

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND ACADEMIC CULTURE SHOCK: DO INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM ACADEMIC ACCULTURATION INTERVENTION?

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE HUMANITIES PROGRAM
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
RORY ELIZABETH SENERCHIA

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

APRIL 2015

ProQuest Number: 3725285

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 3725285

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

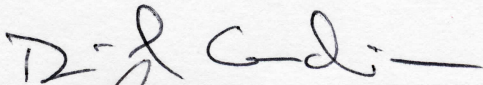
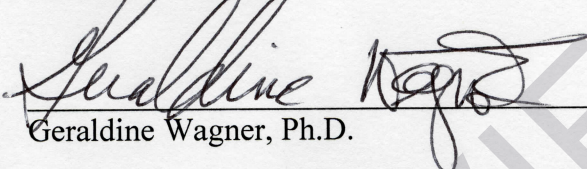
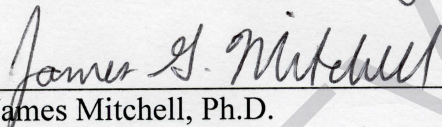
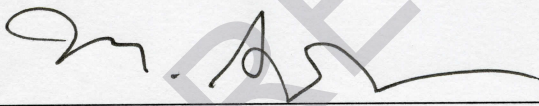
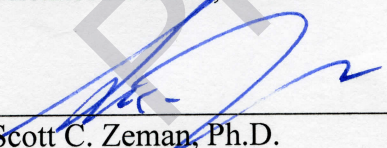
© Rory Elizabeth Senerchia, 2015

PREVIEW

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE STUDIES

This dissertation of Rory Elizabeth Senerchia entitled "Academic Success and Academic Culture Shock: Do International Graduate Students Benefit from Academic Acculturation Intervention?" submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

Reader:		<u>4/15/15</u>
	Daniel Cowdin, Ph.D.	(Date)
Reader:		<u>4/10/15</u>
	Geraldine Wagner, Ph.D.	(Date)
Mentor:		<u>4/15/15</u>
	James Mitchell, Ph.D.	(Date)
Ph.D. Program Director:		<u>4/15/15</u>
	Michael A. Budd, Ph.D.	(Date)
Provost:		<u>4/15/15</u>
	Scott C. Zeman, Ph.D.	(Date)

ABSTRACT

International education exchanges within higher education continue to rise each year and as a result, American Colleges and Universities are struggling to understand the implications of ‘internationalizing’ their campuses. In wanting to diversify their schools, the number of international students continues to rise but the expectations for both the international student and higher education have yet to be clearly defined. Adjustment needs for both the international student and the College and/or University must be thoroughly investigated. Therefore, this study sought to answer the question, “Is there a relationship between the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, academic culture shock and academic success for international students enrolled in an MBA program within the United States?” The intention of this study, using a mixed-methods research procedure for collecting, analyzing, and converging both quantitative and qualitative data was to gain a better understanding of, as well as to identify correlations between, TOEFL scores, academic success and academic culture shock in order to recognize barriers faced by international students accepted into an American MBA program, barriers that may not be taken into account because of one’s TOEFL score. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected via two studies in the form of international students answering a Graduate Classroom Culture Scale, participating in interviews and participating in an academic culture course in order to determine if certain variables would affect an international student’s transition into an American MBA program. In addition, this study stressed the importance of understanding and defining the relationship between English language proficiency and academic success as an important factor to consider when admitting international students to a graduate program within the

United States, as well as for institutions of higher learning understanding the role support services play in an international students overall success.

PREVIEW

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family. Without your strength, support, perseverance, and time you have all given me, I would never have accomplished my goals. Thank you to Grandpa, Gram, Dad, Marc, Sydney, Marco, Mark, Debbie, and the Sette and Parnoff families. You have all inspired me in one way or another and I hope I have done the same in return.

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals who made this research possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee: Dr. James G. Mitchell, you pushed me to limits I didn't even knew existed and brought me back from the brink a few times; Dr. Cowdin, you inspired me when I was your student and you continued to inspire me as I focused on my research; and finally, Dr. Geraldine Wagner, you have been a constant support and sounding board. In addition, I would like to thank the following individuals for their support in my research: Donna Thomsen, who supported me from the start; Dr. Angela Renaud, who never stopped pushing me; Dr. Gary Gray, who helped locate students for my survey; Dr. Martin Sivula, who always sent me articles and never stopped encouraging me; Dr. Robert Gable, who helped me understand the beauty of quantitative data; Erika Gearing, who was central to my academic culture course; Dr. George Rezendes, who helped me see the importance of the IRB. Furthermore, I would like to thank the ESL department at JWU and in particular, Ann Schroth, Anne Shaw, Erin Wynn, David Hood, Karen Shea, Dr. Emily Spitzman, Dr. Carla White Ellis, Dmitry Mikhaylov, Roman Dzhutov, Konstantin Isakov, Hassan Abuabdallah, and Di Lou. Finally, I would like to thank the MBA faculty for allowing me to work with their students and most of all, I would like to thank the international graduate students who volunteered their time to support and to engage in my research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iv
List of Tables	x
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	3
Method and Structure	4
Relevance to Program	9
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	10
Introduction	10
Validity of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Exam	10
Use of TOEFL Exam as Indicator of Academic Success	14
Predicting Academic Success for International Students	26
Challenges Faced by International Students within Higher Education: Cultural Diversity and Learning Shock	46
Orientation Programs & Learning Support for International Students	53
Acculturation Experiences	62
Summary	79
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	84
Research Design	84
Participant Recruitment	88
Participants	93

Instrumentation	98
Survey Questionnaire	97
Reliability	101
Interview Protocol	104
Course Evaluations	105
Academic Culture Course	105
Limitations	109
Delimitations	110
Summary	110
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS	113
Introduction	113
Quantitative Findings	115
International Graduate Classroom Scale Survey	115
Age	117
Gender	118
Friends or Family in the United States	119
ESL Prior to JWU	120
ESL vs. Non-ESL Students	121
Length of Time in the United States	124
Length of Time in the MBA Program	127
English Study Prior to Entry to JWU	128
English Study Prior to Entry into MBA Program	128

Self-Reporting of English Language Skills	129
Summary of Survey Findings	132
GPA's and Academic Culture Course	133
Qualitative Findings	136
Face-to-Face Interviews	136
Theme 1 Sub-Theme: Adjustment to MBA Program Proved Difficult	142
Theme 2 Sub-Theme: Skill Sets Needed for Academic Success	147
Theme 3: ESL Classes Provide Necessary Skill Sets	167
Theme 4: TOEFL Not a Clear Indicator of Academic Success	172
Theme 5: Academic Culture Course was Helpful	179
Summary of Face-to-Face Interviews	181
Class Evaluations	182
Answers to Class Evaluation- Study 1	183
Answers to Class Evaluation- Study 2	186
Summary of Course Evaluations	190
Synthesis of Qualitative Results	190
Summary of Research Question Results	192
Summary of Research Question One	192
Summary of Research Question Two	193
Summary of Research Question Three	194
Conclusion	196
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION	198

Introduction	198
Major Findings	198
Recommendations	202
Expand Orientation	202
Faculty Support Outside of the Classroom	203
Information Literacy Courses	203
American Culture and American Academic Culture	203
Implications	204
Recommendations for Further Study	204
Conclusion	205
REFERENCES	207
APPENDICES	216
Appendix A: Survey	216
Appendix B: Memo to Students and Consent Beyond Survey	220
Appendix C: Consent Form for Audiotaping & Transcription	222
Appendix D: Consent Form for Participation in Academic Culture Course	223
Appendix E: Interview Script	225
Appendix F: Course Evaluation Questions	227
Appendix G: Outlines for Class Lectures	229
Appendix H: <i>t</i> -test for Age	265
Appendix I: <i>t</i> -test for Gender	266
Appendix J: <i>t</i> -test for Students Who Have Friends/Family in the U.S.	267

Appendix K: <i>t</i> -test for Students Who Took ESL Classes Prior to Entry to JWU	268
Appendix L: <i>t</i> -test for Students Required to Take ESL Classes at JWU	269
Appendix M: <i>t</i> -test for Study 1 Participants versus Study 2 Participants	270
Appendix N: ANOVA Summary- Length of Time Studying in the U.S.	271
Appendix O: ANOVA Summary- Length of in MBA Program at JWU	272
Appendix P: ANOVA Summary- Length of Time Students Studied English Prior to Entry to MBA Program	273
Appendix Q: ANOVA Summary- Student Self-Evaluation of Spoken English	274
Appendix R: ANOVA Summary- Student Self-Evaluation of Written English	275
Appendix S: <i>t</i> -tests for GPAs of Students Who Took ESL at JWU Versus Students Who Directly Entered the MBA Program	276
Appendix T: Summary of English Language Proficiency Scores, GPAs and If A Student Took the Treatment	277

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1:	Treatment and Non-Treatment Groups	5
Table 1.2:	Academic Culture Course: Weekly Course Topics	6
Table 3.1:	Summary of Treatment Groups For Study 1 and Study 2	92
Table 3.2:	Summary of Participation in Interviews: Groups for Study 1 and Study 2	93
Table 3.3:	Reliability with Cronbach's Alpha	102
Table 3.4:	Academic Culture Course Topics by Week	106
Table 3.5:	Academic Culture Course Topics and Course Content	106 - 108
Table 4.1:	Summer Study 1 – Correlation Between Treatment, GPAs and English Language Proficiency Exam Scores	134
Table 4.2:	Fall Study 2 – Correlation Between Treatment, GPAs and English Language Exam Scores	135
Table 4.3:	Summer Study 1 & Fall Study 2 – Correlation Between Treatment, GPAs and English Language Proficiency Scores	135
Table 4.4:	Summary of Interview Participants	137 - 138
Table 4.5:	Categorization of Baseline Qualitative Interview Data	139 - 141
Table 4.6:	Summer Study 1 & Fall Study 2 – Correlation Between Treatment, GPAs and English Language Proficiency Scores	194

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will seek to answer the question “Is there a relationship between the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, academic culture shock and academic success for international students enrolled in an MBA program within the United States?” In order to answer the above question, this dissertation will seek to determine if international students enrolled in an MBA program in the United States benefit from taking a culture course that would significantly address academic culture shock. Not only will this dissertation attempt to identify a relationship between TOEFL scores, academic success as indicated by one’s grade point average (GPA) and culture shock, it will also seek to identify academic acculturation experiences of international students.

The need to engage in such research is due in large part to the numbers of international students who travel to the United States each year to study at an American University. International education exchanges continue to increase every year. According to the 2012 *Open Doors Report* on International Educational Exchange, “the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States [has] increased by six percent to a record high of 764,495 in the 2011/12 academic year” (2012, para. 1). The research conducted in this dissertation will contribute something new to the discipline by showing a relationship between the three variables of TOEFL scores, academic success and academic cultural knowledge. Much research has been conducted on academic success and TOEFL scores but little research has shown the

correlation between TOEFL scores, academic success and academic culture shock. Academic culture shock or learning shock (Gu, 2009, p. 40) or education shock (Hoff, 1979; Yamazaki, 2005) refers to “unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences that learners encounter when they are exposed to a new learning environment” (Gu, 2009, p. 42). International students in particular suffer from learning shock due to not only being placed into a new environment but a new learning environment that causes learners to “struggle with both insufficient language ability and a contrasting teaching and learning tradition” (p. 42). Gu (2005) also defines learning shock as a “specific manifestation of culture shock in the educational environment” (p. 4).

Looking at the data provided by the Open Doors Report, it is clear that international student enrollments are not slowing down and continue to rise each year. The need to better accommodate international students has not gone unnoticed within higher education as many universities are internationalizing their campuses through recruitment efforts abroad. Once on campus, new non-US students participate in orientation programs designed to help them adjust. However, are university’s orientation efforts being placed within the proper areas? The research for this dissertation will explore the existing models as well as combining several protocols in an effort to enhance what others have done.

The need to address academic culture shock can be seen in literature that focuses on international students’ adjustment needs, despite their TOEFL scores. For example, Meyer, in his article entitled, “A Conceptual Framework for Comprehensive International Student Orientation Programs,” (2001) discusses the differences between American students and international students’ academic acculturation. Meyer acknowledges that

while all students are faced with academic acculturation stressors, international students face additional acculturation stressors that ultimately affect a student's academic performance. Meyer states that, "achieving academic success [is] difficult and stressful for international students. In order to cope with educational shock and to be academically successful, international students need to know the American educational system, adjust their academic routines and classroom behavior, and develop new learning strategies" (2001, p. 56). Despite a student's score on the TOEFL exam, the need to acclimate to an American educational system is not the same for everyone. Thus, the need to adjust and adjust quickly becomes a major stress for almost all international students. With these ideas in mind, this dissertation will analyze through research, interviews and surveys, whether or not, regardless of one's TOEFL score, international students will achieve academic acculturation (as measured by academic success in the form of one's GPA) if given the chance to take a semester long academic cultural program.

1.1 Purpose

The intention of this study is to gain a better understanding of, as well as to identify correlations between, TOEFL scores, academic success and academic culture shock in order to recognize barriers faced by international students accepted into an American graduate program, barriers that may not be taken into account because of one's TOEFL score. Additionally, this study will pilot a semester-long seminar, to be offered to all first-year and/or transfer students admitted to Johnson & Wales University's (JWU) MBA program. Depending upon the pilot study results, such a course for international students may be added to curriculum for international students.

The researcher collected data by interviewing first-year international graduate students who have been admitted to JWU's Graduate program with at least a minimum internet-based TOEFL (iBT TOEFL) score of 80 (or equivalent English language proficiency exam) or have taken classes in JWU's ESL program. The focus of this dissertation is to see if academic culture shock causes a gap between those who are admitted to the MBA program but first must take ESL classes and/or take an academic culture course versus those who are admitted directly into the MBA program.

1.2 Method and Structure

This dissertation will be both a qualitative and quantitative study of international students who have been accepted to study in the MBA program at Johnson & Wales University. Interviews as well as surveys will be conducted with international students who have been accepted to the university. International students accepted to the university have either taken the iBT TOEFL test (scoring an 80 or above or an equivalent English language proficiency exam) and were directly admitted to the MBA program, or they did not receive the minimum score of 80 and/or did not have a passing English language proficiency score, in which case they were accepted to JWU's MBA program, but were required to take the university's placement test. Johnson & Wales University tests all international students who have not received a minimum passing score of 80 on the TOEFL or who have not taken an English language placement exam. The placement exam used by Johnson & Wales University is called Accuplacer English as a Second Language (ESL) Levels of English Proficiency (LOEP) Test. Students are placed into beginner, middle or advanced ESL classes based on their Accuplacer ESL LOEP Test. If they score 315 or higher, they are then given the opportunity to take the institutional

paper-based TOEFL that will allow some students to enter directly into the graduate program if they receive a score of 550 or above (equivalent to 80 or above on the iBT TOEFL test).

The primary concern of this study is to identify relationships between a student's TOEFL score, a student's GPA, and learning shock or academic stresses experienced by students. There were four groups identified for this study. Group one consisted of international students who directly entered into the MBA program and did not receive the acculturation treatment; group two consisted of international students who directly entered into the MBA program and did receive the acculturation treatment; group three consisted of international students required to take ESL courses at JWU prior to entering the MBA program who did not receive the acculturation treatment; and group four consisted of international students required to take ESL courses at JWU prior to entering the MBA program who did receive the acculturation treatment. Students were selected by contacting faculty within the MBA program. Faculty within the MBA program selected only classes that were taught to first year MBA students.

Student Target Groups	Directly Enters MBA Program	Required to Take ESL Classes at JWU	Does Not Receive Acculturation Treatment	Receives Acculturation Treatment
Group One	X		X	
Group Two	X			X
Group Three		X	X	
Group Four		X		X

Table 1.1: Treatment and Non-Treatment Groups

The treatment consisted of an academic culture orientation course that was delivered via hybrid-style, i.e., an on-line course that also met face-to-face once a week. The course ran for eight weeks. Each week, information was posted to an on-line site for students to read and post comments via a class blog as well as meeting once a week in

person. Topics for each week were as follows: week one, American academic culture and study skills; week two, communication skills: interpersonal and professional; week three, critical thinking skills; week four, business writing; week five, information literacy; week six, APA citation guidelines; week seven, academic writing skills; week 8, discussion groups where students were able to discuss their progress in the MBA program as well as their experiences taking the academic culture course.

Weekly Course Outline	Course Name
Week One	American Academic Culture and Study Skills
Week Two	Communication Skills: Interpersonal and Professional
Week Three	Critical Thinking Skills
Week Four	Business Writing
Week Five	Information Literacy
Week Six	APA Citation Guidelines
Week Seven	Academic Writing Skills
Week Eight	Discussion Groups

Table 1.2: Academic Culture Course Weekly Course Topics

This seminar focused specifically on the wants, needs, desires, and fears of the students attending the weekly seminars. Moreover, it sought to increase each student's knowledge in the areas of American academic norms and written and oral communication skills.

The number of students selected for the study was based on the number of new graduate students accepted into MBA program at JWU. The students were selected on a voluntary basis and were divided into two groups. The first group comprised of students who volunteered to take part in the study and was selected randomly to take part in the treatment, that is, the hybrid culture and academic culture shock course referenced above while also enrolled in their first semester of their MBA program at Johnson & Wales University. The second group comprised of students who did not take part in the treatment but were be enrolled in the same classes as the students receiving the treatment.

A few students selected to be in the treatment were also randomly selected to take part in interviews. All students selected took part in random surveys. At the end of the term, TOEFL scores and GPAs of students selected to participate in the study were examined to determine if the treatment affected student academic performance as well as to see if any correlation could be made between a student's TOEFL score and a student's academic success. Post-treatment analysis looked at each student's GPA for his or her first year. Also, information from surveys and interviews were analyzed to determine if the treatment affected a student's academic acculturation. Two studies were completed: a pilot study, during the summer 2014 term and a main study during the fall 2014 term. The results of these studies were compared in order to highlight any differences.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a relationship between a students' TOEFL score and a students' academic success? This question needs to be asked and researched due to the lack of consensus in the literature as to whether or not there is a clear connection between a student's TOEFL score and a student's academic success rate. This dissertation must include this question to see if students who enter Johnson & Wales University with an iBT TOEFL score of 80 or higher, set by the admissions office at Johnson & Wales University, perform academically better than those students who score lower on the TOEFL.
2. Will first-year international students accepted into the MBA program at Johnson & Wales University be at an advantage in taking a cultural course that significantly addresses academic culture shock versus those that do not? Considerable research has been conducted on the need for orientations for

international students. The area in which research is currently deficient is the length for which orientations should run as well as their content. Moreover, such culture courses may provide a way to help students with an iBT TOEFL score below 80 to close the gap with those students who surpass the current standard iBT TOEFL admission score.

3. Are first-year international students directly accepted into a graduate program at a disadvantage by not taking any support or orientation programs versus those students who were accepted into the graduate program but either complete ESL courses or take a support/orientation course? This question will determine if academic intervention is needed despite having an iBT TOEFL score of 80 or above (or equivalent English language proficiency exam). The TOEFL score is an important element as it suggests to staff and faculty that these students have sufficient English language skills and need no additional academic intervention.

This dissertation will be structured as such: Chapter One will include the introduction to the problem; background of the study; statement of the problem; purpose of the study; rationale; research questions; significance of the study; and assumptions. Chapter Two will be review of literature. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology as such: introduction; statement of problem; research questions; research methodology; research design; population and sampling procedure; instrumentation and sources of data; validity; reliability; data collection procedures; data analysis procedures; ethical considerations; and limitations. Chapter Four will focus on data analysis and results. Chapter Five, the conclusion, will focus on discussion of results and suggestions for

future research. Chapter five will also discuss the importance of this study to the field of humanities and technology.

1.3 Relevance to Program

This dissertation will examine the role technology plays in how international students are selected for admission into institutions of higher learning within the United States. This dissertation will also examine if using technology will aid in the acculturation process of international students. Language and communication are key components in accessing information and therefore are necessary for a student to possess not only in order to be admitted into a graduate program but also to perform at an adequate level once accepted. The technology examined for this dissertation will be the validity of the TOEFL exam, a technology that assesses potential academic success for international students being considered for admission to an institution of higher learning within the United States, as well as a hybrid course that will use technology to help students to assimilate to American academic culture. Learning a new language and adapting to a new culture are by their very nature processes that require the use of many facets of a student's knowledge, intelligence, and skills. Similarly, this dissertation takes a multidisciplinary approach to answer the research questions raised, using both quantitative and qualitative data and methods that look at both language acquisition and the acquisition of cultural knowledge to evaluate the intersection of technology and the humanities in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The following is a summary of the literature pertinent to this dissertation. This literature review includes dissertations, articles, and books that focus on the role of the TOEFL score in determining an international student's acceptance into a graduate program within the United States. This literature review also focuses on the use of the TOEFL score as an indicator of a student's potential success upon acceptance to a College or University within the United States, and challenges international students may face once accepted and enrolled into an American University, such as learning shock. In addition, the literature review will also examine literature surrounding orientation and learning support programs and acculturation experiences specific to international students.

2.2 Validity of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Exam

Education Testing Services (ETS) published a series of papers addressing various studies on the ever-evolving TOEFL exam. In its Series I, Volume 6 entitled "TOEFL iBT Research Insight: TOEFL Program History" (2011), ETS and its Research and Development Division published a report on the evolution of the TOEFL exam beginning with its inception in the 1960s. This particular "*Insight*" paper discusses the history of the TOEFL exam beginning in 1964 as a paper-based medium with multiple-choice questions. Dubbed by ETS as a test that evaluates "discrete components of language skills and knowledge, the test assessed vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, as well as knowledge of correct English structure and grammar" (2011,