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CULTURAL IMPACTS ON SAUDI STUDENTS AT A MID-WESTERN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The number of Saudi students studying in the United States quintupled from 3,035 students in 2005 to 15,810 students in 2010 due to a fully funded Saudi government scholarship (Open Doors, 2010). As students originating in a cultural background differing from the prevailing principles of their higher education institutions, Saudi students face several challenges. The cultural challenges are one of the most frequently apparent among these challenges (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Miller, 2002). Building upon the relationship between the cultural beliefs and student academic achievement, this study aimed at examining the cultural aspects of the increased presence of Saudi students enrolled in the various academic programs at a Mid-Western research university, Riverside State University, a pseudonym. The study followed the qualitative method for data collection and analysis. After conducting initial site observations and document reviews, primary data were collected from open ended interviews with students, administrators, and professors at the university. Study findings revealed various cultural implications arising from the continuous increase of Saudi students on American higher education campuses. The cultural construct was shown to have several subsequent aspects including: transition, academic life, and social life. University support systems were explored to demonstrate a replicable model that can be adopted to ease the cultural adjustment of these students. Recommendations demonstrate how various techniques can be utilized to increase Saudi students' engagement for academic success.

INTRODUCTION

The increased presence of a unique group of international students enrolled in the various master programs in the college of education attracted our academic and professional attention. Although the literature available at the time did not address the phenomenon, a quick review of the 2007 media reports and national statistics of international enrollment revealed a surge in the numbers of Saudi students enrolled at American institutions due to a fully-funded Saudi government scholarship that sends students to American universities to obtain graduate or undergraduate degrees (Institute of International Education, 2007). This confirmed the value of informed and structured research. We conducted an exploratory case study involving two Saudi

students, one administrator, and one faculty member. The study revealed that different aspects of the cultural construct are central to this group of students while studying in the United States.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

American higher learning institutions have witnessed an increasing influx of Saudi students since 2005 as compared to their numbers in previous decades (Institute of International Education, 2007). The academic year 2009-2010 has been a peak year for international students' enrollment in the United States with Saudi Arabia ranking tenth among the countries of origin of international students for the first time with 12,661 students (Open Doors, 2009). The presence of this growing student group on American campuses has significant implications for student affairs professionals, college professors and university administrators. Saudi students are experiencing circumstances different from other international students due to distinctive economic, academic, psychological, social, cultural, religious, and political factors (Miller, 2002). At RSU, Saudi students represent one fourth of the international population on campus comparable to Chinese and Indian students (Office of International Programs, 2009). In this article we explore one aspect of this phenomenon at RSU concerning the cultural construct of a sample of these students and its influence on their academic and social performance.

Scholars have addressed social, economic, and academic issues related to international students. Recently, researchers began investigating international students' adjustment patterns, linguistic problems, campus involvement, and academic achievement (McClure, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Wang, 2004). Though not fully comprehensive, a limited number of studies examined the cultural aspects regarding international students (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Wang, 2004). The current study, therefore, comes as a logical step considering the scarcity of studies of cultural constructs and the increasing Saudi student presence as part of the international student body on American campuses. Findings of the study reveal several essential aspects that can be helpful to stake holders of higher education in accommodating Saudi students.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As cultural constructs impact student success in colleges, this study explores cultural constructs of a group of Saudi students studying for a college degree in the United States in an effort to explore the multifaceted dimensions of their cultural background and the measures that can address their adjustment challenges to maximize success and benefits from their college experience. The study also offers a deeper understanding of the psychological alienation created by their presence outside their zones of comfort. Related to academic achievement, the patterns of cultural behaviors influencing these students while pursuing their degrees will also reveal rarely visited areas unique to the Saudi case. The research aimed to discover: 1) what Saudi

students expect when applying to RSU and the extent to which they perceive their expectations were met, 2) what perceived challenges faced these students, and 3) the effectiveness of support systems employed by RSU with respect to easing the adjustment of these students and providing them with necessary college survival skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student affairs divisions at American higher education institutions have been successful in accommodating diverse categories of students and helping them succeed in their quest for knowledge and learning (Thelin, 2004). The Saudi students' situation adds several constructs to the situation. Notwithstanding being Muslims and from the Middle East, they are raised in a highly collectivistic society known for its strict rules and close adherence to its traditions (Prokop, 2005). The religious values present in various life aspects in Saudi Arabia are strongly challenged with the absence of the religious role in the American educational setting (Thani, 1987).

Student Affairs and Internationalization

Aware of challenges that face international students, college administrators and academic departments often initiate support systems to help these students adjust to their new context and achieve their desired educational goals (Hayes & Lin, 1994). On the classroom level, the instructors' understanding and encouragement together with the application of cooperative learning strategies were found to help ease adjustment problems (Wang, 2004). Departmental awareness of the problems facing international students was examined to help in the academic and social adaptation of international students (Jochems, Snippe, Smid, & Verweij, 1996). On the institutional level, a system of mentors providing intensive coaching for international students during their first year ,together with programming that targets the inclusion of international students and improves their interpersonal relationships with domestic students was helpful (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Lacina, 2002; Lee & Rice, 2007). Institutions also should articulate the guidelines concerning working with international students in a way that raises the awareness of all persons involved in the educational setting (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Increasing the effectiveness of orientation programs to address the variety of the aforementioned challenges was suggested as one possible technique to help these students cope with the new environment.

Engagement and Inclusion

The friendliness of campus climate and the welcoming gestures to all students with the elimination of fear, oppression and stereotype threats have been established as an important

factor in easing student adjustment and consequently supporting optimal student development and positive college outcomes (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Keup (2006) also concluded that student affairs professionals should endeavor to create a campus environment that is loaded with meaningful as well as inspirational content in the curriculum. Keup (2006) also argued for dedicating resources to improve students' satisfaction, setting high expectations of student performances, initiating structures that help students study, and encouraging their collaboration and discussion of academic knowledge outside of the classroom. Among the factors that influence students' satisfaction are classroom experiences, friendships, and social activities which increase students' sense of belonging and willingness to persist in college (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Gloria and Ho (2003) argued that the strength of the social support elements like comfort in the college environment, social relationships, peer support, and students' self-beliefs are predictors of student success, college satisfaction, and academic persistence.

Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures

Culture refers to a group of shared beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices that bring to life shared meanings and the frame of references of a certain human group. Different cultures were often classified on the collectivistic or the individualistic continuum (Triandis, 1994). This continuum was often used to conduct cross-cultural studies focusing on individual perceptions of self, roles in society, importance of goals, individual and collective identity, measures of success, and individual gains (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Waterman, 1984). Triandis (1994) defined collectivism as a group of conceptions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and values tied toward one's own specific group of people linking one's bonds to a range of social concerns specific to that group. Interdependence and concerns of other group members' needs and interests ensures the presence of a strong social support and intensify senses of belonging (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). An excess of the sense of sameness and similarity fortify the boundaries collectivists set between themselves as a group and members of other groups as well as increase the in-group bonding (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Hui & Triandis, 1986). Individualistic cultures emphasize personal autonomy, independence, self-realization, individual initiative, privacy, and individual decision making (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Therefore, individuals in individualistic cultures are motivated by their personal goals and gains (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). Their interactions with others are governed by clear exchange relationships that are built on equity and allow emotional detachment (Waterman, 1984).

Due to the amount of behavioral pattern restrictions which the society places on its individuals, the learning styles of college students differ according to their culture of origin (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). In collectivistic societies, the students should receive knowledge from the teachers who embody the role of potential sages (Pak & Sands, 1996) while students' individual insights are not valued because learning and teaching is a responsibility for the good of the collective (Pak & Sands, 1996). On the other hand, students in individualistic societies are

responsible for their own learning where some instructors act as guides to knowledge rather than experts in the discipline. Institutions in individualistic cultures provide the learning environment where students can self initiate learning and get personally engaged in a self directed quest (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). When placed in a culture that is on the far end of the individualistic-collectivistic continuum as opposed to their culture of origin, college students with collectivistic characteristics showed depression, anxiety, obsessive–compulsive disorder and dependent personality traits (Youn, 2000).

Challenges for International and Saudi Students

When placed in their foreign educational institution, international students usually face challenges due to transition. These include: 1) finding accommodations and day to day life necessities, 2) acquiring academic skills and learning techniques, and 3) familiarizing and engaging themselves with college social aspects (Choi, 2006; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Kagan & Cohen, 1990). Experiencing greater difficulties than their American domestic peers, international students need tailored academic help and face specific social and psychological distress while settling in the United States for the first time (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Linguistic difficulties have been highlighted by various scholars as important factor influencing the adjustment of international students during their early years (Channell, 1990; Elsey, 1990; Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002).

Saudi Arabia ranks high in the collectivistic category because countries that demonstrate a high degree of clinging to traditional customs and social values are considered collectivistic (Long, 2005). Therefore, Saudi students are expected to demonstrate high collectivistic behaviors that shape their conceptualization of the relationship with others both within their own group and outside of their group (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). Such conceptualization influences their understanding, feelings, and reactions towards their situation in the United States as highly collectivist individuals placed in a very individualistic society. Possessing an orientation that is incongruent with societal values may represent a risk factor for individuals (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). Differences between the individuals' type and the society in which they live can produce various influences on those individuals with dependent personalities, especially their behaviors like social anxiety, obsessive–compulsive disorder and various types of depression (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Moreover, students from collectivistic cultures lack the requisite skills to make new friends outside of their group (Pak & Sands, 1996). Therefore, the case of Saudi students coming from a highly Middle Eastern collectivistic culture presents several constructs that add to the complexity of the case, the challenges they face, and the necessity for institutions to address these challenges to ease these students' adjustment and increase the possibilities of their success.

METHODS

We utilized qualitative research tools to explore the cultural beliefs of degree pursuing Saudi students at RSU and how they influence students' academic achievements, college engagement and social acculturation. Document reviews, field observations, and in-depth interviews were utilized. Three sampling strategies increased the objectivity of research findings: typical case, snowball, and information rich case (Paton, 2001). International students at RSU account for almost four percent of its total student population which provides a variety of circumstances enriching the case studied.

Participants

Participants included two college professors, two college administrators, and five male and three female Saudi students. The students were recruited through the professor and administrators recommendations as active and reflective students. Except for the eight Saudi students, other participants were involved directly in teaching or coordinating educational services targeting Saudi students. All Saudi participants spent more than a year in the United States and had to start with English language courses to get full admission into their academic programs. Their ages ranged between 20 to 27 years old. Various categories of Saudi students were represented in the study. Salwa studied for a master degree in educational instructional technology. Feras began the course work for the masters in civil engineering. Jehad was an undergraduate student of business administration. Zeyad was a junior majoring in communication technology. Ahmed was a sophomore majoring in technology. Hanan was a freshman majoring in information technology. Rabie was a doctoral political science student. Fadila, unscarfed, was a graduate student pursuing a master in public administration. John, a full professor in the Department of Communication, taught cross cultural communication techniques. MaryAnn taught three Saudi students at the College of Education last year. Theresa, a university administrator, was very involved with programming, coordination and advising for international students. Richard worked as the English Language Institute director.

Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining the Institutional Review Board approval, we conducted field observations of activities targeting international students and reviewed relevant documents issued from the Office of International Programs. The primary data source for this study was the 12 one-hour open-ended individual interviews conducted during the fall of 2009 with the twelve participants. Participants responded to a topical interview protocol eliciting their feelings, emotions, and experiences at RSU during the fall, spring, and summer semesters of 2008/2009. The several components of cultural constructs explored by the interview questions included influence of the

culture of origin, cultural challenges, transition, social life, and support systems available at RSU. After transcribing the responses, the data were coded and categorized within an emergent framework of relevant themes.

During the data collection, coding, and analysis, trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation and long-term observation. Triangulation was achieved through varying the data collection tools including document reviews, observations and interviews. Done over three consecutive semesters, long-term observation ensured the study's thoroughness covering a calendar year range of activities that coincided with different occasions and seasons. Open and fair solicitation of participants and an understanding of their cultural beliefs, roles, and reactions to the case at RSU ensured the authenticity of data. Member checking and participants' feedback also asserted that the data are dependable and reflective of the real dimensions of the case.

FINDINGS

Saudi students in the U.S. come from a society that praises the collective aspects of individuals. This is why "administrators at RSU try to involve Saudi students in several activities", says Theresa. Other than the academic services for international students like international academic advising and Student Success Seminar, RSU offers various social and cultural programs that target international students in general like Around the World Party; International Education Week Showcase with dance, food, and culture; Cross Cultural Dialogue; Conversation Partner Program; Conversation Group for International Women; and Summit International Friendship with the First Weeker Program, Host Family Program, and International Speakers Service. Other programs also target Saudi students either specifically or as part of the larger Muslim students on campus like Saudi Arabia days, collective dinner (*Ramadan Iftar*), Eid (Feast) Party, and swimming for Muslim women.

Culture

As collectivist individuals, Saudi students look carefully at what the entire student body, professors, and professionals at RSU think about them. They do not view it on a personal basis but as something that will speak about their group in the United States, their country, and their religion. Ahmed says, "… I care a lot about how Americans would look at me. We have the responsibility for our country and religion. If I do something wrong, they will say Saudi are bad or Muslims are not good. I think we represent Islam while we are here". Mary Ann sensed that feeling while advising some of her female students. "I felt so much pressure from their culture and religion. Not imposed on them… but I felt that they chose this pressure. They always feel they are the ambassadors of their country and religion," she says.

When it comes to offering help to other group members, Saudi students think of their responsibility to serve and support as something that is essential in their lives. It is not something

that is imposed on them as a Saudi or as Muslims, but rather an inherent characteristic in which they believe since the early years of their lives. "I tried to help any Saudi students and I asked the secretary of the ELI to give my name and phone number to any other Saudi student that she thinks might need help," says Ahmed. "I also try to help other Saudi women in the program by passing my notes from the previous semester to them. Sometimes, these notes are helpful," says Salwa. While these responsibilities appear as extra pressure on Saudi students while studying in a foreign country, they are valuable because they insure a strong support system that is always there for any group member who might need help. "And you know, sometimes another person will help me as well," says Salwa. Some students stated that they actually enjoy these responsibilities and take pride in helping others as something encouraged by their religious values.

The collectivistic thinking of Saudi students gets them to think of themselves as a group rather than a number of individuals. Such consideration, though positive in nature, fortifies the boundaries between the Saudi students as a group and the rest of the student body at RSU. Ahmed states,

> If I hang with other students, they are usually Saudi. They are a lot here now. I did not expect to see many of them and they were not as much when I arrived. I feel more comfortable with them than with American friends. We speak the same language and talk about the same things.

Another difficulty that Saudi students experience is making new friends with American students. The degree of connectedness of Saudi students sometimes hinders their ability to socialize and build new social relationships outside of their group.

The same collectivistic culture of Saudi students has a great influence on their reactions to the educational system at RSU. It also shapes the process of their decision making when trying to find the correct path through their college experience. Salwa says, "We ... have to read on our own and even choose topics to study by ourselves. There so much responsibility placed on us. I did not have this experience before." Saudi students often voice that fact in their advising appointments or in discussions with American peers. Mary Ann discovered that and says, "It is very interesting how these students as graduate students cannot choose for themselves when it comes to choice of classes, assignment topic choices, or roles in a group project. They usually want somebody else to choose for them which is not expected at that level, these are graduate students."

Although the placement of Saudi students as collectivists in a highly individualistic society like the United States seems very challenging and presenting difficult obstacles for these students, some students find it beneficial. They enjoy the freedom it provides them. Salwa reflects,

I haven't seen anything that can upset me [here]. I feel more freedom here than in Saudi Arabia. Yes, I live a better life with servants and drivers but here I can … I have been driving since the second month I came here. There is no obligation for me to wear my veil.

Challenges and Support Systems

Saudi students at the American institution face different challenges connected with their transition from their original educational system to the new educational environment. Such transition challenges are always coupled with the difficulties they encounter in participating in the social life inside and outside the institution. However, many more challenges face them while participating in the academic life with all its related educational activities. In facing these challenges, Saudi students may develop strategies to cope with different psychological influences they experience while in their new situation to achieve their goals. At the American institution, various support systems are offered to Saudi students from many levels to help them achieve their educational goals.

Transition

Saudi students expressed a large number of transitional experiences connected with their study in an American institution. The degree to which this transition experience may influence the performance, adaptation, and success varied from a student to another. "I was totally frightened from what may come my way in America. You know the wars are still going on in the Middle East and things happen," says Ahmed. Salwa says the same, "when I finished the first class, I went to my husband and I was strongly shaking. I said this was not my imagination about the American students. It was a fear to the extent that I said I am done. I will go back." But positive transition experiences are also there. "I still cannot forget the advisor's welcoming words during orientation. I was afraid as a male coming from Saudi Arabia. But her words made me assured that I can be safe as long as I mean no harm. I felt even more than welcome as if I was a guest not a student studying in a foreign country," says Ahmed. Gender, as one of the most influential factors, is included among the various elements responsible for these differences where Ahmed's reaction differs from Salwa's reaction to the same situation.

Academic and Social Life

Saudi students are not always underprepared academically for their program of study at RSU. In fact, the Saudi higher education system offers them a good opportunity to master their field of study during their early college years when they start taking classes in their specialization from the first year of college. Mary Ann says, "If you look at the amount of

achievement in their writing, these students definitely got the fact and the knowledge, I mean the book knowledge. But with better communicative skills preparation, they would show exemplary practices. They would really be outstanding students." However, their academic preparedness is always questioned by their professors. One reason is their language proficiency. At RSU, like any other American institutions, Saudi students encounter text books that are written in English, which is also the language of classroom instruction. If their language proficiency level is low, then it is expected that their academic performance will be influenced. Mary Ann understood this fact quickly based on previous experiences with Saudi students.

The opinion of Saudi students themselves varied concerning their academic preparedness for their study at RSU. Some of them thought that the amount of English language training should be extended for more than two semesters to better prepare them for their academic study and especially the amount of reading required for each class session. "I usually have nothing to do after classes. I am at home reading with the dictionary in my hands. I understand the reading but it is difficult for me to report it again in English. ... I always have a problem when completing the reading before classes," says Ahmed. It is also indicated that their ability to engage in class discussions hinders the amount of active participation in the classroom. Mary Ann says, "Once I started getting their written assignment, I reconsidered their participation grades because I understood that they might have a problem as a group in participating orally in the class. From the quality of their written assignments you can say that they have the content perfectly well but they lack the oral or the social skills."

Social Life

Saudi students' participation in the American social life is very limited due to different reasons. Among these reasons, religion, alienation, gender, and dietary restrictions are the most prominent. "I cannot go to any place without my husband or brother. …I cannot usually accept social invitations … because I do not know what might be happening there. I do not drink too. It is against my religion," says Salwa.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Culturally, Saudi students in the study might need to better understand the mechanisms in place at American colleges and in the American society in general. Consequently, their performance and resentment to participate in college life may be positively influenced. Saudi students in the study showed a perceived responsibility as representatives of their religion, region, and country. Understanding that their actions are interpreted as representing them as individuals rather than their collective group, Saudi students should reconsider the idea that they are representative of their whole country, religion, or region. In this respect, multicultural seminars, workshops, and classes may be helpful if integrated as part of their college programs.

Saudi students in the study needed the encouragement to engage outside their group as a way to increase their immersion in the American college life as well as maximizing their learning. Programs such as the Intercultural Dialogues and Conversation Partner should be duly introduced with full publicity to be known to Saudi students who should be highly encouraged to participate for their own benefits.

Saudi students in the study demonstrated little understanding of the rules and regulations governing student conduct, social interactions, and communication norms (Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2003). Saudi students' perceptions about their ability to choose between alternatives should be targeted during activities of the Freshman Seminars. Such activities can focus on developing their decision making techniques and improving their critical thinking skills. The freedom which American lifestyle offers to Saudi students may be utilized as a motivating factor for them to excel in college and persist toward degree attainment at the American institution.

Like other international students, Saudi students face different challenges while studying at the American institution due to transition, the difference in academic practices, and the unfamiliar social life (Choi, 2006; Constantine, et al., 2005; Kagan & Cohen, 1990). Their transition faces social, political, cultural, academic, and linguistic barriers. College administrators and academic departments usually initiate support systems to help these students adjust to their new context and achieve their desired educational goals as well (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Advisors and orientation leaders can play an essential role in easing these transitional obstacles. Several social and community groups can also be supportive of these students when they first arrive at the American institution. Because collectivistic individuals share the feelings and concerns of the group and care for the needs of other in-group members, utilizing other Saudi students is another successful mechanism that can be effective building on the fact that they like to offer help to other group members (Iyengar, Lepper, & Ross, 1999).

Difficulties with classroom participation are major factors in the academic experience of international students (Wang, 2004). Academic responsibilities and assignment are sometimes challenging especially when Saudi students in the study lacked the needed linguistic mastery. Increasing group and pair work in the classes is one technique for increasing both linguistic and academic levels. Programs that encourage collaborative and cooperative learning strategies can help them acquire such skills and maximize their learning experiences. Therefore, initiating learning communities and study groups may be other beneficial techniques that can help Saudi students through getting them to practice their language within the jargon of their academic topic because linguistic difficulties represent an important factor influencing the adjustment of international students during their early years (Channell, 1990; Elsey, 1990; Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002).

Because many international students come from largely collectivist cultures, the loss of connectedness to important family members and the lack of community support increase their psychological or social distress (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Wang, 2004). Saudi students in the study were usually away from participating in social events because of misconceptions about dietary

and ethical aspects about American social life. Activating the role of community organizations may change these misconceptions through introducing programs like the First Weeker program, International Speakers Services, and the Host Family program.

Support mechanisms for international students fall into three levels, classroom, departmental, and institutional. On the classroom level, the instructors' understanding and encouragement together with the application of cooperative learning strategies have been found to help in easing adjustment problems (Wang, 2004). Typical of the case of Saudi students in the study, adopting active learning strategies and cooperative classroom techniques showed progress in supporting their learning achievements. Departmental awareness of the problems facing international students is another level of support (Jochems, et al., 1996). Such departmental awareness can be achieved through initiating faculty dialogues about the case of these students and the best instructional practices suitable for them. On the institutional level, a system of mentors providing intensive coaching for international students during their first year would be helpful together with programming that targets the inclusion of international students and improve their interpersonal relationships with domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002; Lacina, 2002; Lee & Rice, 2007). Therefore, increasing the effectiveness of orientation programs to address the variety of the aforementioned challenges together with introducing activities that pair Saudi students with other American students or provide them with the opportunity to mix with them in a relaxed environment can help these students cope with the new environment.

To conclude, the increasing presence of Saudi students in American colleges and universities warrants consideration beyond the usual issues of linguistic difficulties and adjustment problems to include issues of engagement and academic achievement. Student affairs administrators bear responsibility to provide co-curricular and social opportunities structured to help orient Saudi students to their new learning environment. More realistic orientation programs and information sessions may help to positively influence Saudi students' choice of actions and engagement patterns. Social activities should be organized in ways to promote student interaction and foster connections with students outside of the Saudi community. It is important for faculty and academic departments to consider the cultural beliefs held by these students. Departments could provide training to educate faculty and staff about the characteristics Saudi students possess.

Programs that encourage collaborative and cooperative learning strategies can help them acquire needed learning skills and maximize their learning experiences. Creating academic activities within classes which apply critical thinking and encourage setting and achieving goals can provide opportunities for students to appreciate and further develop their personal abilities. Interactive learning environments and utilizing peer modeling may help students be more engaged with their peers. Further, faculty can structure learning activities that provide opportunities for students to build on success and gain confidence in their academic abilities.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study had three limitations that restricted its findings. First: the small number of study participants limited the generalization of findings. Therefore, findings can only be taken into consideration with caution when looking at other institutions. Second, the geographic location of RSU may have had its influence on the case. In other words, Saudi students may behave, perform, and react differently if they are at an institution located in another region where the student bodies are more diverse. Third, information about the study participants obtained through this study, though revealing in-depth rich aspects of the case, is very specific to the case studied and cannot be utilized to speak about the whole group of Saudi students even at RSU. However, readers may find similarities between the case studied and some of the Saudi students at their institutions which may make the implications applicable.

Previous studies which dealt with cultural beliefs of foreign students usually focused on international students as a group or some specific nationalities. Although the results of these studies cannot be neglected, the case of the noticeable increase of Saudi students in the United States deserved a more focused attention. This study showed that cultural beliefs as an agreed upon construct of student academic achievement can be addressed to improve the satisfaction level of Saudi students at American higher education institutions. Such increase can be the result from orientation programs, college success seminars, freshman year programs, student life programs, and multicultural events. An informed decision making process should guide the design of the aforementioned activities. These should be based on engaging activities and socializing opportunities (Wang, 2004). Engaging Saudi students in planning such activities would maximize the benefits. Academically, an awareness of the Saudi students' case and providing engagement opportunities on and off campus may enhance their cultural adjustment. Future studies may target a larger sample size of Saudi students to produce more generalizable results. A quantitative approach may be a suitable technique to study the characteristics of a larger number of Saudi students. A multi institutional study would reveal valuable findings about Saudi students as a fast growing group on American campuses.

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