University of Northern Iowa

UNI ScholarWorks

2013

International Students at UNI: An Analysis of Experiences

Kellie Petersen
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UNI: AN ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES

A Thesis Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

Kellie Petersen

University of Northern Iowa

May 2013

This Study by: Kellie Petersen

Entitled: International Students at UNI: An Analysis of Experiences

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University Honors with Distinction

9 May 2013
_____   _____
Date   Dr. Lindsay Cohn, Honors Thesis Advisor, Department of Political Science

5|10|13
_____   _____
Date   Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Introduction

It is important that people feel welcome in a society. It contributes to the health and comfort of individuals as well as strengthens society as a whole. This is particularly important to immigrants, who are entering a new country and therefore a new society and culture. Due to their immigrant status, they may feel disconnected from this new society and culture. Such a feeling could be intensified if some individuals within the society and culture display xenophobia. This generally refers to intense and irrational dislike or even a fear of people from other countries, but for the purposes of this research this definition is expanded to included any negative feelings directed at an individual or individuals because they are from another country or are perceived as being from another country.

Within university communities, international students, who are also by definition immigrants, are representative of immigrants within the larger society. They likely experience the same difficulties with the university community that immigrants do with the society and culture of the country to which they have emigrated. Considering the questions of whether xenophobia produces feelings of alienation from this new society and culture, this study attempts to answer the questions of whether a xenophobic environment exists at the University of Northern Iowa and if so whether any international students feel alienated from the university community.

International Students

The number of new international students at universities and colleges in the United States has been rising steadily since 2004 – 2005, with a total of 228, 467 new international students for the 2011 – 2012 academic year. This is a 6.5% increase from the previous academic year (Institute of International Education, 2012b). Likewise, the number of international students has

risen since the 1990 – 1991 academic year,[1] with a total of 764, 495 international students for the 2011 – 2012 academic year. This is a 5.7% increase from the previous academic year. For the 2011 – 2012 academic year international students composed 3.7% of the total enrollment in universities and colleges in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2012a). Additionally, the top 25 universities and colleges accounted for only 20.6% of all international students for the 2011 – 2012 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2012c). Thus, it appears that international students are not only continuing to choose the U.S. in increasing numbers, but that they are dispersed over a variety of universities and colleges.

International Students at the University of Northern Iowa

For the fall semester of the 2012 – 2013 academic year, there were 465 international students enrolled at UNI. The international students whose country of origin is available came from 54 different countries, with 163 international students from Saudi Arabia and 88 international students from China. Of the remaining 52 countries, the number of international students is between one and 20. (Kristi Marchesani, personal communication). Thus, UNI presents an appropriate environment in which to learn more about the experiences of international and non-international students, as well as a possible link between xenophobia and feelings of alienation.

Literature Review

Ingroups, Outgroups and Prejudice

People naturally form groups, which in and of itself is not a problematic behavior. However, the unintended consequences of forming these groups may be problematic. Brown

---

[1] There were also increases in the number of international students since the 1948 – 1949 academic year, but prior to the 1990 – 1991 academic year refugees were included in this number.

asserts that categorization is common because the world is too complex for the brains of humans not to have developed such a method of simplifying and ordering, and that by assigning categories to whatever information is being processed, be it landmarks, food, or people, similarities and differences are more easily noticed and therefore dealt with more efficiently (1995, p. 41). He further states that prejudice, specifically whether aimed at a group of people or merely representatives of a group people, has a categorical basis and thus affects the physical group as a whole: "Prejudice is not something that happens to isolated individuals; potentially it can affect *any* member of the outgroup in question" (Brown, 1995, p. 40). Thus, individuals are not potential targets of prejudice due to individual characteristics, but rather solely due to their membership in a specific group or category experiencing prejudice.

Neo-racism

The term neo-racism has developed to explain a particular manifestation of prejudice. Neo-racism is different from the older, though still not extinct, form of overt racism that divided and discriminated against people on the basis of perceived biological differences in that it emphasizes national identity and culture. As Lee and Rice explain:

> Neo-racism finds refuge in popular understandings of 'human nature' and appeals to 'common sense' nationalist instincts, but ultimately gives new energy to principles of exclusion and nationalism. Discrimination becomes, seemingly, justified by cultural difference or national origin rather than by physical characteristics alone and can thus disarm the fight against racism by appealing to 'natural' tendencies to preserve group cultural identity — in this case the dominant group. Underlying neo-racism are notions of cultural and national superiority and an increasing rationale for marginalizing or assimilating groups in a globalizing world. Neo-racism does *not* replace biological racism but rather masks it by encouraging exclusion based on the cultural attributes or national origin of the oppressed. (2007, p. 389)

Thus, neo-racism can be thought of as based more on ethnicity, or national origin and culture, than race, or perceived biological differences.

Neo-racism may be popularly rationalized as an attempt to preserve national identity and the values of the dominant culture (Kim and Kim, 2010, p. 172). This may be particularly pertinent when considering immigrants and international students. It may not so much be their ethnicities and countries of origin that invite such prejudice, but rather their status as immigrants, as some within the country of immigration may view them as a threat to the national identity and culture of the country.

In-group and Out-group Dynamics

Common observation would suggest that members of an in-group view themselves as individually unique while viewing the out-group as compositionally the same (Brown, 1995, p. 55). In actuality, minority groups exaggerate intragroup similarities (Brown, 1995, pp. 57 – 59). Brown states: "The two fundamental effects of categorization are the exaggeration of intergroup differences and the enhancement of intragroup similarities" (1995, p. 41). Specifically, members of minority groups may already be the most likely targets of prejudice, and therefore enhance intragroup similarities. As a reaction to prejudice, minority groups, or any in-group for that matter, begin to view themselves as more similar to each other while at the same time viewing the out-group as less similar to their group as a whole. Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe offer some explanation for this causal relationship: "Discrimination by the mainstream implies that one's social identity is excluded from what is considered 'normal.' Furthermore, discrimination may make it difficult to create meaningful social connections with members of the majority in many different types of situations" (2003, p. 3). Thus, members of minority groups perceive themselves as more similar because of discrimination from the majority group that is then reinforced by the lack of interaction with members of the majority group.

Belonging to the minority group may also serve a protective role. Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe attempt to explain this role with the rejection-identification model. It consists of the three hypothesized relationships of 1) perceptions of discrimination among members of disadvantaged groups encourage minority group identification, 2) these perceptions are likely subjectively experienced as rejections from the majority group which harms psychological well-being, and 3) minority group identification enhances psychological well-being in light of this effect (2003, p. 2). Therefore, minority group identification is enhanced by prejudice or perceived prejudice from the majority group, which helps members to cope with the stress produced by experiencing such prejudice. This process would also likely contribute to the perception that members of the minority group are similar and that members of the majority group are vastly different.

Minority group formation

The enhancement of intragroup similarities may serve to not only strengthen the group, but form new groups as well. Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe applied the rejection-identification model to international students. Their logic is that international students who perceive discrimination have two possible options for identities to adhere to in response, one being identification with their home country and the other being identification with their status as international students, or otherwise minority group members. It may be more helpful for international students to identify solely as an international student rather than as a citizen of their home country. Other international students are aware of the difficulties associated with being an international student, whereas citizens of their home countries are not (2003, p. 4). Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe explain how utilizing the identity of being an international student represents the formation of a new group: "Despite their different national origins, other

international students have in common that they are not U.S. citizens and are treated as such in the new context. Thus, identification with other international students is not based on similar intragroup traits, but is constructed in context based on their common treatment from the majority" (2003, pp. 4 – 5). In this view, international students may form their identity based in part on their status as international students.

Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe find that identification with home country did not help self-esteem when the target of discrimination, while identification with being an international student did. Regressions analyses lent support for a model that found perceived discrimination harmful to self-esteem, but also that perceived discrimination increased identification with being an international student that positively predicted self-esteem (2003, p. 8). Thus, according to Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe at least, groups may be based less on who members of the group are and more on who they are not (2003, p. 9). This conclusion is representative of the nature of in-group and out-group dynamics in general.

International Students and Prejudice

Although many international students may have a mostly positive experience concerning their international studies, as both occupants of a particular category and members of a minority group they are prone to be the targets of prejudice. Lee and Rice find that some of the greatest difficulties in adjusting to university life in the U.S. among international students are due to their foreign national status, with these difficulties ranging from being ignored to verbal insults and even confrontation (2007, p. 405). They conclude:

> We recommend that members of the education community be made aware of this issue
> and their responsibility in creating intellectual environments that foster cross-national
> acceptance and learning and in rejecting the perpetuation of national stereotypes. We
> suggest guidelines concerning teaching and working with international students be
> articulated so that administrators and faculty are aware of their responsibility in providing
> a safe and welcoming environment for international students. It should be understood, for

example, that these students may have different perceptions of the faculty-student relationship, may respond in different ways than do U.S. students, and may feel that authority figures are beyond reproach. (Lee and Rice, 2007, p. 406)

Thus, international students have unique needs due to their status as immigrants and the unfamiliarity with certain customs, such as expectations of the student-teacher relationship, which this status entails. In order to make the experiences of international students more positive, students, faculty, and administrators at universities and colleges can be sensitive to these unique needs.

It is certainly upsetting that some international students experience overt acts of prejudice (Lee and Rice, 2007, p. 405), however others may experience more subtle forms. Kim and Kim state that some international students reported experiencing discomfort and inhospitality but had difficulty locating the precise source of the feelings, which they allege are due to the subtlety of the insults. International students are able to identify overt acts of prejudice but their "internalized 'outsider' states" may lead them to underrate subtle slights and indignities (2010, p. 172). However, sometimes members of the majority group, in this case non-international students and faculty, may be unaware they are committing an offense, which makes the target "left to wonder about the intent, the veracity of the insults, and the proper reaction and its consequences" (Kim and Kim, 2010, p. 172). Such incidents are understandably confusing, as international students must decide if an action or statement was intended as an insult as well as whether and how to respond.

These more subtle behaviors refer specifically to a type of prejudice termed microaggressions, which are defined racially as "subtle verbal, nonverbal, or environmental slights and indignities that are intentionally or unintentionally committed toward people of color" (Sue, et. al. qtd. in Kim and Kim, 2010, p. 172). The difficulties experienced by international

students appear to be in three categories: social interactions, which include interactions between international students and non-international students and international students and faculty; classrooms, which include course curricula and class dynamics; and campus institutions, which include university policies and organizations that govern or serve the student body (Kim and Kim, 2010, pp. 173, 175). It is clear that international students may be experiencing difficulties from multiple aspects of universities or colleges, and that solutions to these difficulties often require the cooperation of those within all these aspects.

Kim and Kim highlight seven themes as examples of the types of microaggressions that international students may experience that cut across the three aforementioned categories. The first is ascription of intelligence, which refers to international students, particularly those who are non-native speakers of English, being assumed to be unintelligent. It may be demonstrated by professors and non-international students dismissing the comments of international students on the basis of incomprehension or simply ignoring their comments altogether (2010, pp. 174–175). Additionally, pathologizing cultural values/communication skills refers to professors and non-international students maintaining cultural homogeneity, which includes communication styles. This then pressures international students to assimilate (2010, p. 176). There are obviously cultural differences in communication styles, and unfortunately international students may feel the need to adopt the communication styles of the dominant culture in order to be heard.

Another theme is invalidation of international issues and perspectives. It refers to a failure to acknowledge international issues and perspectives. This may occur either through failing to incorporate international students and then not noticing this failure or through curricula that are insensitive to international issues and perspectives, such as by emphasizing American ideals like capitalism, competition, and independence (2010, pp. 177 – 178). The fourth theme is

assumption of homogeneity, which may be evidenced by international students being assumed to be a part of U.S. minority groups. This is upsetting because they may share little with members of these groups and are often from the majority group in their home country, so are unfamiliar with the experience of being considered a minority (2010, pp. 178 – 179). It also may be disconcerting to be perceived as belonging to a different group itself.

The theme of exclusion and social avoidance may be shown by international students feeling excluded both inside and outside the classroom or having to work against negative stereotypes to form friendships (2010, pp. 179 – 180). The sixth theme is invisibility, which is furthered by reports from some international students that they feel invisible. The implicit message from the actions that produce such a feeling is that international students are unnoticeable and insignificant (2010, pp. 180 -181). To feel unnoticed and insignificant would be upsetting to anyone, and for international students that are away from their home countries the negative effect is likely intensified.

The last theme is environmental and systemic microaggressions. It refers to problems with institutions such as the university or government. It may be demonstrated by not receiving fellowships or receiving research assistantships instead of teaching assistantships, policies that restrict the number of work hours, which seem to imply that international students are taking valuable jobs and resources from more deserving non-international students, and difficulty in obtaining a visa (2010, pp. 181 – 183). These last examples are perhaps especially representative of how some policies could be negatively interpreted by international students, even if the policies were in no way intended to produce such effects.

This demonstrates how international students may experience, and be harmed by, prejudices that likely are not considered as such by the majority group and therefore go unnoticed. Kim and Kim state the following about international students:

> Their identities have been invalidated, minimized and pathologized; they have been ignored, rejected, and unsupported, both at the institutional and interpersonal levels. Many of the problems they face are due to indirect verbal and nonverbal acts of discrimination that disregard their cultural values, communication styles, and experiential realities. If institutions are to continue enrolling international students, acceptance of them should not end with their admission. (2010, p. 188)

Students, faculty, and administrators meeting these needs are likely essential to whether international students have a positive experience.

Studies Specific to the University of Northern Iowa

International students studying at the University of Northern Iowa likely have similar needs and experience similar difficulties as international students in general. Msengi finds that most international students at UNI experienced stress most of the time or often (2004, p. 42). The top five sources of stress, ranked greatest to least, are 1) discrimination or alienation resulting from opportunities being denied to them; 2) loneliness resulting from homesickness; 3) non-specific stress resulting from language problems, etc.; 4) daily living resulting from responsibilities, financial difficulties, and meeting goals; and 5) academic pressures resulting from class workload, pressure to do well, job search, graduate school search, examinations and assignments, and oral presentations (2004, p. 62). Given these results, it is obvious that international students have some sources of stress common to all students, such as those related to daily living and academics, yet according to the study the greatest sources of stress for international students are unique to their status.

Li explores cross-cultural self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and sociocultural adjustment of international students in relation to contact spent with hosts. She finds that both the sociocultural

adjustment and cross-cultural self-efficacy of the international students studied is positively related to contact with their hosts. Additionally, cross-cultural self-efficacy is positively related to sociocultural adjustment. She also finds that attitude toward hosts is positively related to contact with them, while ethnic identity is negatively related to contact with hosts (2003, pp. 24, 31 – 33). These findings appear to lend some support to the optimistic theory that relations between in-groups and out-groups can be improved through interaction.

Race/Ethnicity and International Student Experience

Findings seem to show that international students who are Caucasian, and are either native speakers of English or speak English fluently report less discrimination than international students who do not fit such criteria. Lee and Rice find that students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported considerable discrimination while students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not report any direct negative experiences related to their race or culture (2007, p. 393). Additionally, Msengi found that a majority of international students from Africa and Asia felt alienated and hence felt opportunities were denied to them, while almost no international students from Europe or North America reported such feelings (2004, pp. 62 – 63). These findings in general are disheartening.

International students who are not Caucasian may have the additional problem of being inappropriately grouped with U.S. minority groups. This is confusing and frustrating, both because, as previously mentioned, international students often represent the majority group in their home countries and therefore have a limited understanding of being in a minority group (Kim and Kim, 2010, pp. 178 – 179) and because international students may be pushed into such categories yet at other times excluded due to their positions as outsiders (Lee and Rice, 2007, p.

395). Either way, international students may not anticipate how racial and ethnic relations in the U.S. may impact them.

Methods

As previously stated, this study attempts to answer the questions of whether a xenophobic environment exists at the University of Northern Iowa and if so whether any international students feel alienated from the university community. The hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: International students are less integrated into the larger university

community and therefore feel more alienated than non-international students.

Hypothesis 2: If the environment of the university is xenophobic international students

will feel even more alienated.

In order to test these hypotheses this study utilizes a questionnaire submitted to both international students and non-international students. The results are then analyzed according to the expected relationships.

The independent variables are use of technology, international student policy, non-international student opinion, and hate crimes. Specifically, use of technology is measured according to whether respondents feel the television programs they watch and websites they visit would be familiar to respondents in the groups opposite theirs. The group opposite their own refers to non-international students for international student respondents and international students for non-international student respondents. It is also measured according to whether respondents interact with only their group, the opposite group, or a combination of both via social media. International student policy is measured according to whether respondents who are international students feel the language resources made available to them are effective and whether they feel the other resources available to them are helpful. Non-international student

opinion is measured according to the degree to which respondents who are non-international students agree with the presence of international students at UNI and universities and colleges in general and the practice of universities recruiting internationally. Hate crimes is measured according to the available statistics for the past five years, beginning with 2012, of reported hate crimes due to the ethnicity on the UNI campus.

Additionally, the questionnaire includes a question intended to measure xenophobia in general. It is whether non-international student respondents feel there is a lack of interaction with the opposite group, and if so whether the lack of interaction is due to language barriers, other barriers, or both. They were also asked that if these barriers were to be removed whether they feel more and perhaps better quality interactions with the students in the opposite group would occur.

The dependent variables are social group, involvement, and feeling of alienation. Specifically, social group is measured according to whether respondents indicated having friends only in their group, the opposite group, or both, and if they indicated having roommates whether they were only in their group, the opposite group, or both. Involvement is measured according to which categories, or individual listings if respondents chose to do so, of student organizations and/or extracurricular activities in which respondents are involved. It is also measured according to whether respondents attend university events, and if so with what frequency and which categories of events they attend. Feeling of alienation is measured according to the degree to which respondents indicated their general experience at UNI has been positive and whether they feel a part of the larger university community. It is also measured according to whether international student respondents had ever had any particularly negative interactions with students in the opposite group. If respondents indicated that they had, they were asked whether

they felt it was due to them being in the opposite group. If they answered in the affirmative to this question, they were then asked whether they felt the interaction or interactions were motivated by unkind intentions or being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the situation. Respondents who are non-international students were also asked these questions, in response to international students, as a control. Additionally, feeling of alienation is measured according to the converse of the question intended to measure xenophobia in general. Specifically, it is measured according to whether international students feel there is a lack of interaction with non-international students. If they feel there is a lack of interaction, they were also asked whether they feel it is the result of language barriers, other barriers, or both and whether they feel that if these barriers were to be removed they would have more and perhaps better quality interactions with non-international students.

The control variables are the socieoeconomic status of the respondents' families and level of education of the main economic provider for the respondents' families. They are measured according to respondents' indications of which socioeconomic class they feel their family fits into and the highest level of schooling achieved by the main economic provider for their family. The questions pertain to the respondents' families, rather than the respondents themselves, because as students it is not exactly accurate for respondents to indicate their socioeconomic status and they have already attained at least some college education, with it being unclear how much more education they are to attain in the future.

In order to investigate these variables, a questionnaire was submitted, with the approval of the Institutional Review Board, to selected groups including international students and non-international students. For the international student participant group, the leaders of student organizations judged likely to include significant membership of international students were

contacted via e-mail with a request to forward the questionnaire to their e-mail lists. The students organizations included in the sample are: C.A.N. (Change Agents of Nicaragua), Chinese Students and Scholars Association, Cultural and Intensive English Program Student Council, Hope 4 Africa at UNI, International Club of Business Students, International Dance Theater, International Student Association, International Student Promoters, Muchas Manos Light Work, Middle Eastern Dance Club, Saudi Students Club, Turkish Students Club, Turkish Students Association, UNI African Union, UNI Invisible Children, University of Northern Iowa Tibetan Students, and TESOL/Linguistics Club.

For the non-international student participant group, the professors/instructors of the first sections of the courses satisfying Group A: Sociocultural and Historical Perspectives, Group B: Individual and Institutional Perspectives, and Group C: Topical Perspectives of Category 5: Social Science of the Liberal Arts Core were contacted via e-mail with a request to forward the questionnaire to their e-mail lists. The courses included in the sample are: Culture, Nature, and Society, World Geography, Human Geography, American Civilization, Women's and Gender Studies: Introduction, Introduction to Economics, Introduction to American Politics, Introduction to Psychology, Dynamics of Human Development, Social Problems, Women, Men, and Society, Social Welfare: A World View, and American Racial and Ethnic Minorities. Although the international student participant group and the non-international student participant group are grouped separately, this is only to simplify the process. Only one survey is utilized, with an option for international students and an option for non-international students, so that if any non-international students are included in the international student participant group or any international students are included in the non-international student participant group they were sure to receive the correct survey.

Findings

The usable total of responses is 13, with 1 respondent disagreeing to participate. Of the remaining 12 responses, three are from international students and nine are from non-international students. It should be noted that an error with the questionnaire caused the respondents who are international students to see the questions that were intended for respondents who are non-international students, and that two respondents who are international students answered these questions. However, their answers have been eliminated in the results. Additionally, there are four partial responses. Of these, two are from international students, one is from a non-international student, and one did not specify. For the purposes of explaining the findings, the complete and partial responses will be grouped together, resulting in five international students and 10 non-international students.

Concerning the independent variable of technology, all but one respondent indicated that they watch television and utilize the Internet for purposes not related to school. Of the respondents who are international students, one indicated that the programs he or she watches and sites he or she visits would be familiar to non-international students and four indicated that they may be familiar to non-international students. Of the respondents who are non-international students, two indicated that the programs they watch and sites they visit would be familiar to international students and nine indicated that they may be familiar to international students. All of the respondents, except for one, indicated that they utilize social media. Of the respondents who are international students, all indicated interacting with both international students and non-international students via it. Of the respondents who are non-international students, one respondent indicated he or she interacts only with international students via social media, four respondents indicated they interact only with non-international students via social media, and

four respondents indicated interacting with both international students and non-international students via social media.

For the independent variable of international student policy, three indicated they feel the language resources available are effective while two indicated they feel they are not. All five indicated that they feel the other resources available are helpful. Examples of resources provided by the International Students and Scholars Office include orientation, immigration advising, personal advising and counseling, programs and activities, and the International Friendship program (University of Northern Iowa, 2013a). Additionally, there is no limit on the number of international students admitted, with the admissions standards, aside from any necessary TOEFL requirements, being the same as those for non-international students (Kristi Marchesani, discussion with author). The recommended TOEFL score for undergraduate admission is 550 for the paper-based version, 213 for the computer-based, and 79 for the iBT (University of Northern Iowa, 2013d). The recommended TOEFL score for graduate admission is 550 for the paper-based version, or 79 for the iBT. The IELTS is also accepted (University of Northern Iowa, 2013c). Conditional admission, which requires enrollment in the appropriate level of the Culture and Intensive English Program is also available (University of Northern Iowa, 2013b). Thus, the international student policy, as analyzed separately from the questions included in the questionnaire, appears favorable to international students.

Five respondents indicated that they strongly agree with the presence of international students at the UNI and universities and colleges in general, four indicated that they agree, and one did not answer the question for the independent variable of non-international student opinion. Four indicated that they strongly agree with the practice of universities recruiting

internationally, four indicated that they agree, one indicated that he or she is indifferent, and one did not answer the question.

With regards to the question intended to measure xenophobia in general, six of the respondents who are non-international students indicated that they feel there is lack of interaction with international students while four indicated that they feel there is not. Of those who feel there is a lack of interaction with international students, one indicated feeling it is due only to language barriers, one indicated feeling it is due only to other barriers, and four indicated feeling it is due to both language barriers and other barriers. Five indicated feeling that if these barriers were removed they would have more and perhaps better quality interactions with international students, while one indicated that he or she was not sure.

As for the independent variable of hate crimes, there were no hate crimes in 2011, 2010, 2008, or 2007 (University of Northern Iowa, 2011, 2010, and 2009). There were two hate crimes due to ethnicity in 2009 (University of Northern Iowa, 2011). This indicates that there is little xenophobia at UNI, given hate crimes due to ethnicity can be considered highly representative of xenophobia, yet these figures may also be affected by the low likelihood of international students and other victims to report such incidents.

Of the respondents who are international students two indicated being friends only with international students while three indicated being friends with both international students and non-international students for the dependent variable of social group. Of the respondents who are non-international students, six indicated being friends with only non-international students, and four indicated being friends with both international students and non-internationals students. Of the respondents who are international students, three indicated having roommates. Two indicated having only international students as roommates and one indicated having both international

students and non-international students as roommates. Of the respondents who are non-international students, six have roommates. Four indicated having only non-international students as roommates while one indicated having both international students and non-international students as roommates.

For the dependent variable of involvement, of the respondents who are international students four indicated that they are involved in student organizations and/or extracurricular activities with the categories of these being academic/honor societies, business, fraternities and sororities, ethnic-cultural, NISG, religious, and service. Of the respondents who are non-international students, 10 indicated that they were involved in student organizations and/or extracurricular activities with the categories of these being academic/honor societies, business, ethnic-cultural, service, sports, religious, theater and arts, and other.

Considering the dependent variable of feeling of alienation, of the respondents who are international students, one indicated that his or her general experience at UNI has been very good, two indicated that it has been good, and two indicated that it has been okay. Of the respondents who are non-international students six indicated that their general experience at UNI has been very good, three indicated that it has been good, and one indicated that it has been okay. Of the respondents who are international students, two indicated that they generally feel a part of the larger university community while three indicated that they do not. Of the respondents who are non-international students, six indicated that they feel a part of the larger university community while four indicated that they do not. Of the respondents who are international students, two indicated that they had a particularly negative interaction or interactions with a non-international student or students. One respondent indicated he or she felt the negative interaction or interactions was due to the fact that he or she is an international student and the

others involved are non-international students, yet also indicated that he or she feels the interaction was due to being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the situation rather than unkind intentions. The other respondent indicated that he or she is not sure whether the negative interaction or interactions was the result of him or her being an international student and the others involved being non-international students, and therefore was not shown the follow-up question about motivations. Of the respondents who are non-international students, none indicated having a particularly negative interaction or interactions with an international student or students. Of the respondents who are international students, all of them indicated that they feel there is a lack of interaction with non-international students, that this lack of interaction is due both to language barriers and other barriers, and that if these barriers were removed they would have more and perhaps better quality interactions with non-international students.

For the control variable of socioeconomic status of the respondents' families, of the respondents who are international students, three indicated the socioeconomic status of their families as middle-class and two indicated it as poor. Of the respondents who are non-international students, four indicated the socioeconomic status of their families as upper middle-class, four indicated it as middle-class, one indicated it as lower middle-class, and one did not answer the question.

For the control variable of level of education of the main economic provider for the respondents' families, of the respondents who are international students, one indicated it as a professional, doctoral, or a Master's degree, two indicated it as a Bachelors degree, and two indicated it as some college. Of the respondents who are non-international students, two indicated the level of education for the main economic provider for their families as professional, doctoral, or a Master's degree, one indicated it as some professional or graduate school, four

indicated it as a Bachelor's degree, two indicated it as some college, and one did not answer the question.

Overall, since the responses the questionnaire yields are inconsistent, both hypotheses can neither be proven nor disproven. It is not clear whether there is a relationship or lack of relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The weighted mean is slightly greater for the independent variables, at 7.3, than the dependent variables at 5.9. However, given that there are more questions pertaining to the dependent variables and fewer responses, these could be considered close to even.

As for the measures of the independent variables that do not rely on the questionnaire, specifically some of those for international student policy and those for hate crimes, they are difficult to relate to the dependent variables as all of the measures for these rely on the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the measures for international student policy imply one that is favorable to international students. However, the international student policy of UNI may need to be compared to those of similar universities in order to legitimate this finding. As for the independent variable of hate crimes, the low number of hate crimes included in the statistics seems to imply a lack of xenophobia on campus, yet as previously mentioned it needs to be considered that international students and other victims of hate crimes may not report the incidents. Thus, this measure may unfortunately be inherently inaccurate.

Discussion

It is perhaps first necessary to discuss some limitations. The sample size, with 12 completed questionnaires and 4 partially completed questionnaires, is very small. Thus, any findings are not generalizable. Given this, it may be more appropriate to think of this study in more preliminary terms, more as the foundation for future studies rather than a study itself.

Additionally the findings may have encountered problems related to the survey method of collecting information, or mainly that respondents may have already had an interest in how international students and non-international students relate to each other. Such an effect could have biased the results, specifically by making relations between international and non-international students more favorable than the reality. It is also always a potential hazard that questions may be misinterpreted, leading the researcher to draw conclusions that are not accurate. The respondent believes the questions to have a particular meaning, which differs from the meaning believed, and implied, by the researcher.

It is also not clear whether the responses were due to the variables being studied or other factors. For example, both international students and non-international students may experience feelings of alienation. Both respondents who are international students and respondents who are non-international students indicated similar degrees of satisfaction with their general experience at UNI, with respondents who are international students indicating that their experience has been mediocre and others indicating that it has been good or very good. Respondents who are non-international students showed similar variety in their responses. Additionally, some non-international students, even though they would not be as expected to be the targets of xenophobia and therefore experience feelings of alienation as international students, indicated generally not feeling a part of the larger university community. Therefore, other factors that could potentially affect feelings of alienation, but are independent of xenophobia, need to be taken into account.

International students could experience feelings of alienation even in the absence of xenophobia, for example by the adjustment required to living in a new country, a lack of new friends and isolation from family members and old friends back home, and individual factors. Non-international students could similarly experience feelings of alienation. For example, non-

international students who belong to a minority group could experience feelings of alienation, because although a student is a U.S. citizen and could have lived in the country for his or her entire life being a part of a minority group could be isolating from the dominant culture and larger society. Additionally, as college students, non-international students are perhaps just as likely to experience a feeling of alienation caused by a lack of new friends and isolation from family members and old friends back home.

Both international students and non-international students are also subject to individual factors like extroversion or introversion that would either reduce or increase the likelihood of experiencing feelings of alienation. Another example is provided by a respondent who is a non-international student, who indicated that he or she did not feel a part of the larger university community but specified that he or she is a non-traditional student. Aspects such as being older, married with children, and living off-campus could contribute to non-traditional students not feeling a part of the larger university community. In retrospect, the questionnaire could have benefitted from such demographic questions, such as to which racial and ethnic groups respondents belong and whether they are a non-traditional student, which may have relieved some of the ambiguity.

It was expected that there would be some signs of xenophobia, which would contribute to international students feeling alienated. It was also expected that international students would indicate greater feelings of alienation. However, these expectations were generally disproven. Thus, even though the findings are not generalizable, it could be said that they did not support the hypotheses. Nevertheless, the findings yield some interesting information, which in some ways could even be considered pleasantly surprising.

Firstly, both respondents who are international students and respondents who are non-international students indicated that they have friends who are in the group opposite their own. Additionally, one respondent who is an international student and one respondent who is a non-international student indicated that they have roommates who are in the group opposite their own. There are similar findings considering whether respondents felt there is a lack of interaction with international students or non-international students, as a majority felt there is a lack of interaction and that they would have more and perhaps better quality interactions with the students in the group opposite theirs if the barriers, be them language, other, or a combination of both, were removed.

Additionally, it was more common for respondents to indicate that they had not had any particularly negative interactions with a student or students in the group opposite theirs than to indicate that they had. Of the two international students who did experience particularly negative interactions with non-international students, it could perhaps be expected that they would indicate a lack of socialization with non-international students and greater feelings of alienation, for example by indicating a generally mediocre or unsatisfactory experience at UNI and not feeling a part of the larger university community. However, this was only true of one respondent, who indicated having only international student friends, a generally okay experience at UNI, and that he or she did not feel a part of the larger university community. The other respondent, rather, indicated having both international students and non-international students as friends, a generally very good experience at UNI, and that he or she did feel a part of the larger university community. It is important to note that there could be some unknown factors that impacted these responses. For example, personality, and therefore how the respondent viewed the incident, may be a factor. The respondent who indicated having had a particularly negative

interaction with a non-international student or students but also indicated having both international students and non-international students as friends also indicated that although he or she felt the interaction was due to his or her being an international student and the others involved being non-international students, it was the result of being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the situation rather than unkind intentions. This may certainly have been true, but it could also be how the respondent chose to perceive the situation, which may have kept them more open to pursuing friendships with non-international students. Additionally, the severity and other important details of the particularly negative situation were not discussed. It is certainly understandable how experiencing a severe particularly negative situation may impact the reception of an individual to friendships with the opposite group, as well as his or her general experience at UNI or even whether he or she feels a part of the larger university community.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the questionnaire did not yield enough responses for the results to be generalizable, and that the study represents a foundation for future studies rather than one itself. Nevertheless it lends some insight into the important issue of the international student, as well as non-international student, experience at the University of Northern Iowa.

Firstly, future research could include an expansion of the present study with the goal of more responses that would hopefully yield more generalizable results. If done, certain study measures, such as allowing plenty of time to gather survey responses, utilizing paper instead of electronic surveys, and widening the sample could be taken to enhance the likelihood of achieving this goal. Secondly, all of the respondents who are international students indicated that they feel it would be helpful to be surveyed by the university about their experiences. This finding opens the possibility of studying whether other universities and colleges utilize such

surveys and if so why, the possible benefits of using such surveys, and even the potential for development of such a survey for use at UNI. Additionally, a somewhat interesting finding is that all, except for one, of the respondents indicated utilizing social media, and that many indicating interacting with the group opposite theirs via it. It may be interesting and useful to pursue whether this is 1) an indication of willingness to interact with people different from oneself or simply a feature of social media and 2) whether it could actually facilitate friendships between people of different groups, or in this case international students and non-international students.

Significance

It is important that students feel they are welcome at UNI, perhaps especially so for international students, who as both immigrants in the U.S. and international students in the UNI community, may experience particular difficulties with adjustment and integration. Fellow students, particularly non-international students, faculty, and an administration that are sensitive to such difficulties would likely contribute to international students feeling welcome, which positively contributes to their health and comfort. It perhaps could go without stating that such a welcoming environment is one free of xenophobia. Pursuing such an environment likely not only benefits international students, but non-international students and the university as a whole as well.

References

Brown, Rupert. 1995. *Prejudice: Its Social Psychology*, pp. 40 – 59. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

Institute of International Education. 2012a. "International Student Enrollment Trends, 1949-50 – 2011/12." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Accessed April 4, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment-Trends/1948-2012.

——————————————————— 2012b. "New International Student Enrollment, 2004/05 – 2011/12." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Accessed April 4, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/New-International-Enrollment/2004-12.

——————————————————— 2012c. "Top 25 Institutions Hosting International Students, 2011/12." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Accessed April 4, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Institutions/2011-12.

Kim, Suah, and Rachel H. Kim. "Microaggressions Experienced by International Students Attending U.S. Institutions of Higher Education" in *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact*, edited by Derald Wing Sue, 171 – 191. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010.

Kristi Marchesani (Assistant Director of International Admissions, UNI), in discussion with the author, April 23, 2013.

Lee, Jenny J., and Charles Rice. 2007. "Welcome to America? International Student Perceptions of Discrimination." *Higher Education*, 53: 381 – 409. Accessed March 21, 2013. doi: 10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3.

Li, Hongeai. 2003. "Asian International Students' Sociocultural Adjustment." M.A. thesis, University of Northern Iowa.

Msengi, Israel Gabriel. 2004. "Sources of Stress and its Impact on Health Behaviors and Academic Performance of International Students at the University of Northern Iowa." M.A. thesis, University of Northern Iowa.

Purdy, Margaret. 2004. "Countering Terrorism: The Missing Pillar." *International Journal*, 60: 3-24. Accessed November 13, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40204016.

Rubin, Donald L., Stuart Ainsworth, Eunshook Cho, Don Turk, and Laura Winn. 1999. "Are Greek Letter Social Organizations a Factor in Undergraduates' Perceptions of International Instructors?." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23: 1 – 12. Accessed March 21, 2013. doi: 10.1016/S0147-1767(98)00023-6.

Schmitt, Michael T., Russell Spears, and Nyla R. Branscombe. 2003. "Constructing a Minority Group Identity Out of Shared Rejection: The Case of International Students." *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 33: 1 – 12. Accessed March 21, 2013. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.131.

University of Northern Iowa. 2013a. "About ISSO." Accessed April 30, 2013. http://www.uni.edu/internationalservices/about-isso.

—————————————. 2013b. "Admission Policies." Accessed April 30, 2013. http://www.uni.edu/intladm/undergraduate/admission.

—————————————. 2011. "Crimes Reported to University of Northern Iowa Department of Public Safety." Accessed April 6, 2013. http://www.vpaf.uni.edu/pubsaf/crime_stats/cleryreport11.pdf.

—————————————. 2010. "Crimes Reported to University of Northern Iowa Department of Public Safety." Accessed April 6, 2013. http://www.vpaf.uni.edu/pubsaf/crime_stats/cleryreport10.pdf.

—————————————. 2009. "Crimes Reported to University of Northern Iowa Department of Public Safety." Accessed April 6, 2013. http://www.vpaf.uni.edu/pubsaf/crime_stats/cleryreport09.pdf.

—————————————. 2013c. "Graduate Admissions Requirements." Accessed April 30, 2013. http://www.uni.edu/intladm/graduate/admissions-requirements.

—————————————. 2013d. "Undergraduate Admissions Requirements." Accessed April 30, 2013. http://www.uni.edu/intladm/undergraduate/admissions-requirements.