sent us both here together so I guess it was more of a challenge for him since he was not what you can call wealthy just like ok. I remember that most of our tuition was paid on debts and stuff like that. So early on we had to work, sometimes illegally, so I guess that when you wondered where most people [African students] are, they are at work. The Asians have a better economy. The average income is able to pay international fees to study here but in Africa that is not the case. Even a wealthy person there [Asia] is middle class here.

I am pretty much an easy-going guy. One thing I used to tell my sister was that before we came here, we were pretty much taken care of by our parents. So learning to pay the bills on time, being organized, going to school, and managing working 35 to 40 hours, I guess that was a little challenging. And especially like sometimes working and you knowing that you don't want to get caught, you don't want to lose everything, so we used to live with that little stress. Just stressful at times. I averaged B's and B-'s and only began to get A's towards the end of my program when I was working as an intern for 20 hours a week as opposed to working under cover for 40 hours a week. I had more time to study, was not as tired, and did not have the additional mental stress of working illegally. The fluctuating exchange rate between developing African countries and the West was

extremely difficult for my parents because while the school fees were the same, it became increasingly more expensive for my parents in their own currency. This made it difficult for them to plan financially. People from Africa will have to have more options in financial aid, grants and stuff like that. Not that they want to have a free ride but help them get through it because if they don't, most of the time they will go out of status, not finish school and stuff like that. So at the end the school is not a learning institution but a business. We feel like we are customers, we are giving money and expect to be taken care of. It is a public school for Americans but for us it is more like a private school, the money we pay here is probably more than some of the private schools around here. We kind of expect better treatment during and after we graduate.

I remember my first economics and math classes. The way they taught math back home and here was really different so for the first two months, I had a hard time understanding. Back home, it was applied math, like plotting the graphs and reading the graphs as data. They gave us functions to solve, and we just solved it. Back home, we used to memorize; here it is a whole different ballgame, critical thinking and practical applications. For the first two months in my economics class, I had difficulty with the graphs. At home, we were just asked to find the values for "X" and "Y" with no practical applications. The tests [at home] are set to reproduce material, and here it is not set to reproduce the material. I would also say the English aside, at the beginning you have to try to write down everything and try to understand what they are saying while everybody else is there [understands] on the first time. So you are always working from behind and have to work twice as hard to get to the same level. Academically, I would say that I had to catch up because when you transfer [from the community college], it is hard because

your grade point average [GPA] is zero and because of financial difficulties we pick classes last and are left with the hardest classes to take. It is hard to manage with work and everything so that was bad. The first semester was bad.

I also had difficulty with the English language. I had to work twice as hard to translate and get to the same level. I had to work hard. Because of the difficulties faced by my older sister in learning the English language, my father got me an English tutor who worked with me for six months before I arrived here in 2004. This made my transition much easier than my sister who, as a result of these difficulties, graduated with me even though she started before me.

At [the urban community college], you are dealing with the same people. There are many professors there that teach here. The only difference is the infrastructure so that did not really faze me.

Racial discrimination is one thing I haven't really focused on because that is something that is always going to happen. Little bumps but nothing really that could shape my experience because when you come you already kind of know that you might get into those kinds of aspects of culture. In Africa we are all black but sometimes you can go from one village to another and not be welcome. So when you go somewhere as far as the United States I just feel like I have to be prepared for stuff like that. So even when it happens, it's true you get mad, but you just continue on. I did not experience racial discrimination at school. Not openly, probably behind my back but I don't care. I did not experience it in class with professors but I had a friend who had a little something going on. He was asked last to pick the day of his presentation. He presented first and all the later slots were taken up. He felt discriminated against. I only had an experience when

going to work 'cos of my red uniform. My uniform was in my pocket and someone saw me in the parking lot and called the police. Can I not walk through the parking lot? It's a public place right? I get along fine with everyone White Americans, Black Americans, and Asians.

I feel alienated because resources are made available to other students who can study without stress. Many parents [African] just send kids and think the US is a country that will look out for you. You will get loans that you can repay later, and it is not so. They know from the beginning that they will not be able to afford the whole entire school. That's why many of them drop out. So, I will say that the number one problem is that there is no financial support to make sure that the African students are able to graduate. I remember from the first time I paid for each semester, I started worrying about how to pay the next semester.

I don't feel lonely or homesick because my sister and cousins are here. We all stick together and have fun together. I also have friends in other states so, when we have breaks, we try to get together. I have not been home since 2004, but my mother came for my graduation, and my dad used to come for work so he would stop by.

My parents have been most supportive and bore the stress of having to pay the school fees for me and my sister here in the United States. Here in the US, you are on your own. People only care about their business; they don't care how you make it. People don't assume you need help since your parents filled the forms [financial support]. It's a catch 22.

Thank God I have never fallen sick. I have the school insurance and haven't really needed it. For the first three years I was here, I had no insurance. I guess God was looking out for me

I know of a lot of students who have dropped out of American universities and all these students have dropped out because of financial challenges. Most go to the community colleges and cannot transfer back to the four-year schools for financial reasons, the tuition doubles or triples. Most of the time they go out of status, keep working and looking for solutions. Once this happens, it is hard to go back to school.

#### *Factors Responsible for Success*

My parents have kept me positive, encouraging me to focus less on financial challenges and more on school. They have been tremendous support and I will say that is the biggest factor. I speak to my parents often; my mum cannot go for a week without speaking to me. I have not been home since 2004. Going was the same price as taking summer classes. Having my older sister here made me feel like we were a team taking classes together and studying together, it's been fun. My resolve has also been a factor, I came here with a goal and I really worked hard to achieve it.

Matt [pseudonym], an Assistant Director at the ELTI, took my sister and I under his wing. He guided and helped us change our tourist visas to F-1 visas even though that was not his job. Guinea doesn't give student visas. He told us about the urban community college and suggested we first complete our first two years there so as to save money to attend the university for the last two years. He helped us get our apartment over the weekend, etc. I met a lot of international students at the ELTI, and the experience was very positive.

The OIP? They were all right; they got my I-20 very quickly when I got the internship position. I appreciated that. I never went to the coffee hour because I was working. I lived far, and I didn't have a car. When I asked an African friend about the coffee hour, he said, "We don't attend because when they are drinking coffee, we are making it in gas stations and fast food restaurants."

My friends have given me tremendous emotional support. I have a friend from Mali who dropped out for financial reasons and has been unable to reinstate himself. This friend continuously tells me not to be like him "even if it is hard, just keep up."

In my culture, parents are right under God. I don't want to let them down. I am Muslim but do not practice much. I connect everything to God, just keep doing your thing, and focus on the good. When bad things happen I just look at them and analyze them and keep going so that helped me.

I am easy going. I don't let things sink in and break me. I have grumpy days but most of the days I try to keep a smile because I know that there is somebody out there that has it worse than me. My parents paid every semester; I just had to pay the bills. There were people out there that didn't have that kind of support; they were out there by themselves so I try to keep positive. I am better than most. I set easy to reach goals one at a time and did not shoot for the moon.

I believe I have bright prospects back at home in Guinea especially armed with a degree from the United States. My prospects will be brighter and easier if I am able to have some work experience here in the United States and also a Master's degree from the United States. I will like to get an MBA with a focus on real estate because that is one thing that is not developed at home. This will make people take me more seriously and

not just as a person with a foreign degree with no knowledge of how to apply the concepts in practice. I do want to go home and avoid getting caught up in the rat race here in the United States. Most plan to go back home but don't save. You think you are making it, it is true you are comfortable and have electricity and water and many of the things that are not taken for granted if you go back home but I don't think you achieve much. I always feel that what I can become in my country I can't become here because as soon as bad things happen they don't give jobs to the internationals but to the Americans. I am kind of attached to my country and I know that sooner or later I will go back, that I know. My dad believes that if I can apply the concepts learned here there are definitely opportunities.

It's easy for me to say that I am going back home but when you have kids it's hard to just pick them up and take them [home]. What I am talking about the rat race is that I know people that stay here for 20 or 30 years with a specific goal to make a certain amount of money but most of them didn't even start saving after 20 years. That means that there are so many things happening at the same time that it is really hard to stay focused, that means you really have to have a good job because there is always something coming up. There is this vacuum, like your money finds ways to run out of your pocket. Lincoln says that a smart man learns from his mistakes but a wise man learns from the mistakes of others. But like my dad said in Africa there is nothing done so you don't have to be a genius to go and start something. All you have to do is apply concepts that worked somewhere else so it's not like there is nothing to do there. There are many successful people but I would like to think that if my parents, you can't call them rich, were able to

find ways to pay school fees for two people at the same time for four years that means that there are definitely opportunities in Guinea and Africa.

### *Recommendations to School*

Like I said have more options for financial aid. Many schools give grants to minority students. Like there is not even a brochure, a two page brochure that they [African students] can look at if they have financial difficulties. The only form they have is for academic hardship and even with that international students can't have loans or nothing. So it can be as simple as letting students that are doing good pay in state fees. Give students work permits and give them the option of going to school every other semester. Most students do that now. They work illegally one semester to save to pay for the next semester. They get out of status and then have to get back in-status. It's a catch twenty-two, you don't have money for school and they won't let you work to have money for school, so it's mixed up.

I would say have more knowledgeable staff, most times you are asked to find a lawyer. Sit down with students and help them find out. The man at ELTI did not have all the answers but he knew where to find them. We have to go to Yahoo ourselves. This is a university and it should be where they have the answers. They don't have a contact person at the immigration agency, and when they call, they speak to anyone the way we would speak to anyone when we call. It is, therefore, no use.

Don't treat all international students the same. Check out the Gross Domestic Product of countries and see who can afford and who can't, who needs more help and who does not. At ELTI, half the class was from North Korea, 5% Japanese and the rest were from Columbian and Katour. Ninety percent of them didn't need financial aid.

Most are well off and their currencies are not on par with the dollar but up there or floating with the dollar. So when the dollar goes down their currency goes down. But in Columbia, Guinea, Argentina and most African countries that have unstable currencies it is difficult to budget. Lock in rates in African currencies, like in Guinea for example they could say that I am going to pay them in dollars but the rate is going to be the rate that I am going to pay in Guinean francs. That would be a tremendous help. Exactly in 7 years the Guinean franc went from 2,500 francs to \$1 to 7,000 francs to \$1, that's an almost 120% increase. That's inflation! So for somebody paying their children's school fees you are paying three times what you used to! Having international students is like being in international business; it is not the same price, the system cannot be set up like you are dealing with people that make dollars. In the end, the poorest people pay more than the richest. If I live in Japan the Yen doesn't go down as much. When the dollar goes down sometimes the Yen goes up.

Culturally, the University is doing fine. They have great events, which other universities don't have. The ELTI does a good job; it is the niche where they try to teach you the most. They don't just teach you English they try to make you understand the culture here and they do a pretty good job of it.

#### *Advice to New African International Students*

First of all I would say don't come here, it is too expensive. Don't come on a tourist visa! [laughs]. If you don't have to work, don't work while going to school. For the first three years, I was a B- student and did not have the time to do all my homework because I working 35-40 hours a week. I was really tired after work; I had a tight schedule, when you get home and you are looking for your bed, it affects your academic

performance. The only time I was an “A” student was when I was working as an intern 20 hours a week. This has caused my grade point average [GPA] to not be stellar. I was only able to join organizations and interact with people when I worked as an intern 20 hours a week. Join one academic organization and one social organization. At some point, you don’t know what’s more important: going to school or paying for school.

The interview was wrapped up with an extensive discussion on the state of economic development in Africa, the state of African tertiary education, and the need for African professionals educated abroad to go back home and take part in the economic development needed. Mohammed stated that the GDP of South Korea was comparable to that of Guinea in the 1960’s but now the GDP of South Korea is 15 times that of Guinea because the South Koreans studied abroad and went back home. The South Koreans utilized their knowledge at home whereas people in Africa are utilizing knowledge from the 1960’s. “Africa has no infrastructure. There is no road that connects more than 10 countries in Africa and there are 53 countries. There are no highways and train stations, there is no commerce and we are still divided” This Mohammed believes is the reason why Africa is not advancing. He talked about an uncle who had three Ph.D.’s from France and was able to make a great difference in Guinea after he retired. He got in trouble when he told this uncle, “Imagine what difference you could have made if you came back much earlier when you had the physical strength.” He also talked about a female Zambian who earned her Ph.D. who gave a talk to the students on her book *Dead Aid*. The book *Dead Aid* discussed most countries in Africa dependence on aid, and the only countries making progress are the ones that can think for themselves. He also talked about the state of research in Africa, libraries with obsolete information, teachers who go

on strike because they are not paid, African intellectuals who teach in schools in the industrialized world where their knowledge is not needed. “They don’t need your knowledge where you learned your knowledge. They need your knowledge where that knowledge is not available and you need to make it available”. He stated that there was just one university in Guinea that used to be a polytechnic. Mohammed discussed the composition of the African Students Association which is comprised mainly of students from West and East Africa with little or no North African presence. He also discussed the culture in Africa where Africans “settle” for the status quo and don’t strive for improvement yet dislike those that try to make a difference. He concluded that Africans all look out for themselves. His perspectives were so intriguing that an African American man having a drink and smoking a cigarette on a nearby table joined in the discussion and shared his perspectives on the topic.

### *Guinea*

Guinea gained its independence from France in 1958 and has been under authoritarian rule since then (The World Factbook, 2009). Its capital is Conakry. Its legal system is based on French civil law, customary law, and decree. It was vulnerable to the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia but as those countries have stabilized, Guinea began to suffer increasing political and economic instability. Complaints of corruption and bad governance caused two strikes in 2006 and one in 2007. Its natural resources are bauxite, iron ore, diamonds, gold, uranium, hydropower, fish, and salt. Guinea has almost half of the world’s bauxite reserves, which accounts for more than 70% of exports. Despite its natural resources, Guinea suffers from a lack of infrastructure, electricity, skilled workers, and political uncertainty caused corruption (The World Factbook, 2009).

Its climate is hot and humid with monsoon rain in the rainy season and harmattan winds in the dry season. Its population is 10.05 million with 53.7% of the population between 15 and 64 years. The life expectancy is 57.09 years. Thirty four percent of the population lives in urban areas. Guinea has four major ethnic groups and three major religions: Muslim (85%), Christian (8%), and indigenous beliefs (7%). The official language is French (The World Factbook, 2009).

### Eyele

The researcher was referred to Eyele by a professor in the department of Africana studies. A member of the researcher's dissertation committee introduced her to this professor. This professor also serves as an advisor for the African students at this university. The researcher met with the professor to discuss her study and sought his perspectives on how best to recruit participants.

The researcher first initiated contact with Eyele towards the end of the spring 2009 semester when students were in the middle of their final examinations. It was understandable; therefore, that the researcher did not hear from Eyele until after the researcher had sent two e-mail messages explaining that the meeting would not last longer than 30 minutes. When she did respond, she gave her cell phone number and times that she would be available. The researcher proposed meeting after her final examination for the semester.

The researcher and Eyele first met for lunch at a café near the campus. Eyele was a very amiable young lady that clearly had a sense of purpose and the ability to command the respect of her peers. She was of medium complexion and about five feet five inches in height. It became very obvious after the first meeting why the professor recommended

her as a first point of contact. Over lunch she told the researcher about herself and her family, how she came to the United States, her course of study, her future plans, and the current state of the African Students Association at this university. She expressed enthusiasm for the study and the need for the study, and she promised to provide names of potential participants. She asked that the researcher send her an e-mail describing the study, which she could forward to potential participants. She also told the researcher that she had missed the major end of year party that the African students had that semester but that they were having a social gathering that evening. Despite the researcher's extremely busy schedule, she promised to attend later that evening at about 9:30pm after her son's orchestra performance at 7:00pm. The researcher was able to order some African hors d'oeuvres (puff-puff and chin-chin). After the interview with Eyele, the researcher headed back to work and then straight to her son's school for the orchestra performance.

The researcher got to the party with the hors d'oeuvres, which were greatly appreciated. She was then allowed to speak to the students about the study and verbally recruit potential participants. She also encouraged them to complete the online survey and not ignore it as one of those numerous junk e-mails. Eyele was extremely reliable; she gave the names of seven potential participants. Two of these potential participants could not participate in the study. One was a graduate student from Sierra Leone with a family; he wished the researcher luck but expressed time constraints as a limitation. The second was a female student from Togo who did not attend this metropolitan southeastern research university.

Eyele traveled out of town right after the end of the semester and was, therefore, one of the last interviewees. Each of the three interviews were held at the library coffee

shop, which was determined to be the best location in terms of limited noise and also a place where it was possible to have a drink without the distraction of a full meal. After the researcher's first two interviews, it became obvious that meeting at a restaurant was a bad idea. The background noise made transcribing the tapes difficult and it was difficult to eat while speaking. On both occasions, the researcher and the participant had to take their food home because neither of them could eat.

### *Eyele's Profile*

My name is Eyele, and I come from the English speaking southwestern part of Cameroon. I grew up in the French capital of Yaoundé. I am fluent in both English and French. My parents are from the southwestern part of Cameroon. My father is a diplomat, and my mum is a journalist with the civil service in Cameroon. I have three siblings, a 19-year-old brother who is in his final year in secondary school, a 16-year-old sister who is taking her "O" level examinations, and a 20-year-old adopted sister who is a distant relative but I'm not too sure of the exact family connections on my father's side. I am 21 years old. I've attended boarding schools in the English speaking northwestern province of Cameroon since I was 10 years old.

I first came to the United States in August of 2005 after my "A" level examinations. My mother was awarded the XX Scholarship from Harvard University and brought me with her on a J-2 visa. She believed this would be a great opportunity for me to receive my university education in the United States. The decision to come to the United States was a family decision based on the benefits of a foreign degree in Cameroon. My family and friends felt it was a great idea. I went to a community college in Massachusetts in the fall of 2005 and came here [southeastern city] because my mum

has two sisters and a brother here. She wanted me to be where she has relatives. If I stayed in Massachusetts, I would have to stay off campus, which is more expensive but here I could live at home [with relatives] and go to school. I enrolled in the community college here as an international student in the summer of 2006. It was very hard; I got my associate of science degree in the fall of 2007 and transferred to the professional science program here in the spring of 2008.

This professional science program is not very developed back home. The program in Cameroon is in French; I did not want to study in French and was concerned about the quality of education I would receive if I went there. The only other option was to attend the English polytechnic; I did not want to do that since a polytechnic is a step down from a four-year university. My other options were to study accounting or business but since I really wanted to study this professional science course, it was decided that it was a good idea for me to stay here. I feel very lucky to be here in the United States.

Prior to coming to the United States, I believed that everything was going to be good here; everybody has money, everybody lives comfortably, you know, what you see in the media. It's just like here, all Americans see about Africans are the negative aspects, and all Africans see about Americans are the positive aspects. Everybody back home thinks that America is heaven, but honestly, that is not true. The day we flew in, we were driving and stuck at a light, and I saw one of these homeless people. I was shocked. I was like, "People are homeless in America?" I didn't have any idea about the reality of America. The only thing I knew about American people was that they were different. In Africa, everybody's the same. You are only separated by tribal language. America is very diverse. You have Blacks, Whites, Indians, and Chinese, and then they speak very fast.

That's all I knew about Americans. Now that I look at it, I know much more; I didn't know the depth of racism and other social issues Americans have. So many things you have here you won't have in African cultures where everybody is the same. There is no competition, people are not fighting. Let me see how to put it, the media's portrayal of beauty is not everybody's kind of beauty. This is just an example of how diversity does not work here. I expected the best. The students from Harvard were very nice, kind, and inquisitive bourgeois White people. They asked a lot of questions but I felt odd among them. Right up 'til today, if I am placed in a room full of Americans, I don't have anything to say; I just keep thinking I want to get out of here, I don't feel comfortable. But if I am placed in a room full of Africans, I am a completely different person. I still don't find myself one with them.

I really wanted to go to another university that is well known for its school of technology but the \$30,000 annual school fee was too much. The annual school fee for international students at this university is \$16,000 a year. It's good. I love it. That's one reason why I really don't want financial challenges. You are doing something that you have a passion for, you can't wait to go to class, and you enjoy learning something new.

I have been able to get a little job where I work in the mornings before school. A typical school day involves going to work at 5am and then going to school where I stay until evening. My classes are usually in the mornings and my labs are in the afternoons and evenings. After my labs, I usually attend meetings, and on the weekends, I try to find something to do like visit my aunts and friends and go to an African Ghanaian church on Sundays. I try not to work; I've never had to work on Sundays. I am Catholic but prefer the Apostolic African churches here in the United States. They treat you like family and

are very ready to help you out. They understand being in America. They also help each other. My mom is Apostolic.

### *Challenges*

There are only two challenges: finances and the people in the environment. I do not face any challenges academically at school. My greatest challenge is financial. I constantly worry about accommodation, food, and books. Financially, it's not like other Americans when you go to school; their parents have paid for everything right down to their dorms and meal pass. The only thing they have to worry about is passing and getting good grades. But on the other hand, I have to worry about having a roof over my head, having something to eat every day, having money to spend on lunch, having money to buy my books and having money to pay my school fees. I am constantly worried whether my parents will be able to send money in time for my school fees to be paid. Like now, I don't know if my parents will be able to send the \$8,000 in time for me to register for the fall semester. I wanted to take classes this summer but my parents could not send the money. Most African students, especially the guys, are working extremely hard and still able to get good grades despite their financial hardships. Finance is the biggest problem especially with the currency difference. One million francs is equivalent to \$2,000, so \$8,000 is equivalent to four million francs. My parent's regular monthly salary is not up to one million francs combined unless my dad has a mission.

I don't know why but I just feel uncomfortable with American people and lose my confidence. I find the culture a great challenge. I have tried to take part in activities but the American culture is so different from the African culture. For example, what I think is funny, they will not think is funny, and what they think is funny, I will not find funny. I

feel intimidated because of my accent. I also feel that the people are prejudiced, and I always have to double prove myself when I am among them even the ones that are nice and kind, you can easily know it, how can I put it? When I am at a meeting with them, I just feel like I am not supposed to be there. I feel ignored; I don't get the vibe. Some know you but avoid making eye contact with you in different settings. Not all of them are like that. Initially everybody appears to be nice but after I realize that everybody is still nice but everybody is not accepted. When I am involved in discussions, I am not sure how to respond to issues being discussed, and I'm afraid of saying something wrong. You have to think twice before you say something because you have to think if you will offend somebody. I always try to speak professionally to my professors. I have tried to face this fear by joining organizations that invite me, but when I get there, I wish it were like, I'm different you know. I just love the African Students Association. I love that organization. I love being there. I attend all the meetings and everything because I relate to these people. We have the same views, we see things the same way, and we understand life the same way.

Blacks and Whites are different. African Americans are loud and outgoing. I used to work in fast food with Blacks, and after a while, it was easy to get along with them but Whites are different. I don't know how to explain it, ok, maybe it's because Blacks and Africans are loud and outgoing and stuff like that. But Whites are calmer; they view things different. I agree with the way of life of Whites, they are more conservative...but when it comes to interacting as Africans, we always joke around and would rather go to Black clubs than White clubs. But when it comes to business, you would rather work for

a white man than a black man. These are my personal feelings; I have not had any conflict with anyone over them.

The climate is either too hot or too cold; there is hardly any balance. At home, people are always outside walking on the street, there are hawkers, people are playing music, and you can go outside and take a stroll and have fun. Here people are either in their cars or at home. You can't go outside, and you have to have money to go to a club or someplace fun.

I have experienced racial discrimination but I do not take it personally. People say that racism in America is not there but I believe it is still there, because obviously I am Black, you know a White person will think an African is an African American. So in being myself among them, I won't officially be the person I want to be in their eyes the way I will be the person I want to be among Africans. Most Africans carry themselves like they are better than African Americans; they say that African Americans are not serious and all that. Some may say I am intimidated by Americans but I don't call it intimidation because I don't think they are truly better than me. It's just that they are different. When I worked at a fast food restaurant, a white patron threw his money at me instead of giving it to me in my hand, and in the library at this southeastern university, my phone had died and I asked a White male student if I could use his, he refused but a Black male student let me use his. The professors are very nice and understanding; they are good.

Academically, the American system is easier. I think that is where I have an advantage. Nothing has been harder than "A" levels. Just to learn their terminology because they have a more advanced form of English but I have no problems with tests

and the short answer essays. When it comes to school-work, I don't let anything like relationships in group work get in the way. I am ultimately here because of my school-work. When it comes to school-work, I have no problems.

I do feel alienated. I feel very different from the typical American Black or White. Even though my uncle and aunts are here, I still feel homesick. Not lonely but homesick. I know so many people here. I was last home in 2006. I hope to be able to go home this year for Christmas but it all boils down to one thing: money.

I have health insurance coverage with the school but the insurance doesn't do anything. When I had an allergic reaction, I went to the health clinic, and what they gave me didn't work, and I was rushed to the emergency room because my body was itchy and my legs were swelling. What they gave me worked but I am now paying back a \$600 bill every semester. I just don't get the system here. I like the cleaner environment here; it favors my illness. At home, I was always having attacks because of the pollution in the air in the city but my boarding school was remote so I never used to have asthma attacks. I only have heavy breathing and a pounding heart here when I jog.

I know and have heard of so many people who have given up their studies due to financial challenges. Many of them have returned back home as a result of the financial difficulties they face in paying their school fees. Once they cannot pay their school fees, they lose their status as F-1 students and have to leave the country. Some people get married. Most of the time it's not for real. It takes time and involves a lot of money. If it doesn't work, you don't get your money back.

*Factors Responsible for Success*

In Africa, you don't give up. Even if you feel like hell is breaking loose, you stay there. I had a very strong background before coming to the United State. I have found my teachers here to be very helpful especially with regards to technology. Where I grew up, we are technologically behind. My faith is strong. I often do not know whether my school fees will be paid or not. I also don't know if I will end up like others who have had to drop out but I still have faith that everything will work out. One of my African professors says that he does not know how I do it and still walk around smiling with everything that I face. I don't let little things weigh me down. My mother is a strong Christian and brought me up to put things in perspective and not let problems bury me.

My family has been my strongest support system so far financially and emotionally. Both my aunties are divorced and going through difficult times of their own. In fact, one of them is sending her two children back to Cameroon to stay with my parents so that she can go to nursing school in order to have the financial background to give them a better life here. I don't know what happens to African men when they come to the United States? They change. My uncle's wife is in nursing school, too, so basically when it comes to financial support, I wouldn't say that they give me financial support.

My friends here are cool and awesome. They take up your time, you know. Sometimes you are tempted to doing what you know is not right but that's why they are there to pass time. Some people say that I am snobbish, quiet, and talkative. It depends on whom you ask. I behave differently in different environments. I do not have a need to know people.

My motivation is all because of my parents. They have put so much into me. What would kill me is if I turn out to be something that I know is against my parents. I don't want to disappoint my parents. They have an image and most people have the utmost respect for them especially my mother who is seen as a good, hardworking, and kind Christian woman. So far, my younger brother has disappointed my parents because he is still taking his final "O" level examinations when he should be in university. I feel it is an insult to be anything other than ambitious; my younger 16-year-old sister is now at the same level that he is at. I want to make my parents proud. They are supporting me financially.

The school support systems have not been very helpful to me. When my mum needed to have surgery, I requested a delay in the payment of my school fees. I was so desperate I even wrote a letter to the University Chancellor but did not get a response. As a result, I do not get too involved with the OIP and have never been to a coffee hour. They cannot help me based on what I need. I cannot even get a job on campus. If you go to the international meetings you do not see African students there; they are too busy working or in class at that time of the afternoon.

The Ministry of Education in Cameroon has promised me a \$2,000 scholarship, which I am yet to receive. I haven't received any here, not even free accommodation.

I definitely want to go back to Cameroon once I complete my education here and work for an American company in Cameroon like ARIVA or Chevron where I can be paid in dollars. I want to work in the power industry in an area related to renewable energy. [At our final meeting she shared that she got a \$1,000 scholarship. She is currently looking for a paid internship this summer].

*Recommendations to the School*

Most of my recommendations have to do with the financial challenges faced by F-1 students and culture. Provide a waiver to help international students pay their school fees given the weak value of most African currencies as compared to the US dollar [exchange rate]. Provide scholarships for those that have high GPAs. In Arkansas, there is an International house that helps international students with cultural adaptation challenges and housing. Organize activities that are of interest to African students. Most work due to their financial situation and are so busy that they do not have the time to attend the activities organized by the OIP. The activities organized by the OIP are nice but not effective in helping African international students adapt. I believe that the OIP tries a lot and they are really, really nice but it is hard to reach out to the African community. They say when in Rome do as the Romans do. I don't really think it is their job to bend but it is more of our job to bend to them. I don't think that there is much that can be done because they [OIP] have to support other international students that are part of the community. Conduct a survey on what African international students want. Most do not stay on campus; on-campus accommodation is much more expensive than off-campus accommodation like the four bedroom apartment that I share with three other students. I pay \$350 in rent monthly.

Our organization was resurrected last fall. They [southeastern research university] denied our organization funding last year, and the second time we applied, the amount they gave us was nothing. I don't want to say that they denied us funding because it's an African organization, maybe it's because we are new. The goal, as of now, is to create a place where we can be Africans away from school and life and America out there. We

would like to create a place where you can go if you are lonely, feel left out, or just want to get away from reality. And also try to reach out to the school to make them think about Africans. Sometimes you get the vibe that the community itself is not interested, and what they know about Africa is insufficient. Most members are from West and East and Central Africa.

#### *Advice to New African International Students*

Get involved in leadership activities and volunteer. Any activities outside of academics are important. Don't get distracted. Keep good grades. Connections are everything, meet and mix with others. Not everyone will be nice. Be patient.

#### Achalle

Eyele referred the researcher to Achalle. Everyone Eyele referred to the researcher responded to voicemail messages; as a gatekeeper, she was obviously well respected by her colleagues. Achalle and the researcher planned to meet at the library coffee shop; however, the researcher had thought that the library coffee shop was at the bookstore which is near the library. After ten minutes Achalle called the researcher to find out where she was and went to meet her in front of the bookstore. Achalle is a young dark man of about six feet. The interview began almost immediately as a decision was made to remain at the Chick-Fil-A at the bookstore and not go to the library coffee shop.

#### *Achalle's Profile*

My name is Achalle and I am 27 years old. I was born in southwest Cameroon but come from western Cameroon. I speak French, English, and German. My parents are divorced; I am the third of five children. My older sister went to school in Belgium and is an engineer; my older brother also went to school in Belgium and is an accountant. My

younger brother is a freshman studying engineering here in the United States, and my youngest brother is in high school. My father is a mathematician and has taught mathematics in secondary schools for the past 30 years. I obtained my undergraduate education in the physical sciences in Germany and came to the United States in 2002 for nine months as an exchange student. I came back to the United States in 2006 as an F-1 student and obtained my first masters degree in the physical sciences in a state university in the southern part of the United States. I came here [southeastern city] as a master's student in the social sciences in January of 2009. I will begin my doctoral program in the social sciences this fall and transfer my credits from my master's program.

I came to the United States because I don't really like the atmosphere in Europe that much. The United Kingdom though was an option for my masters because I was given a scholarship. The only place I really love to live in Europe is Germany. I had a lot of friends there. They were very nice to me, and they miss me a lot. I took classes for six months to learn the German language. I have never been to Spain; I think I would love to live in Spain or Italy. Canada was not an option for further studies because of the weather.

After I completed my master's degree at a state university in the south, I moved to the northeast and was hoping to get a place to do my optional practical training but could not find employment. My friends talked a lot about job prospects in the social sciences especially if I combined my degrees in the physical sciences with the social sciences. I did not plan to do another master's degree but did not want to go out of status. I searched online and found the master's program here that combined the physical sciences with the social sciences; I prayed a lot about it and felt that I could do it. I think that there are only

two universities that offer this particular program. I drove down here from the northeast and met with the Dean. I then applied and was given admission. While in this program I was approached by the Dean of the Ph.D. program in the social sciences. I applied and was given admission with funding. I will begin the Ph.D. this fall. My experience at this university has been positive so far and this city has been the best so far in my stay in the United States. I give this city a "B." It is quiet, and the people are friendly as compared to the southern city where I obtained my masters degree. The people there were not very friendly; I will never go to that city again. My expectation for myself in coming to the United States is to finish school. I came here to go to school. People are different. I don't judge people and really don't care about what they do, and that is their concern. My expectation is what I came here to do. I want to finish it.

My typical school day revolves around school studying during the day and attending classes in the evening; I am yet to get used to the evening classes that last for three hours. I do not have much social activities in my life at this point.

### *Challenges*

My main challenges are financial. As an F-1 student, I do not qualify for loans, and the school fees are just too high. You can't work, you just have to live. Everything is awful, just too difficult for you because you can't work, you can't do anything. Right now I am very stressed about how to raise the fees I need for the fall semester from family and friends. I have a portion of the \$8,000 but need to raise more than 60% before registration is over. These financial challenges are made worse because of the ridiculous conversion rate that most African currencies have to the United States dollar. Most people's family members are making the equivalent of US \$30,000 and, therefore, find it

extremely difficult to pay the \$16,000 plus required for their family members who are students in the United States. Look at Africa as a continent that is aspiring to better itself. Give African students some financial assistance so they can help themselves and, in the long run, help their countries. They cannot fulfill their dreams, the scholarships are very limited. So far, friends and family have been pitching in to pay my school fees here in the United States. Don't put African students in the same category with other people; we all know what happens in Africa...we all know what is going on there. I believe in God and I just believe that if you are determined, you will make it. I am still motivated and believe others should be encouraged.

My first semester here was very challenging because most of the concepts and terms in the social sciences were new to me. In my six years in college, I don't think I have written more than four essay exams. For my research, I will just go to the point and write what is necessary. I study most of the time just to get comfortable with the concepts.

I did not know much about America or Americans until I came here. I just knew that they have some good schools and do a lot of research. They have the money to fund research here, in other places it won't be funded. Given my experiences in Europe, I don't make assumptions about people until I have lived with them. Different people have different value systems and cultures and so it is important to respect their cultures/value systems and not pass judgment. I have been to many countries: Denmark, France, England, and Poland. My definition of culture depends on where you are coming from. Culture depends on your race. Culture depends on your location. Culture depends on who you are associated with. Everybody's culture is perfect to that person.

Respecting their cultures does not mean that you agree with them, however, but simply acknowledge the fact that they are different and figure out how to exist within the system. When in Rome act like the Romans, and you will have no problems. Here in the United States, they have different cultures. For example, the south is different from the deep south. Everything is different: the way they talk, live, and socialize. Culturally I have adjusted in some areas but have not changed my fundamental belief system. Do not change what you do fundamentally; I keep to my culture and stick to those who have similar belief systems.

Racial discrimination is a big topic. People might have a certain concept about others but most of the time, if you behave well, people will like you; they will love you. Look at a mirror, look at your character. If you behave well people will be nice to you and respect you. A lot of people complain about racism but I think some of them should keep quiet and look at themselves and behave well. As a group, if you do what is required, you will be respected. People won't respect you if you sit at home everyday doing nothing, or if you make five babies and you don't take care of them. Racial discrimination exists everywhere. At home, we call it tribalism. I don't focus on it; at this point in time, it is the least of my worries. If someone does not want to hang out with me because I am coming from somewhere, that is fine with me; I am not bothered by it. Nobody gives me oxygen. If you work hard, you will do well. You will be treated fairly but if you make noise and do not attend class regularly and then do not do well, how can you describe others as discriminating against you? On campus here, most students are friendlier than the southern university I attended. I give the students here a B plus. Off-campus people are also friendly. As a Black man, only God can hold me back; that's my

belief. Most of my friends that share my value system are White Americans, Indians, and other international students. I have no problems getting along with others. I am very focused on my goals.

I do not feel alienated, lonely, or homesick. No matter where I am, I have friends from everywhere. I love to meet people. I never had that problem in my life. I respect their culture, and I hope they respect mine also. I don't know [pause,] I have a strong heart; I have always been like that. I just pray that my family is being taken care of; I know that God is taking care of them. I left Cameroon nine years ago. When I have money, I call home every two weeks and talk to my mom. The only thing I wish is that my mum could be here. If my mum was here today, I wouldn't have any problems. I also call my younger brother every day. He is an F-1 freshman here in the United States. I think at a certain age when you are in grad school, you don't make friends that much anymore. You have to think more when you get older. At 21, I wanted to hang out with everybody but I have passed that stage; I am not really interested. If someone is genuine, why would I not want to be their friend? I want to be by myself most of the time.

[When asked about challenges with regards to social support, he asked the researcher to define social support.] The faculty is very supportive. Ninety five percent of them are willing to help you because that is what they are there for. I think the major problem for international students is finance. I don't see social support as a problem. There is a local Cameroonian association here but I have not attended their meetings. I would like to settle myself first before going. I do not want to go when I am needy. People will just think that I am coming because I need help. I am Catholic and go occasionally to a Catholic church near campus. I have not yet reached out to others. I

have never been sick; I just have the occasional headache. My most difficult challenge is financial.

Ninety-nine percent of the African students who have given up their studies have done so as a result of financial difficulties. I have a friend who was a pre-medical student and couldn't pay. Last semester, he couldn't go to school. There are a lot of stories of those who have had to drop out because they can't work, and the school fees are just ridiculous. If I think of my financial situation, I won't be able to go to class. It causes a lot of anxiety and difficulty. I think my head is like a lion [laughs]..ha..ha..ha.

#### *Factors Responsible for Success*

I am humble, never giving up when it is difficult. I have an aspiration and a quest for knowledge; I prefer knowledge to money. Ninety percent of my friends are the same way. Most of my friends are working on their Ph.D.s and we pull ourselves along. It's competition in a positive way. We all went to the same high schools. I worry about my mother and want to make her proud of me, probably even see me on TV someday.

I am motivated because no matter what challenges I face, I don't give up. I am a fighter. I might cry but I will come back later and wipe my eyes and start like nothing happened.

I don't believe activities like the coffee hour organized by the OIP is really achieving its purpose for all international students. They play games [board games]; I don't like to play games. Many of the students you see there are shy, they can't even talk, they are not very social, and the relationships end at the coffee hour. That's my opinion.

This school has supported me by granting me admission into a Ph.D. program with an assistantship that will begin in the fall. At that point, I will be able to earn a little income that will help me with my day to day sustenance.

I had a lot of family support while I was a student in Germany. In Germany, the German government pays for everybody so you just need to take care of your housing and feeding, that's all. We paid \$250 a semester and had free transportation. In Germany, you have a social system that looks after the poor. It's not like very expensive but was still expensive for Africans. You need to have several hundred dollars a month to take care of your home and feeding. You are not really allowed to work, but you can have a part time job but they are not easy to find. You have difficulties everywhere.

My family also supported me while in Germany and at the university in the south but now I have fallen out with some of my relations. My extended family, like my aunts and uncles, used to support me but I don't think that they were respecting me based on the fact that they were helping me. If you are supporting a child, support them to succeed not to follow your beliefs; know that they have their own ideas and opinions. My friends do help me out occasionally but I haven't really asked them for assistance. I live with a friend now so I don't have to worry about rent and my mum helps me.

I am open but conservative. My belief system has helped me to make friends, know what I want, know who to associate with and do stuff with, and who not to do stuff with. I have certain things that I value, it is how I was brought up, and I have never forgotten about that. My parents were very strict. They used to control the friends I had back home, and I have still have that imbedded in me. I think I have not forgotten because I stayed in Africa until I knew what life was. You have to stay there to have the

feeling of what being African is all about. There are so many African kids that are born here that look down on Africans. They think they are poor and look down on their parent's people; they just think that they beg and stuff. Some Africans who come here and are making good money think they have reached heaven; you should never forget where you come from. If you help others, don't complain. I have a friend whose father always told her that if he takes her home, they can only stay a few days because people beg a lot. He classified them like animals.

### *Recommendations to the School*

African international students are not aware of the opportunities that exist for international students like the Asian, South American, and European students. They are not many and most are young undergraduate students. They don't know about the environment and what to expect. Some are unaware of what is available. E-mails do not help much. OIP should reach out to the organization, talk to the president, and send students to these organizations so that they can know more when they get here. Help the African Students Association financially during some of their events like the African students week because they are bringing awareness. Let there be a bond between the African Students Association and the international office [OIP]. [Are you a member?] I am not a member because when they have their meetings, I am always in school [evening classes]. I have been to some of their meetings but most of them are very young and they think differently. I am five years older than most. There are very few graduate students that are members, that's a problem. [To mentor and guide them with the vision, purpose and goals of the organization, networking?] Yes, that's another problem, not just to socialize. Show them where they can get sponsorship from organizations that can help

them because they are not aware of these organizations. In my former school, our professional department used to give us up to \$1,000 whenever we were having an event. Different organizations sponsored our events; we didn't have to spend a dime.

Look into the school fees; it is very discouraging. Initiate a way for international students [African] to get loans to go to school that would be very helpful. Have study abroad programs to Africa, initiate exchange programs, get students from African schools to come here [America] just like students that come from France, India, etc. And send students to Africa to create awareness of the different cultures, etc.

#### *Advice to New International Students*

I'll ask them if they are comfortable and have a place to stay and then direct them to the African Students Association. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> college that I am attending and the 4<sup>th</sup> African Students Association that I have encountered. I have not really gotten involved in this association. The association is young and so are the majority of the students. They are mostly interested in socializing at this point and keep to themselves. They have to contact other student organizations and invite their presidents. By so doing, other student bodies will get to know about African Students Association -they need to know what the African Students Association is doing and they should send e-mails to all others. [Do you have any questions or comments?] Yes, how helpful will this study be to the African students?

#### *Cameroon*

When the country called Cameroon was divided, one part was colonized by the French and the other was colonized other by the British (The World Factbook, 2009). It gained its independence on January 1, 1960, and in 1961 both parts merged to form the

present country. Its capital is Yaoundé, and its legal system is based on French civil law with common law influences. Due to its relative stability, Cameroon has made progress in the development of its infrastructure like roads and railways and also in its agricultural and petroleum industries. It, however, faces problems of a stagnant per capita income and an unequal distribution of income with those in civil service making much more than the average person. Cameroon also has an unfavorable business climate (The World Factbook, 2009).

Its climate varies from tropical along the coast to semiarid in the north. Its natural resources are petroleum, bauxite, iron ore, timber, and hydropower. Cameroon has thermal springs and Mount Cameroon, which is the highest mountain in Sub-Saharan West Africa, is an active volcano. It has a population of approximately 18.8 million people with 56 % of the population between the ages of 15 to 64 years. Fifty seven percent of the population lives in the urban area, and the life expectancy is 53.69 years. There are eight major ethnic groups and 24 major African language groups with English and French being the official languages. There are three religious groups (indigenous beliefs-40%, Christian-40%, and Muslim-20%) (The World Factbook, 2009).

#### Emeka

A professional colleague who was also a doctoral student at this university referred the researcher to Emeka. While he agreed to participate through e-mail, he appeared to be very hesitant and tentative after phone contact was made. He wanted copies of the researcher's methodology and the steps that were going to be taken to safeguard and eventually destroy the source documents so as to ensure anonymity of the participants. After providing him with summaries of the above including a synopsis of

her 21-year professional career, he agreed to participate in the study. The researcher assured him that the study would be conducted professionally and also that confidentiality and professionalism has always been a requirement in her career where she is consistently handling confidential information. He discussed the study with his wife and agreed to have the three interviews in a classroom in his department on campus in the mid-afternoon after he had returned from his lunch break at home. He also agreed to introduce the researcher to his family at the end of the third interview at their home. Emeka was of medium complexion and about five feet 11 inches tall. His time management was stellar; he was always at school working on his projects.

#### *Emeka's Profile*

My name is Emeka. I come from the southeastern part of Nigeria. I am married with a young child. We live in an apartment very near the university campus. I am a Ph.D. student between the age of 35 to 40 years old. My parents are formally educated; my father is a retired civil servant, and my mother is a retired nurse. So in essence, one can say that I grew up in a family that values formal education. I am the first child of my parents and have five siblings, all of whom are college graduates except the last two who are still in university. Their fields of study are accounting, English language, mass communication, sociology, and architectural engineering.

I first came to the United States with my family in August of 2008 and chose to come to [southeastern research university] because I was given a scholarship. I learned about this program at this university by researching schools on the internet. At the time I began my research into schools, I was still in England with my family. I obtained my first degree in the physical sciences in Nigeria. I then obtained a masters degree in the

technology field in England and a second master's degree in the same field as my undergraduate degree in England. I am now working towards a Ph.D. in the same field as my undergraduate degree.

I come from a family that values education and was encouraged to continue to pursue my studies in the United States. I am lucky that my parents are not the typical Nigerian parents that would have put pressure on me by now to start making money so as to help with others at home and also to be seen as having achieved something after all these years away from home studying in England. I count myself lucky to be able to pursue my passion without that added pressure that so many Africans have once they leave their countries to start life or even studies in Europe and America. I did not share my decision to come to the United States with friends until after I had gotten admission and made plans to travel to the United States with my family. I did not want the discouragement. My wife has a professional degree in the social sciences and worked in England before coming to the United States with me.

I knew very little about Americans and America prior to my arrival. While I knew a lot from listening to the news, reading newspapers and magazines, and coming into contact with others who either lived here or have visited the United States, I had made contact with very few Americans while in Europe and was, therefore, hesitant to draw conclusions about the American people based on those I met abroad or stories told by others who are statistically nothing compared to the 300 million people who reside in this country. I know that the United States consists of population centers that have differences. I avoid making conclusions based on a few people; it is not just intellectually dangerous but culturally deviant to make an assessment of a group of people based on

those who you meet while traveling around. I have also had the experience of people making quick decisions on who I am without knowing who I am. As a result of this, I had no expectations when I arrived here in August of 2008.

I found out about this university on the internet; it was the only one that offered funding for a graduate student in my field. My search encompassed the United Kingdom, Canada, America, and other places. I really didn't care about the name of the university. I am an F-1 student, and my wife has an F-2 visa. A typical school day starts at 6am. I spend an hour each morning between 6 and 7 am working on my research project. I then spend the day working on my private studies, homework, assignments, and then lectures during the day and evenings. I take a break everyday between 11am and 2pm to go back home and spend time with my family. On a typical weekend, I do not study so as to spend time with my family. Since we don't have a car, our movement is very limited to areas that the public transportation system can take us around campus. We are Catholics and go to mass at a nearby Catholic church; friends sometimes pick us up and take us out for social activities. Pedestrian access is also limited and this limits where we can go to even though walking such distances is normal for us coming from England but the lack of pedestrian sidewalks makes this a dangerous prospect.

### *Challenges*

Most of my challenges are financial. Financial challenges for me are the greatest. Even though my graduate education is funded, it does not cover housing. My wife has an F-2 status and, therefore, cannot work. She is extremely lonely and frustrated being at home with no adult contact. In other countries, spouses of graduate students get work permits. Here spouses cannot get work permits; if they apply to study than their status

changes to F-1. The tax system here discriminates against married students. I was asked to complete my tax forms as a single student with no dependants whereas I have a wife and child living with me.

The public transportation system is not developed; it is irregular and cannot be taken for more than one trip in a day. If you take it for more than one trip it will take you hours to get from one point to your destination. It is not functional and is not child friendly; there is no place for strollers nor are there straps to securely buckle in toddlers. Accommodations are only made for the disabled. There is also no place to place shopping baggage.

Thinking along this trajectory, the university itself is not child friendly. There are no facilities for married people or children. There are no structures, physical structures to support this. For example, a forum for the spouses of students, a place to meet and interact, things to do during the day that can keep them busy.

Academically, the program has heavy course work, and I have to put in a lot of hours of self study to get up to the level of expectations. I have been out of school for five to six years. My professors are quite congenial, very friendly, open, and accessible. My professional colleagues are from different continents in the world, and the department operates as a family. Academically, I experienced difficulties. I believe the English language has been dumped down, the colloquial English is okay but in England they want it simple short and crisp. The United States English is different from British English, and I have experienced difficulties with pronunciations, the use of nouns and adjectives, and how words are placed in sentences or used in speech. For example, I would pronounce routes as roots. In the use of consonants, the last consonant does not make a sound for

mountain; the last consonant just seems to drill off. I have to take note of the differences in spelling and writing patterns. For some of my professors, English is not their official language, and so they are not connected to it and see it as a tool to get what they want. Also, outside of the university campus, you have to pay a lot of attention to understand what the people are saying; they have their own milieu of language, their own terms, constructions, and linguistic patterns, which you, as a new person, have to pay attention to or you run the risk of not understanding what they are saying.

In speaking about culture, we have to put some markers on what we consider as culture. Culturally, Americans, due to suburbanization, are encouraged to be dispersed. This suburbanization plays a great role in the way Americans interact. There is no congregation point; we are connected here by highways, and this plays a major role in how people meet and interact. People meet at specific places for specific purposes and, therefore, have that purpose as a point of commonality. The relationship revolves around that purpose and normally does not go beyond that purpose or extend into other areas. For example, parents meeting at their kids soccer games have that as a point of interest and interact based on that point of interest. I do not have any problems in my daily interactions with Americans. My interactions with them are based on areas of interest and purpose. I have not interacted with any of them deeply enough and, therefore, I do not feel that I am in a position as of yet to fairly describe the American people. I don't have a friend that is a United States Citizen. For example, I interact with people in school, church, and at shopping malls but have never been in the homes of any of these people. One or two have come to my home but that was more or less a business visit. From a distance, I believe that American people are more open and communicative than

European people, they are more accessible, and they smile more, exchange greetings, are more flexible, and, therefore, appear more human than the British who are very legal, procedural, and mechanical in their ways. They don't smile, they have long faces. My impression of the cultural dimensions and interactions of the citizens of this place is still ongoing.

I have not noticed racial discrimination on campus or in the community that we live in near the university campus. Having lived in Nigeria and Europe, I believe that I have experienced more discrimination in each of these areas than the United States. Racial discrimination is entrenched in Europe. This [pointing to his arm] black skin has been a major cause of delays in my work, career, and education; it has delayed my progress but has not prevented my progress.

An average United States citizen does not know the geography beyond his hometown; he does not know Africa. The learned United States citizen, however, is different and is many times bilingual and more flexible. Americans move a lot, and the presence of this university here is a global spot of knowledge. In other words, most people here in this university community have come here as a result of the university and are not native to this city. I have not yet met any natives so far. I believe the restrictions that F-1 and F-2 visa holders have is to make sure that there are job opportunities for the local citizens.

Feelings of alienation are not applicable to me. I am here with my family and do not feel lonely or homesick. Thanks to technology, I keep in regular contact with family and friends in Nigeria and Europe.

The health insurance system here is not accessible. In the British healthcare system, one is entitled to free health care regardless of status, and one is also cared for by the best of the best complementary practitioners regardless of their financial status. The American healthcare system does not appear organized, it is not accessible, and it is based on money and controlled by the private insurance system.

There is definitely a lack of social support for international students. Most policies are made for US citizens. Where I live, there is no play area or park within walking distance. There are no sidewalks for pedestrians to walk. The accommodations and policies at the school are run as if all graduate students are single.

#### *Factors Responsible for Success*

It is hard, you start to reflect on how and what. I have always had aspirations. I divorce my aspirations from my pains and stick to it. My aspirations are self-inflicted, almost self-destructive. I attribute my value system to the way I was brought up. You have to define a path and follow it up. I am faithful; no single factor is responsible for my success so far. It has been a combination of events, thoughts, and behaviors that have brought me to this point where I am today. I believe in taking advantage of opportunities.

My family has been a major source of support and are all still cheering me on. With regards to outside social support, my colleagues and fellow Nigerians have been very helpful to me and my family. I don't have as many friends today as compared to when I was younger. I keep in touch with friends that I consider relevant and am continuously making new friends.

The values of my ethnicity are very closely tied to my Catholic faith, which is the dominant denomination where I come from. The Catholic faith interfaces with the traditional religion of my ethnic group. There is also a strong belief in education.

I am open minded in dealing with issues. I have a strong belief in self; I am stubborn, I stick to my opinion, I am very pensive but I am at peace with myself. I am not materialistic, and the benefits I hope to gain from continued education are not materialistic.

The OIP has not done much for me; I, therefore, do not go there often except to show face.

#### *Recommendations to the School*

My perspectives will relate more to non-academic forms of support that relate to my personal life as a married Ph.D. student with a family living very close to the campus. For married students, I believe that the university should give spouses work permits as is done in Canada and the United Kingdom. The tax system should be reviewed and married students should be allowed to file as married students with dependents and not made to file as single students. The International Students and Scholars Office [ISSO] should expand its information system, which is only fit for those of US origin. For example, list preferred places of shopping, alternative forms of health insurance, information on the workings of the American credit system and phone system where one is charged for calls received and made. In Europe and Africa, one is only charged for calls made and not calls received. Other issues that need to be explained to international students at orientation include the privacy of personal information and unsolicited phone calls. The OIP did do a good job of putting me in contact with people of Nigerian

descent. Continue to do this; I found it extremely helpful. It is also important to have some form of orientation for married international students so that they know what to expect and also to have a provision whereby a student can arrive before their spouse and put things in order before the spouse arrives. Because the school actively recruits students from India and China, the activities of the OIP are geared towards these students; they should note that others are here on personal efforts even those on scholarships.

The university should note that the United States is no longer attractive to international students at the master's level. In Europe, a master's degree can be completed in nine months as opposed to two years here in the United States. While here for two years in the United States, one cannot work on the F-1 visa and has huge school fees to pay while in Europe, one can work and get a loan to pay off school fees. If the loan is not paid off, you do not get your certificate from the school. Given the aforementioned, the United Kingdom is making a lot of money from African international students who are able to go back home after the nine-month program. These universities also teach in English to capture this growing market segment. Even universities in Germany and Sweden teach in English.

Academically, the faculty should not feel that those who are married are trying to take advantage of their marital status if they have personal issues that need to be addressed because of the potential negative impact of these issues on their school work. In other words, I am asking for sensitivity towards those of us who have families here with us. We are not weak or trying to avoid our work loads. The information system as a whole in the United States is not comprehensive in explaining for example what privileges one has as a parent. The school should provide the conduit for obtaining this

information. In addition, the heavy course work in my program should be reviewed [nine credits a semester]. Two years does not give students enough time to prepare for their research paper properly. In addition to the research work and coursework, Ph.D. students are required to do assistantships, which I believe is counterproductive. One cannot be effective in both research and coursework.

#### *Advice to New Students*

I have no advice to give new students coming in from Africa because the struggle at home is far greater than the struggle here.

#### *Nigeria*

Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in 1960 (The World Factbook, 2009). Its capital is Abuja. It was ruled by the military for almost 16 years and transitioned to civilian rule in 1999. Its legal system is based on English common law, Islamic law, and traditional law. Nigeria has been plagued by political instability, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and poor macroeconomic management (The World Factbook, 2009).

Its climate varies from equatorial in the south to tropical in the center and arid in the north. Its natural resources are natural gas, petroleum, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, niobium, lead, zinc, and arable land. Its population is approximately 149.23 million and is Africa's most populous nation. Fifty five point five percent of the population is between 15 to 64 years, and 48% of the population lives in the urban areas. The life expectancy is 46.94 years. Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups and three major religions: Muslim (50%), Christian (40%), and indigenous beliefs (10%). English is the official language (The World Factbook, 2009).

### Thematic Analysis

The open-ended interview questions were designed to seek answers to the research questions in the words of the participants. Interview responses were read, and significant statements were extracted and organized into categories. Meanings were formulated and clustered into themes (Creswell, 1998; Seidman, 1998). The responses were placed in six categories, and the emerging themes within each category are discussed below. The six categories are personal background, choice of university, challenges faced, factors responsible for success, recommendations to the university, and proposed advice to new African International students. These categories and emerging themes materialized through the interviews with each participant, the transcription of the recorded interviews, comprehensive field notes, and journals in which the researcher reflected upon her feelings, the participants' feelings, and the settings where the interviews took place. The categories and themes are summarized in the table below.

Table 2

*Categories and Themes*

Categories	Themes
Personal Background	Country of Origin Family Background Age Perception of America Disappointment
Choice of University	Family Quality of Education Cost of Education
Challenges Faced	Financial Cultural Racial Challenges and Stereotypes Alienation Loneliness/Homesick Lack of Social Support Academic Health Issues
Factors Responsible for Success	Family Personality Motivation Belief System Outside social support/Friends School Support Systems
Recommendations to the University	Financial Cultural
Advice to new African students	Financial Cultural

Table 3

*Thematic Analysis*

Participants	Personal	Choice of University	Disappointment	Challenges	Success	Recommendations	Advice
Kofi	Both my parents are traders	My uncle lives here	I expected to focus on education but have bills	I have no time for myself, I have no social life	I am focused on my plans	Financial...student loans	Have a strong financial backbone
Fatou	My father is an agriculturalist..my mum owns a hair braiding salon	My parents live here..it is cheaper than the others	You have to work and go to school	I have to work and go to school	I ask for help..never feel too good to ask for help	More financial opportunities	Use resources, take charge of resources
Mohammed	My father is an engineer and my mother is an accountant	My dad's cousin lives here	People here work very hard it is not like the videos	My parents...paid our school fees by taking loans from friends, family and the bank	My parents kept me positive and encouraged me	More options for financial aid	Don't work while going to school it affects .academic performance
Eyele	My dad is a diplomat and my mum is a journalist	My aunts and uncles live here...it is cheaper	I expected the best but am disappointed	I have to worry about accommodation and food...fees	My family supports me financially and emotionally	A waiver to help with international school fees	Get involved in leadership..volunteer
Achalle	My father is a mathematician	I went online...they offered to fund my Ph. D	This city...is quiet, clean and the people are friendly	I can't get a loan...the school fees are very high	Humility..never giving up	Create an awareness for the African students	I'll direct them to the African Students Association
Emeka	My father is a retired civil servant and my mother is a retired nurse	I went on the internet...it's the only place that funding for a graduate student	The people here..have been very nice	Funding doesn't cover housing..with a wife on an F-2 visa and a child...it is very difficult	I am faithful...no single factor..a combination of events, thoughts, behaviors and patterns	Enable spouses to have work permits	No advice..the challenges at home are far greater than the challenges here

## Personal Background

In this category, the researcher asked questions that established familiarity with the participants so as to get to know them as people better before discussing topics directly related to the research questions. The researcher obtained the following information from this portion of the interview: countries of origin, their family background, their age, and their perceptions about America prior to arrival and how these perceptions compared to their reality.

### *Country of Origin*

All participants were from Western Sub-Saharan Africa. They came from Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, and Nigeria. Gambia, Ghana, and Nigeria were colonized by the English, Guinea was colonized by the French, and Cameroon was colonized by the French and English. Apart from Guinea, English is one of the main languages that is spoken, and as a result of this, all participants except Mohammed were fluent in English before coming to the United States. Eyele and Achalle, who are both from Cameroon, are also fluent in French. In addition to English and French, all participants were also able to speak their native languages; thus, they can all be described as either bi-lingual or multi-lingual.

### *Family Background*

Except for Achalle, all participants' parents were still married, and they all reported having siblings. Eyele, Fatou, and Emeka were the eldest children in their families, while Achalle, Kofi, and Mohammed were middle children. From the interview discussions, it became evident that all participants came from middle class and upper middle class families. Their immediate and extended families were strong and played

very vital roles in their lives. All participants' reported having at least one parent who was a white-collar professional with tertiary education except for Kofi whose parents were successful traders (business owners).

My dad is a diplomat and my mum is a journalist with the civil service...I have attended private boarding schools since I was 10 years old.....my mother's two sister's and her brother live here [southeastern city] ...my mother attended a course at Harvard University on a XX Scholarship awarded by Harvard University....." – Eyele

My father is a mathematician and has been teaching secondary school students for the past 30 years ..... My two older sisters live in Brussels and studied mathematics in Europe, my younger brother is an engineering student here in the United States...I have relations in different parts of the United States – Achalle

My father is an agriculturalist with a governmental agency here [southeastern city] and my mother has a hair braiding salon here....my grandmother obtained her first degree in England.. my mother's brother is a college professor in XX. My uncle has been very useful in helping me adjust to school here in the United States...I did one of my first school projects about him...When my father won the green card lottery he came to the United States 12 years ago, my mother joined him 10 years ago... my brothers and I joined them in 2006. While my parents were here my grandmother took care of us, we went to the best private schools and had everything we wanted... my parents always sent money home... – Fatou

My father is a retired civil servant and my mother is a retired nurse.....all my five brothers and sisters are university graduates except the last two who are still in university – Emeka

Both my parents are traders.....my oldest sister is a trader and my second oldest sister is a teacher, my older brother works with an educational foundation in Cape Coast and my youngest brother who is in university plans to be a teacher....when I first came I lived with my uncle here [southeastern city] – Kofi

My father is an engineer who got his graduate degree here in the United States, my mum is an accountant and got her degree in Guinea. They both work for an American company in Guinea... My older sister is here, my younger sister is studying communications in France and my younger brother is in high school in France...My father's cousin lives here [southeastern city]. - Mohammed

### *Age*

All the participants except Emeka were in their twenties. When asked for their age range, they all gave their exact ages without hesitation except for Emeka who gave his age range.

“I am 21 years old” – Fatou

“I am 24 years old” – Kofi

“Do you want a range or my exact age?...I can tell you my exact age...I am 27 years old” – Achalle“

I am 21 years old” – Eyele

“My age range is ....is let's say between 35 and 40 years...” – Emeka

“I am 22 years old.” - Mohammed

*Perception of America and Americans Prior to Arrival*

All participants were recent arrivals in the United States. Mohammed, who arrived in 2004, has been here the longest. Eyele arrived in 2005, Achalle and Fatou arrived in 2006, Kofi arrived in 2007, and Emeka arrived in 2008. It is interesting to note that Eyele, Fatou, Kofi, and Mohammed did not have any negative perceptions about America and Americans before coming. Their perceptions ranged from extremely positive to not knowing that much about the country or the people. Eyele, Fatou, and Kofi were all undergraduates in their twenties, and this was the first time each of them had traveled outside their country of origin. Mohammed, on the other hand, who had just graduated, had very similar perceptions to Eyele, Kofi, and Fatou. They all arrived in the United States with positive expectations; their family members and friends also believed that they were lucky to have the opportunity to obtain an education outside of their country of origin. Achalle and Emeka, on the other hand, were older graduate students who went to school in Europe. As a result of this, they both claimed to have come here with neutral expectations, not being in a position to judge the country and its people based on news reports, magazine and newspaper articles, or television shows until they came here and interacted with the people themselves. Achalle obtained his first degree in the sciences in Germany and a Master's in the sciences at an American state university in the south before coming to this southeastern research university to pursue a second master's degree. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in a Ph.D. program at this southeastern research university. Emeka obtained his first degree in the physical sciences in Nigeria and obtained one master's degree in the same field during his undergraduate

educational training and a second master's degree in information technology in England.

At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the same field of study as his undergraduate degree in this southeastern university.

I came here in January 2007.....I did not know much about America before I came here.....I knew that there were White versus Africans but I did not have knowledge of the relationship between the two...– Kofi

I came here in August of 2005.....Everything is good, the media is free, all is well and good...Americans are different...they are separated by race. – Eyele

I came here in 2006...[America is] Paradise on earth...the last destination...– Fatou

I first came here in 2001 for a two month vacation...it was then that I realized that people here work very hard....it is not like the videos.....this prepared me for when I came back in 2004. - Mohammed

I arrived here in August 2008....I knew a lot about America from news, magazines...and others who have been here... but I knew little about the people– Emeka

I came here in 2006.....I did not know much about the people....I did not like the atmosphere in Europe... – Achalle

*Disappointment*

Kofi, Fatou, and Eyele all expressed disappointment on arrival as their reality was not what they expected. Mohammed knew what to expect after his two-month vacation in 2001. Achalle and Emeka, on the other hand, who had both lived in Europe, liked this southeastern city and the people; they both prefer the United States so far to Europe.

I expected the best but am disappointed – Eyele

I expected to focus on education...but here you have bills...you have to work hard...life here is very different...my Uncle promised my parents that he would take care of me but after 9 months he asked me to find my own apartment – Kofi

It is not easy...you are kinda disappointed and shocked...life is in the fast lane...you have to work and go to school...they [African Americans] have no morals...they do not know what they have and do not take advantage of their opportunities...most do not care...and have babies....A lot of Africans want to come here...– Fatou

After my vacation in 2001 I came back ready for the reality - Mohammed

The people here so far have been very nice....– Emeka

My expectations are to finish school.....this city has been the best so far...it is quiet, clean and the people are friendly....I will give it a B+...– Achalle

*Choice of University*

In this category, the researcher sought to determine from the students why they chose to study in the United States instead of going to school in Europe, Canada, or Australia or even remaining at home in Western Sub-Saharan Africa. The themes that emerged from this category were family, quality of education, and financial reasons. Eyele, Fatou, Kofi, and Mohammed were all influenced by family members to pursue their tertiary education in the United States. The choice of this particular southeastern city also had to do with the presence of extended family members here. Achalle and Emeka, on the other hand, both found out about this university by searching on the internet for Ph.D. programs in their related fields, which would be funded by the school. In other words, Achalle and Emeka sought universities where they could pursue their Ph.D.s and have jobs as research assistants. Family members did not influence their decision to come to the United States, and neither of them have any family members in this southeastern city. They both also stated that the United States is known for the high quality of their research programs.

I won the green card lottery in 2006....I was already a second year science student in Ghana...my mother, brothers and sisters felt I should come and continue my education here...my father wanted me to finish my undergraduate degree before I came. ...My uncle promised to take care of all my funding if I came....I learnt about this school from my uncle, friends and family...I stayed for a year before I applied so as to get residency... – Kofi

I came to the US with my mum when she won the scholarship from Harvard University. My parents felt it would be a good opportunity for me to go to school here...especially since I wanted to study [professional science course]...I would have better job prospects at home and a better quality of life if I have a degree from the US...I was already doing my "A" levels in Cameroon. I first came as a J-2 student and when my mum finished I came here [southeastern city] because my aunties and uncle live here..this university is cheaper than the others...it is \$16,000 per year the others are around \$30,000 for international students...– Eyele

My dad won the green card lottery and came here, my mum joined him two years later...we came here because my parents were already here....also this university is cheaper than the other universities and I can live at home....I waited for a year before I applied to get residency...– Fatou

My dad is an engineer who studied in the United States.....my father prefers the American educational system to Europe.....that's why my older sister and I went to school here.....my dad's cousin lives in this city- Mohammed

I found out about this school on the internet...it is the only place that had funding for a graduate student in my field...– Emeka

I went online and saw their program.....I drove down from the northeast and spoke to the Dean about the program and then applied....they offered to fund my Ph.D....– Achalle

### *Challenges*

In this category, the researcher sought to determine the challenges faced by these students. Based on the review of the literature, the challenges faced by international students include cultural, financial, racial discrimination, alienation, loneliness, being homesick, lack of social support, academic, language difficulties, climate, and health issues (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Huang, 1977 Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; McClure, 2007; Myburgh, Niehaus & Poggenpoel, 2006; Ninnes, Aitchison & Klaus, 1999; Selvadurai, 1991; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). The researcher began by asking an open ended question, “What challenges do you face as you pursue your studies at this southeastern university?” Based on their responses, their answers were placed in categories. The participants were then asked about the challenges that they did not mention to confirm that these indeed were not challenges that they faced. Each participant began by talking about the financial challenges that they faced. Achalle began talking about his financial challenges even before the tape recorder was turned on. Following closely to the financial challenges were the cultural challenges, which were felt more by Eyele, Kofi, and Fatou, the younger undergraduate students. They all reported having experienced racial discrimination and stereotypes but claimed that those were the least of their problems at the moment; their financial challenges were giving

them all the greatest amount of stress. None of the six participants expressed being lonely. All four undergraduates (Kofi, Fatou, Eyele and Mohammed) did however express being homesick. This is because none of them have been able to travel back home since they arrived due to financial reasons. Only Kofi felt alienated by his classmates while working on class group assignments. Mohammed felt alienated because resources were available to non F-1 students which he believed enabled them to study stress free. They also linked their health challenges to their financial challenges and the private insurance health care system in the United States. They felt that the health insurance provided by the school and the health clinic on campus were very limited in the services offered and Eyele described bills from a referral to the emergency room as crippling. They all also felt that they lacked social support. Emeka was married and was here with his wife and child. As a result of his marital status, he had quite a number of challenges that were unique to his marital and personal status as a husband and father.

All six participants reported few academic challenges; Mohammed, who spoke French, had the greatest difficulty with language and spent a year learning English before he could start his program while Emeka took note of the differences in pronunciations, writing styles, and word placements between the British and Americans. The responses of all six participants resulted in the following themes:

### *Financial*

All students interviewed were extremely daunted and obviously emotionally stressed by their financial obligations. Fatou and Kofi, however, had less pressure than the others who were all F-1 students. Because Fatou and Kofi were permanent residents, they were able to apply for loans, grants, tuition assistance, and get jobs to take care of

their daily needs. They both worked long hours but were not in the dire situation of their counterparts. In addition, they reported having residency status and as a result did not have to pay the extremely high international fees that F-1 students have to pay. Fatou's parents lived in this southeastern city and have achieved a middle income status in the American society. During the interview, Eyele was extremely stressed about the fact that her parents may not be able to send her tuition in time for fall registration. She had hoped to go to school in summer but her parents were unable to send the tuition to her. The overriding themes here were financial difficulties in payment of the high international school fees, accommodation and feeding for F-1 students, and the need to work long hours by permanent residents to earn extra money for their daily sustenance.

I have to worry about accommodation, food, books.... it bothers me if my fees are not paid on time. Most African students work like crazy and still get good grades...the exchange rate is terrible between the CFA and the American dollar.....I am not supposed to work off campus but I had to get a small job very early in the mornings before school to help make ends meet...– Eyele

I am occupied throughout the day...I am taking 18 credits because anything over 12 credits is free....I start classes at 9am and end at 8.15pm. I then work the third shift at a grocery store...I am tired because of the overload...I have no time for myself...I cannot even watch television...I have no social life...I had to cut back my Saturday night shift so I can go to church on Sundays....the extra money is not worth it....it cannot even pay the bills.....I don't have enough time to sleep...because I am a permanent resident I get benefits, scholarships...tuition

assistance, grants and loans....they [southeastern research university] are very fair...if you deserve it they will give it to you...– Kofi

I was shocked by the credit and loans....I have to work and go to school...financial problems for international students are really hard, parents in Africa have to send school fees, many times they are not sure if they can pay the fees....F-1 visas can't work they have to babysit and braid hair to make money...F-1 students have a lot of restrictions...– Fatou

My parents were able to pay our school fees by taking loans from friends, family and the bank.....don't treat all international students the same, check out the GDP's of countries and see who can afford and who can't...who needs more help and who does not....most African countries have unstable currencies, it is difficult to budget....in the end the poorest people pay more than the richest....it is a private school to us and not public... for the first three years I was a "B" and "B-" student because I was working 30-35 hours a week...I only became an "A" student when I worked 20 hours a week as an intern.- Mohammed

As an F-1 student I can't get a loan, the school fees are very high...I have to figure out how to complete my \$8,000 tuition for my master's once I do that then I don't have to worry because my PhD will be funded...so far friends and family are helping me...it is very hard...I have been managing \$2,500 for accommodation, food, transportation, etc since April...the conversion rate is

ridiculous, my parents are making \$30,000 a year and my school fees are \$16,000....Look at Africa as a continent that is aspiring to be better....Give African students some assistance so that they can help themselves and fulfill their dreams.” –Achalle

Even though I have funding it doesn't cover housing....with a wife on an F-2 visa who cannot work and a child it is very difficult.....in other countries spouses get work permits...here no work permits for spouses unless they apply for study....the tax system here discriminates against married students...I have to file as single with no dependants while I have two dependants...- Emeka

### *Cultural*

The participants' perceptions of the cultural challenges they faced differed. Achalle and Emeka viewed the cultural differences more practically and philosophically and were able to put the differences in perspective. Emeka explained why he believed American culture differs from African cultures. Fatou, Kofi, and Mohammed noted the differences but claimed not to be bothered by them. Eyele, however, was profoundly affected by them. The essence of this theme is that there are cultural differences, and as a result of these differences, these African international students preferred to associate with fellow Africans on a close and personal level. While Achalle, Emeka, Fatou, Kofi, and Mohammed did not appear to be negatively affected by these differences, the methods they employed to cope with these differences were the same as Eyele's.

Adjust in some areas but do not change what you do fundamentally.....I keep to my culture...stick to those who have similar belief systems. – Achalle

In the US with suburbanization people are encouraged to be dispersed...there is no congregation point...they [Americans] are all connected by highways...this plays into how people meet and interact. Points of interest or purpose cause people to interact...friendships are therefore based on these points of interest and do not revolve around the whole person....As friendly as I am with my classmates I have never been into any of their homes. – Emeka

No cultural challenges...I'm trying to adjust...Do in Rome as the Romans do...Professors are very informal... – Kofi

It's hard to integrate because you spend so much time working and studying....there are little differences...why do people smile even if they don't know you? People don't do that at home. - Mohammed

It's hard to adjust to their way of life because you see things you don't expect. [Like what?] Okay in dealing with adults it's first come first serve...they do not give chance to elders or seniors....Babies making babies and taking the kids to class.....shame and disgrace won't let you come out at home....they just get support and welfare, they don't have a culture. You don't have elders giving guidance...they have no parental guidance and not much respect. – Fatou

Yes, the culture is very different...people are either at home or in their cars. At home you can go outside and have fun, you can take a stroll, see people, there is

music playing, that is your entertainment ...you don't have to pay money to have fun...I have tried to take part in activities but the American culture is so different. I feel intimidated due to my accent...I always feel that I have to prove myself...I don't know how to respond...I'm afraid to say something wrong...I try to speak professionally to Professors. I love the Association of African students we have the same views. [You are confident, why is it difficult to be yourself?]. ....Perceptions are different...I can get along with African Americans...there are different perceptions among the groups. Everyone initially is nice but afterwards not really...I can get along with Blacks they are loud and outgoing. Whites are different they are calm and view things different. I agree with their [Whites] way of life. – Eyele

### *Racial Challenges and Stereotypes*

Very closely related to cultural differences are racial challenges such as racial discrimination and stereotypes. Based on the review of the literature (Obiakor et al., 2000; Ogbu, 1978; Takougang, n.d; Traore & Lukens (2006); Waters, 1990), the researcher expected this theme to be the greatest challenge faced by African international students; however, their perspectives and attitudes on the topic were surprising. It was almost expected and therefore accepted. While they were aware of racial discrimination and all have experienced it, they accorded some of the blame to African Americans in the United States. Eyele and Achalle made references to African Americans that indicated a strained relationship between immigrant Africans and African Americans in the United States based on negative stereotypes. Fatou made references to African Americans when she discussed her cultural challenges. They acknowledge that the color of their skin was a

mitigating factor but in the words of Emeka, “it can only delay my success; it [pointing to the skin on his arm] cannot prevent my success” or in the words of Achalle, [gesticulating emphatically] “As a Black man, only God can hold me back.” The essence of this theme from the perspectives of these students is that racial discrimination is a challenge that does not have an impact on their academic success. It affects their personal and social lives outside of campus.

...Hmm that is a big topic....look at the mirror, look at your character, if you behave well you will be respected...if you don't come to class on time and regularly how can you claim to be discriminated against?....most young African American girls have babies...I don't have much in common with African American men...I don't know why.....most of my friends are other international students and White students....it [racial discrimination] exists everywhere...don't focus on it ...at this point it is the least of my worries....on campus most students are more friendly as compared to the school I attended in the deep south....off campus people are friendly...nobody gives me oxygen...as a Black man only God can hold me back. – Achalle

I have lived in Nigeria and Europe and have seen more discrimination there than the US. Racial discrimination is entrenched in Europe. This [pointing to his arm] black skin has delayed my progress at work, in my career and my education but it has not prevented my progress....it will not prevent my progress. - Emeka

I have not experienced it much in school....Outside it doesn't bother me....when you are walking behind a White woman they will walk faster and hold their bags tighter or if you are walking in a parking lot you will hear the cars being locked....I believe it is due to ignorance....it is not my problem....it is their problem. – Kofi

I do not encounter it here [southeastern research university]...this school is diverse...I only experience it at work. – Fatou

I know it is going to happen....I have not experienced it in school...I have not experienced it in class with the professors....I have experienced it on my way to work, I got stopped by the police because of my red uniform in my pocket...someone called the police. - Mohammed

I have experienced it at school and at work. I try not to take it personal but it is hard....a customer threw his money at me instead of placing it in my hand...a White person will think an African is an African American...the professor's are understanding. – Eyele

When asked if he felt stereotyped, Emeka talked about his perspectives of the typical American. Listening carefully, it can be seen that his perspectives are shared by the other participants.

The average US citizen does not know the geography beyond his hometown.....doesn't know Africa....the learned US citizen who

has traveled is many times bilingual and more flexible in accessing non US citizens. – Emeka

*Alienation*

With regards to alienation Kofi, Mohammed, and Eyele did feel alienated but Fatou, Achalle, and Emeka did not have feelings of alienation.

In class students know themselves....you have to ask to be included....American students know themselves.....it is easier to relate to other international students as opposed to Americans....they are not very friendly. – Kofi

...things are available to other students that enable them to study without stress...many parents just send kids to school and think the US will look out for you, you will get loans and it is not so....there is no financial support that will enable people graduate...always worrying about paying next semester's bills. - Mohammed

Probably not .....I do not hang out with people a lot.... My research group is very diverse. – Fatou

I feel different from every American.– Eyele

Not Applicable – Emeka

Not really. – Achalle

*Loneliness or Homesickness*

Only Kofi reported feeling lonely; Eyele and Mohammed were not lonely but were homesick. Fatou whose parents were here was neither lonely nor homesick. Emeka and Achalle, the graduate students, also did not report feeling either lonely or homesick even though both of them had not been home in a long while.

Yes, I'm lonely ...I try to make friends.....I have not been home since I came...maybe I'll go next year...I speak on the phone... – Kofi

I'm not lonely but I'm homesick...I have not been home since August 2006, I'm hoping to go home in December but it depends on money...I feel different –  
Eyele

I have my sister here and a couple of cousins...we are all in the same age range and stick together...I have friends in other states...I have not been home since 2004...the cost of going home is the same as the cost of taking summer classes...My mom calls every week....she came for my graduation...my dad stops by when he comes for work. - Mohammed

I keep in contact...I'm not homesick. – Emeka

I have been out of Cameroon for 9 years...my younger brother is in [southwest US]....I don't know... I have a strong personality...my heart is strong...I have always been like that ....I'm not homesick.... – Achalle

*Lack of Social Support*

Emeka and Mohammed felt that they lacked social support. Emeka's perceptions were closely linked to his immediate family that was here with him while Mohammed's response bordered on cultural differences between Africans and Americans.

Definitely....most policies are for US citizens only....there is no play area or park within walking distance...it [southeastern research university] is run as if it is for single people only. – Emeka

Here in the US you are on your own...people only care about their own business they don't care how you make it... - Mohammed

Africans support each other...at the end of the day we are all Africans.... – Fatou

I don't feel like I am lacking social support. – Kofi

There is a lot of faculty support....most difficult problem is financial...I have not reached out to others yet. – Achalle

*Academic*

All students interviewed were science and social science students. The common theme with the challenge of academics includes courses in the liberal arts or social sciences. These academic challenges involved major events that have occurred in the United States of which the average person is aware and they being foreigners were not aware of. Also terms and concepts specific to that subject matter. Emeka discussed the differences between American and British English, Fatou expressed having challenges

with technology, and Mohammed expressed difficulty with translation, critical thinking, and the stress of working off the books while studying.

No...American system is easier; nothing has been harder than “A” levels. They have a more advanced form of English. I have no problems with the tests and short answer essays. When it comes to school work no problem. – Eyele

I have difficulties... discussing issues in the American system that I don't have any idea about...I don't like the peer review...I don't have prior knowledge in liberal studies...I have problems with project work because the students know themselves...I feel violated..... don't have much problems with mathematics....here the students are free in Ghana you listen to the Professor. – Kofi

Economics and math was really difficult for the first two months...I had a hard time with the graphs...at home there was no practical application just find “X” or “Y”...back home you memorize...here it is a different ball game, the test is not set to reproduce...I had to work twice harder to translate [English] to get to the same level....for the first three years I was a “B” and “B-“ student because I was working 35-40 hours a week...I only became an “A” student when I worked 20 hours a week as an intern. - Mohammed

Spelling...using the [science graphing] calculator it was difficult to understand the technology...Africa is backwards. – Fatou

I had challenges the first semester...I was borderline...new concepts. – Achalle

...heavy course work...I have to put in a lot of hours of self study to get up to

level of expectations...the professors are open, accessible and

friendly....colleagues are diverse and work as a family...US English is different I

have problems with pronunciations, nouns, adjectives and where they place

words...outside of the university they have different linguistic patterns... - Emeka

### *Health Issues*

None of the participants reported having any health challenge apart from the occasional cold or headache. Eyele who has had one major allergic reaction here claimed

to enjoy better health with her asthma as a result of the clean and non-polluted

environment. When she was in Cameroon, she was constantly having asthmatic attacks.

A common theme, however, was the inadequacies of the health insurance coverage and services offered at the campus clinic.

I have asthma....but the clean environment has helped...I was always having

attacks in Yaoundé and Duala....when I had an allergic reaction here I went to the

clinic and they took me to the emergency room...I am still paying the bill.. –

Eyele

The health system is not accessible...everything is based on money...it is

controlled by the private insurance system. - Emeka

It's just the cold weather...I went to the clinic for injections [immunizations]... –

Kofi

I get stressed out over exams... – Fatou

Thank God..No! I am under the school insurance and haven't really needed it...For the first three years I had no insurance- Mohammed

I have never been sick...just sometimes headaches. – Achalle

*Reasons for African International Students Dropping Out*

When asked if they knew any student who had to drop out of school as a result of the aforementioned challenges, apart from Emeka, all respondents either personally knew of people or had heard of people who have had to drop out of school as a result of financial challenges. From their responses, financial challenges are responsible for African international students dropping out of universities. They all told stories of people in this southeastern city and others in different parts of the United States who either had to go back home or who were now part of the blue-collar underground economy in the United States.

Yes for financial reasons...no job...no papers...gas station jobs...F-1 can only work on campus with permit.. – Fatou

I know of those who have changed from full time to part time... – Kofi

99% are due to finance when you don't have money... – Achalle

Yes...they can't transfer to a 4-year school...it is too expensive. Most of the time they go out of status, keep working and look for solutions...once this happens it is hard to go back to school. - Mohammed

Yes, so many....some return back home because of school fees, finances, paper work and visas...I have a friend whose mum was accused of embezzlement... she[mum] is in jail and all her accounts are frozen....now she [friend] cannot go to school... – Eyele

#### Factors Responsible for Success

In this category, the researcher sought to determine themes that were responsible for the success of these students despite their challenges. Success in this context means that they had not given up despite their financial and cultural challenges, and in the case of Mohammed, they were able to complete the degree they came to obtain. Each of the undergraduate students (except Mohammed) received academic scholarships from the university and pursued physical science degrees. They were all very positive, determined, and optimistic. Emeka and Achalle dealt with all aforementioned challenges in Europe, and despite these challenges, both have acquired graduate degrees and are on their way to acquiring tertiary degrees. These students can, therefore, all be described as successes at this point. The factors they attributed to their success were family, friends, personality, motivation, and belief system. Kofi and Eyele found the African churches supportive and the atmosphere warm. When asked if they had outside social support the participants did not feel that they had outside social support. In the literature however outside social support includes the African churches and African friends (Hume, 2008). They also did not view the Office of International Programs (school support systems) as being supportive to their specific needs. School support systems have also been cited in the

literature as being a factor responsible for the success of international students (Cadman, 2000; Campano, 2007; Fischer, 2008 Lee & Rice, 2007).

### *Family*

My family supports me financially and emotionally. – Eyele

First of all my parents...they kept me positive and encouraged me to focus less on financial issues and more on school. Being here with my sister has helped me...I feel like we were a team taking classes together and studying together. -

Mohammed

My family supported me in Germany and the deep south, now though ....because they are trying to control my life and dictate what I should do....I don't want anyone to control me....we have had disagreements and that's why I am in a bad financial situation right now...– Achalle

I have no family support except talking to them on the phone.– Kofi

My parents and my uncle in XX me....my uncle motivates me and gives me advice... – Fatou

They [family] are still cheering me on...– Emeka

### *Personality*

Some say I am snobbish, quiet or talk too much. It changes depending on where I am and who I am with. I do not need to know many people. – Eyele

I am focused on my plans... – Kofi

I am pleasant, outgoing and ask for help when I need it. - Fatou

I am easy going...I don't let things sink in and break me down...I have some grumpy days...some have it worse than me. - Mohammed

Humility...never giving up when it is difficult.... Quest for knowledge...I prefer knowledge to money...most of my friends are working on their PhD's here and at home... – Achalle

I am open-minded in dealing with issues. I believe in myself....I am stubborn....I am at peace with myself....I stick to my opinion....I am pensive...– Emeka

### *Motivation*

In Africa you don't give up...we have an academic background...I don't want to disappoint my parents...they have an image. People...a lot of people have a lot of respect for my mum. She's a Christian, is hardworking and a good woman. My brother is not responsible...his behavior hurts my mum. I want to make my parents proud. – Eyele

My resolve...I came with a goal and worked hard to achieve it...my parents paid my tuition every semester...I just had to pay the bills...better than most...I set easy to reach goals and did not shoot for the moon. - Mohammed

Yes...I ask for help...I never feel too good to ask for help...everyone needs help....everyone needs people....I am persistent. – Fatou

I am very determined... – Kofi

Motivation? Yes...very. – Emeka

I am motivated...I am a fighter...I want to make my mother proud...maybe see me on TV someday. – Achalle

### *Belief System*

I have faith that I will graduate in December 2010. It is faith...I am unsure of my finances and not sure how I will pay...it is my upbringing....not to let little problems weigh me down. – Eyele

Yes...the church [Ghanaian church] is morally uplifting. – Kofi

Yes...I am spiritual and religious. - Fatou

I am open but conservative. – Achalle

I am faithful, no single factor....combination of events, thoughts and behavior patterns that come together...how I was brought up...you have to define a path and follow it...My [ethnic] tradition interfaces with my [ethnic] language and the Catholic faith. – Emeka

*Outside Social Support/Friends*

The Ministry of Education in Cameroon has promised me a scholarship of \$2000 but I have not received it. None here [hisses]...even if they could have [give] free housing... – Eyele

No outside social support....I don't have any specific friend....I have found it easy to make friends. – Kofi

My uncle is a form of social support for me....I have African friends because we think alike. I limit my interactions with Americans... – Fatou

Sometimes friends help...I haven't really searched for help. – Achalle

My colleagues are helpful...fellow Nigerians have been helpful. – Emeka

*School Support Systems*

I don't get involved...I'm too busy...I have no time...I have never been to the coffee hour...they cannot help me based on what I need. I cannot get a job on campus....my mum had surgery and I appealed if they could help me with my school fees and they couldn't help... – Eyele

Yes, financially ...grants and loans...that's all – Kofi

I don't know much about the Office of International Programs...they [southeastern research university] help with financial aid...the school could have done better for the African Students Association... – Fatou

Yes, they [southeastern research university] have offered me a PhD program, income, a place to live and the opportunity to go to school...the OIP coffee hour is not really meeting the purpose...they play games. I don't like to play games...Others are not very social...the relationships end at the coffee hour...  
Achalle

I do not do much with the OIP...they are not able to help much... – Emeka

The ELTI English experience was good I met a lot of people from different countries. Matt [pseudonym] at the ELTI really helped my sister and I. He helped us change our tourist visas to student visas, he told us about the urban community college and how it could save us money for use later here...OIP was supposed to help us but Matt was the one that helped us get apartments on the weekend...[but what about OIP?] They were alright; they got my I-20 very quickly when I got my internship job. I appreciated that. I never went to coffee hours...I was working, I lived far and did not have a car. - Mohammed

#### Recommendations to the School

The researcher conducted this study because she believed that the findings would have positive and practical implications. Most of the international students at this school

are of Asian descent; African international students are in the minority. Even though they are in the minority, it is important for there to be a platform for them to air their challenges and concerns and suggestions on how their needs can be met. All of their recommendations have financial and cultural themes.

A waiver to help with international school fees given the different currencies....organize activities that are of interest to African students... – Eyele

Financial....free accommodation, let students render service after education to help with tuition...students don't always get loans make these available to international students...time taken to work detracts from studies and social time...  
– Kofi

....[M]ore financial opportunities...we pay more and should be given opportunities....social support....help the organization [African students] to get involved and help students to be more involved, to join and share culture....Africans don't interact....job opportunities on campus, scholarships, get African mentors to talk to students to help students break their cocoons...Africans have to reach out and help one another...not everyone can handle all the difficulties...we have to work with the school to get support. – Fatou

African students are not aware of the opportunities like the Asians or South Americans or Europeans...most are undergraduates and young they don't know stuff about the environment and expectations before coming. Some are ignorant

about what is available...e-mails do not help much...go to the organization [African students] to talk to the students....assist the African students Association in some of their events...create an awareness for them and create bonds...sponsor or show them where to get sponsorship.....look into fees.....very discouraging....consider...loans.....initiate study abroad to Africa....exchange program...get students from African schools to come here from Africa....and send students to Africa to create awareness... – Achalle

More options for financial aid...let students who are doing good pay in-state tuition...have brochure on financial options not just a form for economic hardship...give work permits and let students go to school every other semester so as to save for the next semester....have more knowledgeable staff...most times you are referred to find a lawyer...we have to go to Yahoo ourselves...have contact person at the immigration services that can help students with issues...they call the same people we call...don't treat all international students the same, check out GDP of countries...and see who needs help and who does not...African countries have unstable currencies...lock in rates in African currencies...having international students is like being in international business...it is not the same price. - Mohammed

[E]nable spouses to have work permits...explain US credit system...continue to network students...ISSO did a good job of linking me to fellow Nigerians...system is geared towards students recruited from India and

China.....take note of others here on personal efforts..even those on scholarships.

– Emeka

#### Advice to New African International Students

Here the researcher shares what advice was given. The themes are cultural and financial.

[G]et involved in leadership and volunteer...activities outside of academics is important...don't get distracted, keep good grades....connections are everything...meet and mix with others...not everyone will be nice....be patient. –

Eyele

Have a strong financial backbone, there is no free food or accommodation, you will take care of everything, find part-time work.....part-time work cannot take care of expenses. – Kofi

You will face challenges – financial, cultural, racial discrimination even though I am not sensitive, academic and technology...take note of how you react, use resources and take charge of resources. – Fatou

Don't come here with a tourist visa...if you don't have to work don't work while going to school...it affects your academic performance...at some point you don't know what's more important going to school or paying for school...join one academic and one social organization. - Mohammed

I'll ask them if they are comfortable...if they are not I will direct them to the African Students Association. – Achalle

In addition to the in-depth interviews, the researcher also conducted an online survey sent out to the entire African student population at the university. This was done as a control to compare the results with the in-depth interviews. Only American citizens were unable to participate in this survey. The survey was sent out three times over a three-week period. Participation was low; only 25 students participated. Despite the low participation, their responses mirror the themes obtained from the in-depth interviews.

The results of the survey are summarized in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4

*African International Student Survey: Demographics*

Demographics	Description	Percentage
Age	18 – 30 years	60%
Gender	Male	60%
	Female	40%
Marital Status	Married	52%
	Single	48%
Children	Have children	32%
	Do not have children	68%
Country of Origin	West Africa	48%
	East Africa	28%
	Central Africa	12%
	North Africa	4%
Visa Status	F-1	48%
	Permanent Resident	52%
College Level	Undergraduate	44%
	Graduate	44%
	Post Graduate	12%
Major	Science	96%

Table 5

*African International Student Survey: Challenges and Support Systems*

Survey Question	Response	Percentage
Reason for studying in the U.S	High quality of education	96%
Length of Stay in the United States	6 years or less	72%
	More than 6 years	28%
Challenges Faced	Finances and culture	100%
Know African students who have discontinued studies for financial reasons	Yes	100%
Support Systems	None	36
	Family and Friends	60%
	Faculty	4%
	OIP	4%
Do you plan to return to your country of origin after your studies?	Yes	48%
	Maybe	28%
	No	24%
Do you have family here in the US?	Yes	60%
	No	40%

## Summary

The findings from this qualitative study were presented in this chapter so as to answer the study's two research questions:

1. What challenges did international African university students face as they pursued their studies?
2. What strategies did they use to overcome these challenges?

A profile of each participant was given in a narrative format and relevant information about their countries of origin was given in order to help the reader understand the participants on an almost personal level and place their responses in the proper context. After this, their personal background and how they chose this university were discussed. These students were all from Western Sub-Saharan Africa; they were

fluent in English, and came from middle and upper middle class homes. Their families and extended families played a very pivotal role in their lives. For the undergraduate students, their families influenced their decision to come to the United States and also influenced their decisions on which university to attend in the United States due to the presence of extended family members. For the two graduate students, they independently sought a university online that offered a program in their area of interest with an assistantship. Their choice of university, therefore, was driven by financial reasons.

Their challenges were discussed, and it was found that their overwhelming challenges were financial followed closely by cultural challenges. As international students who are required to maintain full time status and not work outside campus, these students, who had been unable to get on-campus jobs, were hurting financially. They came from countries where the value of their currencies is way below that of the United States dollar, and the cost of their education was extremely high for their parents. At \$8,000 a semester, the cost of their education is extremely high for an average American. Given the economic state of these countries in Western Sub-Saharan Africa and the renewed interest in higher education, the researcher believes that this is an issue that should be addressed. Their financial challenges gave rise to other challenges like feelings of alienation, feelings of isolation as a result of having a problem that no one seems to be able to do anything about, and being in situations where they have to find a means of being able to take care of their expenses not directly related to tuition. They also felt isolated because they had to work long hours and were unable to enjoy the social aspects of college life; they missed out on opportunities for intermingling with their host

classmates. They also experienced the psychological stress of worrying about receiving their tuition on time so as to pay their school fees and not go out of status.

As Black Africans, it was interesting to note that racial discrimination was not considered a major challenge to these students even though the literature describes it as one of the major challenges (Constantine et al., 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007; Obiakor et al., 2000; Takougang, n.d). They described the university campus and professors as warm and friendly. The literature however gave instances of African students facing racial discrimination on campus and in their interaction with faculty (Constantine et al., 2005). They reported experiencing racial discrimination off-campus but expected it and were not bothered by it, in general. Eyele, however, did take this very personal and was bothered by it.

There was an indication of a strained relationship between the African American students and the African international students, which supports the finding in the literature (Constantine et al., 2005; Goodlett, 1990; Obiakor et al., 2000; Takougang, n.d; Traoré and Lukens, 2006). The participants in this study kept to themselves and did not engage in physical fights or attempts to conform like the high school students in the urban high school studied by Traoré and Lukens (2006). They seemed to go out of their way to maintain a distance.

Their academic challenges were also not as daunting as expressed in the literature for international students (Haiwen, et al., 2006; Holvikivi, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Myburgh et al., 2006). Apart from Mohammed, who had to take English language lessons before coming to the United States and spend a year in the English Language Training Institute at this university, the rest of the participants were fluent in

English. Kofi experienced challenges with respect to the informal atmosphere in the classroom and the peer review assessments in which he felt isolated and unfairly rated by his American classmates. Fatou experienced challenges with the use of technology and continuous assessment tests. Emeka noted the differences between American and British English in the written and spoken form. Mohammed faced challenges with the critical thinking skills that were emphasized over the rote memorization required in his country of origin. While all these challenges support the literature, none has been significant enough to prevent these students from completing their higher education. Mohammed graduated in the semester in which he was interviewed in the social sciences and was sought by a number of companies to complete his optional practical training.

In discussing the factors or strategies responsible for their success, the major themes that emerged focused on family support, strong and persistent personality, belief systems, and the motivation to succeed. The school's OIP program was not perceived as being able to meet the students' needs financially and culturally. The inability to satisfy their needs in these two theme areas also negatively affected the OIP's ability to satisfy their needs with regards to loneliness, feelings of alienation, homesickness, and health issues. The main factor that may prevent any of these students from completing their degree program is the inability to pay their school fees.

Kofi, Eyele, and Mohammed planned to return home after completion of their studies. Achalle and Emeka did not discuss this. Fatou's parents have made their home here in the United States. In the survey, almost half the students planned to return home after the completion of their studies.

Chapter 5 presents an overview and significance of the study. The results are then discussed as it relates to the literature and methodology. This is followed by conclusions, limitations of the study and the researcher's recommendations.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Let not the shining thread of hope become so enmeshed in the web of circumstance that we lose sight of it” (Honor Books, 2005, p. 104).

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the international student body in the United States, the challenges that they face, the factors that they attribute to their success, the purpose and significance of the study, the research questions, the definition of key terms, and the delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 covered a comprehensive review of the literature as it pertains to international students in general and African international students in particular. The chapter also provided a brief geographical and historical perspective of the African continent and the state of higher education in Africa. Chapter 3 covered the methodology of the study and the reasons why a phenomenological case study was the preferred methodology in obtaining answers to the research questions. Chapter 4 introduced the participants to the reader in the form of first person profiles followed by a thematic analysis of their responses.

Following in Chapter 5 is an overview of the study, the significance of the study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

### Overview

The world today is indeed a dynamic global village with decisions and policies made in one country having an impact on many others. The world is engaged in the complex exchange of goods and services; one of these services is the education given to

international students. University education has been acknowledged as critical for the economic development of a nation (Bloom et al., 2006; Doss et al., 2003; Mamdani, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Schultz, 2003).

It has private benefits to the individual such as better employment prospects, higher salaries, and the ability to save and invest. The public benefits include economic development through technological advancement, sustainable population growth, improvements in health and agriculture, strong leaders, the ability to train its workforce to compete globally by developing relevant curricula, and an eventual impact on how citizens make choices that make democracy meaningful (Bloom et al., 2006; Doss et al., 2003; Mamdani, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Schultz, 2003).

The United States is one of the leading destinations for international students. These students come from all over the world to attain a higher education that is considered of high quality and accorded a prestige status to that available in their countries of origin. These students who are often the best and brightest in their countries of origin serve as cultural ambassadors of goodwill between the United States and their countries of origin. On average, these students have bright job prospects at home on the completion of their studies (Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007 & Marcketti et al, 2006).

The number of university level foreign students studying in the United States has grown from 48,486 (1.4% of total enrollment) during the 1959-1960 academic year to 623,805 (3.5% of total enrollment) in the 2007-2008 academic year (Open Doors, 2008). These students contributed 15.5 billion dollars to the U.S. economy in 2008, with 62.3% of this coming from personal funds. The majority of international students in the United

States are from Asia (61%) and 6% of these students come from Africa (Open Doors, 2008).

African international students come from the oldest, second largest, and second most populous continent where it is believed by most paleo-anthropologists that humans originated (“Africa,” 2009). Egypt, in North Africa, is believed to be the source of ancient civilization, and at its apex, African civilizations and kingdoms were reported to be comparable to their European counterparts. Africa consists of 54 countries with different ethnicities, races, religions, cultures, and value systems. It is endowed with natural wonders (lakes, mountains, deserts, and plains) and natural resources including oil, precious stones, metals, and minerals (“Africa,” 2009; Diop, 1974; Du Bois, 1965; Rodney, 1974).

Africa is currently the poorest and most under developed continent as a result of history, apartheid, and decisions made by international developmental agencies on areas requiring funding, debt relief and restructuring, and the devaluation of currencies during the structural adjustment programs (“Economy” 2009; Erinosh, 2008; Rodney, 1974; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002, Sall, 2003; Sawyerr, 2003; Varghese, 2008). Corrupt leadership, socio-economic, ethnic, and political conflicts have also had a negative impact on the development of the continent (“Africa,” 2009; Coombe, 1991; Erinosh, 2008; Piyushi, 2004; Rodney, 1974; Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

This has left its institutions of higher learning in a state of decay with extreme financial crisis resulting in dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms and halls of residence. Libraries have outdated books hindering the research capabilities of students and faculty, no equipment or chemicals to conduct experiments in the laboratories,

inconsistent and erratic supply of water and electricity, students who are unable to afford to attend universities and those that do are unable to afford three meals a day (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyer, 2004; Sawyerr, 2003). Finally, this financial crisis has resulted in disillusioned and cynical faculty members who teach without the advantage of technology, make very meager incomes, and have to earn extra income often in areas unrelated to academics for example driving taxis and trading (Coombe, 1991; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003; Sall, 2003). This, in turn, has negatively impacted their professional self-esteem, resulting in unethical compromises, psychic or actual truancy, the dereliction of their duties, and opportunism (Coombe, 1991). These members of faculty feel out of touch with the international community of scholars and are unable to conduct research. In 1995, Africa produced 5,839 published papers compared to 15,995 in South Asia and 14,426 in Latin America and the Caribbean (Bloom et al., 2006; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyerr, 2003). This has resulted in the loss of Africa's best and brightest to Western industrialized nations (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Erinosh, 2008; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Ndulu, 2003; Ramphele, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002).

Other challenges faced by African institutions of higher learning include strained relations between the government and universities and strained relations between student affairs and university management, which has resulted in several riots and closures (Coombe, 1991; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). Regional insecurity, anti-intellectual leaders, decisions made by the international development community and the proliferation of private universities, which may not meet accreditation standards all combine to create a

difficult general environment for these universities to operate in (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Erinosh, 2008; Henk & Metz, 1997; Johnstone, 2004; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sawyer, 2004).

### Significance

The aforementioned sets the context for the need and significance of this study. The majorities of African international students in the United States are self-financed and go through extreme difficulties in an attempt to get a higher education that has the quality that they cannot obtain in their home countries (Samoff & Carrol, Lee & Rice, 2007; Marcketti et al., 2006). International developmental agencies, donor foundations, and American universities have a renewed interest in African higher education and are presently conducting research that will provide a blue print for implementation (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Damtew & Altbach, 2004; Erinosh, 2008; Evenson, 2003; Fischer & Lindow, 2008; Johnstone, 2004; Mamdani, 2008; Ndulu, 2003; Ramphele, 2003; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sall, 2003; Sawyerr, 2003; Schultz, 2003; Thaver, 2008; Varghese, 2004). The resultant proposed solutions however will not solve the problems overnight and will take time. The nature of the problems in many African countries is a complex myriad of tensions based on ethnicity, religion, control of natural and financial resources, corruption, mismanagement of public funds and nepotism (Bloom et al., 2006; Coombe, 1991; Rodney, 1974). Based on the aforementioned, the researcher believes that these students who, on average, want to return home to make a difference in their communities can also be part of the solution. If so, then the challenges that they face while pursuing higher education abroad is a relevant part of the solution to the state of economic under development in Africa.

A review of the literature reveals that most studies focus on Asian international students. This is understandable because they make up 61% of the international student body. Their studies have been broken down by region and also by country giving universities an in-depth understanding of their backgrounds, cultures, value systems, and the challenges that they face. These studies on Asian students have provided the basis for providing culturally sensitive support systems to enable them succeed in the completion of their degree programs (Durkin, 2008; Haiwen et al., 2006; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Ninnes et al., 1999; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou et al., 2005). For this reason, many universities have a variety of support programs like English Language Training Institutes, administrative support for the filing of papers, coffee hours that enable students interact and get to meet one another, host family programs and social support networks connecting them to the greater Asian communities in the surrounding areas. As a result of the economic growth of Asia and the significance of the financial contributions of Asian students to the American economy, universities and colleges in the United States actively recruit them (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Comparatively fewer studies have been done on African international students, and those that have been done mostly place them all in one category. Information on African international college students is often found as a part of research studies done on international students in general.

A review of the literature has determined that the challenges faced by international students include differences in climate and living conditions, alienation and loneliness, personal, discrimination, stereotypes, language proficiency, cultural, academic requirements and expectations, and financial concerns. International students are able to

overcome these challenges by using the following coping mechanisms: flexibility, familial support, local support systems, school support systems, hard work, self-determination, motivation, as well as other factors such as sleep and exercise (Cadman, 2000; Constantine et al, 2005; Haiwen et al, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Huang, 1977; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; McClure, 2007; Myburgh et al, 2006; Ninnes et al, 1999 Selvadurai, 1991; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou et al, 2005).

This study was driven by an attempt to provide information about the challenges faced by African international students at a metropolitan research university in the southeastern United States. The researcher hoped the findings would better inform the university about African international students' specific challenges so that culturally sensitive adaptations can be made to the existing support systems to meet the needs of these students. African international students make up almost 10% of the international student body (F-1 and J-1 visas) at the university. The researcher also hoped that this study would give faculty and the greater student body more insight into the continent of Africa, its history, its strengths and weaknesses, and also the backgrounds of these students and their countries of origin. In their book *This isn't the America I Thought I'd Find*, authors Traoré and Lukens (2006) provided a thought-provoking discussion on the challenges faced by African immigrant students in an urban high school. The school authorities, teachers, and general student population did not know much about the continent of Africa beyond the images seen on television of children suffering from malnutrition and hunger, war, and stereotypes of Africa being a jungle and the people savages.

The researcher also hoped that this study would be the start of a discussion platform in which African international students are not invisible but have a voice and are recognized as part of the international student body at the university. It is also hoped that this will be the beginning of a medium in which African international students can share their concerns, hopes, and dreams and make significant contributions to the university community.

### Discussion

Six African international students that attend this university from Western Sub-Saharan Africa were interviewed in-depth to determine from their perspective the phenomenological essence of the challenges that they faced and the factors that they attributed to their success in overcoming these challenges. To understand these challenges, it is important to listen to their stories and experiences in their own words through interviews. Four participants were interviewed three times for 60 to 90 minutes, and two were interviewed twice. The participants were all asked the same open-ended questions and were prompted to discuss the challenges and support systems given in the literature that they did not mention. While the three interview structure was preferred, it is possible to get good results from two or even one interview (Seidman, 1998).

Qualitative research is based on an interpretive epistemology where social reality is based on the meanings constructed by those that take part in that reality. Social phenomena do not exist independently from their participants; therefore, different participants have different meanings for social phenomena. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to discover the nature of those meanings through in-depth studies of the phenomenon in its natural context (Gall et al., 1999). The data obtained from the

participants was rich and reflected their perspectives instead of reflecting the researcher's perspective (Gall et al., 1999; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Phenomenology is defined as “reality as it is subjectively experienced by individuals” (Gall et al., 1999, p. 309). This study was described as phenomenological because it sought to explore, by interviewing different African international students, the meaning or essence of being an African international student. It sought to identify the challenges faced and the factors which African international students attribute to their success.

This study was classified as a case study because the researcher asked “how” and “why” questions about contemporary events over which the researcher had no control. It also investigated a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context where the boundaries between phenomenon and context were not evident (Yin, 2009).

The limitations of qualitative research include the difficulty of separating the interaction of the participant and the researcher, which can result in reactivity, indeterminacy, and interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, because it would be impossible to obtain rich data without interacting with participants, the researcher employed the use of four techniques to eliminate the element of human bias and ensure balance and fairness. These were member checks, debriefing by noninvolved professional peers, triangulation, prolonged engagement and reflexive journals.

The researcher asked the following questions:

1. What challenges did African international university students face as they pursued their studies?
2. What strategies did they use to overcome these challenges?

The participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling with the goal of selecting participants who had specialized knowledge or perspectives that provided emic information that was rich with regards to information needed to answer the researcher's questions. The conceptual rationale for the method used is called criterion-based sampling in which participants met specified criteria (Gall et al., 1999; J. H. Lim, personal communication, July 22, 2008; Patton, 1989; 1990).

Following is a discussion of the findings as it relates to the literature and methodology.

#### *Country of Origin - Western Sub-Saharan Africa*

All the participants came from Western Sub-Saharan Africa. Cameroon, which is part of Central Africa, shares a long border with Nigeria. It is evident that colonization of Africa by the colonialists split cultures along this border into two separate countries. Cameroon is considered sufficiently close to the countries in West Africa for its citizens to share similar values, cultures, and beliefs systems ("Africa," 2009). This is important for a phenomenological study, which seeks, through in-depth interviews, to establish common themes with regards to the essence of an experience from the perspectives of the participants. Cameroon, Ghana, the Gambia, Guinea, and Nigeria have all adopted the language(s) of their colonizers as the official language(s). Cameroon has two official languages (French and English). These countries all gained their independence between 1957 and 1961, which means that all of these countries are less than 50 years old. They have all adopted the legal systems of their colonizers in addition to Islamic law in some countries and traditional or customary law. They all have similar climates and all have natural resources like petroleum, coal, clay, hydropower, and metals like bauxite, iron

ore, titanium, tin, zircon, manganese, limestone, uranium, lead, zinc, niobium, precious metals like gold, silver, and precious stones like industrial diamonds. They also have fish, timber, and salt. Ghana has the world's largest artificial lake, which is called Lake Volta (The World Factbook, 2009).

Despite these natural resources, the countries of origin of these six participants suffer from varying levels of economic, social, and political crises due to corruption and mismanagement of public funds by those in power (The World Factbook, 2009).

. These crises have resulted in the relative state of economic underdevelopment in these countries (Rodney, 1974), which has had a negative impact on the institutions of higher learning available to the populace (Bloom et al, 2006; Coombe, 1991; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). These countries have all experienced military rule and military coups (The World Factbook, 2009).

. These countries were also affected by decisions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The reduction in spending on tertiary education by the World Bank had a negative impact on tertiary education in Western Sub-Saharan Africa (Bloom et al., 2006; Samoff & Carrol, 2002). And the structural adjustment program instituted by the International Monetary Fund in the 1980's has had a negative effect on the value of these countries' currencies which has made the payment of school fees by the parents of the participants very prohibitive (Erinosho, 2008; Samoff & Carrol, 2002; Sall, 2003; Varghese, 2008). Given the currency fluctuations their school fees were not constant in the local African currencies making budgeting difficult for their parents.

Apart from Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa and whose people have a life expectancy of 46 years, the citizens of the participants' countries of

origin have life expectancies of 55 to 57 years. All of the countries have different ethnic groups, and they all have three religions (Muslim, Christian, and indigenous beliefs) (The World Factbook, 2009).

Students options for a globally competitive and quality tertiary education in their respective science and social science fields at home was very limited. In a study on the motives of Eastern African students seeking graduate education in the United States the ability to obtain advanced training not available at home was cited as a motive (Daka, 1986).

[Professional science course] is not a field that is very developed back home. I can't study [professional science course] back home. I won't get a job. There is one polytechnic university back home and it is French. I really didn't want to study in French. So if I had to stay back home, I had to study something like accounting or business. - Eyele

#### *Socioeconomic Status*

All participants except Achalle had parents who were still married. Eyele, Fatou, and Emeka were the eldest children in their families while Kofi, Achalle, and Mohammed were middle children. They all had parents who had tertiary education, and in some instances, tertiary education from abroad except for Kofi who described his parents as successful traders. They all came from middle class and upper middle class homes in their countries of origin. It is interesting to note that they were all pursuing courses in the sciences and social sciences.

My dad is a diplomat and my mum is a journalist with the civil service...I have attended private boarding schools since I was 10 years old....my mother's two

sister's and her brother live here [southeastern city in the US] ...my mother attended a course at Harvard University on XX Scholarship awarded by Harvard University... – Eyele

My father is an engineer who got his graduate degree here in the United States; my mum is an accountant and got her degree in Guinea. They both work for an American company in Guinea... My older sister is here, my younger sister is studying communications in France and my younger brother is in high school in France...My father's cousin lives here [southeastern city].

As a result of their socio-economic status, these students were the privileged few who were able to travel abroad to pursue a tertiary education financed by their parents. Their parents, aware of the state of global competition feared that their children would not have the quality of life and standard of living that they have if they attend these universities in Western Sub-Saharan Africa where the quality of education has fallen.

Despite their middle income status working in the civil service or for foreign firms, the weak value of African currencies relative to the American dollar as a result of the structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s has made payment of international school fees almost impossible. This difficulty was extremely stressful for the participants who were worried about receiving the funds, were unable to get on-campus jobs, and had to work off-the-books to sustain themselves.

This financial situation is particularly worrisome given the youth of the participants who were all in their twenties except for Emeka who was between 35 to 40 years old and married with a family. Sending one's child so far away, even with the

presence of family members in the United States, is a strong indication of how bad the state of tertiary education is in these Western Sub-Saharan African countries. These participants came from strong families where their parents, despite the distance, were very involved in their education and made the choice of school based on the presence of extended family members in the United States. Emeka and Achalle, who are post-graduate students, sought out educational opportunities globally on the Internet, giving preference to institutions that offered them research assistantships. The theme underlying their choices was financial.

My dad studied in the United States which is one of the reasons that he wanted me to come here...he really liked the way of teaching here because he studied in Europe before coming here...we had some family here so this was one of the deciding factors of which city to go....I haven't been home since 2004...my dad used to come [to America] for work and he would stop by. - Mohammed

My parents felt it would be a good opportunity for me to go to school here...especially since I wanted to study [professional science course]...I would have better job prospects at home and a better quality of life if I have a degree from the US...I was already doing my "A" levels in Cameroon. I first came as a J-2 student and when my mum finished I came here [southeastern city] because my aunties and uncle live here...this university is cheaper than the others...it is \$16,000 per year the others are around \$30,000 for international students... – Eyele

I found out about this school on the Internet...it is the only place that had funding for a graduate student in my field... – Emeka

I went online and saw their program.....I drove down from XX and spoke to the Dean about the program and then applied....they offered to fund my Ph.D.... – Achalle

### *Financial Challenges*

Financial challenges were the most serious for the participants and resulted in a lot of psychological feelings of stress and uncertainty. The F-1 students were not allowed to work off-campus; however, none of the undergraduate students were able to get on-campus jobs to supplement the tuition and fees sent by their parents. Given the very low value of many African currencies, the total cost of their school fees in their local currencies was out of reach for the average African citizen. It is even out of reach of the average American. African international students pay \$8,000 per semester in cash. Fatou, Eyele and Mohammed all went to the local community college first to complete the first two years of their university education as a result of the comparatively lower school fees before transferring to the four-year university. Kofi and Fatou who were permanent residents also complained of financial difficulties despite their abilities to get off-campus jobs, loans, grants, and tuition assistance. The permanent residents had cars but the F-1 students did not, and, therefore, financial challenges for them also translated into transportation challenges. The public transportation system in this southeastern city is not well developed. Financial difficulties with regards to school fees, housing and food are

cited as a critical challenge for African international students (Blake, 2004; Mulugeta, 1986; Njeru, 2006; Okafor, 1986).

I have to worry about accommodation, food, books.... it bothers me if my fees are not paid on time. Most African students work like crazy and still get good grades...the exchange rate is terrible between the CFA and the American dollar.....I am not supposed to work off campus but I had to get a small job very early in the mornings before school to help make ends meet... – Eyele

I am occupied throughout the day...I am taking 18 credits because anything over 12 credits is free....I start classes at 9am and end at 9pm. I then work the third shift at a grocery store...I am tired because of the overload...I have no time for myself...I cannot even watch television...I have no social life...I had to cut back my Saturday night shift so I can go to church on Sundays....the extra money is not worth it....it cannot even pay the bills.....I don't have enough time to sleep...because I am a permanent resident I get benefits, scholarships...tuition assistance, grants and loans....they [southeastern research university] are very fair...if you deserve it they will give it to you... – Kofi

I was shocked by the credit and loans....I have to work and go to school...financial problems for international students are really hard, parents in Africa have to send school fees, many times they are not sure if they can pay the fees....F-1 visas can't work they have to babysit and braid hair to make money...F-1 students have a lot of restrictions... – Fatou

My parents were able to pay our school fees by taking loans from friends, family and the bank.....don't treat all international students the same, check out the GDP's of countries and see who can afford and who can't...who needs more help and who does not....most African countries have unstable currencies, it is difficult to budget....in the end the poorest people pay more than the richest....it is a private school to us and not public... for the first three years I was a "B" and "B-" student because I was working 30-35 hours a week...I only became an "A" student when I worked 20 hours a week as an intern. - Mohammed

As an F-1 student I can't get a loan, the school fees are very high...I have to figure out how to complete my \$8,000 tuition for my master's once I do that then I don't have to worry because my PhD will be funded...so far friends and family are helping me...it is very hard...I have been managing \$2,500 for accommodation, food, transportation, etc since April...the conversion rate is ridiculous, my parents are making \$30,000 a year and my school fees are \$16,000....Look at Africa as a continent that is aspiring to be better....Give African students some assistance so that they can help themselves and fulfill their dreams. -Achalle

Even though I have funding it doesn't cover housing....with a wife on an F-2 visa who cannot work and a child it is very difficult.....in other countries spouses get work permits...here no work permits for spouses unless they apply for

study....the tax system here discriminates against married students...I have to file as single with no dependants while I have two dependants... - Emeka

*The Role of the Community College*

Fatou, Eyele and Mohammed all attended the local urban community college and completed their associate degrees before enrolling at this southeastern research university. By enrolling at the community college they were able to complete the first two years of their university education for considerably less (\$2,000/semester) than if they had enrolled in the 4-year university (\$8,000/semester). Fatou remained at home for one year so as to get residency status in the state; this gave her the ability to pay a lower in-state tuition rate. Community Colleges therefore play an important role in the education of international students who due to financial challenges seek out lower cost options with comparable value.

I went there as an international student...it was hard....it was about \$2,000 a semester...I graduated two years later...in the fall of 2007 I got my associate degree in science...I transferred to [southeastern research university] and .....started in the spring of 2008. - Eyele

I was a student here for...first one year and then I came back for the last two years.....as you know it is really expensive to go to school here...I did my English at ELTI here first so I did a year....my parents were not able to afford it so I had to transfer to [local urban community college] for the first two years which is going to save them money for me and my sister. - Mohammed

*The Role of the Media*

All participants were recent arrivals in the United States. Mohammed, who arrived in 2004, had been here the longest. Eyele arrived in 2005, Achalle and Fatou arrived in 2006, Kofi arrived in 2007, and Emeka arrived in 2008. The younger undergraduates had positive perceptions prior to arrival and were expecting the glamour of what they watched on TV. Their friends and families believed that they were lucky to have the opportunity to pursue higher education in the United States. Achalle and Emeka, however, were graduate students who had obtained degrees in Europe and claimed that they did not have any perception until they arrived. This is perhaps because they had similar positive perceptions prior to traveling to Europe (Germany and England respectively). It is interesting to note that the media portrays life in the United States as positive while it portrays life in African countries negatively, focusing on war, hunger, and poverty. This negative portrayal of Africa by the media is described by authors Traoré and Lukens (2006) in their book, *This isn't the America I Thought I'd find*. Therefore, the media plays a role with regards to stereotypes that exist in different societies and indirectly contributes to the challenges relating to stereotypes that African international students face in the United States.

I came here in January 2007.....I did not know much about America before I came here.....I knew that there were White versus Africans but I did not have knowledge of the relationship between the two... – Kofi

I came here in August of 2005.....I believed that everything was going to be good here, everybody has money, everybody lives comfortably, you know what you see

in the media...all Americans see about Africans are the negative aspects and all Africans see about Americans are the positive aspects. Everybody back home thinks that America is heaven but that honestly is not true. - Eyele

I came here in 2006...[America is] Paradise on earth...the last destination... – Fatou

I first came here in 2001 for a two month vacation...it was then that I realized that people here work very hard....it is not like the videos.....this prepared me for when I came back in 2004. - Mohammed

I arrived here in August 2008...I knew a lot about America from news, magazines...and others who have been here... but I knew little about the people. – Emeka

All the undergraduate students expressed disappointment at the realities after arrival. The graduate students on the other hand prefer the United States to Europe.

I expected the best but am disappointed...the day we arrived we were driving and stopped at a light and I saw one of these homeless people and I was shocked. I was like, people are homeless in America? I didn't have any idea about the reality of America – Eyele

I expected to focus on education...but here you have bills...you have to work hard...life here is very different...my Uncle promised my parents that he would take care of me but after 9 months he asked me to find my own apartment... – Kofi

It is not easy...you are kinda disappointed and shocked...life is in the fast lane...you have to work and go to school. – Fatou

After my vacation in 2001 I came back ready for the reality. - Mohammed

### *Racial Challenges and Stereotypes*

The participants report the professors as being fair and the racial atmosphere on campus as being positive. This is in contrast to the literature which cites racial discrimination as one of the major challenges affecting African international students (Blake, 2004; Mulugeta, 1986; Thomas, 1985). One or two negative incidences were shared. However, the strained relations between African immigrants and African Americans were picked from their responses. One participant was very hesitant to discuss the aspect of race and asked the researcher to turn the tape off so that he/she could adequately express his/her opinion on this strained relationship between Africans and African Americans. The findings from this study support the findings from the book *This isn't the America I Thought I'd Find* by authors Traoré and Lukens (2006) who found that African immigrant high school students in an urban high school either kept to themselves for familiarity and safety or engaged in physical conflicts or, in some cases, changed their accents, their dressing, and their behavior to fit in with African Americans.

The literature on African high school and university students support the findings by authors Traoré and Lukens (2006) where African students alienate themselves from American culture and associate more with those from their country, other Africans and foreign students (Blake, 2004; Ekaiko, 1981; Njue, 2004). The participants in this study reported having more in common with other international students and American students [Whites]. They kept to themselves and kept a distance from African Americans. The participants made reference to culture and work ethic as partial reasons for the stereotypes that exist about African Americans. Being university students, however, they did not engage in physical conflict. The participants did not give any indication that they felt African Americans looked down on them nor had any negative perceptions about them but they did indicate having negative perceptions of African Americans. In discussions, they emphasized their opinions about African Americans. These strained relationships were also recognized by the African Americans on campus, and an African American sorority on campus invited the African students to a panel discussion on the reasons for the strained relationship and proposed solutions. The findings from the present study on the strained relationship resulting from differences in culture, world views and self-concept between African immigrants and African Americans support the literature (Cisco-Titi, 1991; Clawson, 1983; Goodlett, 1990; Ismail, 1984; Ngumba, 1996; Njue, 2004).

The responses of the participants also support the findings of the author Ogbu (1978) in describing African immigrants as voluntary and autonomous immigrants that have distinct racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural identities and who, because they do not have a shared history of slavery, do not see the dominant group [Whites] as

their reference group. As a result, Ogbu (1978) suggested that African immigrants do not strive to assimilate with the dominant majority and that the ideology of innate inferiority may be absent in their relationships with the dominant majority (Ogbu, 1978).

A White person will think an African is an African American. Their perceptions are different...so in being myself among them I won't officially be the person I want to be in their eyes, yeah, the way that I will be the person that I want to be among Africans.....I don't truly think that they are better than me...it's just that they are different. - Eyele

Ogbu (1978), however, also gave explanations for the positions and perceived behaviors of African Americans in the American society. He described African Americans as involuntary minorities, the descendants of slaves who view school as part of the dominant White culture of oppression. Unlike voluntary minorities who, on average, have the choice of going back home and are willing to adapt to the expected difficulties faced by newcomers, involuntary immigrants do not have such options (Ogbu, 1978). They can make another country their home but it is not the same as going back to extended family members. Also, Africans are educated in the curricula of their colonialists, which focus on African and European history only. For this reason, most African immigrants are deeply shocked at how ingrained racism is in the social institutions that make up the fabric of the American society (Lee & Rice, 2007; Manyika, 2001; Obiakor et al., 2000; Takougang, n.d.). While many programs have been established to reduce the achievement level of Blacks and Whites in school, Ogbu (1978) stated that the reason that these programs do not work is that academic success has not benefitted members of their group (Blacks) as compared to the dominant group (Whites).

The educated members of the minority group have been unable to live where they want and have not been evaluated as individuals based on their training and ability. Therefore according to Ogbu (1978), racial stratification, underfunded schools, and the minorities themselves are responsible for the education achievement gap and the socio-economic gap that exists in society today. When one compares the position of African Americans to Black Africans in South Africa, one finds that the issues are very similar (Low, Akande & Hill, 2005). For the purposes of the present study, because Black South African students have experienced apartheid, the perspectives of these participants who come from societies that are almost racially homogenous cannot be generalized to them; their shared history is not the same.

It is important for African international students and African American students to receive education on American history, African history and culture in order to promote better understanding between the two groups.

...Hmm that is a big topic...look at the mirror, look at your character, if you behave well you will be respected...if you don't come to class on time and regularly how can you claim to be discriminated against?...most young African American girls have babies...I don't have much in common with African American men...I don't know why.....most of my friends are other international students and White students....it [racial discrimination] exists everywhere...don't focus on it ...at this point it is the least of my worries....on campus most students are more friendly as compared to the school I attended in the deep south....off campus people are friendly....as a Black man only God can hold me back. –  
Achalle

I have lived in Nigeria and Europe and have seen more discrimination there than the US. Racial discrimination is entrenched in Europe. This [pointing to his arm] black skin has delayed my progress at work, in my career and my education but it has not prevented my progress....it will not prevent my progress. - Emeka

I have not experienced it much in school....Outside it doesn't bother me....when you are walking behind a white woman they will walk faster and hold their bags tighter or if you are walking in a parking lot you will hear the cars being locked....I believe it is due to ignorance...it is not my problem....it is their problem. – Kofi

I do not encounter it here [southeastern research university]...this school is diverse...I only experience it at work..... they [African Americans] have no morals...they do not know what they have and do not take advantage of their opportunities...most do not care...and have babies....A lot of Africans want to come here... – Fatou

[I]n Africa we are all Black but sometimes you can go from one village to another and not be welcome so when you go somewhere as far as the United States I just feel like I have to be prepared for stuff like that. So, even when it happens it's true you get mad but you just continue on. - Mohammed

I have experienced it at school and at work. I try not to take it personal but it is hard....a customer threw his money at me instead of placing it in my hand.....the professor's are understanding. – Eyele

### *Cultural Shock*

The participants' responses to the question of cultural challenges are consistent with several of the findings in the literature (Airen, 1983; Benson-Jaja, 1993; Constantine et al., 2005; Ekaiko, 1981; Lee & Rice, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006; Njeru, 2006; Okafor, 1986). These include different tastes of food, Kofi cooks his own food and the economic and social system of the United States, Fatou did not understand the credit and loans. Emeka and Eyele were frustrated with the healthcare system. Emeka was also frustrated with how cell phone companies bill incoming and outgoing calls instead of outgoing calls only as is done in some other parts of the world. Emeka was frustrated with his wife's visa status and inability to get a job while the wives of graduate students in Europe can work. Eyele found the quiet environment uneasy, and preferred the noise and music that can be heard on the streets of Yaoundé as one takes a walk. She stated that the noise and music heard on the streets of Yaoundé was entertainment in itself as compared to the United States where one has to pay for entertainment. In the United States, according to Eyele, one cannot just experience entertainment in the people's way of life.

The participants found the culture here in the United States to be individualistic with no emphasis on the African-centered perspective of life. The African-centered perspective of life emphasizes community and group over individual, focuses on harmony, collective responsibility, commonality, cooperation, expressive individualism, oral tradition, and social time perspectives (Constantine et al., 2005). They also found the

friendship patterns of the locals shallow and not holistic. For example, Achalle, reported viewing the friendships developed at the international students coffee hour as starting and ending there. The literature describes the friendship patterns of Americans as high spread, low obligation, low duration, and high trust, which makes it difficult for students from high-obligation and high-duration cultures to establish relationships (Gareis, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006). The reasons for these characteristic patterns of Americans revolve around independence, self-reliance, and the mobility patterns of families who change residence every few years. This affects the ability of Americans to develop close friendships causing them to develop self-protecting habits, which, in turn, keeps relationships casual to avoid being hurt by repeated separations (Gareis, 2000). With this perspective, Achalle did not feel that such relationships were useful. Emeka succinctly explained why American friendships were not holistic but were based on areas of common interest such as sports. According to Hofstede's (2001) dimensions, Americans have been described as individualistic, masculine, short-term oriented, having smaller power distance, and weaker uncertainty avoidance. African cultures are generally more communal and friendship patterns and relationships have a long-term orientation. As a result, Africans generally do not hesitate to call on others for help, visit one another and share meals. Emeka did not feel that he really knew his colleagues because he had never visited any of their homes. Eyele felt that people were nice initially but not really afterwards meaning that they (Americans) were not ready to take the friendship to a deeper and more holistic level beyond the initial point of interest or contact. Also there is greater power distance or hierarchy in African relationships this can explain Kofi's unease at the informal relationships between professors and students in the classroom and

not being required to place a prefix (title) before an older person's name. Fatou was also shocked at the lack of respect given to elders in the society, she could not understand why an older person had to wait in line and not be attended to first.

The findings of this study support the U-curve adjustment pattern developed by Oberg (1960) who first introduced the term *culture shock* in 1954. He described culture shock as occurring in four stages: fascination with novelty, hostility, beginning of adjustment, and acceptance of the host country. Fascination with novelty involves the excitement and positive expectations of visiting someplace new, hostility occurs when the positive expectations are not met and disappointment sets in. Beginning of adjustment involves making changes to one's mindset and behaviors and acceptance of the host country involves adaptation to the culture of the host society. Kofi, Fatou, Eyele, and Mohammed all experienced fascination when they first arrived in the United States. Kofi, Fatou, and Eyele were still in the hostility stage. This can be seen by Eyele's nostalgia for her home country mitigating the seriousness of ethnic tensions in Africa.

In Africa everybody's the same you are only separated by tribal language...America is very diverse...I didn't know the depth of racism and other social issues...we don't have these in African cultures where everybody is the same. There is no competition; people are not fighting... - Eyele

Mohammed, who had just graduated could be said to be in the beginning of the adjustment stage. Achalle was in the acceptance stage while Emeka appeared to have been going through a combination of hostility, adjustment, and acceptance. As acknowledged in the literature (Oberg, 1960), these stages may not necessarily occur in

sequence, and a person can experience more than one stage at a time or revert to an earlier stage during times of difficulty. Symptoms of culture shock expressed by the participants that were consistent with the literature included homesickness and sadness. Here, too, the researcher believes that orientation programs that explain these differences in culture will be useful to both African international students and American students. This will foster better relationships and understanding between the two groups which is extremely important given the current dynamic global environment.

Adjust in some areas but do not change what you do fundamentally.....I keep to my culture...stick to those who have similar belief systems. – Achalle

In the US with suburbanization people are encouraged to be dispersed...there is no conjugation point...they [Americans] are all connected by highways...this plays into how people meet and interact. Points of interest or purpose cause people to interact...friendships are therefore based on these points of interest and do not revolve around the whole person.....As friendly as I am with my classmates I have never been into any of their homes. – Emeka

No cultural challenges...I'm trying to adjust...Do in Rome as the Romans do...Professors are very informal... – Kofi

It's hard to integrate because you spend so much time working and studying...there are little differences...why do people smile even if they don't know you? People don't do that at home. - Mohammed

It's hard to adjust to their way of life because you see things you don't expect...[like what?] Okay in dealing with adults its first come first serve...they do not give chance to elders or seniors.....Babies making babies and taking the kids to class.....shame and disgrace won't let you come out at home.....they just get support and welfare, they don't have a culture. You don't have elders giving guidance...they have no parental guidance and not much respect. – Fatou

Yes, the culture is very different...people are either at home or in their cars. At home you can go outside and have fun, you can take a stroll, see people, there is music playing, that is your entertainment ...you don't have to pay money to have fun...I have tried to take part in activities but the American culture is so different. I feel intimidated due to my accent...I always feel that I have to prove myself...I don't know how to respond...I'm afraid to say something wrong...I try to speak professionally to Professors. I love the Association of African students we have the same views. [You are confident; why is it difficult to be yourself?]......Perceptions are different...I can get along with African Americans...there are different perceptions among the groups. Everyone initially is nice but afterwards not really...I can get along with Blacks they are loud and outgoing. Whites are different they are calm and view things different. I agree with their [Whites] way of life. – Eyele

*Alienation and Loneliness/Homesickness*

Kofi, Mohammed, and Eyele felt alienated. Their feelings of alienation are consistent with findings in the literature in which international students feel resentment at being treated like uninvited guests. This resentment results in an unwillingness to interact

with others and creates an invisible cultural barrier that makes joining social circles and cliques difficult. Students like Eyele may also have different understandings and reactions to issues that are discussed, which contributed to her feelings of isolation and alienation. Kofi's exclusion from lesson groups also supports the literature regarding reasons for feeling alienated (Constantine et al., 2005; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Myburgh et al., 2006; Okafor, 1986; Selvadurai, 1991).

In class students know themselves....you have to ask to be included.....American students know themselves.....it is easier to relate to other international students as opposed to Americans....they are not very friendly. – Kofi

...things are available to other students that enable them to study without stress...many parents just send kids to school and think the US will look out for you, you will get loans and it is not so....there is no financial support that will enable people graduate...always worrying about paying next semester's bills. - Mohammed

Probably not .....I do not hang out with people a lot.... My research group is very diverse. – Fatou

I feel different from every American. Our goal [African Students Association] ...is to create a place where we can be Africans away from school and life and America out there...a place where you can go if you are lonely, feel left out or just want to get away from reality – Eyele

Not Applicable. – Emeka

Not really. – Achalle

Apart from the post-graduate students Achalle and Emeka, all the participants felt homesick.

Yes, I'm lonely ....I try to make friends.....I have not been home since I came...maybe I'll go next year...I speak on the phone... – Kofi

I'm not lonely but I'm homesick...I have not been home since August 2006, I'm hoping to go home in December but it depends on money...I feel different. – Eyele

I have my sister here and a couple of cousins...we are all in the same age range and stick together...I have friends in other states...I have not been home since 2004...the cost of going home is the same as the cost of taking summer classes...My mom calls every week....she came for my graduation. - Mohammed

I keep in contact...I'm not homesick. – Emeka

I have been out of Cameroon for 9 years...my younger brother is in [southwest US]....I don't know... I have a strong personality...my heart is strong...I have always been like that ....I'm not homesick.... – Achalle

### *Lack of Social Support*

Emeka and Mohammed both felt that they lacked social support. Emeka's perceptions were based on his family while Mohammed's perceptions were based on cultural differences between Africans and African Americans.

Definitely....most policies are for US citizens only....there is no play area or park within walking distance...it [southeastern research university] is run as if it is for single people only. – Emeka

Here in the US you are on your own...people only care about their own business they don't care how you make it... – Mohammed

### *Health Issues*

None of the participants reported having any major health challenges. Eyele reported having asthma. She described having an allergic reaction and being rushed to the emergency room. She, however, reported being happy with the clean and pollution-free environment of this city. She claimed to have constant attacks while in Yaoundé but fewer here. Emeka saw the American health care system as inaccessible to the average person. Eyele and Emeka's dissatisfaction with the health care system was fundamentally financial. Stresses and headaches experienced by the participants were expressed as being brought about by the financial stress of not being able to pay tuition and bills on time, the inability to find work on campus and the stress of having to work off the books at the risk of getting caught while juggling their academic studies.

I have asthma....but the clean environment has helped...I was always having attacks in Yaoundé and Duala....when I had an allergic reaction here I went to the

clinic and they took me to the emergency room...I am still paying the bill.. –  
Eyele

The health system is not accessible...everything is based on money...it is  
controlled by the private insurance system. – Emeka

[S]ometimes working and knowing that you don't want to get caught...you do not  
want to lose everything so we used to live with that little stress. Just stressful at  
times. - Mohammed

#### *Academic Requirements and Expectations*

The findings from this study are consistent with the literature regarding academic requirements and expectations (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Myburgh et al., 2006; Ninnes, et al., 1999; Selvadurai, 1991). While none of the participants were in any danger of failing (Eyele and Kofi were awarded scholarships during the previous semester for their outstanding grades), they shared experiencing a number of difficulties in academic requirements and expectations. Differences in the classroom atmosphere were unsettling to Kofi who attended university for two years in Ghana. He was not used to students talking when the professor talked or the relaxed and informal atmosphere in the class. He was stressed by the peer review portion of his class assignments because he felt that the students rated him unfairly because they did not know him. This was very distressing because he came from an environment where high grades were stressed. He believed that other student's perceptions of him had a negative impact on his grades. The peer review process also made Kofi feel alienated. Fatou was challenged by technology and stressed by the continuous assessments that were unlike the final exams given at the end of each

term in her home country. Achalle, who had been a pure physical science student, was challenged by the new concepts and terms in the social science courses that he currently studied. Emeka was conscious of the differences in the pronunciation of words between British English and American English as well as the use of punctuations and word placements. Mohammed was challenged initially by the critical thinking required. At home in Guinea, he memorized and repeated the information he learned; here he was asked to come up with practical applications of the concepts. As a result of these challenges, all of the participants worked very hard to gain group acceptance and respect. Language proficiency was only a problem for Mohammed who came from French-speaking Guinea. Despite having private lessons in English at home before coming to spend one year at the English Language Training Institute, he still had difficulties learning English at the college level. However, in discussions with the researcher, he was very fluent.

I have difficulties ..... discussing issues in the American systems that I don't have any idea about...I don't like the peer review...I don't have prior knowledge in liberal studies...I have problems with project work because the students know themselves...I feel violated..... don't have much problems with mathematics....here the students are free in Ghana you listen to the Professor. –  
Kofi

Economics and math was really difficult for the first two months...I had a hard time with the graphs...at home there was no practical application just find “X” or “Y”...back home you memorize...here it is a different ball game, the test is not set to reproduce....I had to work twice harder to translate [English] to get to the

same level....for the first three years I was a “B” and “B-“ student because I was working 35-40 hours a week...I only became an “A” student when I worked 20 hours a week as an intern. - Mohammed

Spelling...using the calculator it was difficult to understand the technology...Africa is backwards. – Fatou

I had challenges the first semester...I was borderline...new concepts. – Achalle

Heavy course work...I have to put in a lot of hours of self study to get up to level of expectations...the professors are open, accessible and friendly....colleagues are diverse and work as a family...US English is different I have problems with pronunciations, nouns, adjectives and where they place words...outside of the university they have different linguistic patterns... - Emeka

### *Returning Back to Africa*

Kofi, Eyele and Mohammed all expressed an interest in returning back home. They spoke about their career prospects back home and embarked on courses of study where there is a need for their skill set. Kofi and Eyele both spoke of renewable energy and power systems while Mohammed spoke of planned real estate development. Fatou’s parents have made their home in the United States but however still have strong ties to her paternal grandmother back home. Emeka and Achalle who are post-graduate students did not express the sentiment of going back home. None of Achalle’s older siblings returned home after the completion of their studies in Europe.

Kofi, Eyele and Mohammed believe that they will have good employment prospects back home in addition to a quality of life that they cannot have here in the United States. Eyele told the researcher during the final interview that she did not want to be as busy as the researcher when she got to the researcher's phase of life. She also shared the difficulties her aunts were facing in the United States resulting in one of them sending her children back to Cameroon to be taken care of by Eyele's parents while she went to school here in the United States.

I don't want to be like you, you are too busy, you have no help, you do everything by yourself...both my aunties are struggling with their own problems...their husbands left them.. I don't know why African men go crazy when they come here...she [aunt] is sending two of them [children] to Cameroon...my mum is going to watch them until it is time for them to go to college... - Eyele.

Mohammed spoke of the Africans who have come to the United States but have been unable to save any money; he expressed not wanting to be like them.

Lincoln said that a smart man learns from his mistakes but a wise man learns from the mistakes of others - Mohammed.

African countries stand to benefit if there is a healthy balance between those who return home after the completion of their studies and those who remain abroad legally. Those who remain abroad send remittances home and could be a source of technological

and economic development by maintaining contacts with their home country and investing in the private sector. Those who return back home will be able to transfer and utilize their skill set and knowledge base in furthering technological and economic development. It is important though that these students have practical experience related to the problems that exist in their countries of origin in order for them to be part of the economic and technological development (Amuzu-Kpeglo, 1985). If however most students who travel abroad do not return back to their countries of origin then this loss of skill set (brain drain) will have a negative impact on their countries of origin. Limiting study abroad opportunities to avoid this loss of skill set however would restrict the flow of ideas and publications between Africa and the industrialized world (Samoff & Carrol, 2002) and also discourage prospective returnees (Damtew, 1997).

The United States also benefits from this healthy balance. Students that remain behind legally become a part of the intellectual capital of the United States and those that return home to Africa often have goodwill and affinity for the United States (Lee & Rice, 2006). The participants in this study are talented, creative and have the drive, energy and discipline to succeed. According to Ndulu (2003) they are the potential leaders in their countries of origin. Since these students contribute positively to their countries of origin and the United States whether they return home or remain abroad it is important for the university community, their home governments, international development agencies and international donor agencies to be aware of the challenges that they face in attaining this skill set. The major challenge facing these participants were financial challenges. According to Samoff & Carrol (2002) African international students who are self-

financed have a lower rate of return to their countries of origin as compared to those who are primarily supported by foreign government scholarship programs.

A study by Okoli (1994) on "*brain drain*" and *the assimilation of African students into the American culture* determined that the longer an African student stayed in the United States the higher the probability that they will remain in the United States. Okoli (1994) also found that those students who are able to adapt easily tend to have more positive evaluations of the host society and better interpersonal communication with Americans, leading them to remain in the United States. Konfor (1989) had similar findings with regards to length of stay in the United States. Konfor (1989) also found that African students with higher levels of education and who came from democratic countries with political stability had a higher propensity to return home than those with comparatively lower levels of education and who came from Marxist economies with unstable political environments.

Given the culture of inefficiency and corruption in most Western Sub-Saharan African countries the positive impact that these students could have when they return home may appear minimal. However in interacting with these African international students and attending their meetings the researcher noticed the adoption of certain Western cultures by these students. They were observed to be very time conscious, none of the participants were late for any of the interviews, the researcher also observed that the meetings of the African Students Association started and ended on time as planned. There was a respect for the time of others. As small as this may appear it is a start in the right direction towards effectiveness in the achievement of goals and efficiency in the use of resources, time being a very valuable resource.

Many people that come here to study and stay get caught up in the rat race. Like you think you are making it. I know people that stay here for 20 or 30 years but they had this specific goal to make this amount of money but most of them don't even start saving after 20 years...something is always coming up...there is this vacuum...money finds ways to run out of your pocket. It is true that you are comfortable, you have electricity and water, many things that are not for granted if you go back home but I don't think that you achieve much. I always feel like I have what I can become in my country but I don't think that I can become that here...my dad said in Africa nothing is done so you don't have to be a genius to go and start something...all you have to do is apply concepts that worked somewhere else...if my parents were able to find ways to pay our school fees that means there are definitely opportunities in Guinea and Africa...I am kind of attached to my country and I know that sooner or later I will go back. That I know. - Mohammed

I plan to get a Master's degree in an area related to renewable energy and power systems; this will give me good job prospects back at home. - Kofi

### *Relations between African Students*

During the course of the interviews the researcher noticed that the African students at this university maintained close affiliations with Africans that came from their region. The members of the African Students Association were mainly from West, Central and East Africa. When the participants were asked of North African students who attended the meetings they all mentioned a particular North African student. There were

also very few South African students who attended. These affiliations reflect the manner that Africans affiliate and relate to one another in the greater community. African relationships strengthen from the regional level to the country level with the strongest affiliations being the ethnic affiliations that exist within countries.

The researcher believes that these affiliation tendencies are a part of the problem that has contributed to the economic underdevelopment of Africa. This is because strategic decisions most often are not made on a conceptual basis taking all stakeholders into consideration but on a regional or ethnic basis taking only a few stakeholders belonging to the ethnic or religious affiliation of those in power into consideration. This weakness is obvious among the African international students at this university. Efforts need to be made to bring them all together so that all of them are represented in decisions that are made. With representation from all parts of Africa they will have a stronger voice in the university community.

The North Africans have isolated themselves from the Black Africans, in all situations even when it comes to soccer. – Kofi

Most members are from West, East and Central Africa. - Eyele

#### *Factors Contributing to African International Students' Success*

The participants attributed their ability to persevere and not give up to their very strong family support. They were all in contact with their family members back in Africa who continuously cheered them on. They all described themselves as being persistent, being intrinsically motivated, and also possessing a very strong belief system. Christians reported their major outside social support as the African churches in the city. Achalle

and Emeka however did not describe the Catholic Church near the campus as being a strong source of social support. Eyele described herself as being Catholic and had attended a few Catholic masses initially but preferred to go to a Ghanaian Apostolic church where she felt more comfortable and welcomed. These students also found their fellow African friends in similar situations to be a strong source of support. They encouraged one another. These findings are consistent with the literature regarding sources of support where students isolate themselves from the host country nationals by keeping to themselves and forming in-group ethnic communities (Constantine et al, 2005; Hume, 2008; Myburgh et al., 2006). It is interesting to note that while the literature cites the Office of International Programs (school support systems) as an area of support, these students did not feel supported by the OIP (Cadman, 2000; Campano, 2007; Fischer, 2008).

The perception of lack of school support was not consistent with the literature. It should, however, be noted that this inconsistency did not relate to administrative filings; it related more to financial and cultural challenges, which were the primary challenges that the students in the present study identified. Luzio-Lockett (1998) discussed the impact of an international student's self-concept on academic success. This self-concept is constantly changing and is affected by the cultural environment by the school and can be helped by guidance and personal counseling.

Fatou however held the African students partially responsible for this lack of support because she believed that they did not reach out and interact with others. Fatou's observations are supported by the literature where it was found that African international students prefer to use informal sources for counseling and mental health as opposed the

established counseling and mental health centers (Essadoh, 1992). Mushambi (1994) also found that even though African students were aware of the school support systems they did not use them. By not interacting with others Fatou believed that the school was not in a position to provide culturally sensitive support systems. Studies however by Perrucci and Hu (1995) and Schram and Lauver (1988) as (cited in Lee and Rice, 2007) recommend that school support systems be tailored to the specific cultural backgrounds of these African international students. In other words have sensitized staff reach out to these students with orientation programs and support systems that they feel comfortable with (Njeru, 2006; Omotosho, 1998).

The participants' persistence supports Ogbu's (1978) argument that, for many voluntary immigrants, education has benefitted them in their countries of origin. These voluntary immigrants strive to attain this education so as to have higher standards of living and qualities of life. The participants were not deterred by their perceptions that the school's support systems did not adapt to their needs. They found other sources of support.

### *Motivation*

In Africa you don't give up...we have an academic background...I don't want to disappoint my parents...they have an image. People...a lot of people have a lot of respect for my mum. She's a Christian, is hardworking and a good woman. My brother is not responsible...his behavior hurts my mum. I want to make my parents proud. – Eyele

My resolve...I came with a goal and worked hard to achieve it...my parents paid my tuition every semester...I just had to pay the bills...better than most...I set easy to reach goals and did not shoot for the moon. - Mohammed

Yes...I ask for help...I never feel too good to ask for help...everyone needs help....everyone needs people....I am persistent. – Fatou

I am very determined... – Kofi

Motivation? Yes...very. – Emeka

I am motivated...I am a fighter...I want to make my mother proud...maybe see me on TV someday. – Achalle

### *School Support Systems*

I don't get involved...I'm too busy...I have no time...I have never been to the coffee hour...they cannot help me based on what I need. I cannot get a job on campus....my mum had surgery and I appealed if they could help me with my school fees and they couldn't help...they denied us [African Students Association] funding last year and the second time we applied the amount they gave us was nothing...sometimes you get the vibe that the community is not interested and what they know about Africa is sufficient – Eyele

Yes, financially ...grants and loans...that's all. – Kofi

I don't know much about the Office of International Programs...they [southeastern research university] help with financial aid...the school could have

done better for the African Students Association... Africans by nature do not reach out and interact with others so the school does not come out with themes that affect them. – Fatou

Yes, they [southeastern research university] have offered me a PhD program, income, a place to live and the opportunity to go to school...the OIP coffee hour is not really meeting the purpose...they play games. I don't like to play games...Others are not very social...the relationships end at the coffee hour...  
Achalle

I do not do much with the OIP...they are not able to help much... – Emeka

The ELTI English experience was good I met a lot of people from different countries. Matt [pseudonym] at the ELTI really helped my sister and I. He helped us change our tourist visas to student visas, he told us about the urban community college and how it could save us money for use later here...OIP was supposed to help us but Matt was the one that helped us get apartments on the weekend...[but what about OIP?] They were alright, they got my I-20 very quickly when I got my internship job. I appreciated that. I never went to coffee hours...I was working, I lived far and did not have a car. - Mohammed

### *Recommendations to the University*

After conducting a pilot study in the summer of 2008 on the effectiveness of the support systems given to international college students in the southeastern United States, the researcher purposed to further her understanding of the findings she gained. She

interviewed international student advisors at four different colleges in the area and spent eight weeks at the OIP office. During her eight weeks at the OIP office, she did not come in contact with the African student population. She saw many Asian students and surveyed them on the effectiveness of the support systems at the university. Because the pilot study was an independent study for which she did not get IRB approval, the results cannot be shared. In an effort to obtain results that could be shared, the researcher sought to complete this study. The present study was conducted at this university in order to bring to light the specific challenges faced by African international students who make up almost 10% of the international student population at the university. Listed below, in their own words, are their recommendations to the university. Their responses had financial and cultural themes.

A waiver to help with international school fees given the different currencies....organize activities that are of interest to African students... – Eyele

Financial....free accommodation, let students render service after education to help with tuition...students don't always get loans make these available to international students...time taken to work detracts from studies and social time...

– Kofi

....more financial opportunities...we pay more and should be given opportunities....social support....help the organization [African Students Association] to get involved and help students to be more involved, to join and share culture....Africans don't interact...job opportunities on campus, scholarships, get African mentors to talk to students to help students break their

cocoons...Africans have to reach out and help one another...not everyone can handle all the difficulties...we have to work with the school to get support. –

Fatou

African students are not aware of the opportunities like the Asians or South Americans or Europeans...most are undergraduates and young they don't know stuff about the environment and expectations before coming. Some are ignorant about what is available...e-mails do not help much...go to the organization [African Students Association] to talk to the students....assist the African students Association in some of their events...create an awareness for them and create bonds...sponsor or show them where to get sponsorship.....look into fees.....very discouraging....consider...loans.....initiate study abroad to Africa....exchange program...get students from African schools to come here from Africa....and send students to Africa to create awareness... – Achalle

More options for financial aid...let students who are doing good pay in-state tuition....have brochure on financial options not just a form for economic hardship...give work permits and let students go to school every other semester so as to save for the next semester....have more knowledgeable staff...most times you are referred to find a lawyer...we have to go to Yahoo ourselves....have a contact person at the immigration services that can help students with issues...they call the same people we call...don't treat all international students the same, check out GDP of countries...and see who needs help and who does not...African countries have unstable currencies...lock in rates in African

currencies...having international students is like being in international business...it is not the same price. - Mohammed

[E]nable spouses to have work permits...explain US credit system...continue to network students...ISSO did a good job of linking me to fellow Nigerians...system is geared towards students recruited from India and China....take note of others here on personal efforts..even those on scholarships.  
– Emeka

*Advice to New African International Students*

Here, too, the advice that these participants offered to new international students had financial and cultural themes.

[G]et involved in leadership and volunteer...activities outside of academics is important...don't get distracted, keep good grades....connections are everything...meet and mix with others...not everyone will be nice....be patient. – Eyele

Have a strong financial backbone, there is no free food or accommodation, you will take care of everything, find part-time work....part-time work cannot take care of expenses. – Kofi

You will face challenges – financial, cultural, racial discrimination even though I am not sensitive... academic and technology...take note of how you react, use resources and take charge of resources. – Fatou

Don't come here with a tourist visa...if you don't have to work don't work while going to school...it affects your academic performance...at some point you don't know what's more important going to school or paying for school...join one academic and one social organization. - Mohammed

I'll ask them if they are comfortable...if they are not I will direct them to the African Students Association. – Achalle

### Conclusions

International students contribute both tangibly and intangibly to the university community. Given the importance of the global village, these students serve as intellectual capital and ambassadors of cultural goodwill between their host countries and their countries of origin. African international students in particular come from countries that face a myriad of political, economic, and social crises. These crises are responsible for the relative state of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa today. More importantly, these crises have had fundamental negative impacts on the state of higher education in Africa. In order to reverse Africa's plight it is important for the continent to have labor that is skilled at the tertiary level. These African international students have the potential to contribute towards the economic development of Africa by improving infrastructure, technology and the educational curriculum to meet the needs of their societies.

While international developmental agencies and donor agencies in conjunction with American universities have been working hard to bring about change, it is important to not lose sight of these self-financed skilled workers who on average want to go back home and make a difference. Tertiary education has been acknowledged as being necessary for change in Africa. If these students are considered a part of this change

process, what can be done to mitigate the financial challenges that they face in obtaining this tertiary education in the United States?

#### Limitations

This study was conducted in one university in the southeastern part of the United States. As a phenomenological case study with participants from Western Sub-Saharan Africa, its findings cannot be generalized to the entire African student body at this university nor can it be generalized across the African international student body in the United States. This is because while one can assume general regional characterizations as a result of predominant cultural traits it is important to remember that individual differences exist.

#### Recommendations

These recommendations are suggested solutions to the findings of this study. The researcher recommends that a forum for discussion between the African Students Association and the university be conducted, formally recognizing these students as part of the university's international student body and giving them a voice. The researcher recommends that the OIP develop culturally sensitive programs and orientations to meet the needs of the African international students. Ask them for suggestions. While the researcher understands that most international students at this university are Asian and that most of the literature focuses on the needs of Asian students it is important to make accommodations for all international students.

The researcher also recommends that the graduate African international students get involved in the African Students Association. Differences in perspectives will enhance and broaden the goals and objectives of the organization thereby attracting a

broader cross-section of African students from North and South Africa. This will also attract students with families. Most members of the African Students Association are young single students from West, East and Central Africa.

With a more diverse membership the African Students Association can organize forums/workshops that effectively address the myths and racial stereotypes portrayed by the media with the goals of promoting cultural understanding between the races and within the Black race. These myths and racial stereotypes have contributed to the cultural challenges faced by African international students.

With a broader membership the association would also be in a position to contribute towards effective orientation programs for new African international students and develop support groups for those who are going through culture shock, alienation, loneliness, homesickness and also academic challenges.

Finally the researcher recommends that the university alleviate these students' financial burden in light of the exchange rates and the relative weight of their school fees in their home country's currency. Financial challenges contributed to these students' feelings of psychological stress, loneliness, alienation, homesickness and lack of social support. Financial challenges were also responsible for their inability to socialize with the host university community and detracted from their time for studies due to work.

On a positive note the students did not report racial discrimination as a challenge. They had very positive perceptions of the faculty and racial atmosphere on campus.

In order to enhance the literature on African international students the researcher recommends that similar studies be replicated in other universities with African international students from different regions of Africa.

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APPENDIX A: DISSERTATIONS ON AFRICAN  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS<sup>2</sup>

1960-1979

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<sup>2</sup> Dissertations are listed by date, with alphabetical ordering within specified timeframes.

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## APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER

Date

Dear Ms. XXX,

Thank you so much for the support given to me this summer as I conducted an independent study on support systems for international students at colleges and universities in the United States. The findings from my independent study have led me to my dissertation topic, Challenges Faced by African International Students at a Metropolitan Research University: A Phenomenological Case Study.

The goal of this study will be to determine the specific challenges African international students face and determine the factors and strategies to which they attribute their success. The findings of this study will provide the Office of International Programs insights to the specific needs of this group of students and how best to meet their needs through programs and services. It will also be of value to faculty who teach these students; it will provide them with a better understanding of the perspectives that these students may not readily share with faculty members. It will also enable new students to expect these challenges and be armed with the strategies to successfully overcome these challenges.

I am asking for your permission to conduct this survey with the entire African international student body at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am also asking your permission to recruit a sample of six African international students who are proficient in English and are either final year undergraduates or graduate students for in-depth interviews. Enclosed is a copy of the survey.

Thank you so much for your cooperative effort and assistance in this research study.

Sincerely,

Loretta G. Evivie

## APPENDIX C: STUDENT LETTER

Date

Dear African International Student,

My name is Loretta Evivie and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I graduated with an undergraduate degree in Accounting from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, West Africa in 1988 and obtained a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Maryland, College Park in 1997.

In partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree, I am currently working on my dissertation research on the perspectives of African international students at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte regarding challenges they have faced and factors and strategies they attribute to their success.

The purpose of this study is to determine what your specific challenges are and how support systems can be better customized to meet your needs.

Enclosed is a survey questionnaire that will not take much time to complete. Your specific responses will be most appreciated.

Please do not write your name or address on the survey. All the information provided will be kept in strict confidence and used for the purposes of this research only.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Loretta G. Evivie

## APPENDIX D: AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

1. What is your gender (male or female)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your age? 18-30 \_\_\_\_\_ 31-40 \_\_\_\_\_ over 40 \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your marital status? single \_\_\_\_\_ married \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you have children? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes how many? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your country of origin? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your status? F-1 \_\_\_\_\_ J-1 \_\_\_\_\_ PR \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you a[n] undergraduate student? \_\_\_\_\_ graduate student? \_\_\_\_\_ postgraduate student? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is your program of study? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What factors were most important in your decision to come to the United States?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How long have you been in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What major challenges do you face here in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you know of any African international students who have not completed their programs as a result of challenges faced? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What challenges caused them to discontinue their studies? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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14. What support systems have been most effective in helping you overcome your challenges? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. Do you plan to return to your country of origin after your studies? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you have family here in the United States? \_\_\_\_ If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

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## APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



You are invited to participate in a research study titled: **Challenges Faced by African International Students at a Metropolitan Research University: A Phenomenological Case Study**. I will be interviewing African international students who are proficient in English and that are either final-year undergraduate students or graduate students that completed their undergraduate education in the United States. Students must currently be attending the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

This study is being completed by doctoral student Loretta Evivie, in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, and Professor Corey Lock (dissertation committee chair, supervising faculty). Loretta Evivie is also an African student.

I would like to conduct 3 taped one-on-one interviews with you to talk about your experiences as an international student in the United States and your perspectives on what your challenges have been and the factors and strategies to which you attribute your success.

Each of these interviews will take between 60-90 minutes. There are no known risks to participating in this project. You are a volunteer. The decision whether or not to participate is completely up to you. You may choose not to answer any of the questions or to stop the interview at any time.

The recordings will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher and a panel of professional peers. After transcription, the recording will be destroyed and only the researcher will have access to the transcript. To further ensure confidentiality, your real name and any identifying material will be removed from the transcript and the written report.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact the researcher: Loretta Evivie, XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at xxxx@uncc.edu or Professor Corey Lock at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at xxxx@uncc.edu.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Please contact the university's Research Compliance Office (XXX-XXX-XXXX) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant.

Approval Date: This form was approved for use on Month, Day, Year for use for one year.

Participant Consent: I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the researcher conducting the interview.

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Participant Name (PRINT)

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DATE

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Participant Signature

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Investigator Signature

---

DATE

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Warm-up Questions

- What is your country of origin?
- What is your family background?
- What is your age range?
- When did you first come to the United States?
- Why did you choose to come to the United States as opposed to other countries?
- What did your family and friends think of your decision to study in the United States?
- What did you know about America and Americans prior to your arrival?
- What did you expect when you came to America?

Choice of University

- How long have you been a student at this university?
- What is your visa status?
- What subjects are you studying? Undergraduate or graduate?
- Why did you choose to come to this university?
- What is a typical school day like?
- What is a typical weekend like?

Challenges

- What challenges do you face as a student here?
- Prompts
  1. Academic?

2. Cultural?
3. Financial?
4. Racial Discrimination?
5. Alienation?
6. Loneliness or homesickness?
7. Lack of social support?
8. Health issues?
9. Do you know of any student who has given up his or her studies as a result of these challenges?

#### Factors Responsible for Success

- How are you able to overcome these challenges?
- Prompts
  1. School support systems?
  2. Family?
  3. Outside social support
  4. Friends
  5. Belief system?
  6. Personality?
  7. Motivation?

#### Closing Questions

- What advice would you give an African international student coming to this university?
- Do you have anything else to share with me today?

APPENDIX G: NUMBERS AND DESTINATIONS FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, 2004  
10 MOST IMPORTANT SENDING AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES

Outgoing	Incoming											Total
	France	USA	S Africa	UK	Germany	Portugal	Australia	Morocco	Canada	India	Other	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Botswana	849	488	7012	700			792				479	9471
Egypt		1822		799	1192						1833	6545
Ethiopia		1060		263	566					225	1208	3322
Ghana		3288		2798	744				222		1096	8148
Kenya		7381		3083			1115		341	521	1707	14123
Mauritius	1893		1732	1646			860			366	727	7224
Mozambique		93	815	71		1066	67				254	2366
Nigeria		6140		5942	630						2426	15138
Senegal	8329	805			256			435	246		606	10677
South Africa		1971		1408	196		643				1401	5619
Tanzania		1471	283	1053	115		119				866	3907
Uganda		696		885	121					93	659	2454
Other	97856	12273	26444	6841	18450	7470	1455	2782	2096	28	35299	211014
Total	108927	37488	36286	25489	22270	8536	5051	3217	2905	1233	48611	300013

APPENDIX H: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BY PRIMARY SOURCE OF FUNDING, 2006/07 & 2007/08

Primary Source of Funding	2006/07		2007/08		% Change
	Int'l Students	% of Total	Int'l Students	% of Total	
Personal and Family Funds	358,281	61.5	388,821	62.3	8.5
U.S. College or University	152,017	26.1	161,633	25.9	6.3
Home Government/University	18,704	3.2	21,085	3.4	12.7
U.S. Government	3,450	0.6	3,282	0.5	-4.9
U.S. Private Sponsor	8,003	1.4	6,013	1.0	-24.9
Foreign Private Sponsor	6,682	1.1	6,522	1.0	-2.4
International Organization	1,685	0.3	1,390	0.2	-17.5
Current Employment	29,262	5.0	29,399	4.7	0.5
Other Sources	4,901	0.8	5,660	1.0	15.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>582,984</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>623,805</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>

APPENDIX I: TOP 20 LEADING PLACES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS 2006/07 & 2007/08

Rank	Place of Origin	2007/08		% of Total Change
		2006/07	2007/08	
	WORLD TOTAL	582,984	623,805	100.0
1	India	83,833	94,563	15.2
2	China	67,723	81,127	13.0
3	South Korea	62,392	69,124	11.1
4	Japan	35,282	33,974	5.4
5	Canada	28,280	29,051	4.7
6	Taiwan	29,094	29,001	4.6
7	Mexico	13,826	14,837	2.4
8	Turkey	11,506	12,030	1.9
9	Saudi Arabia	7,886	9,873	1.6
10	Thailand	8,886	9,004	1.4
11	Nepal	7,754	8,936	1.4
12	Germany	8,656	8,907	1.4
13	Vietnam	6,036	8,769	1.4
14	United Kingdom	8,438	8,367	1.3
15	Hong Kong	7,722	8,286	1.3
16	Indonesia	7,338	7,692	1.2
17	Brazil	7,126	7,578	1.2
18	France	6,704	7,050	1.1
19	Colombia	6,750	6,662	1.1
20	Nigeria	5,943	6,222	1.0

APPENDIX J: NUMBER OF AFRICAN STUDENTS BY REGION & PERCENTAGES OF AFRICAN UNDERGRADUATES  
AND GRADUATE STUDENTS BY REGION

Place of Origin	2006/07	Percentage 06/07	2007/08	Percentage 07/08
Africa	35802		35654	
East Africa	13375	37.00%	12664	35.52%
Central Africa	3257	9.00%	3405	9.55%
North Africa	3700	1.00%	3858	1.08%
Southern Africa	2124	6.00%	2095	5.87%
West Africa	13334	37.00%	13632	38.23%

Place of Origin	Percentage Undergraduates	Percentage Graduate
Africa	58.20%	32.00%
East Africa	60.70%	30.50%
Central Africa	70.50%	21.40%
North Africa	38.50%	47.70%
Southern Africa	56.80%	34.00%
West Africa	58.50%	31.30%

APPENDIX K: COUNTRIES IN AFRICA BY REGION OPEN DOORS 2007

<b>East Africa:</b>	<b>Central Africa:</b>	<b>Northern Africa:</b>	<b>Southern Africa:</b>	<b>Western Africa:</b>
• Burundi	• Angola	• Algeria	• Botswana	• Benin
• Comoros	• Cameroon	• Egypt	• Lesotho	• Burkina Faso
• Djibouti	• Central African Republic	• Libya	• Namibia	• Cape Verde
• Eritrea	• Chad	• Morocco	• South Africa	• Côte d'Ivoire
• Ethiopia	• Congo	• Sudan	• Swaziland	• Ghana
• Kenya	• Democratic Republic of the Congo	• Tunisia		• Guinea
• Madagascar	• Equatorial Guinea			• Guinea-
• Malawi	• Gabon			Bissau
• Mauritius	• Sao Tome and Principe			• Liberia
• Mayotte				• Mali
• Mozambique				• Mauritania
• Réunion				• Niger
• Rwanda				• Nigeria
• Seychelles				• Saint Helena
• Somalia				• Senegal
• Tanzania				• Sierra Leone
• Uganda				• The Gambia
• Zambia				• Togo
• Zimbabwe				