“CITIZENS OF THE FUTURE”? – EXPLORING THE CAREER DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR COLLEGE-AGED THIRD CULTURE KIDS

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Kelly Patricia Wilcox
DEDICATION

This dissertation, and my entire educational journey, is dedicated to my mom and dad. Thank you for instilling in me a love of learning and reading, a strong work ethic, and for modeling grit and resilience.

Your love and support have been unwavering. Thank you.

And to Ellary, you are my greatest adventure.

You have brought me joy beyond measure. I hope one day you will understand the importance of perseverance and value learning as much as I do.

I know I had to “read my books” a lot, but now that I am finished, the best adventures are yet to come...
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ABSTRACT

“CITIZENS OF THE FUTURE”? – EXPLORING THE CAREER DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR COLLEGE-AGED THIRD CULTURE KIDS

Kelly Wilcox
Laura Perna

This study examines the career decision-making process for college-aged Third Culture Kids at an elite university in an urban setting in the United States. This qualitative study engaged students (sophomores, juniors and seniors) and recent graduates from a range of passport cultures (U.S and non-U.S.) in individual semi-structured interviews designed to gain an understanding of their college majors, career goals and professional aspirations, the activities they pursued in order to advance their career goals, and the influence of the Third Culture Kid experience on career planning and professional competencies.

Third Culture Kids, by definition, spend time during their formative years in a passport culture other than their own due to an overseas job placement for one or more parent. They may exist on campus as “hidden immigrants”, looking like many of their peers, but thinking differently due to their globally mobile upbringing. As a cohort they can be hard to identify, which may render it difficult for college support personnel to understand their strengths and challenges, and advise them accordingly.

Third Culture Kids have been identified in the literature as potential candidates to fill the growing need for culturally competent and adept professionals
in an increasingly global workforce. TCKs may possess valuable traits conducive to success in a global workforce, but ultimately it is up to the individual to decide how to identify and apply the skills and competencies gained through cross-cultural experiences in their chosen career paths.

Findings suggest that participants are open to global placements in their future careers, seek flexibility in their professional fields, value the Third Culture Kid experience, and the perceived benefits and professional competencies that were influenced by this experience. Participants navigated visa considerations, turned to their peers and family members for advice, and accessed university sponsored resources in navigating career related decisions.

This study fills an existing gap in the literature, as little attention has been paid to the career decision-making processes for college-aged Third Culture Kids, and gives voice to a population that is being presented as a potential solution to emerging global workforce needs. Participant findings provide insights into practices and policies that can be implemented by campus administrators and possibilities for future research.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

“At a time when the term globalization carries both positive and negative connotations worldwide and international cooperation is vital to the health of the planet and its people, the leadership of persons whose vision and experience extend beyond borders is critically needed. Global nomad students – who are raised and educated internationally due to a parent’s career choice – arrive on campus cross-culturally skilled and globally aware at the age of eighteen; they are prime candidates for such leadership roles.” (McCaig, 2011, p. 45)

Introduction

Advances in technology, transportation and communication tools have contributed to an increasingly interconnected global world. The push towards globalization has led to a refined set of skills and competencies needed to successfully compete in the workforce. According to research completed by Booz, Allen and Hamilton (on behalf of the British Council) (2012), employers are under pressure to find employees who are “not only technically proficient, but also culturally astute and able to thrive in a global work environment” (p. 3).

The trend towards globalization has also contributed to a rising number of U.S. citizens living abroad – estimated to be as high as 6.8 million in 2014 (Constanzo and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2013). This number only represents a fraction of the number of people living outside of their home country worldwide, estimated to be as high as 232 million in 2013 by the United Nations International Migration Report (2013). These overseas placements have led to a growing population of children spending a notable period of their developmental years in a
culture outside of their parents’ passport culture(s). These globally mobile children are referred to as Third Culture Kids (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009).

In 1984 Ted Ward projected that Third Culture Kids (TCKs) would be the “prototype citizen of the twenty-first century” (McCaig, 2011, p. 55). This projection was based on a growing appreciation for the unique shared experiences and typical traits of Third Culture Kids (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009) and in anticipation of a time when “a childhood lived in various cultures would be the norm rather than the exception” (Van Reken, 2008, para. 9). Barack Obama, John McCain, Kobe Bryant, Ian McEwan, Isabel Allende, Barbara Kingsolver, and John Kerry represent a small number of highly visible and successful Adult Third Culture Kids (Bushong, 2013). President Obama’s leadership traits and the high number of Adult Third Culture Kids that were part of his cabinet (Van Reken, 2008) possessed characteristics typical of a Third Culture Kid – someone with a global perspective who is socially adaptable, intellectually flexible, comfortable navigating different cultures, appreciative of different points of view, and often multi-lingual (Fail, 1996; Gerner et al., 1992; Jordan, 2002; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Van Reken, 2008).

Human resources management literature highlights the need for these competencies (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992; Black et al., 1999; Bonebright, 2010; Harvey and Buckley, 1997; Lam and Selmer, 2004) and Third Culture Kids have been identified as having a high likelihood of possessing them due to their upbringing (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004; Selmer and Lauring, 2014; Tarique and Weisbord, 2013). Studies have been conducted with Adult Third Culture Kids to identify career patterns in terms of
preferred fields of employment (Cottrell, 2002; Fail 1996; Wisecarver, 2014), and with adolescent Third Culture Kids to ascertain career aspirations (Gerner et al, 1992; Gerner and Perry, 2000; Lam and Selmer, 2004) and illuminate needs for the processes of repatriation and initial transition to college (Arthur, 2003; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Klemens and Bikos, 2009; LaBrack, 2011; Smith, 2011; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). The population that bridges these two cohorts is college-aged Third Culture Kids, particularly sophomores, juniors, and seniors, as they have already successfully navigated the initial transition to college.

**Statement of the Problem**

A paucity of research considers the undergraduate college experience, particularly as it relates to the career exploration process for Third Culture Kids. This time period corresponds to the second stage in Super’s (1970) career development theory. In his five-stage theory of career development, Super describes ages 15-24 as the Exploration Stage, with specific sub-stages occurring from age 18-21 (Transition) and age 22-24 (Trial). The other stages are Growth (birth – age 14), Establishment (age 25-44), Maintenance (age 45-64), and Decline (age 65 on) (Super and Bohn, 1970, p. 136).

Families are living and working abroad as expatriates in increasing numbers (United Nations International Migration Report, 2013). This proliferation has led to an increase in the number of children spending their formative years abroad before returning to their passport country for college (LaBrack, 2011). Given that this cohort of students can be difficult to identify unless they enroll in a college that explicitly offers resources and community forums for Third Culture Kids (Holdren,
2013), it can be hard to understand their lived experience as Third Culture Kids in college (LaBrack, 2011; Quick, 2010). Without this knowledge it is hard to know how to support them as they navigate the risk factors associated with being a Third Culture Kid (Barringer, 2001; Stultz, 2003), as well as how to maximize the benefits of their highly mobile and cross-cultural lifestyle (LaBrack, 2011) through informed counseling (Bushong, 2013) and intentional engagement in the career planning process.

Understanding how college-aged Third Culture Kids identify, describe and apply the skills and competencies gained during their mobile childhood can inform the career advising and mentoring processes at colleges and universities. This study seeks to bridge the gap between the needs identified in the human resources literature and the career aspirations and transition needs identified for Third Culture Kids as adolescents by exploring how the experiences of a mobile childhood and parental overseas assignments influence potential career choices and career exploration, as well as activities that inform career choices, including choice of majors and involvement in pre-professional activities for college-aged TCKs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how U.S. and non-U.S. undergraduate Third Culture Kids engage in career exploration and decision-making processes. This topic was explored using data collected through interviews with sophomores, juniors, seniors, and recent graduates at an elite university with a reputation for strong pre-professional training. The questions that guided this qualitative study were: 1) What are the college majors, career goals, and
professional aspirations of selected Third Culture Kids? 2) What activities (beyond choice of major) are selected TCKs engaging in to advance their career goals? 3) How does their experience as TCKs influence these choices and professional competencies?

This study contributes to the understanding of the lived experience of Third Culture Kids as they navigate the career exploration process and make decisions regarding potential post-graduation plans. Related decisions regarding major selection, pre-professional training opportunities and perceived professional competencies were explored. Exploring this topic at an elite university where pre-professional training is emphasized can inform institutional practices including academic and major advising, outreach and support efforts for Third Culture Kids, career advising, and pre-professional training opportunities. Career Services professionals can also strengthen recruitment and placement efforts by identifying the competencies exhibited by Third Culture Kids and championing these strengths to potential employers and recruiters.

Who are Third Culture Kids?

This section discusses the genesis of the term Third Culture Kids and the “typical” traits and experiences of these students as identified in prior research. Chapter 2 describes the theoretical perspectives that guide this exploration and reviews the literature that focuses on global workforce needs and career planning considerations for Third Culture Kids in various life stages.

As noted by other observers (e.g., Bushong, 2013; Fail et. al., 2004; Quick,
2010), Pollock and Van Reken (1999) bring attention to the experiences of Third Culture Kids and provide the most common and accessible definition to date:

A Third Culture Kid (TCK)... is an individual, having spent a significant part of the developmental years in a culture other than the parents’ culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any. Elements from each culture are incorporated into the life experience, but the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar experience. (p. 13)

On college campuses, TCKs may be considered “hidden immigrants” – they may share physical traits and country of citizenship with the majority of students but they may lack the cultural cues and references that come with living in one’s passport culture during formative years, particularly adolescence (LaBrack, 2011; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). TCKs may “look alike,” but given their exposure at a critical age to a range of cultures and global issues, they may not “think alike” (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009).

**Genesis of the Descriptor**

One might assume that the third culture part of the TCK label refers to an experience in “Third World” countries (Useem and Cottrell, 1996). In actuality the “third” culture is the “interstitial” culture, a set of shared commonalities for those living and internationally mobile lifestyle (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Useem and Cottrell, 1996). The “first” culture is the home or passport culture and the “second” culture is the host culture.

John and Ruth Hill Useem first observed this “interstitial” culture while living in India in the 1950s. They were living there for a year, with their three sons, to complete a field study of Americans living and working as “foreign service officers,
missionaries, technical aid workers, businesspeople, educators, and media representatives” (Useem and Cottrell, 1996, p. 23). As part of their research, they observed the school environments of the children accompanying their parents overseas. In their observations, many of the expatriates “created, shared, and learned” (Bushong, 2013, p. 22) a similar lifestyle, regardless of position or nationality (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Useem and Downie, 2011). Dr. Ruth Useem’s research continued on U.S. soil, as she observed that college students in her classroom who had spent time abroad in a different culture during their formative years exhibited common traits (Bushong, 2013).

Dr. Ruth Useem coined the term Third Culture Kid in the 1950s, to describe children “who accompany their parents into another society” (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009, p.15). In the ensuing decades, additional terms, including global nomads, cultural hybrids, cross-cultural kids, global souls, trans-culturals, and internationally mobile children, have been used to describe these individuals. Third Culture Kid (TCK) remains the mostly widely used term in the literature and will be used in this study as the primary descriptor.

David Pollock expanded the term to include a reference to “developmental years,” arguing that the experience of living abroad can be quite different for children than adults (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). Their parents may experience culture shock and experience varying degrees of difficulty in adjusting to the new culture. According to Quick (2010), the difference is “that adults have already established their value system, sense of cultural identity and core relationships with family and friends in the home culture” (p. 8). For many of the children, however,
moves between cultures happen during the adolescent years, before they have fully
developed a sense of their own personal and cultural identity (Pollock and Van
Reken, 2009). Ramifications of this underdeveloped sense of self sometimes do not
surface until these children repatriate, often for college (Bushong, 2013; La Brack,
2011).

History of Mobility

While the term, Third Culture Kids, was introduced in the 1950s, the lived
experience of children traveling with their parents to foreign posts has a much
longer history, tracing its roots to colonialism. Certain empires, such as the French
and British, encouraged the practice of moving entire families to foreign countries
so as to “populate and civilize their overseas posts” (Bell-Villada and Sichel, 2011, p.
5). Families also traveled for religious reasons, serving as missionaries in service of
the church. For the United States, the growth in overseas posts occurred after the
mid 1940’s, when the nation started to have more of a presence and dominance in
the global scene. The post-war era ushered in a proliferation of U.S. military bases
around the world, as well as an expansion in the regions of the world where
missionaries were being placed (Bell-Villada and Sichel, 2011; Ender, 1996; Pollock
and Van Reken, 2009).

In recent decades, reasons for working overseas extended beyond
missionary or military work to include work in tech industries, business, foreign
service, and education (Van Reken, 2011). The type of work, and the corresponding
sponsoring agencies, has led to a commensurate expansion in the terminology used
to describe the children of those working abroad – “missionary kids” (MKs), “biz kids”, “Army brats”, and “oil kids” (Useem and Downie, 2011).

The type of parental assignment or post can influence the level of privilege TCKs experience, the daily lived experience of TCKs, and the type of schooling available, as well as how strongly TCKs identify within the system and community created by the sponsoring agency (Bushong, 2013; Ender, 1996; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). For example, certain postings (foreign service, business, embassy, military, etc.) may provide allowances for domestic help, access to elite schools, special privileges on base, chauffer services for children, and access to preferred housing (Useem and Downie, 2011). Even families involved in missionary work tend to enjoy a higher standard of living than the average citizen within the host culture. Third Culture Kids may also learn a set of expectations regarding behavior and take on a “representational role” (mini ambassador, military brat, etc.) as the behavior of the whole family impacts the job security of the parent (Bushong, 2013; Useem and Downie, 2011). The set of norms and expectations associated with the type of parental work (representing the home country, doing God’s work, defending peace and security, etc.) can be a stabilizing force in an ever-changing world for the TCK (Bushong, 2013; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009).

The TCK Profile and Experiences

In the first known text dedicated to describing understanding this population, David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken (2009, originally published in 1999) describe the realities shared by most Third Culture Kids – they have been raised in a “genuinely cross-cultural” and “highly mobile” world (p. 17). Their cross-cultural
experiences are not gained through passive observation or academic study. They are immersed in cross-cultural exchanges and experience them first hand every time they travel back and forth between their passport and host cultures. In terms of mobility, Third Culture Kids may have traveled to, and experienced, many new host cultures. Or, conversely, they may have been stationed in one setting for a prolonged period of time, while the people around them (friends, teachers, neighbors, etc.) may have changed constantly (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Third Culture Kids report being close to their family unit as their family may be the one stable presence in their childhood (Useem and Downie, 2011).

Third Culture Kids experience difference on many levels. Their physical appearance may set them apart in their host culture. Even when physical difference is not obvious, they may think differently than those around them. These differences may occur both in the home and host culture (Bushong, 2013; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Additionally, TCKs and their parents generally expect repatriation. Knowing that they will someday “go home” sets them apart from other groups, such as immigrants (Bushong, 2013). The expectation for repatriation also impacts both conscious and unconscious decisions about how deeply they plant “roots” in the host culture (Bushong, 2013; Gilbert, 2008).

**Third Culture Kid Traits**

“Typical” traits and characteristics of TCKs and Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) are often described as “paradoxical,” as context plays a large role in determining whether an individual trait is viewed positively or negatively (Bushong, 2013; Glickberg-Skipper, 2000; Tarique & Weisbord, 2013). According to Jordan
ATCKs “have repertoires of social behavior, are keen observers, and adjust easily but never adapt. They carry their third-cultureness with them, thriving on newness, difference, challenge, and stimulation” (p. 226). Greenholtz and Kim (2009) found that the overall characterization of TCKs, or “cultural hybrids,” has shifted from a largely negative view (dysfunctional, alienated, and rootless) to a more positive one in the last three decades.

In terms of practical skills, researchers report that TCKs self-assess and exhibit higher levels of linguistic, cross-cultural, observational, and social skills (Jordan, 2002; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010; Sheard, 2008; Stultz, 2003). These skills derive from being exposed to multiple languages at an early age, being sensitive to the more nuanced aspects of culture, continuously welcoming new classmates (or adapting to a new classroom), and carefully observing novel situations before rushing in (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009).

In a study of over 700 ATCKs ranging in age from 25 to 90, Useem and Cottrell (1996) identify self-reported traits and outcomes for this population. The majority of respondents maintain an international dimension to their lives and 90% report having “more understanding and awareness of other peoples and cultures than most Americans” (p. 31). Drawing on their childhood international experience, over 80% feel they can relate to anyone, “regardless of differences such as race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality” (p. 33). Finally, ATCKs in this sample feel different, but not necessarily isolated. Given their enlarged world-view and commitment to engaging with complex global issues, they have trouble relating to many of the (North) Americans they meet, particularly on reentry (La Brack, 2011; Quick, 2010;
Useem and Cottrell, 1996). Both of these experiences are reflected in the fact that the majority of participants agree that they “feel at home everywhere and nowhere” (Useem and Cottrell, 1996, p. 32).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study examines the attributes, perceived environmental influences, current behavior, perceived childhood impact, and anticipated outcomes for college-aged Third Culture Kids as they relate to the career exploration and decision making processes. This chapter discusses career development theories that have been used to examine career-related choices during the college years (Super, 1970), the life stage studied in this dissertation, as well as the interplay between emerging global workforce needs, perceived TCK professional competencies, and career and life choices for Adult Third Culture Kids. The impact of the adolescent experience on career aspirations and the undergraduate experience of TCKs is also discussed.

Guiding Theoretical Perspectives

Super’s (1970) Theory of Vocational Choice recognizes the importance of self-concept as it relates to vocational maturity, defined as the readiness to navigate the developmental tasks at each of the six life and career development stages, and resulting vocational choices (Super and Bohn, 1970). As an individual’s self-concept changes over the course of their lifetime, their confidence in their ability to adapt to the next stage is strengthened. Particularly relevant to this dissertation’s examination of career development of Third Culture Kids is the framework’s attention to the undergraduate years as an integral stage (Exploration) in this five-stage process.

Super’s (1970) emphasis on the development of self-concept in white men limits the application of the theory to non-dominant groups and has led to the
introduction of more inclusive theories in recent years. According to Lent (2013), Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) connects elements identified by earlier career theorists and “seeks to create a unifying framework for explaining how people (a) develop vocational interests, (b) make occupational choices, (c) achieve varying levels of career success and stability, and (d) experience satisfaction or well-being in the work environment” (Lent, 2013, p.115). This framework integrates a variety of constructs (e.g., interests, abilities, goals, contextual influences) that “have been found to be important to the career development process” (Brown and Lent, 2006, p. 204). In an attempt to serve as a more inclusive and unifying framework, SCCT addresses the experiences of diverse populations (e.g., people of color, women, persons with disabilities, gay and lesbian workers) (Lent, 2013, p. 116). This perspective recognizes that the experiences of TCKs may vary, given the characteristics of their upbringing.

SCCT is guided by social cognitive theory, particularly Bandura’s (1986) Triadic Reciprocal Model of Causality. This model recognizes the complex nature of the “interlocking mechanisms” of personal attributes, external environmental factors, and overt behavior as they relate to career decisions (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994, p. 82). According to Bandura (2012), social cognitive theory is “founded on an agentic perspective” and the belief that “to be an agent is to exert influence over one’s functioning and the course of events by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2012, p. 11). Self-efficacy is a “constituent” of intrapersonal influences (personal attributes, as listed above) (Bandura, 2012), and “people’s self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will
exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the fact of obstacles” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176). These beliefs develop from four sources and from the interpretation of information from these four sources: personal accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and affective states (Brown and Lent, 2006). This dissertation considers the impact of childhood and adolescent “vicarious experiences” on career planning for Third Culture Kids, as well as “personal accomplishments” in relation to campus leadership activities, classroom contributions, and the application of professional competencies.

In regards to the second component, environmental forces, Bandura (2012) recognizes that “the environment is not a monolithic force” and that three types of environments can exist: imposed, selected, and constructed (p. 11). These distinctions are important to consider in this study, given the unique experiences of TCKs. For childhood and adolescent TCKs, early environments are typically “imposed” by their parents and families, and may shift often, sometimes dramatically and with little notice. College selection and preferred professional fields are more likely to be “selected” by TCKs. Bandura (2012) argues that “environment is not confined to physically proximate influences” (p. 12). For TCKs, the notion of home may also not be linked to a physical location and may include connections to other TCKs through a third, interstitial, culture (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009).

Bandura (2002) argues that “cultures are diverse and dynamic social systems not static monoliths” (p. 269). Recognition of cultural diversity and dynamism may also align with the cross-cultural experiences and shifting identities within different
contexts for TCKs (Jordan, 2002; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). Bandura (2002) recognizes cultural differences regarding deference to autonomy versus interdependence, individualism versus collectivism, and personal agency versus social structure, and that “the relative contribution of individual, proxy (relying on another in your best interest) and collective (collective agency through group action) modes to the agentic mix may vary cross-culturally” (p. 270). Social cognitive theory can therefore be applied across value systems and cultures and can consider the impact of globalization: “The growing globalization and cultural pluralisation of societies and enmeshment in a cyber world that transcends time, distance, place, and national borders call for broadening the scope of cross cultural analyses” (Bandura, 2002, p. 270). Attention to cross-cultural and global frameworks is important for this dissertation, given the number of cultures TCKs are exposed to over the course of a lifetime, as well as the focus in this study on workforce needs arising from globalization.

The final component of the Triadic Reciprocal Model of Causality, overt behavior, is also a useful lens for guiding this study as there are actions on the part of students that impact career plans beyond the identification of a preferred professional field or path. Students also select a college or university, declare majors and minors, display leadership and professional competencies on campus, and engage in internships and other pre-professional opportunities.

Global Workforce Needs

Globalization calls for increasingly specialized skills and competencies (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992; Harvey and Buckley, 1997). In order to compete
successfully on an international level, employers are seeking employees that possess an ability to understand different cultural contexts and viewpoints, demonstrate of respect for others, and possess knowledge of foreign languages (Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 2012, p. 3). According to Harvey and Buckley (1997), “success in the international arena requires a different skill set,” and simply expanding or applying a domestic perspective in expatriate training programs will not suffice (p. 37). This is because “the rules of the game are different, customers have different purchasing behavior, motivations and capabilities, and most importantly, a new set of competitors possess distinctive core competencies from those in the domestic market” (Harvey and Buckley, 1997, p. 37). However, it takes time and resources to develop these competencies through training programs (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992), and the demand for global leaders outstrips the supply (Black et al., 1999; Mendenhall, 2006; Selmer and Lam, 2004).

In a survey of Fortune 500 companies, Black et al. (1999) found that 85% of those firms did not feel they had an adequate number of global leaders and that even among those “identified as global leaders the average skill level was not sufficient” (Black et al., 1999, p. 7). Developing transnationally competent managers is a growing priority for multinational companies (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992). However, high rates of failure (measured as premature return to the home country) (Lovyorn and Chen, 2011; Varner and Palmer, 2005) and limited success with training programs for future expatriates (Glanz, 2003; Selmer and Lam, 2004) provide a dilemma for human resources managers looking for employees with these aptitudes and skills (Varner and Palmer, 2005).
The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) disseminates an annual list of competencies that demonstrate career readiness of college graduates as they transition into the workforce (NACE website, 2016).

Teamwork/collaboration is listed as a primary competency and is described as the “ability to build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints” (NACE, 2016, p. 1). Black et al. (1999) found that managers discovered a large percentage of employees sent on foreign assignments to be “culturally illiterate,” underscoring the importance of the competency identified by NACE. The importance of effective intercultural communication and cultural sensitivity – defined as “familiarity with how cultures work, and how to work with them” – is also underscored in the United Nations Population Fund State of the World Report (2008). Successfully identifying and training candidates with sufficient intercultural communication skills for overseas assignments is a challenge for international human resource professionals (Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 2012; Harvey and Buckley, 1997; Lam and Selmer, 2004).

**TCK Professional Competencies**

Boush (2009) presents Third Culture Kids as potential candidates to fill this hiring need, as these individuals have already learned to live and interact in one or more cultures, by virtue of their upbringing. In his study of TCK’s motivation to lead in a global workforce, TCKs are described as “individuals whose cross-cultural skills are experientially learned and developed, and are incorporated into their values and
personality, as opposed to a set of tools and procedures to be applied to appropriate situations” (Boush, 2009, p. 38).

Third Culture Kids are being empirically studied for their appropriateness as future expatriates, particularly in the business realm (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004; Selmer and Lauring, 2014; Tarique and Weisbord, 2013). Tapping into the competencies and global mindset already acquired by TCKs during their adolescence in order to meet hiring needs is a potential alternative to traditional training models for future expatriates (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004; Selmer and Lauring, 2014; Tarique and Weisbord, 2013). The effectiveness of traditional training models is being called into question (Harvey and Buckley, 1997; Selmer and Lam, 2003; Varner and Palmer, 2005), underscoring the need for alternative models and new approaches.

Lyttle et al. (2011) empirically tested the proposition that Third Culture Kids possess enhanced interpersonal skills in comparison to their mono-cultural peers. In a study with 142 participants, they found significantly higher levels of social sensitivity in TCKs as compared to mono-cultural participants, while mono-cultural individuals reported higher levels of emotional sensitivity. They found no relationship between intercultural experience and interpersonal sensitivity, but qualified this finding by raising questions about the instrument used to measure these constructs (Lyttle et al., 2011, p. 692).

Tarique and Weisbord (2013) found five predictors of cross-cultural competencies in Adult Third Culture Kids in their empirical study of 159 TCKs from
13 countries. Cross-cultural competencies (CC) are defined as the “knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that allow individuals to think, act, and behave in ways that are appropriate in the host country” (Tarique and Weisbord, 2013, p. 140). This study identified five predictors of dynamic CC: variety of international experience, language diversity, number of foreign languages spoken as a child, family diversity, and the personality trait of openness to experience (p. 152). These findings suggest “that experiencing international travel during childhood can provide competencies today’s employers seek” (Tarique and Weisbord, 2013, p. 153) and are consistent with past research (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004).

Guided by Bandura’s social cognition theory and the concept of self-efficacy, Selmer and Lauring (2014) hypothesized that TCK expatriates on assignment will be more culturally adaptable than their mono-cultural peers given that they have already gone through “a trial and error processes allowing them to ignore what has not worked for them in the past and to concentrate on what did” (p. 425). Results of the study with 267 expatriates in Hong Kong show that Adult TKC expatriates have higher general adjustment, but comparable interaction adjustment and job adjustment (Selmer and Lauring, 2014).

**TCK Life and Career Choices**

TCKs are being studied as potential business expatriates (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004; Selmer and Lauring, 2014), but the actual career preferences and life choices of TCKs are not the foci of these studies. Cottrell (2002) represents one of the few studies to examine the life and career choices of ATCKs. Cottrell (2002) finds that, for 63% of the 603 ATCKs in the study,
their mobile childhood influenced their selection of a major; nearly one-third chose a major with an international focus. Teaching (especially ESL), business, economics, and nursing were all seen as contributing to overseas opportunities for employment (Cottrell, 2002). As adults, TCKs are likely to have careers involving “expertise, leadership and independence” at the professional or semiprofessional level (Cottrell, 2002). These numbers represent general patterns, but do not illuminate the decision-making processes that led to them. In addition, this study is 14 years old and the findings may not be reflective of more recent patterns in career paths for TCKs, given the shifts in the global workforce over the last decade.

A more recent study, Wisecarver (2014) examines how the concept of home impacts career choices for 30 Adult Third Culture Kids. While the sample size is smaller than Cottrell (2002), similar patterns regarding popular professional fields exist. Careers in business/finance, education, and health services account for 60% (Wisecarver, 2014) and 62% (Cottrell, 2002) of all responses. In terms of mobility, the participants with the highest number of moves as adolescents report the highest number of moves as adults (Wisecarver, 2014).

Fail (1996) presents similar patterns of mobility in a study with 38 participants. The average number of moves before the age of 18 was 4.3, compared to 6.1 in the 20 years following graduation. Similar to the 72% of respondents reporting and international element to their work in Cottrell (2002), 61% have jobs with an international focus and 82% of respondents have “international aspects to their lives” (Fail, 1996, p. 33).
Bikos et al. (2014) examines interviews with 11 Missionary Kids at a religiously affiliated university in order to understand the contributing factors to their career decisions. Contextual issues in the external environment, personal attributes (cognitive-personal variables), and overt behaviors (past performance accomplishments) are all considered in this qualitative inquiry (Bikos et al., 2014, p. 158). Grounded in social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), this study brings voice to the career decision-making process for college-aged Third Culture Kids. However, the participants experienced just one type of parental placement, missionary work, which contributed to some “atypical risk factors” in this study (e.g., irregular education, narrow exposure to career/career paths, a strong influence of faith, a high rate of return to mission-oriented careers) (Bikos et al., 2014, p. 169). The authors urge career service practitioners to consider these factors when designing and offering resources to missionary kids in college, but caution about the generalizability of their findings to students from different placements.

The Undergraduate Experience

This dissertation situates career exploration within the broader literature on the undergraduate experience for Third Culture Kids. The repatriation process and adjustment to college are the focus of much current literature (Arthur, 2003; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Klemens and Bikos, 2009; LaBrack, 2011; Smith, 2011; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Weigel 2010). In response to the potential challenges of college transition and persistence, researchers and practitioners examine the roles of counseling and institutional resources (Choi et al., 2011; Holdren, 2013; Stultz,
as well as resources for pedagogy (Al-Issa, 2004; Barringer, 2001; Gillies, 1998; Limberg and Lambie, 2011). Little research is related to the career decision-making process for college-aged Third Culture Kids.

Regarding college outcomes, Useem and Cottrell (1993) reveal that TCKs are four times more likely than their domestic peers to earn an undergraduate degree and half of TCK degree earners pursue advanced degrees (Useem and Cottrell, 1993). Another study of 608 adult missionary kids shows that 94% of the individuals engage in university-level studies, with 73% graduating from university (Andrews, 1995). In addition, 25% graduate with honors and 3% are Phi Beta Kappas (Andrews, 1995).

The path to the undergraduate degree is not linear for all TCKs however. The average TCK will transfer colleges twice before graduating and a large number take time off to pursue other, usually international, opportunities often because they “feel their overseas schooling and experience but them ahead of their peers” and because they feel “out of sync with their all-American-reared peers” (Useem and Cotrell, 1993, para. 10). Few have considered how high levels of academic achievement, as well as the non-traditional and non-linear paths to completion, may factor into career decision-making processes for TCKs.

**Adolescent TCKs**

Researchers have also considered an earlier stage in the life cycle for Third Culture Kids, adolescence (Gerner et al., 1992; Gerner and Perry, 2000; Lam and Selmer, 2004). To understand perceptions of being international in adolescent TCKs, Lam and Selmer (2004) compared data collected from British TCKs who were
living in Hong Kong with data collected from mono-cultural peers living in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. Consistent with the findings by Gerner et al. (1992), TCKs have a future focus on international careers. TCKs also report having stronger family relationships (Lam and Selmer, 2004). These findings suggest the sources to which TCKs may turn for advice and guidance when navigating career and career-related decisions. Overall, the TCKs agreed with all nine statements on the International Mobile Adolescent Questionnaire at a higher level than their mono-cultural peers in both the United Kingdom and Hong Kong (Lam and Selmer, 2004). The nine statements contributing to a perception of being international are international experience, parental and institutional education, a second language, neutrality, open-mindedness and flexibility, attitudes towards other systems and cultures, respect for others, and tolerance for others’ behavior and views (Lam and Selmer, 2004).

Gerner and Perry (2000) explored the career interests of adolescents in their empirical study of gender differences in career orientation among internationally mobile and non-internationally mobile adolescents. Their study found consistent differences between female adolescents who had always lived in the U.S. versus those who had lived abroad in regards to openness to other cultures, languages, national groups, travel, and interest in international careers (Gerner and Perry, 2000, p. 278). In considering the implications of their findings, Gerner and Perry (2000) urged those within the educational systems abroad and in the U.S. to take a more active role in preparing children for the “global society” of the future. They argue:
Internationally mobile adolescents are developing an identity that is transcultural, and the promise of this global identity is too precious to leave to the vicissitudes of inaction or ignorance. Adults need to assume an active role to help the adolescent returning to a U.S. school or college to establish contact with other internationally mobile students who have successfully negotiated reentry, explain how to relate to peers who do not have this type of experience, help them craft a course of study or avocation that affirms their interest in things international, and put them in contact with organizations that understand their unique status (e.g., Global Nomads International). (p. 280)

These studies (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004; Selmer and Lauring, 2014; Tarique and Weisbord, 2013) apply an empirical analysis of the traits of Third Culture Kids that had previously been cataloged predominantly through observation and narrative, to explore the assertion that TCKs may fill a vital gap in the expanding global workforce. Studies were carried out with adolescent TCKs projecting ahead (Gerner et al, 1992; Gerner and Perry, 2000; Lam and Selmer, 2004) and with Adult TCKs already in the workforce (Bikos et al, 2014; Cottrell 2002; Fail, 1996; Wisecarver, 2014).

Few studies have considered the career exploration processes of the college student TCK population. TCKs may be strong candidates for certain global assignments, particularly in business. However, the factors that influence the career-related decisions during a crucial period in the career development process (undergraduate years) are not well understood.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study used qualitative methods to explore the perceptions and experiences of college-aged Third Culture Kids as they engaged in career exploration and planning processes. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative research process calls upon the researcher to keep “a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or what writers express in the literature” (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). This qualitative study gave voice to a population on college campuses that can easily remain invisible (due to the hidden immigrant phenomena) and drew attention to the career exploration and decision-making processes for this population.

The desire to be heard, understood, and supported was reflected in the number of students who thanked me in person or in writing for choosing this research topic, for allowing them to take part, and for my commitment to raising awareness about the strengths, needs, and contributions of Third Culture Kids on college campuses. Participants appreciated the opportunity to speak freely and critically about their experiences and several planned to incorporate their reflections and answers into future interviews and job applications.

Sample

Data for this study were collected from Third Culture Kids attending a prestigious research university, located in an urban setting. Participants were rising sophomores, juniors and seniors (had completed at least one year of study) or were
recent graduates (graduated within two years of the study). The research site is a
private research university with approximately 10,000 undergraduate and 11,000
graduate students. Twelve percent of first year students are international students,
with approximately 4,500 international students across all programs
(undergraduate and graduate) (university website, 2016). These enrollment
numbers point to an institutional commitment to attracting and supporting
international students, and a recognition of the contributions made by these
students to the campus community.

The research site is consistently ranked as one of the top twenty universities
in the country. This level of prestige was a consideration in choosing the research
site. The university's reputation would likely appeal to Third Culture Kids from a
range of backgrounds and parental occupations (education, technology, missionary
work, foreign service, etc.), thereby expanding the pool of potential participants. As
TCKs are typically living outside the U.S. when conducting the college search, high
school seniors are not always able to visit prospective campuses in person and
therefore often rely on rankings and prestige, word of mouth, and/or
recommendations from counselors (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Quick, 2010).

The schools within the larger university structure provide students with 89
potential majors and opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary study (university
website, 2016). The existence of the different schools, each with their distinct
reputation for pre-professional training and emphasis, was an important
consideration in research site selection. The presence of a business school, in
particular, was of particular interest, given the focus in the literature on the appeal
of hiring Third Culture Kids for leadership roles in the global business sphere (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004). Interviewing students from the different schools within the larger university structure provided insight into how the application process to the specific colleges/programs and subsequent major decisions impacted career choices.

This research site was also chosen because of the institutional goals, as stated by senior leadership. In recent history, the president outlined a vision for engagement in local, national and global arenas (university website, 2016). As part of this strategic plan, two centers with a focus on global issues were opened, with a stated goal of providing a “wide range of student opportunities focused on major international issues.” Both of these centers aim to foster the diverse communities that TCKs are already accustomed to being immersed in, and to generate the cultural exchanges that typified their globally mobile adolescent years. This level of institutional engagement with international affairs may appeal to Third Culture Kids, thereby impacting the potential pool of participants.

Despite this stated commitment, the research site does not promote or identify institutional support structures for Third Culture Kids. In this regard, the selected institution represents a typical approach to the recruitment and support of Third Culture Kids at U.S. colleges and universities. Schools that actively promote support institutional structures and tailored programs for Third Culture Kids (such as Lewis and Clark College, College of Wooster, American University, Wheaton College, and University of the Pacific in CA) are more the exception than the norm (Holdren, 2013; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).
Sampling Criteria

To address the research questions, I was interested in selecting participants who are U.S. citizens and identify as Third Culture Kids, as well as international students who identify as Third Culture Kids. The research site was purposefully chosen because of the large international student population. U.S passport holding Third Culture Kids are sometimes grouped with international students for outreach and programming, while other U.S. Third Culture Kids students seek out international students once on campus because of shared experiences. The inclusion of non-U.S. passport holding students adds to the understanding of the experiences of TCKs students in college by moving beyond the traditional U.S. centric lens that has dominated the research thus far (Hylmo, 2002; Kanno, 2005; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Yoshida et al., 2002).

Criterion sampling was employed to solicit participants who identify as Third Culture Kids (or comparable identifier). The research study targeted undergraduate students who had successfully completed their first year and recent graduates. This selection criteria was guiding by the assumption that these students would have navigated the initial repatriation process and would be in a position to reflect upon the choices that informed their career exploration process in college thus far. As sophomores, juniors, and seniors they would have declared, or seriously considered, a major, would have likely engaged in pre-professional exploration activities (e.g., internships, research experience, etc.), solicited the advise of professional advisors (academic and career), and engaged in activities on campus that draw on their experiences and traits as Third Culture Kids.
I was unable to identify an institutional structure or mechanism for identifying or supporting Third Culture Kids at the research site. Given that these students may not choose to publicly identify as a Third Culture Kid (or Global Nomad, etc.), and are not necessarily identifiable through physical traits or passport status, I used my professional contacts on campus (e.g., career services office, residential deans, international student support office, student life division) to establish contact with prospective participants. Outreach by colleagues at the research site yielded eight names and a link to student leaders of an international student group, many of who publicly identified as Third Culture Kids. Direct outreach to these students resulted in another five interviews. Snowball sampling was employed for the second phase of outreach. Several participants offered to share my contact information with fellow students based on their positive interview experience and their stated commitment to enhancing awareness of the Third Culture Kid experience. After two phases of outreach, 25 students were identified, with 23 meeting the criteria for the study.

A consent form was shared with each participant before the interview, which outlined the scope of the study and interview structure, as well as the steps being taken to ensure confidentiality. Participants were also reminded that they could stop the interview at any time and that they would have an opportunity to review the transcript at the conclusion of the interview.

**Participant Information**

This study sought to illuminate the experiences of Third Culture Kids with both U.S. and non-U.S. passports, so as to represent a range of cultural experiences
and perspectives beyond a U.S. centric lens. Of the ten participants with a U.S. passport, four solely held a U.S. passport, with six possessing dual citizenship with a second country. For the thirteen participants in possession of a passport outside of the U.S., five had dual citizenship, while eight cited citizenship for a single country. Citizenship did not equate to place of birth for all participants, as four participants were born in countries where they were not granted citizenship due to local government policies. Citizenship information for the participants is shared in Table 1.

As the nature of global workforce needs continues to shift, the industries and professional roles that are conducive to overseas placements and recurrent moves continue to expand. The experiences of these 23 participants mirror this expansion of roles beyond the focus on missionary kids and army brats in the early Third Culture Kid research. Placements related to the tech industry and business/finance were most common, with six participants citing one or more parents accepting foreign assignments due to employment in these industries. The presence of science and energy sector placements was also notable with parents working in the oil industry (3), engineering (3), biochemistry (1) and the energy fields (1). Representing the spectrum of assignments, parents were also engaged in missionary work (2), education (1), and management (1).

The total number of moves for the participants (inclusive of the final move to the United States for college) ranged from two to eight, with the majority of participants (18) experiencing four or more moves prior to enrolling at the selected
institution. The participants who experienced less than four moves still identified strongly as Third Culture Kids, a primary criterion for participation in this study.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews took place in a private room on campus for 14 of the participants and through a mutually agreed upon video conferencing platform for 9 participants. Each interview was conducted privately so as to encourage freedom of expression and was recorded on two devices, to guard against technological malfunctions. The interviews ranged in length from 40 to 148 minutes, with an average length of 68 minutes.

I employed a semi-structured interview guide approach (Patton, 2002), which allowed me to explore consistent topics with each participant, while also affording me the freedom to expand upon certain topics with individual participants when appropriate. The initial interview protocol (Appendix A) was based on themes that emerged after a review of the literature (Creswell, 2014). After each interview I reflected on the appropriateness of the questions and adjusted the order of the questions based on my notes. I added one question to the protocol based on a suggestion from a participant and slightly modified two questions. The interview questions focused on topics related to the career exploration and decision making process – school and major selection, engagement in pre-professional activities, self-efficacy, impact of global lifestyle and parental career path on potential career choice, engagement in academic and career advising, and the development of professional competencies.
I transcribed one interview where the audio recording was of poor sound quality. The remaining interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. All recordings and transcriptions were stored on password-protected device.

I read through each interview to check for accuracy and to seek out any words or phrases that warranted further clarification. As suggested by Creswell (2014) I then reread the transcripts and took note of the topics that emerged, categorized these topics, and developed preliminary codes. Each transcript was analyzed with the aid of NVivo software. In the first round of analysis I added and amended codes based on the data and coded passages under more than one theme when warranted. I then reviewed the data within the larger thematic codes and refined the analysis with the addition of sub-codes for certain codes.

**Trustworthiness**

I employed several validity strategies to ensure trustworthiness of my findings. All participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews to confirm accuracy and to clarify any points shared in the initial interview. I also allowed them to amend identifying information and provide a pseudonym, as a demonstration of my commitment to confidentiality. I assigned pseudonyms to the students who did not provide one. Fourteen participants responded to this request for feedback. The most common editorial suggestions related to the spelling of foreign institutions and geographic locations. One student asked me to mask the identity of her high school and major so as to ensure confidentiality. I also engaged with a peer debriefer throughout the research.
process, which allowed me to “review and ask questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Finally, I read the transcripts several times in order to identify themes that cut across accounts from different participants.

**Role of the Researcher**

I currently work as an Associate Dean at a small co-ed liberal arts college outside of Philadelphia. As the Director of the Office of Academic Resources, I support students from a variety of backgrounds as they pursue success as learners and scholars. The nature of my work involves individual academic coaching sessions with many students each day. Through the course of these conversations, several students have shared their experiences as TCKs and have reflected upon the impact of this experience on their academic and personal experiences at the school. Students have disclosed that they chose me as their academic coach given my international background and my training in supporting students with learning differences and non-native speakers. Given my dual role as a dean, which sometimes carries judicial responsibilities, I chose not to solicit participants from my own institution.

In my professional career, I have lived and worked abroad in education settings on two occasions. Both experiences exposed me to other cultures and to students with a global mindset. However, in my most recent post in the Middle East, I worked with a student body in which approximately 30% of the students identified as TCKs, as well as nearly 20% of the staff. As the First Year Dean to all incoming students, I was exposed to the range of experiences that informed this identity, as
well as the mix of strengths and challenges that resulted from the TCK experience. As the Director of the Academic Resource Center, I also witnessed student experiences that raised questions for me about how being a TCK influences learning and other educational experiences. Given the small size of the school, I was able to observe classes and work closely with faculty to learn how the “global mindset” that many of the students possessed impacted classroom discussions and curriculum design. My interactions with TCK college students have occurred predominantly with first and second year students. This professional and personal history allowed me to engage in the interviewing process with sophomores, juniors, and seniors with limited assumptions and preconceived notions.

Throughout the interview process I engaged in self-reflection to assess and address any biases that I brought to the study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). Through this process I realized that I predominantly employ a strengths based approach in my work with students and had to be intentional in giving equal weight to the questions regarding the drawbacks of the Third Culture Kid experience. I considered this potential bias when coding and was careful to present “negative or discrepant themes” that ran counter to the themes I initially developed (Creswell, 2014, p. 202).

I also accounted for the bias that I bring as a researcher in my attempts to achieve a professional balance between developing rapport with the participants and presenting myself as trustworthy, without offering information or personal details that could bias the participants to answer certain questions in a certain light.
This consideration was particularly relevant when students asked for additional clarity or context regarding the study at the outset of the interview.

I do not personally identify as an Adult TCK. While I did spent portions of my adult life abroad, my formative years were spent in one location in the United States.

**Limitations**

Qualitative researchers do not expect their findings to be generalizable to other settings. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) assert, transferability in qualitative research is “about how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 113). I endeavored to strengthen this possibility for readers by providing “thick descriptions” whenever possible in the findings section.

In conducting a qualitative research study, I served as the research instrument, which brought inherent biases and limitations. The participants also represented a limited sample. In addition to the relatively small number of students interviewed, I did not include first-year students, graduate or professional students, or non-traditional age students. The study included students and graduates from one institution, and as such, the findings cannot be generalized to other institutions or to other types of institutions (e.g., community colleges). Other distinguishing features of the research site also limit generalizability. These include the level of academic prestige, the size of the international student population, the pre-professional emphasis, and the demonstrated commitment to international engagement by university leaders. Additionally, given the snowball sampling that
was employed, it is possible that students spoke to each other outside the confines of the one-on-one interview, which may have allowed for the formulation of answers in advance of the interview.

Despite these limitations, this study has the potential to inform career and academic advising efforts at colleges and universities where support structures and programming aimed specifically at Third Culture Kids are not in place or readily apparent. Additionally, schools with an institutional commitment (stated or perceived) to pre-professional training can benefit from the findings of this study. In recognizing that many offices directly or indirectly impact career and academic planning, institutions can benefit from understanding the lived experiences of college aged Third Culture Kids as they consider targeted programming and outreach efforts at various stages in the typical college experience. This can include admissions outreach, orientation events, advisor assignments, major selection, study abroad, and post-graduate planning (career planning, professional school admission, prizes and fellowships, travel, etc.).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the career exploration and decision-making processes for undergraduate Third Culture Kids attending an elite institution with a strong reputation for pre-professional training. Through qualitative research methods I sought to illuminate the voices of students who can easily remain hidden or overlooked on college campuses. The analysis revealed themes regarding professional competencies emanating from the Third Culture Kid childhood experience, a desire for a global dimension in future professional placements, and a clear link between childhood experiences and decisions regarding college enrollment, major selection, professional exposure activities, and career plans.

While all participants engaged in professional exploration as an undergraduate, the specific experiences (e.g., internships, job shadowing, research assistant) varied. Some but not all participants were able to identify mentors for career or academic advice. For those who described a mentor, peers and family members were most commonly mentioned. On campus, the participants most often received career and academic advice from the career services office, the international student support office, and the university-sponsored network for career connections.

College Search and Selection

International prestige and curricular offerings and flexibility were the most frequently mentioned factors in deciding which choice of institution to attend. With
the majority of participants anticipating a career with an international dimension, name recognition in an international arena was important. For students deciding between colleges and universities in and out of the United States, the reported deciding factor was perceived flexibility in major selection and diversity of curricular offerings.

Curricular Offerings

While all of the participants ultimately chose to study at a prestigious university in the United States, nearly half (11) of the participants seriously considered studying in other countries as well. Seven of the participants weighed the benefits of studying in the U.K. (predominantly Oxford or Cambridge) versus studying in the United States. In their view, the United States offered greater flexibility regarding major selection and course offerings. Participants also considered studying in Hong Kong, Australia, France, Lebanon, and other European nations.

For Amber, curricular offerings was an important consideration in deciding between colleges in the UK and the US: “I considered applying to Oxbridge [Oxford or Cambridge]...but then to apply to Oxford you have to apply to a program so you have to know what you want to major in. At the time, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do so I really liked how American colleges offered the undecided option.” Sonia explained, “I didn’t know what I was going to study, and you know you have to know what you want to study if you want to go to the UK.” In weighing the benefits of universities in the UK versus the US, Arjun also placed great value on the flexibility of offerings, as well as opportunities for interdisciplinary study:
So I think for me between the U.S. and the U.K., the U.K. is definitely you need to have an idea of what you want to do before going in and I kind of did, but especially after coming from the IB, I didn’t want to restrict myself to only one field of study, so that kind of eliminated it a little bit for me...But the reason I applied to [my college] in particular was because I felt that I was getting the same sort of focus that I’d be getting in the U.K., because of the distinct schools, but also because I would still have the chance to explore and maybe combine different interests. And in the IB I definitely saw the benefits of combining two very distinct fields and bringing them together and how much more that could enrich your understanding of the subject.

Charlotte also considered flexibility around choosing a major when deciding between schools in Canada and the United States:

Then I was pretty sure that I was either going to go to college in the States or Canada, because it’s way cheaper because I’m Canadian, also, by passport. It was one or the other, and then I kind of split it a little bit...Then I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I applied for college. I thought I wanted to be a doctor. I wasn’t really sure about it. For Canadian schools, you have to choose a major or a department before you go in. I didn’t really want that. Then I feel like [my college] has a lot of different interdisciplinary majors and a lot of opportunities for that.

Prestige

In addition to the flexibility of offerings, prestige and international reputation were contributing factors in deciding where to attend for six of the participants. Mona, a business major, explains the importance of prestige for her:

[My school] has a reputation for offering very intellectually stimulating courses and advanced studies and the business school too has a strong rep internationally...So all of this together made it seem like a prime destination for someone who’s future interests are appealing to a more global community.

The prestige of the internationals relations program at the university he ultimately chose was an important consideration for David:

Their IR (International Relations) program at the time I applied was top 5 in the country. I didn’t really make a note about the business school. I was
more like, it’s a global education. Everything they advertised was like, become a global student.

Diversity of the Student Body

Five participants spoke explicitly about the importance and appeal of having a diverse student body at their college and within their academic programs. The opportunity to experience a level of diversity in college, similar to their experiences as a TCK in their K-12 education settings, appeared to factor into college selection for several participants.

Hana noted that the diversity of the selected university stood out during her initial visit, particularly in comparison to other schools. Amber also touched on the importance of diversity in her college selection process:

I think definitely because of my experiences growing up as an international kid I wanted my college career and also my future to also be what my experience growing up was, which was a lot of new challenges a lot of different things being thrown at me every day. I think [my school] also provided that spectrum of people to meet. People from all over the world. My friends here are from all over the world and from a lot of different backgrounds so I think that was also really important to me when I was choosing colleges. I wanted to surround myself with people who were different from me.

The academic program that Mona ultimately enrolled in conducted targeted admissions outreach and articulated a goal of attracting international students to the program. This stood out to her during the college search process and factored into her decision to ultimately enroll at the university and in this specific program:

The program sent a representative specifically for that program so it was like a very dedicated card and because of that, it was how I got to know the program. And because they specifically looked for people who had this multitude of international experiences... There was a big draw especially because I felt like it would be a small community within a very large school. The [influence of me] attending the international school was really seeking
community that was pretty international. My college class, sorry my high school class, represented about sixty countries across eighty of us. So then relative to that, [my program] is about fifty percent international.

The international diversity of the student population in this program was also important to Aaruv, given his TCK background. By his estimation, half of the students in his international studies program are international students:

I think I’m really blessed as a Third Culture Kid to be in the program, I mean, because the program is pretty much mostly Third Culture Kids. Not mostly, I’ll say about 50%. Their target is 50% international students. The vast majority of those international students are Third Culture Kids by the nature of the program. The program wants people who are global thinkers, proficient in languages other than their own, who’ve grown up in foreign countries. Freshman year, we’re all living on the same floor in one dorm, so just on the way to the bathroom, I’ll hear six different languages.

Additional Considerations

Financial considerations were mentioned by three of the participants, particularly the need blind admissions policy at the university. Individual participants also spoke about the influence of family ties, religious considerations, peer recommendations, parental influence, civic engagement opportunities, and career support (particularly in relation to working in the U.S. after college) on their college selection process.

Religious considerations were important to Hannah and “limited what she was looking at” in her college search:

My choices were also filtered through by my religious observance so I was looking for a place with a strong Jewish community... A strong observant Jewish community so not just a place with a lot of Jews, but a place with an Orthodox community and somewhere where I could eat kosher meals and have a community on the Sabbath so things like that.
Meredith, describing the influence of parents on her college selection, shared that attending college in the U.S. was a “given” in her family:

It was unspoken, of course, we’re going to America. I’m going to America. We were the American kids, I had an American accent. Most people thought I was from America. People still do. I had this very strong sense that I had to go back to America, so I did...

**Major Exploration and Selection**

A plurality of participants (10) chose a major or minor related to economics or finance. Five participants chose to major or minor in math or statistics, while four chose international relations. Biology and art were the next most popular majors and minors, with three participants each, followed by psychology, English, East Asian studies/Chinese, and communications (each selected by 2 participants).

**Influence of TCK Experience**

Several participants spoke about the influence of their Third Culture Kid experience on their major, minor, and course selection. Hannah identified the role that her TCK academic experience played in her major selection in the humanities. English and global studies were her favorite topics in high school, but when it came time to settle on a major she chose comparative literature over English for the following reasons:

...it allowed me to apply my language skills and I also am interested in creativity and imagination in terms of how it’s expressed in the translation and the manipulation of sacred texts so I studied that in Jewish texts because that’s what I feel that I have the most access to. My two national language literatures are Russian and Jewish... so I would say that being a Third Culture Kid directly impacted that because two of those languages I would not have had such fluency in had I not been raised in them.
Alicia’s international experience led her to strongly consider international relations as a major:

I took psychology and international relations thinking that I would major in that, because I had international experience and I think I really valued that. I wanted to see how my experience could be translated into how I would study and understand the world through an IR lens. Then I took IR and I realized I didn’t like how macro it was. It talked about countries and nations, it was very high level.

Others choose majors, minors, and courses that allowed them to explore their own identity, or the history and politics of the countries they had lived in. Even though Arjun plans to focus on business, he appreciated the opportunity to take a South Asian Studies course. He chose the class in order “to learn a little bit more about the Indian culture.” He goes on to explain: “I have a good understanding, but especially because I associate myself with being an Indian, I don’t think I have a good enough of an understanding and that class in particular was about Hinduism, which is the religion I practice.”

Similarly, Isabella considered a major in East Asian Studies “because I figured I’m half Chinese, and I’m not really in touch with that side of me. It always intrigued me, and I wanted to learn Chinese.” For Mona, college presented an opportunity to learn more about the cultures she had been exposed to growing up in through more of an academic lens, “I specifically looked for courses that were steeped in either Chinese culture or Arab culture, Arab Studies, things like that. I felt that college was my time to really relearn the cultures that I was already immersed in.” To meet requirements for his international studies major, Aaruv chose Arabic for his target language and the Middle East as his target area, “because of the familiarity I have of
it, just trying to approach it from an academic perspective, but also considering the possibility of working there in the future.” Growing up in China, Amber wasn’t “allowed to learn about things like the Cultural Revolution or the rise of the Communist Party because of censorship and all that.” For this reason, she was particularly drawn to a class on the history of China.

Rita, a junior majoring in economics, was initially deciding between a career in medicine and business. She credits her early exposure to the banking systems in both Asia and Europe with a curiosity about the “behind the scenes” operations of such vastly different systems, particularly in terms of corruption. Over time she settled on business, due largely to this early interest in global economies:

... as I grew up I found that I was more interested in like international scale things so less medicine and science and more so like business where you get to travel the world and explore like different economies and how they all interact with each other and I feel like that would have been more -- like that’s more fulfilling to me than potentially staying in the same country forever and like treating non-international like, you know, medicine. So yeah, I feel like especially during high school when we did start to open ourselves up more to the world. That’s what drew me more.

Influence of Parents

Hana, Arjun and John spoke about the influence of their parents’ work on their selection of a major. Two participants, David and Sonia, spoke of direct parental influence on their major and selections. David referenced his parents’ influence on his major selection in his consideration of French as an alternative major:

I’m really fascinated by French. I came to [college] and I took an upper level French course. My professor in the class begged me to major in French, but that was still at the time when I was like, "But my parents want me to do
econ," so I didn’t switch. Looking back I think French would have been a really good fit, but that’s been done.

Sonia spoke more explicitly about the role her dad played in choosing her second minor, East Asian languages and civilizations:

My dad kind of made me take the Chinese language to continue it so that I wouldn’t forget it, and in this day and age apparently it’s the language to learn. But I kept thinking, yes if you’re going to be an investment banker in Hong Kong, or even in the U.S. it’s definitely a skill people like to see, but I have an idea of at least where I’m not going to end up working at, and I don’t think I’m going to need Chinese.

In terms of career decisions, eight participants described their parents as supportive and felt they were trusted by their parents to make sound academic and career choices, particularly once they reached college. Sasha’s parents “have completely let me follow my own path. Like one hundred percent.” Amber also described the “hands off approach” taken by her parents once she reached college:

Not to say that they didn’t care. I’m sure they cared. They really cared about academics and stuff like that and they pushed me but then once I went to [college] it wasn’t really there anymore. Part of it was probably because they are so far away. It was harder to talk to them, but then also they just respected my decisions and trusted that I would figure something out.

In considering their own future careers, participants spoke of respecting their parents’ “resilience,” “work ethic,” and “risk taking mentality and willingness to dive into another environment that they knew nothing about.” Sasha spoke of her dad as a huge source of mentorship, talking to him “a lot about what I want to do in the future and what paths I should take.” Neeti cites her parents as important
sources of inspiration and support, and wonders if other Third Culture Kids feel similarly:

I guess most of my career choices, other than what I am actually do, or the type of job that I want, comes from my parents and what kind of opportunities they gave me, and so I would kind of wonder if parents are a point of reference for a lot of other TCKs, because I don't think I have talked about that with a lot of people.

Recognizing that her older sister possesses a unique and valuable perspective on her personal situation, Mayra lists her as her primary mentor:

Whenever I’ve had a problem, even in school, the person I go to is my sister. She is two and a half years older than me and I think we’re close enough in age so that she just ... Whatever I'm going through, or decision I have to make she just went through it. One year ago, or two years ago. It makes it real easy to reach out to her and she probably will understand my problems better than my peers at [college] who are international or who were raised differently. She's always been my mentor. Because she went through a very similar process that I had to go through.

Having navigated a series of challenging and frightening situations as a family unit while growing up (including being evacuated in the middle of the Egyptian revolution), Joslyn places a great deal of trust in her parents’ opinion: “Just because I think if anyone knows me really well it's probably them. And they’ve really been with me through everything. So I know whenever I have a decision to make I consult them.”

**Challenges With Major Selection**

When asked if they would have changed anything about the major and minor selection process, two participants described unease regarding their majors early on in their academic career and three participants described feelings of indecisiveness
regarding the overall major selection process. Meredith expressed initial displeasure with her major, revealing that she “may have misunderstood the major a little bit, just because the graduate school is very different from the undergrad[uate].” However, in time she recognized the positive social impact that she could have with her communications major.

Sonia spoke of a time in her undergraduate career when she was “feeling very lost in general,” including in her major, particularly as she compared herself to peers who seemed to have clearer academic and career plans:

I met a lot of people like that. A lot of people with one passion. Even if it was a passion for math, and then they were majoring in math. I didn’t meet a lot of people like me who just had no clue. Clearly I was very lost in general. I was lost culturally. I was lost with my major. I think I probably could have used more guidance, and I was so stubborn I didn’t look for it.

Mateo hinted at the indecisiveness sometimes attributed to TCKs (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009) in his description of the major selection process. He considered engineering and other paths before settling on math: “Even though I changed majors a thousand times, math was always in the background.” Similarly, declaring a major was “a difficult task” for Natasha due to her resistance to making commitments in general:

I have issues sort of making commitments and like in writing, and saying, yes, this is what I’ll do...I think it just – it might – probably stems from the fact that like even like signing a phone contract. Like something that says like two years, it was like, ”No, I don’t know if I will be here for two years.”... So it was very difficult for me to just officially go and say, yes, I am an econ major and this is what I’m going to study. I waited honestly until the last day. Even though honestly every class that I’d taken was – it was like econ classes and math, and it was obvious, like you don’t have anything else to fall back on. There is nothing else you can major in.
Career Aspirations

For these participants, business was the most popular expected career as nearly one third of the participants (7) anticipated a career in the business sector, namely consulting or finance. Citing diplomacy as a potential, but not definite career path, Mayra chose economics as her major because she “didn’t want to close [her] doors.” In her estimation, economics was something she could “apply to most roles, or most jobs. It was broad enough even to want to change my major if I wanted to be a diplomat or become a business person, or work in entertainment, or whatever...” Business held a similar appeal for Sasha because “you can apply business to anything.” For Natasha, economics made the most sense given her long-term aspirations, in that it “gives you the flexibility to move to different places.” Natasha echoed the appreciation for the broad application of this major shared by others:

Because you can use economics and use your different languages to do business, you can use your strong math skills. You can continue on and go to diplomacy, and focus on international trade. You can focus more on the law aspect. You’re really not closing your doors to anything. So I think that was the real main motivation to why I chose economics as my major.

Almost every participant described plans to pursue a professional or graduate degree. Three participants plan to pursue advanced degrees immediately after college, while nearly all the other participants have plans to pursue an advanced degree within 2-5 years of graduation. Mateo and Jim plan to pursue PhDs in STEM related fields, while Neeti and Meredith are seriously considering law school as their next steps. Meredith views a law degree as a valuable springboard
for her interest in policy and education, while Neeti sees a legal foundation as
serving her well in her longer term goal of working for a multi-national company.
David, Alicia and Agatha are all interested in fields with an international focus
(international development, diplomacy, and international law) and view an
advanced degree as a crucial step in working in these fields. Allie plans to remain in
a creative field and is already considering the best time to pursue her master’s
degree. Hannah hopes to pursue a PhD at some point, but first wants to pursue
professional roles that allow her to use her language skills (academia, publishing or
communication).

**Undecided in Career Search**

Seven of the participants described themselves as “open” to a range of
possibilities or undecided in their career search. The majority viewed this openness
and flexibility as a positive, while Mona and Jim spoke explicitly about the
challenges of being undecided. Like the majority of the participants in the study,
Mona sees herself going back to school in a few years, likely for business. However
in the short term she is undecided and feels a bit paralyzed by the career decision
making process and wonders if her TCK experience is contributing to this
indecisiveness:

> I think one issue is the kind of like the decision paralysis. Paralysis of choice. I
have a very... Maybe this is partially the third culture thing. I’m very open to
a variety of opportunities and regions so that makes it a lot more difficult to
narrow down what to do. Maybe verses if you had grown up in one city or
your family was in one city and you are really tied to this one place, or this
one job, or one industry or whatever it is. So I definitely have like too many
choices and not enough time...
While Jim is strongly considering graduate school in statistics and a career in academia, he would also like to be published and plans to continue writing. As he approaches graduation he shares that “I need to get my act together eventually. Probably get a job or something, but I’m not very sure about my career in a lot of ways.” Right now his “strategy is to try to keep the options open.” Whereas Mona recognizes that her broad exposure at an early age plays a role in her indecisiveness, Jim describes a very different contributing factor to his uncertainty. Raised in a missionary household in China, he points to his father's missionary work as his only real point of reference for career planning:

You don’t build a stable career. You do what you think is right and you pay whatever cost you need to pay along the way. For me, I recognize the duty to earn enough money to provide for my family, because that’s an explicit biblical duty. If you don’t, then you're worse than an unbeliever...This idea of going into professional, you know, working for a big company and sort of thing, I think that’s a wonderful thing to do. I have no objections to it, it’s just that I haven't got a living example or drive towards it.

**Professional Aspirations: Global Dimension and Flexibility**

The one element of the career planning process that was addressed by all participants was the possibility of undertaking global assignments in their professional lives. The prospect of working globally was a professional aspiration for the majority of participants. For these participants, this longer-term professional aspiration dictated their choice of majors, early professional exposure experiences, and choice of graduate programs. Some were eager to work outside the United States immediately after college, while others recognized that staying in the United States for a few years initially made the most sense in terms of graduate studies, visa
extensions, and a sense of personal stability. The participants who did not identify global assignments as strong personal aspiration still described openness to the possibility of working internationally in the future.

Several participants emphasized the importance of flexibility in their professional trajectory, as well as opportunities for mobility and global placements.

Neeti plans to work abroad as part of a multinational company after college and after three years of college is already feeling anxious about being in the same place for so long:

I really loved being a TCK. I know a lot of people didn't and they would rather... some of my friends would rather stay local when they do get a job. But I just want to move around a lot. I get really anxious now. Four years is the longest I have ever stayed in a single country, so undergrad is making me anxious now and I want to move out really soon.

For Rita, a desire for professional mobility on an international scale played a large factor in her selection of a business major. She credits her early exposure to the oil and gas industry, as well as her international school experience, as playing keys roles in this:

Whenever I talk to people who are in oil and gas, what I notice is that most of them move around a lot and my childhood was moving around a lot and going to different countries and that’s something that draws me to that industry, but I guess it’s not that industry in particular but more like the traveling experience. And so I feel like as I grow up and if I do – like when I do pick my career, I want to choose something where I can move around, because I would just get really bored if I had to stay in one country for more than maybe five years.

Natasha shares Rita’s’ desire for mobility in her professional career. She also chose a major (economics) that would “give her the flexibility to move to different places.”
As she looks ahead she doesn’t see herself “in a job where I’m sort of like stuck in one place. I kind of get the need to sort of okay, I’m going to move, I want to go somewhere else. And I’m starting to feel that already, like living in [city], because now I’m going into my junior year.”

Alicia’s desire to work globally also stems from her own international travel and experiences as an international college student. She describes a strong desire to work at branch campuses outside of the United States because she is drawn to “being in a space where so many different cultures get to intersect and exchange ideas [in] different places in the world [where] we’ve had places of unrest.” As early as her first year of college Alicia “was always kind of looking for jobs that were international, or global focused.” As she looks ahead to graduation, she is considering “working in the Middle Eastern region, South East Asia especially” for both professional and personal reasons:

I think those two spaces specifically. Just because I feel like, yeah, I wanted to be even more exposed in a way that made me especially uncomfortable. It’s like weird, why do you seek uncomfortable spaces, but it’s only when really live in an area that you experience the full extent of what it means to be really uncomfortable. Not in a bad way, but just out of your comfort zone, like, what am I doing here?

The desire for a major and career with a global focus was also strong for Agatha, an international relations major: “I knew I needed to do something with some kind of global focus. I don’t think I would ever be happy just being fully in one place. That sounds bad. I want to settle down eventually, but I want a job that lets me move around. If not the job, at least a career that allows me to switch states, countries, travel at least.”
Mona views herself as being quite open to a range of geographic locations as a professional:

Relative to a lot of my friends, I have no issue with packing up and moving... I really feel like I can move wherever, and pick up new friends and build a new life and still have your old friends, your old lives, just in different cities around the world.

Sasha is also open to living in other places, as long as it is in a metropolitan city:

I studied abroad in England and I absolutely loved London. I would be so open to living in London. I think that I would definitely be open to traveling and living in other places. I love traveling and I love visiting new countries. But I definitely think that I would need to live in a metropolitan city, like a really busy, buzzing, happening place because I feel like I always have to be doing something.

**Staying in the United States After College**

Seven of the participants hope to stay in the United States initially after college, before pursuing global opportunities. The strength of U.S. graduate programs, a desire for stability, the benefits of launching a career in the U.S., and relationship considerations were mentioned as contributing factors. Mateo and Allie listed the strength of the graduate programs in their chosen fields as a factor in their decision to remain in the United States after college.

Amber plans to attend medical school in the United States after taking a short break to “go abroad to either volunteer or do some other things.” She admits that she is “getting a little sick of staying in the U.S.” and is actively applying to fellowships that would allow her to go abroad right after college. Mentors have told her that earning an M.D. in the United States provides the best platform for international work, which she hopes to pursue at some point in her career:
If you were to get an M.D. in the States it's easier for you to practice elsewhere than if you had gotten an M.D. outside of the States and wanted to practice here. A lot of them were like if you're not sure it's always a good idea to get your M.D. in the States. Something else I was looking at was Doctors without Borders, but that would be short-term abroad situations.

John will also be staying in the United States after college in order to pursue a master’s degree in Divinity. Following the completion of the degree, John expressed openness to professional work in a range of locations:

I could go back to the Middle East. I'm not too keen on it, but I could and it wouldn't be a huge adjustment. I could go to Europe. I could go to Africa, for goodness sakes, and do something there...I could go to China. I don't know what I would do in China for goodness sakes, but say if I was looking for a job and a job was in China and that was something I was interested in doing, it's not inconceivable that I would apply for it.

John understands firsthand the challenges associated with a mobile lifestyle, particularly around the issue of developing a sense of community. The value of being part of a community for an extended period of time is something he is grappling with, particularly as he is considering pastoral work as an element of his future professional life:

Do I know the cost of moving? Yes, I do. It takes about two years to really settle in somewhere I've found. If one really works hard, then maybe a year and a half to really build new community networks and so on and to really enjoy a place as much as one does after one's lived there for a longer time. I also know that I can do that. I know it's exhausting and it's tiring and I really don't like the process, but I know that I can do it, so in the big scheme of things it’s okay. In this respect, some people at church have challenged me. Isn't like staying in a place and committing to a certain community, also an important value in life. It took me about two months to figure out what they were trying to say. It just didn't connect with me. "Oh, yeah. You might have a point."
Meredith is “definitely” open to an international position later in life, but recognizes that she, like John, grapples with the importance of community and feels that she has found a valuable community in the city where she attended college. She understands the desire for travel for her American friends who have lived in the same place for most of their lives, but after experiencing so much mobility as an adolescent, she plans to stay in the city where she attended college, at least in the short term:

I’m the opposite. I’ve explored, not everywhere, but a good deal of pieces and chunks. That puts me at an advantage, but disadvantaged point. I feel very open, but at the same time very uncertain about who I am and where I belong. I just feel like [city] has been the place I’ve started really creating a really concrete sense of the self, so I’m not willing to lose that.

Similar to Meredith, Charlotte plans to stay in the United States after college and work in consulting before considering other options. After moving so much, she too would like to experience some stability in her life:

A lot of people ask me during interviews if I’m thinking about global work, just because I’ve been around a lot. I want to say yes, but I do want to stay in the States for a bit, since I’ve been moving around so much already. I want to stay in the States and just work somewhere for a couple of years, and then maybe when I’m older I might work in China or Australia, or I don’t know...I think it really depends if I really liked it here. I guess if I like the stability, I might stay, but I think most likely this is like 10 years and beyond when I’m older, I might move and try to work out of a different country. It's unclear to me if I want to go back to China, just because I already know it so well, or go to England, because I think it's cool, and keep traveling.

Aaruv views the United States as offering the best initial platform before working internationally and plans to work in the U.S. before launching his international career. As he explains, “the headquarters of major companies are in
the United States, and just the upper-executive-level international leadership generally originates from the United States.” With this longer-term goal in mind, Aaruv recognized as a high school senior that his selected university “appeared to have better supports for the kind of careers I was considering” and chose accordingly.

Arjun would also like to work in the United States after college before working in a developing country and eventually working with, or starting, an NGO. Following the advice of upperclassmen and recent alums, he recognizes that:

What we learned here is most applicable to the U.S. I mean it’s definitely useful wherever you go, but it’s best used in the U.S. for us. And especially for something like finance, I don’t think there is a better place to learn more about the profession than, for example, Wall Street...

In the short term he hopes to earn enough money after graduation to “pay for his sister’s education by the time she graduates” and then move again:

I don’t know if I’d want to continue staying here. I mean a lot of people do end up staying here and I could as well, but just because of the way I’ve been raised, I think I realize the value in moving and there are a lot of other countries that I want to see. And I think my skill would best be used in developing countries, because that’s what I know a lot about and I’m used to. So I think I’d like to move to a country that’s kind of not necessarily less developed, but undergoing rapid change.

**Influence of TCK Experience: Professional Exposure and Openness**

For several participants, the TCK experience afforded them exposure to a range of careers, and this exposure influenced their internship and potential career choices. The mobility experienced in their childhood also impacted the level of openness to global assignments for select participants. For Neeti, her interest in
global affairs stemmed partly from the students she was surrounded by in the
British school she attended in Peru:

I think I was just always interested in global affairs. Then I think going to a
private British school was definitely part of it because it was like children
who were diplomats’ children or other kids who were born in all different
places. I think in high school I did Model UN, for example, and I think that
really was one of the biggest reasons why I went into international relations.
I was really interested in diplomacy and politics and just having a big impact
somehow.

Agatha’s early exposure to foreign diplomats as a Third Culture Kid has her
reconsidering this early career goal. Mentors have suggested the Foreign Service as
a potential career path within the realm of diplomacy, but she explains, “I find the
Foreign Service strangely constricting because it’s all about projecting American
values as opposed to having a legitimate discussion with someone.” Agatha admits
that she has “the moral complex” when it comes to considering possible careers and
references her parents’ work and her internship experience as influencing this:

...unlike my parents, I want to work somewhere where I can see the effects of
the work I’m putting in. I like to feel that what I’m doing is valuable, and is
contributing something. I mean, as an intern, it’s like, "I’m glad these
photocopies are being read." "I’m glad this coffee is heated up.” In the future,
it’s made me reevaluate whether I want to work for something like the state
department, where your ideas will probably get lost in the paperwork or
something. I want to feel like I’m contributing something positive.

Meredith views law school as a potential springboard for work in policy and
education and describes how early exposure to inequality as a Third Culture Kid
impacted her career aspirations:

And in Singapore there are maids, Indonesian/Malaysian/mostly Indian
workers. They’re trucked around like animals. It was such a stressful
experience in a way. Very eye opening. There was nothing I could do there. I
was just a kid I felt...But now it's like, "No, that's not true, I do really care." Obviously America isn't the only place, but still I feel like I need to regroup myself here before I can be like, "Okay I can help the world." I need to figure myself out.

Alicia possesses an interest in working in higher education, in the student affairs realm specifically, and sees her Third Culture Kid experience as playing a pivotal role in guiding this choice and informing her awareness of “student need.”

I think because I have a perspective of living abroad, and then also studying in a place where I wouldn't necessarily have called home... I think I have a very personal and felt experience of what it means to not be home, and what it looks like to look for places that resemble my home. I guess because I have felt the need, and felt that desire, and that search in me even in terms of developing even a cultural identity, and being able to engage in that dialogue, or find safe spaces where I can share about my qualms, and my culture shock, reverse culture shock coming back to the States, have been of high priority for me. I think having that mindset and being very aware of that tangible need of students would then inform me in terms of programming, let’s say like in a programming division of student services.

As a missionary kid, Jim views the Bible as his “number one culture”, with additional influences emanating from “western intellectual tradition” and a “smattering of Asia, since [he] grew up there.” For him, “the Bible and Christianity” are importance influences on his overall life and career planning, and contribute to his openness to future global placements:

I agree that the career is somewhat uncertain, but I believe that God will lead me...I would be willing to, if God called me, I'd be willing to go to China and I'd be willing to go to Saudi Arabia. I would be willing to go wherever. Go through whatever. I don't expect... Part of that kind of upbringing is I don't expect to have an easy life or a successful life...If you’re standing for something that is true and relevant, then I expect to face some push back. I don’t expect to necessarily be successful.
Mayra believes that TCKs experience of “not feeling attached to one specific city” may serve as an asset in terms of openness to travel and global assignments:

I think being a Third Culture Kid also helps me in terms of I don’t feel very attached to a specific place... I didn’t feel like I need to be in a specific place after graduation or in the long term. Whenever people ask me "where do you want to live eventually", I feel that I'd be happy in any big city. I think...not everybody, but I think a few Third Culture Kids at school feel the same way, we don’t feel that attached to one specific city.

Similarly, Sasha’s openness to living in a range of countries as a professional would not be impacted by family concerns, as she is used to being far from them already:

I don’t think that family will make an impact on where I live to be honest. Being in college I am about a thirty-six hour journey away from my family as it is. Technology makes it so easy to keep in touch and feel like you are close and we see each other over the holidays. I think my choice would be completely based on my interests.

Alternatively, Aaruv sees the high rates of mobility for TCKs and their families as a potential challenge for the career planning process. He suspects that the constant mobility of parents (before, during and after college) could render it difficult for Third Culture Kids to create decisive career plans in terms of geographic locations:

I think career plans, as a Third Culture Kid, are always far, far less solid than for most others, primarily because of the nature of linking to where parents are, which is constantly changing, and linking to where you are which will often be different to where you parents are compared to where you are right now or where you want to be. Between those, you've got four or five different places.

Visa Considerations

For six participants, the timing of their departure from the United States was
largely dependent on the visa process. Participants mentioned “changing laws,” the uncertainty of the lottery, and visa restrictions as major factors in their longer-term career plans. While some would prefer to start their careers in the United States before working abroad, they recognize that the visa lottery is largely out of their control. For four participants, career related visa restrictions and OPT training extensions impacted their major selection as undergraduates, as the selection of a STEM major or minor afforded them additional time to work in the United States after graduation. Participants in this study turned to their peers, particularly upperclassmen, most often for visa related advice.

In addition to major selection and career plans, visa considerations informed internship selection for the participants as well. Eight of the 14 participants with internships outside of the United States did not possess a U.S. passport. For the visa-carrying participants who chose to save their Optional Practical Training (OPT) for junior/senior summers or post graduation work experiences, their search had to be for internships outside of the United States for their first few summers of college.

Allie chose to spend her first three summers interning in Asia, “because it was really difficult because of visas to intern in the U.S., and I wanted to save my OPT for after that.” Arjun is already factoring OPT limitations and alternative options into his plans for future internships:

So the OPT that I’m allocated is for 12 months and if I use up – if I use – choose to use OPT for a sophomore summer internship that would be three months of those 12 gone and then I’d have to use another three for the junior internship, which is actually the most important one. So I probably won’t be using OPT for a sophomore internship. We actually have another option called CPT, which is kind of a quarter credit class, but it’s really just a way to get around the visa regulations. So I think you fill in like a survey every day
about your day at work, so it’s supposed to be like learning through the job kind of class.

Sonia has found the visa policy to be “so complicated and so demoralizing” that she has started to abandon her original dream of living in the United States after college. She credits this with “not really feeling wanted.” For her, a talk on campus by an immigration lawyer about “applying for OPT, and staying, and the H1B” and the fact that “only 60,000 people get chosen” was particularly demoralizing:

He said like Australians get a special visa and then someone else, but we don’t want any Indians or Chinese people, and I was like well great. That’s not helpful. He said that multiple times. I was basically thinking after that talk maybe I have to start accepting the idea that I won’t stay. That was the first time I think I was like, okay maybe I’ll move out of the U.S. Maybe I’ll move back home.

Charlotte recognizes that visa restrictions will likely impact her career plans as well. She shares that “as an international student, your options are a little bit more limited because of the visa.” Her academic majors afford her more time in the United States after college, as does her Canadian citizenship:

So both bio and stat give STEM extension, but I’m also Canadian so that helps. There’s a North American treaty, so I’m lucky in all of these aspects, that it helps out. For a lot of my friends who are like Korean or from India, they just, it sucks...a couple of them are getting deported this month or something. They’re having their goodbye, farewell dinners, type of thing. They will be back once they try again. Can they? I don’t even know.

Rita, a rising sophomore, already recognizes the impact that visa regulations will have on her job placement after college and, like other participants, is open to a range of locations as a result:
Yeah, the US would be nice depending on the visa restrictions as well, which could be an issue. But I'm also thinking about maybe going to Asia so like Hong Kong. I'm really drawn to Hong Kong even though I don't speak Chinese. I would like to do that or maybe Europe as well just because I haven't lived there in such a long time.

She is carefully planning out her summer internships so as not to use up her Optional Practical Training (OPT) allotment too soon and sees the upcoming recruiting process as a litmus test for how open companies are to sponsoring someone like her:

I'll definitely start recruiting next year even though I might not take up any of the offers if I get any. Just because I feel like it would be good practice and just to see if recruiters are actually open to hiring international students. And if they're open to helping us out in terms of visa issues so like I'll lay down my situation and say like, "Oh, I need this visa and I need this. Are you interested in helping me out or are you interested in putting me in another branch overseas?"

Allie found the visa seminars sponsored by the international student support office to be helpful and sees them as crucial for many Third Culture Kids. Given how closely the major selection is tied to the visa process and professional trajectory, she felt that the seminars could have been advertised more widely:

They have this seminar twice a semester or something like that where they go over the visa processes, and that does affect a lot of Third Culture Kids, and if you miss that seminar, you don't know what's going on in terms of OPT and H-1B, you're kind of screwed. Thankfully I went to it, and I know a couple of my other friends went to it, but I think that should've been advertised a lot more, and it should've been brought up earlier, because the thing is, with the H-1B visa, and OPT visa, and the TN visa, and all sorts of other visas, it is very contingent on what major you study. Thankfully, my major's covered by TN, so I can stay a lot longer than a lot of my friends who had to basically leave after this past summer because their H1-B visa ran out. I'm sure that if they had known a lot of this stuff, it would've helped guide their college process and their career process prospects, because then they wouldn't have used their OPT in the summer or something like that. So I feel like that kind of
stuff, like getting kids familiar with how your summer internship ends up panning out for the rest of your career, and if you want to stay in the US, what does that mean.

**Professional Exploration and Engagement**

All of the participants sought and secured professional experience and exposure during their undergraduate career. These experiences took the form of internships, research assistantships, job shadowing opportunities, volunteer work, independent study, and fellowships. Internships were the most popular activity. The 23 participants engaged in a total of 42 different internships. Fourteen participants engaged in internships that were not in the United States. Of these 14, 6 held U.S. passports. Traditional jobs (seemingly distinct from internships) were described 13 times by participants. Nine participants secured research assistant positions, while 3 participants engaged in job shadowing experiences. Individual participants also mentioned the utility of independent study, volunteer work, fellowships, independent study, and engagement with Model UN in providing valuable professional exposure and experience.

For nine participants, engaging in internships allowed them to explore different professional fields and “narrow down” choices. John saw his jobs and volunteer work as opportunities to develop specific skills and competencies, notably languages, directly related to his Third Culture Kid experience.

For Charlotte, the internship experience was a key element in guiding her toward a career in consulting. After engaging in a range of internships and summer jobs that ultimately moved her away from the pre-med track, Charlotte followed the advice of some upperclassmen and pursued a consulting internship, “I think I was
really influenced by the way they say how good it is, the perks, all the things you get to learn. It touches every industry, so you can really do what you want. I think I actually just followed into their steps and did consulting.” Similarly, Sasha is leaning towards consulting after deliberately securing internships that would allow her to compare the real world experiences of investment banking versus consulting:

I think that is how my professional-academic career has evolved. Like I said before, I was recruiting for finance, specifically sales and training from last September to this past January, but then talking to consultants this past summer has made me realize that consulting is more better suited for me.

With her sights set on obtaining a PhD and working in a public agency in the future, Agatha places great value on tangible experiences and has been quite intentional in her professional exploration of different sectors:

Well, in the fall, I'm actually working at the State Department... At this point, in my experience spreadsheet, I've worked in an academic setting. I've worked for an NGO. Then, I'll work with the public sector. My goal is to work in some sort of private industry, just to see what kind of career path exists for someone with my interests in the private sector. Then, after that, decide collectively.

Alicia credits her internships and jobs as contributing a clearer career focus, “Given all of that experience, and kind of just dabbling in many things, and weighing different options, I think for me that's why now career exploration has been higher education focused.” Neeti's exposure to health care management helped her eliminate that as a career option, “I also explored the health care management realm and how that would look. So I interned for about a month at a hospital in India. And that was pretty interesting. But it kind of put me off the health care management route.” Mayra also credits her internships with providing valuable perspective: “I
think internship wise, I definitely figured out what I like and what I don’t like. In terms of classes they helped me figure out what drives me and what I’m generally interested in.”

For John, the opportunity to enhance language exposure and proficiency was a key factor in deciding the location of his work experiences and summer academic study. He spent “one summer learning Arabic in Jordan” because he wanted to “learn Arabic and Hebrew really, really well.” For him, the summer intensive study “made my career in Arabic. It broke down my fear of reading Arabic from any period of history...I was also hosted by a Muslim family which I sort of requested.” During another summer term, John decided to explore “church work stuff” and “experience Europe more”, with a specific goal of strengthening his German. In the process of developing his own proficiency in German, he was able to apply his own international background and language skills in support of the refugees entering Germany at the time, as well gain some insight into personal career goals:

The languages were great. This was just the beginning when refugees started coming into Berlin, so I spoke almost as much Arabic as I did German just talking to Lebanese and Syrians and all types of people. Then I used my French too. Not my Hebrew, but it was in English as well, and it was really great. That really helped sort of solidify, "Okay, I know I want to do something like this. I might not want to do exactly this, although I really enjoy it." I would burn out I realized doing only that. I need to be more academically inclined.

Challenges

While all participants were able to secure internships and other opportunities, the process of securing these opportunities was not without
challenges. Four participants also described challenges with securing internships due to professional network limitations and differing concepts of internships outside of the United States. Several participants described visa constraints and considerations in relation to the internship search, while two participants found the emphasis on pre-professional planning at their university to be a source of stress.

This process is complicated by the fact that many countries outside of the United States do not share a similar concept of internships. Rita was able to secure an internship overseas through personal contacts, but alluded to the struggle that she, and many of her peers, experienced, "Like all of my friends, they all got their internship through people they knew...because just being a student with no experience and trying to find a job overseas is very difficult." She recognizes that this limitation emanates partly from the non-U.S. perspective of internships:

If you want to go abroad, it’s hard because internationally people don’t usually offer internships. It’s a very American concept to have a summer intern, because usually you’re training for the job that you’re going to do as soon as your training is over. I feel like, just career wise, it’s very limited. It’s kind of a paradigm shift. You have to think of it as more like "You’re personally reaching out to them, and they’re doing you a personal favor of taking this kid who has no experience on."

Meredith and Hannah plan to access personal networks in order to secure internships for the summer. Arjun also recognizes the lack of familiarity with the concept of internships outside of the United States and plans to leverage personal networks for future internships:

Sophomore internships are a bit hard to get in the U.S. So I think hopefully I’m going to talk to a few family friends either in Singapore and the Middle East. I think that’s going to be the most likely option, because nowhere in the world are they looking for like sophomore interns outside of the U.S., and
because I’m not a U.S. citizen, it doesn’t help. Like in India, there is no concept of an internship, you just – you get your first job after you finish studying. In Singapore there are – there is definitely, but they almost exclusively recruit from their own universities rather than from outside. And the only way to get into that is if you know someone there and because of the nature of my parents’ work, they have a lot of friends in those fields. So I’m hoping that something comes out of that. But if not, I haven’t really decided what I’m going to do yet.

Consistent with the nature of the Third Culture Kid experience, the families of the majority of participants were still in professional placements outside of the United States. For some, their parents had reached a point in their career where they could predict where they would be for the foreseeable future, but this was not the case for all participants. Proximity to family during summer internships, as well as after graduation, was a consideration for Aaruv:

That’s actually something I’ve been thinking about in the past two weeks as I apply for future internships, and I, again, maybe this is representative of my future job struggle. We’ll see, but I began being torn in two directions in the sense that I kind of want to intern in the Middle East because the summertime is time I want to spend with my family. It’s time I value with my family...I very much treasure family. On the other hand, I know career-wise, it may be best to intern in probably the New York area for next year or the year after.

For two other participants, the intensity of the pre-professional vibe at their university (as they perceived it) was a source of stress as they navigated the career exploration process. Committed to exposing herself to different pathways and exploring professional options beyond the “very traditional paths, like doctor, lawyer, medical, nurse...”, Agatha found her openness to exploration to be at odds with the certainty projected by her peers:

Yeah, so coming here, I tried to find as many things that might be interesting
to me as possible. In terms of internships, that was also weird. I mean, people seem to have their lives figured out a lot of times. That’s part of the culture here. That everyone wants to project an image of themselves as having everything figured out, but no one really knows what they’re doing.

Sonia described being a “little bit demoralized” by the pre-professional of the university. As she explained, “the pre-professional aspect of it [college culture], I guess was something that no one really warned me or explained to me. I guess I wouldn’t have known what to do with that information anyway if someone had told me.” Similar to Agatha, she sees herself as being more open to a range of options in her future, “I see not one clear path, but my personality, or the way I am is just to take on a lot of different projects, and at any given time I’m doing like five different things. I don’t know what my primary motive, like sustenance will be.”

**Accessing Formal and Informal Resources**

In addition to engaging in internships, assistantships and other endeavors related to professional exposure and development, participants accessed formal and informal resources to further their career goals. In terms of formal institutional resources, participants interfaced with the international student support office, faculty, the alumni network, and career services most often. Peers and family were cited as the most trusted sources of career advice.

**Career advice**

Peers, particularly upper-class students and recent alums, were cited as the most popular and trusted source of mentorship and advice for seven of the participants. Parents and family members were viewed as trusted mentors by five participants. Four participants identified individual faculty members who were
particularly helpful regarding career advice, while two described negative interactions with their professors. Individual students also described work supervisors, religious advisors, high school guidance counselors, student affairs administrators, and high school friends as valuable sources of information. Seven participants admitted to not really having someone they would consider a mentor on campus.

For career related advice, participants most commonly turned to their peers, which Arjun feels is “the best support system.” As a member of a group on campus that includes many TCKs, Arjun is proud of the resources the group provides to new students: “We provide them a community, a social community that they can always depend on and any other advice they need.” In considering the complex issue of visas for her and others, Rita points to the value of the peer network that exists in the form of a popular international student organization on campus:

All the juniors help us a lot...so like the older people help the younger people and they explain all the different like formalities that we have to do and how they got around to getting their jobs. And I know like a lot of the people I spoke with did take up the STEM major just because like for visa purposes, which is why I was considering it before.

Charlotte values the advice she receives from upperclassmen at the university, but also looks to her TCK friends from high school, given their shared values and experiences:

...some of my friends from high school, just because we had very similar upbringings. I think we share a lot of the same values, so in that sense I would ask them for help or for advice more than maybe some friends I made here, just because we were more similar and some people here just might
not get that we have to be in the States because of X, Y, Z. I think that’s also, those are also people that I ask for help.

Agatha, one of the students who struggled to identify a mentor on campus, alluded to the potentially unique advising needs of Third Culture Kids in her search “for someone who can sort of take everything about me and help piece it together.” According to her:

Because I myself desperately need guidance...Yeah I find that some of the more, quote/unquote "establishment figures" are a little ... not as helpful. Yeah, I think I’m still looking for someone to ... Who at least has experience dealing with students who come from a mixed background- in terms of experiences and family, et cetera. I’m just hoping that I can find someone who can direct me towards a clearer path, as soon as I finish deciding what sector I want to be in...Just for someone like me, I guess I’m a very demanding person in terms of employer. I want to do this, and I want to travel...Ultimately, I just want a job that’s dynamic and enables me to share, use my experiences for the better.

John found his interactions with academic advisors to be frustrating, given their singular focus on academia as a potential career route:

Maybe they just encouraged me to go the academic route because I was really promising at it, but at the same time I would have appreciated a wider imagination for what can be done with the sort of gifts I have.

John went on to describe how he finally found the Office of the Chaplin to be a “wonderful resource” and “really helpful in thinking about all of these things.” He posited that Third Culture Kids might require a specialized approach to advising given their potential lack of awareness regarding dominant cultural norms and expectations:

I think for TCKs, that can be...That sort of addresses the way I’ve experienced advising, which would apply to anyone; not just TCKs. TCKs often need more help with this than other because they take longer ... they are often just
learning the rules of society. If the rule of society is you've got to go apply for a Rhodes scholarship because that's what people do, they might just actually do that. You just do what people do until you learn what the rules are, then you can resist them...They could use help figuring out what they actually want; not just what they need to do to be a socialized human being.

Also unable to identify a mentor on campus, Arjun looked to his parents and peers on campus for career planning advice, particularly in light of visa considerations when choosing classes and majors:

I think definitely the students more than anyone else, and in particular international students, because a lot of people say like “this is the time”. I mean it’s very easy to get carried away by the general advice that's given to all students. You should be exploring. You should be doing this. But as an international student, you have to be a lot more pre-professional about your choices and that gets lost if you’re listening to that general advice. So I definitely try and talk to other international students, the most international upperclassmen. I've got some great recommendations and advice from them.

Regarding career-related topics, Alicia also admits that she actually hasn’t “had that much mentorship to be honest." However, she does point to a series of conversations with a PhD student she was “working under” as helpful, albeit sobering, career advice:

She gave a lot of helpful advice about pursuing a PhD degree, because for a while I thought maybe I wanted to become a psychology professor, or at least go into academia immediately. She basically debunked a lot of the idealistic, "Oh, I bet pursuing a PhD is all about learning what you want to learn, and studying what you want to study." She was like, "No, it all depends on who wants to give you the money, and if you have the money." I was like, "Never mind." I think she was a good source of like a dose of reality for me in terms of academia.

Sonia took some responsibility for not having a mentor, admitting that she didn’t seek one out, despite feeling uncertain about her major and career plans:
Again, this is probably a 50-50 my fault, 50% the college’s, but I did feel pressured to arrive at a decision for my major really fast, and I did not seek any kind of external help for deciding what I should major in. I had lists and lists of things I like to do, interests, everything. The same goes with career, I like would write down everything I loved, and everything I loved to do, and everything I was interested in, and hoped it would show me a link, and a possible major or career choice, and it didn’t. I just was left with this long list of things. Maybe seeking out help would have been a good start.

In terms of reaching out to other community members, participants found interactions with professors to be mixed. Four participants described welcoming, supportive and useful interactions, while two found professors to be aloof or intimidating. David described an interaction with a professor that was particularly helpful in his career search:

He was very nice about a couple of times sitting me down, being like "What do you want to do?". I was like "Oh, like I’m really interested in the intersection between economics and international relations," and he was like "You know you could do like this type of research, and you know you could do like this type of stuff," and I was like "All right, but like how do I get there?" He was like "Look up the people who have the jobs that you want, and then see what their track was," so that’s how I got on the “I’ll get a PhD in econ track.”

In his search for career advice, David has found two student affairs administrators to be quite helpful, describing the ways that they have helped him consider internship and career choices through the lenses of his identities. After creating a student club with the help of one of these advisors, he “always goes in and checks in, and talk about my interests, where they lie.” He goes on to describe a memorable exchange with one of these advisors regarding a potential internship:

She’s very good at listening and being like “it sounds like you want to do this.” At some point in the spring I was going crazy about internships for the summer because I felt like whatever I was going to do was going to box me
in, and I just did not want that to happen. I went in, was like I'm in this class, and they told us about this internship with the Mural Arts Program, and I really want to do it, but do I really want to do development in America, I'm American Lebanese, and she was like "Do you like it?" I was like yes, so she was like "all right, then do it." Like who cares what country you are from, it's just an internship.

**Interfacing With University Resources**

In addition to seeking out formal and informal mentors, participants also engaged with university sponsored resources and offices to advance career goals. The career services office, international student support office and college-sponsored network were the most frequently used resources. Eleven students interfaced with the career services office, with varying degrees of satisfaction. The international student support office was described as being very helpful by five students, while four students were impressed by the college-sponsored network for on campus and alumni contacts.

Six participants described generally positive experiences interfacing with the career services office. The office was described as most useful for “general stuff,” resume review, and international postings on the website. Four students felt the office could be more accessible and supportive of Third Culture Kids and offered suggestions to that end, while two described negative experiences with the office.

Natasha felt that the university was doing the best that it could to meet the career needs of Third Culture Kids and understands the need to differentiate advice between “non-American citizenship holders and American or U.S. residents.” Mona felt that the career services office was generally strong and provided students with access to a strong alumni network. Rita also appreciated the range of international
listings on the career services office website. Agatha, however, felt that the career services office could “probably develop more of a network with international companies and employers, that at least know about the fact that internships exist.” She “didn’t go to the career services office that much,” partly because “they don’t have the best international jobs.”

Neeti, Mayra and Sonia all recognize the strength of the recruiting process and career advice at their school for students interested in the business sector, but feel that Third Culture Kids and international students could benefit from more tailored advice and recruiting opportunities. Neeti would like to have information regarding OPT and OCT more readily available, as well as a more inclusive on-campus recruiting program (beyond the business sector) that includes bringing more multi-national companies to campus. Sonia felt frustrated by the internship search as an international student searching for positions in the United States:

I spent a lot of times at the career office, and I signed up for the international listserv, and I went to the career day fair things, and I never felt fully understood, so definitely to them. Just putting in the effort to, well firstly kind of acknowledge that there are a lot of international kids at [college], and a lot that don’t want to go into something business related. Because the emails that I would get for international opportunities would often be some kind of marketing or banking job. The other thing is that international opportunities would be in international places. There wasn’t anything, at least in my emails for international kids in the U.S.

Five participants viewed the international student support office as particularly useful in seeking more specialized career advice, especially regarding visas. Natasha, Neeti and Allie stressed the importance of offering extensive education and outreach around the visa process. Natasha lists the international student office as her “main resource” for career related advice:
... just because the career services office is more into – they’re more in tune with American – like when you don’t have to worry about visas or sponsorship and stuff. And for me that’s often like the first hurdle. Like before you can even think of applying to certain jobs you have to make sure that your paperwork is in order and stuff. So I spend more time with the international student office.

Aaruv has accessed a range of resources (including the career services office) in consideration of career and academic plans and hints at the need for self-reliance on the part of Third Culture Kids, a trait valued by other participants as well:

Academic choices and career choices, most of it comes from just the culture of word of mouth, things around me. I don’t have a specific point of reference that I’ve been going to. I’ll have conversations with my friends, I’ll hear the word on the street, look at how industries are doing, and then learning from my experience in terms of what I tend to enjoy researching, or learning about, or discussing...Yes, absolutely, definitely the career services office for when it comes time to recruiting for both internships and then full-time jobs, but also liasoning with the international student office to make sure all of that works out from a legal standpoint, but definitely yeah, when looking into internships this year, I know I’ll be talking to them about their recruiting process, for sure.

After a frustrating experience with the on-campus recruiting process sponsored by the university, Isabella decided to become more self reliant and develop her own network for career advice and mentorship:

Then we had this thing called On-Campus Recruiting. Basically, you try to sell your soul to an employer... It's mostly tech companies, finance, and consulting. I tried that out for a while. Didn’t work out either, so then I just decided to do research on my own and talk to tons of people, who were already more established in their career and could give me some of their perspectives and to see whether on a personal level we meshed and if they liked what they were doing, maybe I could like it as well.

The participants also recognized the positive impact of other offices on campus, as they relate to the professional and personal growth of Third Culture
Kids. Hana recognized the learning resource center as being particularly helpful, while Sasha and Hannah pointed out the value of the cultural centers on campus.

**Benefits and Challenges of the TCK Experience**

Participants described the perceived personal benefits and drawbacks of their Third Culture Kid experience. They considered how the beneficial aspects of their TCK experience contributed positively to the development and application of professional competencies, both on campus and in professional settings. In addition, participants described the challenges they encountered and considered the TCK traits that could potentially be viewed negatively by employers.

**Benefits of Childhood Mobility**

Regardless of the number of moves experienced, all participants articulated personal and professional benefits that they believe resulted from their mobile lifestyle and from the cultural diversity they encountered in their school and social environments. The most often cited benefits include tolerance and open-mindedness (8 participants), global perspective and international exposure (6 participants) and adaptability/resilience (5 participants). Three participants also spoke about the cultural understanding that was developed during their adolescence, while two participants appreciated the ability to learn multiple languages. Additional benefits perceived as emanating from the Third Culture Kid experience include independence, confidence, diplomacy, empathy, and the ability to make connections with people from a range of backgrounds.

The participants felt strongly that their experience as Third Culture Kids led to the development and strengthening of several professional competencies that
would serve future employers well. For those students still enrolled in college, these insights arose largely from internship and other professional exploration activities, in addition to campus leadership roles. The recent graduates also pointed to specific interactions with colleagues or supervisors as examples of these competencies, which allowed them to consider how these competencies align with company or industry wide needs.

Participants described the application and value of the childhood benefits in two different settings, the college campus and the professional workplace. Ten participants described situations in which their global perspective contributed positively to a conversation, class discussion, or challenging situation on campus, while five described moments they were able to bring campus communities together as a result of the skills and perspectives they gained as a Third Culture Kid. Exposure to global issues inspired three participants to spread global awareness on their campus. Three other participants shared examples of how they applied their perceived cultural awareness when planning and advertising events for their peers. Two drew from their Third Culture Kid perspectives in their approaches to welcoming and mentoring younger students on campus.

Different patterns emerged when participants considered the application and importance of perceived TCK benefits and competencies in the workplace. For eight participants, the ability to speak multiple languages was perceived to be the most valuable asset. Participants also felt TCKs could contribute in a professional setting by virtue of their adaptability/resilience, interpersonal and diplomacy skills,
broader perspective, cultural awareness, open-mindedness, interpersonal skills, ability to remain calm in a crisis, strong work ethic, and ease with travel demands.

**Tolerance and Open-mindedness**

Several participants mentioned the importance of tolerance and open-mindedness in the workplace and describe how these traits were encouraged and developed through a range of educational settings and TCK experiences. Mateo shared:

I feel like I became more tolerant and I had a more global perspective about things and problems. I always kind of felt like I wasn’t entirely the same as other people just because I felt a little more global and a little more well traveled and more knowledgeable.

Sasha’s credits her open-mindedness with early exposure to other cultures in her international school:

I think one of the best things about going to an international school was being exposed to the different cultures at such a young age because I think it just makes you more open-minded as an individual. Because each culture comes with different views, comes with different religions and comes with different perspectives. So coming to the US for instance... like generally, I feel like Americans tend to be more close minded or they think of America as the world kind of thing. So going to an international school, you definitely don’t have that perspective. It was great, like my best friends were from Holland, Sweden, Malaysia, and Japan.

Aaruv credits the diversity of the student population and the educational approach of the United World College campus he attended in Singapore as providing valuable exposure to other cultures and global issues. From his perspective:

UWC is a school where you really focus on like those world issues, just because of the type of students. The diverse students and their background makes it easy to have those discussions, because someone has a different perspective to always add to the conversation.
He describes his United World College setting as “a melting pot of Third Culture Kids.” Founded in 1962, the United World College currently consists of 17 international schools and colleges and national committees in more than 115 countries. UWC’s stated mission is “to deliver a challenging and transformational educational experience to a diverse cross-section of students, inspiring them to create a more peaceful and sustainable future.” (www.uwc.org, 2017)

For Amber, the transition to college highlighted the importance of tolerance and helped her to appreciate the openness to diversity that she believed her international school setting fostered:

We were also from all over the world so things like ethnicity or background didn’t really matter. That was something that surprised me a lot when I came back to the States. Even at [college], like how much communities self segregate and stuff. I think that was something that I really appreciated that I was able to just form close relationships and friendships and not think about how different we are.

Rita attended a French school in Malaysia and describes how that setting contributed to her openness to other cultures as well:

...because we were in an international school, a lot of our teachers really put a lot of focus on being international and being open, especially, I remember my English teacher he would tell us, he would teach us this term, which was the intercultural umbrella. And so we would learn about all these different cultures and how to behave and accept other people and how to get the most out of every situation when you are confronted by different people.

Sonia recognizes that being a Third Culture Kid does not always equate with being more open-minded. In her particular experience, she has “family everywhere, so a lot of travel was involved.” Because of this, “You hear ideas, you are introduced to new stories, to art for me, especially new visuals, new people, and I think it makes...
you a more open person overall.” However, she argues that this may not be the case for everyone:

It can go two ways. It can make you more accepting, or it can make you more closed off, and I think it depends on the type of person you are. For me it's definitely made me more accepting, more tolerant. I don't question as much, and kind of embrace what difference people have to bring, as opposed to kind of look at them funny because they’re different, which I don’t.

**Broader Perspective and Critical Analysis**

The notion of bringing a broader, or alternative, perspective to a professional setting manifested in a number of ways for the participants. Through her summer internship, Mayra has come to appreciate that she “always think[s] of things on an international level” and has been able to present important foreign considerations for a number of projects. Similarly, Aaruv feels his Third Culture Kid background manifests in a “foreign perspective” that he has brought to his internships in the business sector. Isabella credits the extensive travel she undertook as child as contributing positively to her broader perspective:

It really helped me see differently form a very young age because first of all you're in a country where you don't speak the language. Everyone acts a little differently, behaves a little differently. It helps to put things in perspective that people are not just the way you are or the way that people around you are in your country.

Sonia recognizes the impact of living abroad, extensive travel, and her cross-cultural upbringing had on her worldview:

I mean both Hong Kong influences, as well as my own family and Indian influences on me from the Asian side of me, and then all the Western things I've learned. I'm not putting this well, but basically there are different strengths I think I’ve picked up from both sides of the world. I think that
makes me quite unique, because say if I’m in the U.S. and I bring the whole Asian perspective in and vice versa when I’m here.

Jim, who grew up in China as a missionary kid, values the “new perspective” that Third Culture Kids can bring to a situation, as well as their “strong work ethic.” From his perspective, “the kind of people that choose to totally relocate themselves” can develop “an outsider stance.” As he describes it, “it’s an outsider stance that is very family based. My family is my culture. My family is my people. That brings certain insights.” An example of this is when he discovered freedom of speech during his first year of college:

...maybe there are some things I can say that can be somewhat insightful because I’m coming from a different background like, for example, there’s, say in a liberal university, there is a very strong emphasis on how bad America is and how bad the history is...Because, I come from a radically different background, I look at America and I’m like, “Man, this is the best nation on earth. These people are wonderful. Freedom of speech.”

In addition to providing alternative insights on the dominant culture, Jim also feels that that “outsider stance” can allow Third Culture Kids to “fit into niche markets, like the immigrants.” In his description of his ability to connect with his Chinese roommate, he points to the value of a broader world perspective and to “an understanding of sectors of populations in America that are different, outside of the mainstream culture, because we’re outside of it too and spent our whole lives always outside of the mainstream culture.”

For Natasha, “thinking outside of the box” and applying a broader perspective is inextricably tied to “being aware of different cultural things”:
For example, in the Middle East the topic of women is something that is dealt with very differently than I think in other western countries, and just being aware of that difference. Some people would think that oh, it’s like oppression or it’s something like this or something like that. But once you’re immersed in that culture you can see like it’s not always like that. There is sort of like cultural reasoning behind it. And you can’t just judge so quickly, like yes of course there are examples of extreme violation of human rights, like basic human rights. But at the same time you also have to respect. You have to respect; I think that’s the most important thing. Respect other people.

Six students described classroom situations where their broader global perspective, as they perceived it, allowed for valuable contributions and interesting exchanges. Hannah believes her immersion in two vastly different cultures has contributed to a unique perspective within the classroom:

In academic settings, if it’s a culture that I’ve had access to...I think that there’s common sense knowledge that I have that other students don’t necessarily have that I can contribute. From experience interacting with those cultures, I can bring that in when someone says something and it sounds too hoity-toity highfalutin in academic language and I don’t find it convincing because that’s not the experience I’ve had with that culture or at least that I can present a different perspective.

Amber perceives that her direct exposure to family dynamics, workforce needs, and educational opportunities in rural China allowed her to provide valuable insight regarding the value of education across cultures:

I was taking a course on international relations and our textbook was divided into a lot of different categories like, what war does for a country, what infrastructure does for a country and then there was one, what education does for a country. A lot of the people in the class were obviously all for investing in education, education is great, education brings opportunities, education uplifts a community and is the way to go. I played a little bit of the devil’s advocate because with my experiences growing up I’ve seen that education isn’t necessarily always the saving factor...I think that made me think a lot about education in a developing country versus education in the United States where a lot of people are living relatively comfortable lives in comparison to the rest of the world. In that class, where everyone else was
saying a lot of great things about education, I was like, "No, you have to think about a lot more situations in other countries where you don't need such high skilled workers, education isn't maybe the best thing for kids."

John describes how his experience as a missionary kid has allowed him to offer unique perspectives during classroom discussions:

Okay, so definitely being a missionary kid in the Middle East means certain constraints. You can’t always explain what your parents are doing. This turned useful in a history class on North Africa. We were talking about anthropological practices. You go in there, you do interviews, do you explain what you’re up to? These cultures have often no category for anthropology. It makes no sense what you're doing. You look like a CIA spy.

For David, the need to remind his peers that there may be non-U.S. students and perspectives at play in the classroom was a valuable contribution, but also one that could be frustrating for him: "Like sometimes I’ve walked into class, and I’ve been like you sound like you know nothing about what's going outside of these United States, but I'm really not in the mood today to talk to you about it, so tomorrow.” However, there were times he felt comfortable pushing his peers to broaden their U.S.-centric perspective:

I think I’m always amazed how in political science courses I’ve had peers who say 'we' a lot in the conversation, or like 'I feel like', or like 'I think', and it's like this talking in like the first person, or like including everyone in the conversation like we as Americans, like blah blah blah, but there are people in this room who are not Americans. There are people in this room who are not brought up here, there are people in this room that don't have the same beliefs as you, so why are you saying 'we'? I’d be quick to be like, "But regarding your point you cannot forget that there are other nationalities out there, there's different perspectives on certain things."

Aaruv points to his experience of living in the Middle East in shaping his “foreign perspectives” on a “day-to-day basis.” In addition to playing out positively
in campus interactions, he has experienced the utility of his perspectives in a professional setting. His internship afforded him the opportunity to provide valuable insights regarding larger scale political and business considerations for different countries and cultures:

I was working in the portfolio management branch for a local Saudi firm’s fund, and there, it was definitely okay, how do you think this company’s performing in the States? I’m like I would say that okay, I know they’re facing this issue, they’ve been working this way, but the way the U.S. political system works, it’s more this way. When we compare it to the Middle East, it works in this sense. It’s also been great for analyzing how larger regional conflicts are interpreted on either side, so those are definitely situations where I’ve been able to leverage it, but also in making myself a part of multiple communities on campus, it’s allowed me to really bridge different groups of people.

Cultural Awareness and Appreciation

Enhanced cultural awareness and appreciation on the part of Third Culture Kids was one of the more pervasive themes discussed by the participants. In addition to considering herself very adaptable as a result of her childhood, Hannah prides herself on her appreciation of new cultures and languages:

I’m not afraid of new cultures. I find them absolutely fascinating. I love learning languages. I know six languages. I hope to know more. When I come to a new city, the way I learn the city is I get lost with a map, a physical map, and then I find my way back.

Rita feels that her exposure to a range of cultures growing up has led to a greater appreciation of cultural diversity. She believes that her peers, particularly students from a range of cultures, view Third Culture Kids as leaders because they are perceived as possessing greater cultural awareness than their mono-cultural
peers. She points to the composition of the leadership board of a campus international student group as evidence of this:

The leadership board is elected by the student body and I feel that a lot of the students who participate in the areas are from so many different cultures that Third Culture Kids appeal to a lot of them because they give off this understanding that I think someone from just like one country wouldn't be able to provide.

The international exposure experienced during childhood and adolescence informed professional engagement and campus leadership activities for several participants. For Meredith, her “personal international experience” was an important factor in her decision to volunteer as an intern for a startup created by two graduate business students:

One is an Indian, and the other is Muslim American. Their whole idea is to try to become the Uber of homemade food. There’s GrubHub, but they’re not usually the best for your health, or calories, whatever. The idea is you would empower these immigrant women or men who their only skill may be cooking, and they do that really well. Trying to connect them with busy professionals who want either an exotic experience, whatever that means, or a homemade feel. I think I was drawn to that for that very reason. The idea of providing income for immigrants who have valuable skills that are not being monetized. For hopefully people to learn about other cultures.

Hannah has applied her experiences with travel, languages and research to her work writing for a travel guide, she “wrote, edited, and/or translated reviews for a publication called In Your Pocket, which is a travel guide for expats and English speakers.” Alicia has applied her interest in being in intercultural spaces to her internships and volunteer positions:

... I work at this English language program as a program assistant so I meet students from Kazakhstan, we’re having dinner on Sunday. I met many students from Saudi Arabia, Turkey...Japan, Korea, China. Latin American and
South American countries like Paraguay, Brazil, and Portugal…I think I realized even as an international student who's had experiences like that I love intercultural spaces and working there gives me life. I just love learning about different cultures and giving them a space to express their home and being able to bring that here.

John channeled his experiences with a range of cultures by creating community in the form of an “interfaith dialogue group (Jewish, Christian and Muslim)” on campus. Rita “created a French society” on campus because she “noticed that there wasn't a society for people who spoke French. So not necessarily French people, but just Francophones”.

Alicia applies her understanding of a range of cultures when planning events on campus and tries to broaden the perspective of other student planners in the process:

Kind of even just figuring out ways like, oh, how can we bridge gaps, maybe even not in a conversational way, but even just having a shared activity that all people can take part in. Even thinking about activities, like one of our student program assistants, or our student coordinator he wanted to do like a dance party, but then I was like, "Oh, but wait, our Saudi, or like orthodox Muslim females don't feel comfortable, or don't feel like it's okay culturally okay, or even just religiously okay to dance in front of men. How can we create activities even that can encompass the most amount of people, the most number of people, yeah."

As a student planning a career in business, Aaruv describes how he is applying his appreciation of global culture, influenced by his international school experience, to his approach to business:

...whereas in an international school system, it's always been a global analysis looking at different cultures, but also global culture as a whole, and how they interact, how they interplay. I think that's been really helpful because it definitely lends to a very strong realization that there's more than one way of doing things, and that the way you've been brought up with is not
necessarily the best way. But at the same time, that you can expect a lot, especially when you combine different aspects of different cultures in a sense that. I guess an analogy in a business context would be to find the best part of every culture, and use a different culture for each part of the process, say, so taking the best from every culture to build a larger whole. I think it’s giving an opportunity to see what works best, and learn from that.

Participants also recognized the potential downside of the cultural and global exposure experienced by Third Culture Kids, in regards to workplace fit. As David points out, Third Culture Kids may be perceived as “too foreign for the workspace.
If everyone grew up in Portland, Oregon, and was only exposed to Portland, Oregon, and then you come in, if you’re too flamboyant about your foreignness it might not go well.” Mona also recognized that some professional organizations might not actually value diversity and that “sometimes when you need to make relationships with other people, if those people are all like-minded then they may be seeking to be a business partner or do business with someone who is just like them.” This could impact hiring decisions for “a Third Culture Kid or someone who associates with different cultures” as they “decrease the pool of people that are just like them.”

Language Skills

Instruction in a foreign language and immersion in a bilingual or trilingual educational setting at an early age promoted language acquisition for several of the participants. Nine participants cited full or moderate proficiency in four or more languages. The average number of language spoken for this cohort was just above three.
When applying for a position in Admissions, Natasha highlighted the particular relevance of the competencies she gained as a Third Culture Kid and hopes to apply her language skills in this role:

…during the second half of summer I’m going to be working at Admissions. And something that I highlighted was the fact that, hey, one of the reasons that I came here was because of the international community. So definitely during the summer is when you see most international students have the opportunity to come and visit the campus. So I think I will definitely be an asset to the office when people need to ask more internationally focused questions or like language or stuff. If they come with their parents, and I could communicate in a couple languages, so that’s going to help me be able to navigate the front desk and stuff.

**Diplomacy**

Diplomacy skills took many forms for these participants, both on campus and in professional settings. Alicia described how her childhood experience of being immersed in a range of cultures led to an appreciation of diplomacy:

You just try to sort of be diplomatic at all times. And try to have good relations with everyone. Because you honestly do not know when you’re going to see them again, whether that be in like another school, another country, in the airport one day, or even at college or university...and sort of keeping in mind that you’re an ambassador, I guess, for whatever country that you’re from...

Reflecting on her childhood, Allie also described skills pertaining to diplomacy and described the importance of listening:

I think that I’m more open-minded had I not gone through this experience, and I'm a better listener, I relate to people a little bit more, and I think that’s one of the things that you learn - that everybody’s opinion is valid whether you agree with it or not. Just because you think that there’s something wrong with it, there’s a reason why somebody believes something a certain way, and you have to respect that. I think that’s one of the biggest lessons I’ve learned.
Mona’s involvement in organizations was fueled initially by her own questions of identity and struggles with culture shock:

So the organizations that I joined, just those organizations were kind of reflective of my cultural, like wide spreadedness I guess. I joined an Asian sorority my freshman year and part of that was also trying to re-find my identity. And it was part of coming back to this like culture shock of America.

Over time this involvement led to leadership positions that allowed her to draw upon the mediation skills she developed as a Third Culture Kid:

...later on that led me to getting really deep in the broader multicultural Greek society at college. All the Black, Latino, and Asian sororities and fraternities, and I led that group, that council and I think I was a lot more able to see past differences relative to other girls who were in my sorority of purely Asian descent, just like me, but who hadn’t gotten that broader range.... We were dealing with a lot of campus issues of racial sensitivities and party themes that were suggested. It was a lot of playing the middle ground between the traditional white, fraternities and sororities and the African-American ones, and I was able to navigate that I think because of the experiences I had before.

Mayra points to her Third Culture Kid upbringing as the impetus for her interest in diplomacy and willingness to employ a critical lens regarding tough issues:

For example, my freshman and sophomore year at [college], I applied to this program that would...I could go to a conference on the UN. One of the things I got to speak about there was being raised in Peru, having Indian parents. It was this conference on Women’s Rights, and basically I got to speak about how both the South Asian culture and the Peruvian culture are not the most at promoting women’s rights or gender equality. And definitely to that I had the chance to speak out on the different issues.

For Mateo, the sheer volume of exposure to different cultures that comes
with being a Third Culture Kids also contributes to the development of diplomatic tendencies and a general respect for cultural differences:

I would say it comes down to you are exposed to many different people and many different views, so you learn how to work with different people. I feel like you learn how to make sure your point of view comes across, even if in a more diplomatic fashion without offending anyone. I feel like you are just more aware of cultural things and you become more respectful about them.

In addition to emphasizing his language skills and adaptability, David describes diplomacy as a potential contribution to a company when interviewing for positions and shares examples from his upbringing and campus activities to illustrate his ability to “work in different settings, whether it be countries or groups of people,” particularly when diplomacy is called for. He shares an example of this:

...last year I planned an open expression event where I was talking to college Republicans, college Democrats, the group that does protests on campus, the campus newspaper, and like different professors who had competing thoughts, and I was like, "We're having a panel, and you guys are all going to talk about it."

He goes on to describe his personal approach for continually strengthening his diplomacy and mediation skills:

It's like I actively put myself in positions where I'm either different than everyone else, or everyone else is different and I'm just like moderating, or like being that like managerial position, I guess is the word. It's not something that I...The way I phrase it I guess is situations that make me feel uncomfortable are situations that I like jump into because I think just growing up it's been like a staple of my experience.

Interpersonal Skills/Empathy

Several participants also describe the interpersonal and communication skills that come from being a Third Culture Kid. Amber feels that through her
experience as a Third Culture Kid she developed "the ability to be accepting of people from a lot of different backgrounds." She hopes this aptitude will serve her well as a doctor in the future:

It's really honed my communication skills over the years to have to meet people from a lot of different places who speak a lot of different languages. I think at the end of the day if you want to be a good doctor you have to be really compassionate and care about the people that you're helping. That's all that really matters.

Agatha describes how others were welcoming to her as she navigated several moves as a child, and that she now reciprocates by being welcoming to others on her college campus:

I think the biggest way I'm different from people is socially. I've learned not to ever judge people based on their appearances. So, I always reach out to people. I'm always saying "Hi." You know, during my first few weeks, I introduced myself to everybody, even if they were dressed in a different way, or were shy, or not talking. My roommates right now always make fun of me because they're like, "You're too nice. You're too nice." Because sometimes I'm too nice. The other person interprets that as me trying to be best friends, but I just want to make everybody feel welcome. My best friends now were the people who were so welcoming of me when I moved, and were so inviting. [They] invited me along to all of these things at the beginning when I had nowhere to go. So, I always feel like I need to reciprocate that.

**Adaptability**

Another benefit that participants believe come from being a TCK is adaptability. Rita feels that frequent childhood moves “teaches you to be independent and it teaches you to adapt and not get too comfortable because you know that things will change.” In Hannah's estimation, the Third Culture Kid experience contributes to a range of skills, including adaptability:
I think as a Third Culture Kid, there’s adaptability and there’s also this amalgam of a particular culture’s perspective that you have unique access to that you wouldn’t have otherwise. Adaptability, access, curiosity. I guess also add the word resourcefulness to adaptability.

Amber asserts that, because of their adaptability, Third Culture Kids may not need to rely on the university as much to solve certain problems:

I think it’s difficult because the thing about being a Third Culture Kid is that you’re really good at adapting so there wasn’t really a time where I saw a problem and this is on the administration to fix it. Instead I think this is more something I need to adapt to.

**Calm in a crisis**

Two participants felt they were particularly calm in a crisis, an attribute that they believe will serve them well in professional settings. Natasha, who had to be evacuated on the spot with her family during the Egyptian Revolution, described that as being just one of many life events that contributed to her levelheaded approach to a situation:

Remaining levelheaded and calm because you’re going to have problems in life, that’s inevitable. And I think I’ve sort of been I guess trained or I’ve had experiences that have taught me how to deal with high stress, high tension, high everything situations.

Allie wonders if it is true for all Third Culture Kids, but she portrays herself as calm and collected in the midst of challenging professional environments: “I think about if there’s any crisis situations, I’m probably more calm than most people because I’m like, “This too shall pass. Cool, calm and collected, just take things easy, and just kind of wait.”

**Ease With Travel**
Several participants reflected on the increasingly global nature of the workforce, as well as the travel and communication demands that arise from this expansion. David spoke directly to a relevant professional competency shared by many Third Culture Kids – an ease and comfort level with travel: “Then I also think being third culture I'm always prone to want to travel. I'm okay with traveling...It's like yes, like put me on a plane, send me anywhere. Life breathes in me when I walk into an airport.”

Confidence

A desire to lead and to contribute to the overall campus community was reflected in the campus leadership positions held by many of the participants. Arjun detailed a series of leadership positions he held and credits the confidence he gained as a Third Culture Kid as contributing to these roles:

I think as a Third Culture Kid you have so much more confidence and I think you're just willing to take a lot of risks that other people aren't, especially so early on. So I mean if there is like an election, you're willing to speak and contest that spot, you also have a lot of experiences that you can talk about. So I think that helps a lot, I think a lot from the confidence point of view.

Global Experience and Cultural Competence

Six participants touched upon the alignment of emerging workforce needs with perceived TCK professional competencies. Charlotte’s career exploration experiences have led her to conclude that “it actually helps to have global experience” and she actually tries “to play that up as one of my core strengths.” In her estimation, “…the world, they're being more globalized today, so people are opening international offices, a lot of those clients are from different countries, so
having that [global experience] does add value to the company.” Sasha is also keenly aware of the visa considerations that companies must go through when considering international students, but feels the benefit of hiring a visa-carrying Third Culture Kid ultimately outweighs the cost:

I think that they definitely appreciate it [global experience] but it’s always tougher for companies themselves to hire international students because of the required partnership with OPT so I think for them it is just a logistical difficulty to hire international students. But I think it is an asset to them in terms of experience and especially with consulting because you are going to be traveling, you’re going to be working with people with all different backgrounds.

In Alicia’s estimation, several industries, including academia, are in need of culturally competent employees and would benefit from the contributions of Third Culture Kids:

Honestly, I say it’s probably the best option for employers obviously, right. Given how global business and even health care, and cities are becoming more diverse. Academic institutions are becoming ever more globalized, like there’s such a need for culturally competent employees. Honestly, and so even if there were drawbacks that I can’t think of right now of being a Third Culture Kid. I think the very nature of Third Culture Kid, the emphasis is on their living abroad, so I think that experience itself is so, so valuable.

As a rising sophomore in college, Arjun stresses how his experiences align with emerging global workforce needs given that “multinational companies need to transfer their employees around” and require them to “interact with a lot of different cultures:”

But just being more aware that there might be a difference in culture and there might be differences in the way we work, I’m just like already aware of that, because I’ve lived in different countries, seen different things. Like the Middle East was so different to Singapore and both of those countries are so different to the U.S. So yeah, you just don’t – it’s not so much of a conscious
effort that you have to make when you're like working with other people. You're not like, oh, you don't have to tell yourself that, oh, I need to watch out for cultural differences, it is just something that you already do...

Mona’s early exposure to workforce needs has led her to conclude “that relationships are the key to success” in “large parts of business, but really in many jobs” and feels that enhanced cultural exposure plays a role in strengthening these relationships:

To that point, international or third culture or even just people in general who are able to see eye to eye and walk in another person’s shoes, which you maybe tend to do better if you grew up with friends from you know sixty countries around the world. Then these people tend to, or can, or able to more easily connect with others.

Two participants described how their global experiences influenced their interview experiences. Natasha recognizes that her life experiences help her to stand out and be memorable in networking and interviewing situations, “...when you are networking or at an event... if you’re the person that lived through the Egyptian Revolution, it tends to, like, stick.” Similarly, Aaruv finds that his experience as a Third Culture Kid meets “the airplane test” and predicts that it will strengthen his “employability” in hiring situations:

It's always been said in networking advice, you need to give something either in common with the person you're speaking to, or something that gives them an interest in you that makes you, like the airplane test, that they'd want to sit next to you on an airplane. I think that I've noticed over the course of this year, and meeting so many new people after moving to college, when the inevitable part of the conversation, “where are you from?”, comes up. I may hate the question, but there is always a very interesting conversation that develops from that in terms of what life in Saudi was like, what the third culture bubble was like in terms of, “oh, but you speak really good English”. The conversation developing from that - whether it was hard, whether it was easy, how I think it's changed things.
Challenges of Childhood Mobility

For the 19 participants who articulated drawbacks and challenges associated with their Third Culture Kid upbringing, common themes included challenges with constant transition and friendship challenges as adolescents. More specifically, four participants struggled with constantly leaving friends, while another four acknowledged that they didn’t possess lifelong childhood friends as a result of their many moves. Another participant struggled to stay in touch with friends. Three participants described confusion regarding cultural norms and identity challenges, while one cited ESL challenges when reflecting on childhood challenges.

In considering potential drawbacks for employers when hiring Third Culture Kids, four participants did not perceive any specific drawbacks. For those who were able to do so, the most prominent themes emerged around struggles to identify and conform to cultural and professional norms, and the perception of being “antsy” or unwilling to stay in one location or position for an extended period of time. In projecting ahead, participants also acknowledged that Third Culture Kids may be seen as “too foreign” for the workplace, may struggle with ESL issues, experience visa constraints, and may need to contend with family being spread out when considering professional placements.

The two challenges that seemed to span both the childhood experiences and professional workplace considerations were potential misunderstanding of cultural norms, as well as the impact of so many moves and transitions on personal desires to move constantly later in life.
Transition Challenges

Even for participants who stayed in one country for an extended period, the “transient feelings” and grieving process were still present given the constant mobility of friends and teachers around them. Sonia stayed in the same school for all 13 years of her K-12 schooling, but still experienced the impact of constant transition around her:

...many of my friends went to boarding schools, or their families for their job were moved elsewhere. Many, also similarly came here later on in our schooling, so we had incoming and going people, and then that just made for a very transient feeling. I didn't like it actually, because many of my friends left. It was quite sad.

Rita describes some of the transition challenges and feelings of isolation she experienced as a result of her many moves as a Third Culture Kid:

Making new friends, leaving your house, having to leave everything you loved to find a new country where you don’t know anything and you just feel empty and then building the network back I guess. As a kid, it’s a little bit easier because children play and you just get along especially through school, but for like adults, for my mom for example, because she wasn’t working, it would be a lot harder to make friends and to find your bearings in a new city. And so that’s definitely a challenge and also keeping in touch with people is incredibly difficult. So like in my school because a lot of us came from so many different places. I was the only one who applied to the US, which makes me even more isolated.

Identity Challenges

For several of the participants, identity challenges were aligned with struggling to describe where “home” is. Alicia shares that she, and several of her TCK friends, often grapple with the “huge topic” of “Who am I? Where is home? I’m a foreigner.” Similarly, Natasha sometimes struggles when asked where home is, “Either like I’m not American, I’m not from Azerbaijan, I’m not from India. So no
matter where I am I felt like I’m not really where I’m not – not like in my home place or anything.” Questions regarding home bring identity issues to the surface for Sasha, and she admits that she has “no idea what to answer to that” question:

So my default is that I grew up in Malaysia, but I am originally Indian. That is my default answer, but I think that people completely forget the Indian part and just assume that I am Malaysian. Because there are so many American Indians obviously, but they say they’re American. Like as an American but ethically Indian. So that is what people think I am. I am Malaysian but I’m ethnically Indian. But I am actually Indian by nationality and by passport and everything, but I was growing up in Malaysia. That is the toughest part.

While Amber felt that she identified with the Third Culture Kid experience in general, she alluded to the identity challenges that arose for her as a result of her childhood moves:

I was always a little confused on where I stood with the third culture because my parents are Chinese by birth and culturally, but I grew up in the States for a bit, but then I went back to Shanghai. When I went back to Shanghai I went back as an international student and now I am back in America again as an international student.

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) describe the “hidden immigrant” scenario in which a student is assumed to fit in with the dominant culture given outwards markers or citizenship, but is actually struggling to understand the cultural norms and expectations. Amber described the experience of feeling like a hidden immigrant at an early age:

I think when I was younger it was really tough to be in Shanghai, I think from my case it was a little bit different, but I am Chinese but when I went back to China I was 80% American and 20% Chinese. When I moved back to China in second grade I didn’t speak any Chinese at all. I think in my case it was different because people would expect me to fit in but I didn’t because I didn’t speak the language, I wasn’t used to the food, I wasn’t used to how crowded it was. When I was younger, I really, really didn’t like it and for the longest time I would always ask my dad when it was time to go back to the States, and that kind of broke his heart a little bit.
For Natasha, her identity challenge was of a different nature. Unlike Amber, whose physical appearance matched the majority of those around her in China, Natasha felt like she stood out as an outsider in the countries she lived in: “And then obviously wherever else that I’m at it’s clear that we’re not from there...So no matter where I am I feel like I’m not really where I’m not – not like in my home place or anything.” Pollock and Van Reken (2009) describe the process by which many Third Culture Kids become “cultural chameleons.” While Natasha does not use this term, she describes a similar process as she navigated early transitions:

...you are never really fully one identity. Meaning, with every new culture that you gain, you lose a little bit of your old one...And then maybe the other thing is, there’s always this period of transition where when you first get there, you are clearly an outsider. So you have to kind of, jump over those hurdles. And more so than relocating just within the U.S. let’s say. You have to change who you are.

Isabella felt like a hidden immigrant when she entered college, and as a result, advocates for more awareness and resources for Third Culture Kids, particularly given the potential for identity issues within this cohort. She recognizes the importance of cultural centers for other groups, but as she observes:

There’s not really a safe space or a center for international or third-cultural kids. I feel like just having a space in itself would be a great first step towards helping them adjust because on paper, technically I’m an American student, but I came here and I was like, "What’s going on?"

As Jim points out, there is no designated cultural center for Third Culture Kids at his university:

We don’t have something like a cultural center for kids from these polyglot, weird backgrounds, third-culture kind of kids. We recognize each other when we see each other. There’s this bonding experience, but we don’t have a
center where you can go to recognize those kinds of people. That could be useful.

Sonia also felt that she, and other Third Culture Kids, could benefit from a dedicated group:

I don’t fit into Indians from the U.S. and I don’t fit into Indians from India, so I just felt a bit like I can’t be a part of either of those groups, or that type of group. Then there was a Hong Kong Students Association, but I didn’t feel like I fit into that either, because I’m not local Chinese, and pretty much everyone in that group was Chinese. For people like me I would really like a group, like a third culture group.

Looking back on her academic career, Amber wishes she had met more Third Culture Kids: “…I sort of wish I’d met more people like me at [college], I guess who were TCKs and had similar experiences because there were times when it was just hard for me and most of my close friends were not TCKs.” Mona also touched on the struggles that some Third Culture Kids experience in finding their “niche” on campus and the potential benefit of a dedicated group:

But I know a lot of Third Culture Kids in general can struggle with finding their niche, or their group of people. There’s a lot of organizations that exist for people of X descent or people interested in X culture or whatever it is. But there’s not really…There aren’t maybe that many support groups for people who go across those different cultures. So I wonder if maybe there’s room for some organization of that kind to start up or some resources.

Larger systematic practices of labeling students and placing them into boxes can contribute to these identity issues for Third Culture Kids. Admissions offices are often the first place that labels are assigned and, without an appreciation of the unique nature of Third Culture Kids, it can be difficult to label them in a way that validates their experience. Believing that some sort of Third Culture Kid community
on campus would have helped her to meet “more people like her,” Amber describes the ongoing confusion she experienced as a result of the labels assigned to her by the university:

This is something that confused me throughout my whole time at [college]. For some things, they labeled me as an international student and for other things they didn’t because I had US citizenship. Before I came to [college] they assigned me an international mentor and was giving me all this information about the international student orientation. So I knew about it. I don’t know if it was admissions office but somebody at [college] was telling me.

While she appreciated the social connections she made during the international student orientation, Amber argues that some Third Culture Kids have needs distinct from international students:

I guess the international student orientation, and stuff, was ... that was a nice introduction. I met a handful of people who I liked and could talk to about this kind of stuff with, in my first two days at [college]. In terms of resources, I’m sure there’s tons of things for international students. The thing is I guess for me I never really thought to ask for things like that because I felt like I should be American. I technically was American. They’d me label me differently at random times. A lot of those resources going to international kids seemed not that relevant to me. It was stuff like visas and I don’t even know.

For Aaruv, the “day to day necessity of large systems having to put people in a box” is more of a systemic issue. While he recognizes the challenges associated with implementing this change, he would like to see a broader shift towards “having a perspective that doesn’t require one specific place, one specific family, one specific place to be from. I think that’s systemic overall in terms of just the way the culture looks at identity, rather than [the college] itself.” Rita noticed that her peers also had trouble grasping the Third Culture Kid identity, “I feel like a lot of the students’
views are very binary. It’s like you’re either American or international.” Sonia also references the challenges faced by Third Culture Kids in regards to feeling confined by categorizations:

On the Common App, so this is more not just related to [her college], but I think colleges overall, you would use a demographic, you tick Asian, and other, and it’s all very generalized. There’s no third culture option when you tick those, and it’s hard to write, yeah I’m Asian, but I’m Indian. I’m not what you consider Asian, and also I speak German, and a bunch of other things, and I went to a British school. It’s just so hard to condense yourself when you’re someone like me or the people you’re studying.

**Understanding Cultural Norms**

While three participants described struggles with understanding culture norms as a child, some participants worried about the challenges that may occur in professional settings. Allie felt that “most forms of professional etiquette are pretty universal,” but she conceded that for Third Culture Kids, “there might be some cultural things that might kind of fly past you if you haven’t been exposed to it before.” Amber stated, “Maybe there would be workplace culture or little things that you just don’t understand or you were never taught if you didn’t grow up there.”

Agatha has noticed differences that exist in different cultures in regards to professional feedback and suspects that some Third Culture Kids may need to adjust to this:

I feel like in an office setting, maybe there would be some awkwardness or at least a lack of understanding, and in the same token, the way that you’re rewarded for you work is just totally different here. Here, you’re always complimented, no matter what you do, so you don’t really know if you’re doing a good job or not.
Sonia reported experiencing cultural differences during her internship with an ad agency:

I wasn’t Chinese enough to work there. Everyone there that worked there, and the other intern that was there was Chinese. I was interested in the creative side, but the copy side they would only speak in Chinese, because all the ads were going to be in Chinese. What I didn’t realize is how much the, and I should have realized, but I didn’t realize that the local culture has a whole mindset, and that has to be relevant when you are making a commercial.

Both Alicia and Jim described struggles with understanding cultural norms. For them, the experience of being raised outside of the United States (despite being U.S. citizens) and then returning to the U.S. for college led to an interesting perspective on race politics in the United States. Alicia’s transition to college and early professional placements led her to reflect on her own awareness and understanding:

I think one thing that I realize that I lacked was this awareness of the racial tensions that are present in the US. Just because I’ve been so removed my whole life from American, and even the state of urban cities, and even just the city itself in the U.S.

For Jim, his initial introduction to race relations in the United States was particularly challenging:

One of my blunders, one of my greatest blunders perhaps as a Third Culture Kid was I came here, and I found everybody was obsessed with race. I was like, "Why are people so racially obsessed?" Because I grew up in the expat community where everyone’s a different color, and you have this very strong sense of commonality as opposed to "I’m a white boy. That means I’m a foreigner."
Jim described how his background also led to challenges with recognizing social cues when he transitioned to college after being homeschooled:

I recognize that I have some disadvantages due to my third culture and particularly my home-schooling and intensely isolated background...Intensely isolated background. That gives me some social disadvantages. I'm socially awkward. I had to learn a lot of things, like texting. Using abbreviations in texting. Using slang. I knew no slang when I came here, so I was trying to communicate.

In a similar vein, John reflected on his relationship to pop culture references:

I'm not sure this is my personality, or this is Third Culture Kid; it's probably compounded. I have never been good at pop culture references. I don't think if I had lived in one place in my life I would be very good at them. I just don't care about that stuff. In every culture I have been, I have sort of been "out" of those things. The stuff most people use for small talk I just don't connect with it.

**Flight Risk/Antsy**

Several of the participants believe that Third Culture Kids may be perceived as too “antsy” or a “flight risk” by potential employers. Neeti plans to “aim for multinational companies who might need people in different countries” because “some employers might not want someone who is a flight risk. Maybe they want someone who is more domestic and wants to settle down and stay there for a long time.” Recognizing that “she can’t stay in one place forever,” she suspects that other Third Culture Kids also “feel like they always need to go somewhere else or are antsy if they’re in one place for too long. That might not be attractive to a company...This candidate is just going to bounce in like a year or two.”

Alicia perceives that Third Culture Kids can possess a “mindset of fast pace, like changeability in life" and that this mindset of “movement” might not appeal to a
company that is “domestic focused.” She suspects that Third Culture Kids “might just leave the company” if they find themselves “working at jobs that are very stable, and like monotonous at times.” Mayra also recognizes that “a lot of Third Culture Kids do want to move around a lot” and seek “diversity” both in terms of setting and the type of work they are engaged in:

> Even in the workplace, when you're doing work you want different tasks at the same time, a lot of my friends who are international, who are Third Culture Kids, I feel like they move towards jobs that are encompassing different things, or like consulting where your all switching projects, and stuff like that. Yeah, it is a very big generalization, but definitely applies to me. Third Culture Kids want different things a lot, or would get bored in a very standard, one track role.

**ESL**

While some perceived multilingualism as a strength, three participants noted that English is not the first language for many Third Culture Kids and argued this could be a drawback in professional settings. Mateo and Hana articulated challenges they experienced in the classroom and in professional settings as non-native speakers. Charlotte feels that her “English is very American,” but recognizes “that’s not the case for everyone else” and suspects that a strong accent may hinder other Third Culture Kids:

> If you have a really strong accent, or...you don't really know the cultural norms of America, I think that does negatively impact you when people interview you, especially if you’re just not catching on to their jokes, or if it’s a very client-facing job.

**Danger in Appearing Arrogant**

Participants also spoke about the challenge of accurately and positively
conveying all of the potential benefits of hiring Third Culture Kids, while not appearing arrogant. Recognizing that confidence can be perceived as arrogance, Rita spoke of a college-sponsored event where a panel of trustees offered the following advice to students:

They told us to mostly talk about like our global experiences and how it has helped us understand people more and how we would be an asset in terms of oh we can travel to this country and we don’t offend anyone because we know how to react, we know how to – just like be with people.

She sought the advice of upperclassmen because she wanted to understand how to implement this advice without appearing conceited:

...they were explaining to us how you’re supposed to show your strengths without appearing pompous or arrogant about your experiences. Because it’s like “oh I traveled here, I’ve traveled here. I know this because I’m international.” A lot of people don’t like that, which is understandable. So it’s very much like trying to play-off your strengths and explaining like “This is what I’ve learnt.” So showing that it was a growth experience and less like oh I was given this because I was overseas or like this is what I guess it gave to me and more “Oh, I tried to understand this. And this is what I learnt from the experience.” So that would make it come across more -- as if you were more humble and more – like a growth experience.

Agatha is also sensitive to the need not to appear arrogant and spoke of her struggle to eloquently and adequately describe her deeply enriching Third Culture Kid experience to potential employers:

When I write a cover letter, I want to share how deeply different it makes me from the average person...I know that an intern isn’t exactly formulating policy or anything, but just analysis, a way of thinking about things. You know, suggestions, attitude. If I could just say, "I am a TCK," and they would understand that, then I wouldn’t really need to write anything else...I mean, the dynamics of the way people work are strongly affected by someone who has a cultural background that’s different to theirs. I wish that that was appreciated more. Hopefully, your research will make a difference.
Her desire to translate the importance of her Third Culture Kid experience extends beyond the interview process to her actual professional placement as well:

...Long-term, I hope that after college when I get a serious job, they appreciate that about me, because that’s something too, like TCK, you want to feel like you're being valued for your experiences...When I was reading Third Culture Kids, part of being me is also sometimes having feelings of superiority or feeling very arrogant because you think you're better, because you're smarter, whatever. I don't think that's it at all. I think it's more, this is something ... It’s not that it’s a traumatizing experience, but it’s something that very strongly affected me throughout my life, so you should know about it.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to the existing literature on Third Culture Kids by addressing a topic that has received little attention in the research related to the undergraduate experience. By elevating the voices of both U.S. and non-U.S. Third Culture Kids, this study expands the focus beyond a U.S.-centric lens and highlights important career considerations for visa carrying students studying in the United States. Participants in this study experienced a range of placements due to their parents’ occupations. This representation of a range of TCK placements also fills a gap in the current literature.

Recent research in the human resources realm have identified Third Culture Kids as potential candidates to fill emerging needs in a global workforce (Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004; Selmer and Lam, 2004; Selmer and Lauring, 2014; Tarique and Weisbord, 2013). This study builds on that supposition by asking Third Culture Kids directly about their perceived contributions to the workforce, as well as their desire to engage in work with an international focus.

The findings of this study shed light on how the experience of having a highly mobile and cross-cultural upbringing influences how college-aged Third Culture Kids engage in career planning and preparation. All participants were open to global assignments in their professional career, while many stated this as a primary goal and made decisions as early as late adolescence in pursuit of this outcome. The experience of being a Third Culture Kid influenced participants’ selection of
university, academic major and other coursework, pre-professional activities (internships, job shadowing, etc.), potential careers, and the information conveyed in interviews for internships and jobs. In seeking career and related academic advice, participants turned to peers and family members most often. In regards to on campus resources, the participants interfaced most often with the career services office, the international student support office, and the university-sponsored network for career related advice. Third Culture Kids perceive that their experiences have contributed to several professional competencies that may be valued by employers, especially in an expanding global workforce. These perceived advantages include cultural awareness, tolerance/open-mindedness, and a global perspective.

**Summary and Comparison of Findings**

Guiding theoretical perspectives and studies related to workforce needs, the adolescent experience, and professional aspirations were presented in the review of the literature. In this section, the findings from this study will be summarized and compared to these earlier findings. Major takeaways will be presented at the conclusion of this summary.

**Guiding Theoretical Perspectives**

In his five-stage theory of career development, Super (1970) describes ages 15-24 as the Exploration Stage, with sub-stages occurring from age 18 to 21 (Transition) and age 22 to 24 (Trial). The other stages are Growth (birth – 14), Establishment (age 25-44), Maintenance (age 45-64), and Decline (age 65 on) (Super, 1970, p. 136). Super (1970) recognizes that career development is not
always linear in that individuals can cycle through each of the five stages during different phases of life (adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood), particularly at points of transition and during career changes. Similarly, self-concept changes over time, particularly with the onset of new experiences.

Participants in this study did not seem oriented toward ‘Establishment,’ as proposed in Super’s (1970) model. With the exception of participants who spoke of a desire for short-term stability immediately after graduation, the majority of participants emphasized a desire for flexibility and openness in their future career plans. This finding may be related to the high frequency of ‘Transition’ experiences that participants experienced during Super’s (1970) ‘Growth’ time period of birth to 14 years. As predicted by Super, participants in this study did not experience or anticipate a linear career path that aligns directly with the chronological ages ascribed to each of the stages. The TCK experience, as described by these participants, may be better understood as a series of cycles (growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline) experienced with each transition and/or move.

As predicted by social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and Bandura’s (1986) Triadic Reciprocal Model of Causality, personal attributes, external environmental factors, and overt behaviors all influenced the college and major selection process, career plans, and professional career exploration activities of participating Third Culture Kid.

Drawing on Bandura, Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) define self-efficacy as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action
required to attain designated types of performances”(p. 83). Self-efficacy perceptions help to “determine one’s choices of activities and environments, as well as one’s effort expenditure, persistence, thought patterns, and emotional reactions when confronted by obstacles” (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994, p. 83).

Self-efficacy perceptions appeared to influence participating TCKs’ choice of environments. The majority of participants wanted their environments, in the long term, to be what they experienced as Third Culture Kids. Participants articulated self-efficacious beliefs in describing their ability and desire to navigate numerous career moves in a variety of international settings as adults, noting that they have demonstrated the ability to successfully navigate similar transitions as a child. The contributions of “persistence” and “emotional reactions” (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994) to self-efficacious beliefs were also addressed by participants in their references to adaptability, resilience, and the ability to remain calm in a crisis as perceived Third Culture Kid competencies.

**Workforce Needs**

The competencies and traits listed by the participants as being beneficial in a professional workplace closely resembled the skill sets and attitudes described as emanating from their adolescent experiences as Third Culture Kids. Participants in this study cited extensive travel, immersion in a range of cultures and languages, enrollment in schools with an international focus and diverse study body, and exposure to a range of globally focused careers during adolescence as contributing to their interest in international careers. These findings align with earlier studies
that described a strong future focus on international careers for TCK adolescents (Gerner et al., 1992; Lam and Selmer, 2004).

Participants also identified the benefits and drawbacks that they believe potential employers could consider when hiring TCKs. Participants believe that their advantages pertain to their language skills, cultural competency, interpersonal skills, adaptability, level-headedness, mediation skills, outsider perspective, and ease with travel and mobility. These perceived strengths are largely in alignment with the practical skills identified in the research: linguistic, cross-cultural, observational, and social skills (Jordan, 2002; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010; Sheard, 2008; Stultz, 2003). In terms of drawbacks, participants believe that Third Culture Kids could be perceived of as too restless/antsy, too easily bored, and “too foreign” as potential employees, perceptions that also align with earlier findings (Lam and Selmer, 2004).

Most participants felt that Third Culture Kids were uniquely poised to meet the expanding and changing needs of a global workforce (Black et al., 1999; Bonebright, 2010; Lam and Selmer, 2004). Several were already communicating these perceived advantages in interviews and applications for leadership positions and internships. Two participants felt certain about the unique contributions of Third Culture Kids, but were still struggling with conveying this certainty without appearing arrogant.

**The Undergraduate Experience**

In deciding to enroll at the research site, participants cited the flexibility of offerings, reputation on an international level, diversity of the student body,
interdisciplinary programs, and strength of the curriculum as important factors. Several participants felt the school would replicate some of the most positive aspects of their secondary schooling experience in terms of academic rigor (IB was the most popular curriculum) and the diversity of the student body, while also contributing to a career with a global focus and flexibility. Constrained by geographic location and finances, several of the participants were not able to conduct an in person campus visit before enrolling and therefore relied on family and peer connections and formal rankings to make their selection. This experience is in alignment with the experience of other Third Culture Kids who must rely on rankings, word of mouth, and college counselors when unable to visit in person (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Quick, 2010).

In addition to school selection, the adolescent TCK experience also impacted the major selection process. Research on the career choices of 603 Adult Third Culture Kids by Cottrell (2002) revealed that 63% of the 603 participants were influenced by their mobile childhood in their selection of a major, with nearly one-third choosing a major with an international focus. Many of the respondents indicated that they chose a major (international relations or not) that would lead to opportunities for international work (Cottrell, 2002). While the sample size was much smaller for this study, the findings revealed a similar pattern. A majority of the participants selected majors (and minors), were intentional about OPT visa usage, and engaged in pre-professional and campus activities that would contribute to a future career that had an international placement or component. The majority of participants described their need for professional flexibility, particularly on a
global scale, and chose majors that would support this desire for mobility and flexibility.

In addition to a desire for future global placements and overall flexibility, visa considerations also played a large role in major and minor selection for many of the participants. The visa extensions and enhanced opportunities for work in the United States after college were strong contributing factors in the selection of STEM majors and minors for many of the visa-carrying participants. The intentional inclusion of both U.S. and non-U.S. citizens in this study allowed for this finding (the impact of visa considerations on major selection) to emerge.

When choosing majors, exploring careers, and navigating visa concerns, participants in this study turned most often to their peers for advice, particularly upperclassmen and recent graduates. Following peers, family members (especially parents) were listed as preferred sources of mentorship and advice. Earlier studies described the close-knit nature of Third Culture Kid families and the value placed on parents as sources of advice (Useem and Downie, 2011; Lam and Selmer 2004). In describing parents as trusted sources for career advice, participants affirmed these earlier findings. Participants also described a range of positive and negative experiences with campus officials, formal support structures, and professors in regards to career and academic advice. In terms of university-sponsored resources, participants interfaced with the career services office, the international student support office and the university-sponsored network most often for career advice. The variance in personal experiences points to opportunities for colleges and
universities to strengthen outreach efforts, programming and formal support networks. These opportunities will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

All of the participants were able to describe a range of leadership positions and campus engagement activities (in and out of the classroom) that reinforced the competencies and perspectives gained as a Third Culture Kid. These undergraduate leadership experiences were described as an important step in the overall process of transforming early TCK experiences into marketable and valuable professional competencies. The most common campus engagement and leadership activities centered around mentoring younger students, encouraging engagement with global issues, addressing questions regarding identity, as well as applying diplomacy and mediation skills. The student culture at the research site encourages high levels of campus engagement for undergraduates, which may explain the high number of campus responsibilities listed by students. However, the participants were able to articulate unique contributions as TCKs, differentiating several of their experiences and perspectives from their mono-cultural peers.

The research site also has a reputation for placing a strong emphasis on pre-professional training. Two of the participants found the intense pre-professional focus of the university to be challenging. This institutional reputation and culture could have played a role in the level of engagement with pre-professional exposure. All of the participants recognized the value and importance of professional exposure and exploration during their undergraduate years. This was evident in the description of the range and frequency of pre-professional activities they engaged in, as well as the articulation of learning outcomes. The most frequently cited
opportunities were internships, research assistantships with faculty members, and job shadowing. The majority of the participants approached their pre-professional activities as opportunities to explore different professional fields and to “narrow down” choices.

In terms of persistence to graduation, all of the participants in this study were either on track to complete their degree within the typical four year timeframe, or had already done so. This rate of persistence is commensurate with the 95% overall graduation rate at the research site, but does not align with earlier research that found high rates of transfer (two for the typical TCK) and higher incidences of taking time away from school (Useem and Cotrell, 1993). Two participants did take a gap year before starting college, two participants transferred in from other institutions, and one took a short college leave for medical reasons.

In early observational studies, Third Culture Kids were described as rootless and indecisive at times (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). This could explain the high rate of transfer for the Third Culture Kids in college. While several of the participants described early adjustment and identity issues and overall struggles related to the notion of “home”, none of the participants shared strong regrets regarding their choices of school or major. Two of the participants described general indecisiveness regarding the major selection process, but it did not emerge as a pervasive theme. The desire to engage in career paths that allow for flexibility and openness appears to be tied to a desire to travel and engage in a range of challenging tasks, rather than a sense of indecisiveness.
Professional Aspirations

Useem and Cottrell (1993) describe high levels of degree attainment (four times higher than mono-cultural peers) and a strong interest in advanced degree attainment amongst the Third Culture Kids in their study. In alignment with those findings, participants in this study also described a strong commitment to pursuing professional and graduate degrees as part of their longer-term career goals. Three of the participants have plans in place to pursue advanced degrees immediately after college, while the vast majority of participants expressed a desire to pursue an advanced degree within 2-5 years of graduating.

Nearly one third of participants in this study anticipate pursuing a career in the business sector, namely finance or consulting. This trend aligns with earlier findings (Cottrell, 2002; Wisecarver, 2014). In Cottrell (2002), 25% of ATCKs worked in business and finance, with 25% working in education. While several participants in this study shared aspirations of being a faculty member eventually, only one participant envisioned working in higher education with a few years of graduation. This discrepancy could be explained by the lack of undergraduate offerings in education at the research site.

Conclusions

The rich descriptions shared by the 23 participants in this study illuminated a range of findings related to the career decision-making process for college-aged Third Culture Kids. The summary and review of these findings highlighted four major findings. First, the guiding frameworks (Super, 1970; Bandura, 1986) provided a useful reference point for understanding the first set of findings. The
participants in this study described a high number of transitions and moves during their Growth period (birth-14 years) and elements of the cycles (growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline) that often accompanied these transitions. The majority of participants demonstrated self-efficacy by asserting that their successful navigation of these early moves contributed to a sense of confidence in their ability to move often as adults, as well as a desire to incorporate international mobility and flexibility into their career plans.

Second, this study addressed a gap in the literature by asking college students directly about their desire and ability to meet the needs of a global workforce, as identified in the human resources literature. Participants in this study articulated a strong desire to enter the global workforce and cited examples from both college and professional settings to demonstrate why they, as TCKs, are particularly well poised to meet emerging workforce needs by contributing unique perspectives and competencies in professional settings.

Third, an interest in global careers started as early as adolescence for many participants, similar to earlier studies (Gerner et al., 1992; Lam and Selmer, 2004). Through qualitative methods, this study illustrated how this adolescent interest impacted a series of important decisions in late adolescence and college, including college selection decisions, major and minor choices, decisions regarding OPT usage, and internship choices. TCKs can benefit from informed and targeted advising on the part of professionals regarding all of these decisions. In particular, the frequency and intensity of discussions regarding visa restrictions and OPT usage
illustrates the importance of timely advice and resources regarding this topic for TCKs in college.

Fourth, in terms of professional aspirations, the majority of participants spoke of the need for openness and flexibility in their professional careers. Additionally, all participants were either actively working towards global placements in their anticipated career fields or were open to this possibility at a later point in their professional trajectory. These aspirations and priorities can be considered by career services offices when planning recruiting opportunities and by all professionals serving in an advising capacity for TCKs. Implications of these findings for practical applications will be discussed in the following section.

**Implications for Practice**

While this study focused on the career exploration process for Third Culture Kids at a large research institution, the findings can inform procedures and programs at a range of institutions that enroll TCKs. In describing their career exploration journey as undergraduates, the participants in this study described interactions with campus offices and representatives that extended beyond the walls of the career services office. Their reflections and observations revealed concrete strategies that campuses seeking to support college-aged Third Culture Kids can consider implementing. In analyzing the range of suggestions offered, a common theme emerged – visibility. They wanted to be seen and understood so that services, resources, and outreach could be tailored to their unique experiences. The following recommendations represent conclusions based on analysis of the
findings, personal professional experience, and suggestions offered directly by participants.

In general, campus administrators can acknowledge and celebrate the perspectives, skills and strengths that Third Culture Kids bring to campus by encouraging them to serve in prominent student leadership roles on campus. Potential roles include student government representatives, resident assistants, peer mentors, and campus ambassadors for a range of offices. They can also seek them out for input (possibly via focus groups) when planning and implementing student programming. Campus communications offices can also highlight the professional and personal trajectories of faculty and staff who are Third Culture Kids.

Student life divisions are structured differently on every campus. The following section provides suggestions for a range of programs and opportunities for engagement, delineated by the offices most likely to interface with TCKs on campus. After considering the needs of TCKs and budgetary priorities on their own campus, institutional leaders can consider a range of programs and support mechanisms to fit the needs of their students.

Admissions

Admissions offices serve as the first point of contact for many Third Culture Kids. Given their geographic limitations, these offices should consider the outreach efforts and messages regarding TCKs that are being shared during campus visits, through print and digital materials, and via admissions counselors that travel to schools and college fairs. Undergraduate TCKs can be encouraged to serve as tour
guides, ambassadors and hosts during admissions events, and student interviewers, if this exists within an office’s interview structure. These actions could raise the visibility of Third Culture Kids on campus, particularly with prospective students. If a structure is in place on campus to identify and support TCKs, this should also be conveyed through outreach efforts. Professional, student, and alumni interviewers could also receive training regarding the TCK experience and consider their potential to positively contribute to the campus as scholars and leaders when interviewing and reviewing TCK applicants.

Participants in this study highlighted the importance of access to advising and visa information, and revealed how the initial designation on the part of the admissions office (international vs. domestic student) can impact subsequent invitations to participate in certain programs, such as international student orientation. Access to information can therefore be limited for some students based on this initial designation. Select colleges in the United States allow Third Culture Kids to choose for themselves if they would like be designated as a domestic or international student (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). If this approach does not align with the policies of an office, there should be transparency and agreement among related offices (admissions, financial aid, health services, international student support office, etc.) about how Third Culture Kids will be identified and supported by the institution. Given how complex the notion of “home” can be for TCKs, as well as the number of moves they likely experienced, the admissions office can also consider allowing text box entry to accompany questions regarding home address and nationality.
Multicultural Affairs

The most popular suggestion shared by participants in this study was the creation of a group or club on campus specifically for Third Culture Kids. If the school and the population are large enough to warrant it, it was also recommended that an advisor be assigned to support the needs of this cohort. Depending on the structure and philosophy of the student affairs division, this group could be situated under the umbrella of a multicultural affairs office, the international student support office, or another campus office. If a separate group or advisor is not feasible given institutional restraints, welcoming messages for TCKs could still be shared at outreach events and activities fairs by multicultural affairs (or related) offices.

Funds and programming dedicated to social gatherings could allow TCKs to find and develop stronger connections with other TCKs on campus. This was also a stated desire by participants in this study. Resources and opportunities for TCKs over college breaks could also be considered. Certain schools provide home stays, access to college dorms and campus resources, food pantries, or sponsored trips over breaks for international students, low-income students, and other students facing personal challenges. Non-visa carrying TCKs on campus may have families who are based internationally due to work placements and may not be able to travel easily over the breaks to be with them. However, they may be overlooked for these types of support programs and services given their designation as domestic students. If funds or resources are provided for the aforementioned cohorts of students, schools may want to consider adding TCKs as potential recipients.
Participants described several instances in which they leveraged their diplomacy and mediation skills and cultural competencies to bring groups together to address challenging situations on campus. These insights, strengths, and competencies could be harnessed to inform programming efforts for a range of campus offices, particularly multicultural affairs offices. Third Culture Kids should therefore be encouraged to serve as leaders and ambassadors for multicultural affairs (and related) offices, as student leaders can influence programming, visibility, and the allocation of resources.

TCKs could also be considered as panelists or moderators for campus discussions regarding global affairs and/or domestic issues that have global implications such as government policies on immigration and visa constraints. Additionally, the participants in this study grappled with questions of identity and intersectionality as adolescents, college students, and recent grads. The insights gained from this level of self-reflection could benefit other students in small group and panel discussions that focus on the topic of identity.

**Career Services Office**

Participants in this study revealed a strong desire to work globally in their careers, leverage their Third Culture Kid experiences when applying to jobs, and apply the perceived benefits and competencies arising from their TCK experience as employees. Given these findings, there are several measures career services offices could consider undertaking. Professional staff members and peer advisors for the career services office can receive training regarding the Third Culture Kid experience and offer tailored resume, cover letter and interviewing workshops.
These services could then be marketed widely to students, particularly if a designated TCK group or adviser doesn’t exist on campus. For offices with peer advisors and ambassadors as part of their advising and outreach structures, Third Culture Kids could be encouraged to apply to these positions. Their TCK background could be highlighted in their profiles, thereby raising visibility.

Offices could also consider bringing in TCKs as speakers and panelists and highlighting this aspect of their background when offering career talks. These career talks could also include a networking and/or mentoring component. If on-campus representation is difficult due to international placements, panels and mentoring relationships can be offered virtually.

When inviting companies to on-campus recruiting and career fair events, career services offices should encourage them to be transparent at the outset about their willingness and capacity to sponsor visa-carrying students. Additionally, they should consider bringing multinational companies to campus, as these employers often have enhanced flexibility and capacity for supporting employees with visa constraints. If a student is initially hired for a U.S. based branch, but is not awarded a visa through the lottery, they are in a stronger position to transfer them to a branch in another country. If possible, this type of information should be shared in advance of the event or interview so that students can prepare accordingly.

**International Student Support Office**

In this study, the international student support office was listed as one of the most popular resources on campus for participants as they navigated the career planning process. Several participants described the information provided by the
office regarding visa constraints and considerations as vital to course and major selection, as well the internship and job search. Given this, the office of international student support should have current, accessible and clear information regarding visa issues, and this information should be available to all students through a range of mediums. Third Culture Kids may not be automatically signed up to receive notifications from the international student support office, which points to the need for agreement on protocols and policies with the admissions office in regards to classifying students.

All workshops, panel presentations, webinars, and visa related events should be shared with all students, regardless of visa status. Participants in this study highlighted the importance of the peer-to-peer network on campus, so widespread advertising would allow for more peer-to-peer support. The recent change in presidential administration in the United States has led to a series of reviews and proposed policies that directly impact visa-carrying students on college campuses. Given the uncertainty that can result from these changes, efforts should be made to bring in legal expertise to support these students as well, particularly as they consider visa implications for their job search. Advertising these resources to all students can allow non-visa carrying students to support their peers by providing them with concrete strategies that can be disseminated and implemented and by raising overall awareness.

In addition to considering the policy mentioned earlier of letting students choose a designation, international student support offices can invite Third Culture Kids to take part in select orientation sessions or the entirety of the official
international student orientation. Another option would be to create a separate orientation for Third Culture Kids, either in conjunction or in advance of, the general orientation for international students. Some offices are offering webinars and other online forums for international students in advance of formal on-campus orientation programs. This type of resource can also be offered to TCKs in anticipation of potential challenges often associated with repatriation and the general college transition process.

**Academic Advising/Learning Resources/Counseling Services**

The participants in this study highlighted the importance of timely and informed advice regarding course, major, and minor selections in relation to the career planning process. Academic advisors could receive training on visa implications for certain majors and minors, and consider the timing and delivery of advising conversations and outreach related to this topic. Another option would be for the academic advising office (or related office) to offer a session on finding the balance between exploring a range of disciplines and taking electives (especially at liberal arts colleges), and choosing a major when there are additional factors (like visa implications) to consider.

Some advising offices incorporate pre-advising questionnaires in an effort to maximize advisor matching and to allow for more personalized exchanges in the advising sessions. The questions on these forms can be evaluated to determine if the TCK experience is being captured in these preliminary questions. Mentors and advisors who are TCKs could also be identified and purposefully matched with incoming TCKs as advisees. If an academic advising office incorporates peer
mentors into their advising structure, it is important for them to be trained on these topics as well.

Three of the participants spoke of the language challenges they experienced as a result of attending primary and secondary institutions where the language of instruction was not the language spoken at their home. For Third Culture Kids with an American passport, but who attended schools overseas where the instruction was not in English, their struggles with language may not be evident until they are enrolled in college courses with an emphasis on reading and writing. Learning consultants with specialized training could support Third Culture Kids struggling with ESL issues, particularly those who may not have been identified through traditional channels. Targeted outreach could aid in connecting TCKs to these resources. Additionally, several participants felt their academic preparation in high school (particularly coming from an IB curriculum) set them apart from many of their peers. These strong learning and study skills could be leveraged by TCKs as peer academic coaches, if that structure exists in a learning center.

In describing their career exploration considerations, participants also highlighted a range of personal struggles related to identity issues and challenges associated with the transition to college. Targeted training for therapists on the challenges and benefits of the TCK experience could enhance individual counseling sessions and group sessions, when applicable. Counselors could support TCKs as they navigate the college transition process, consider potential career paths through the lens of their chosen identities, and as they look ahead to navigating the transition to the professional workplace after graduation. Additionally, targeted
outreach and acknowledgement of the TCK presence on campus could send a
powerful and welcoming message to students who can sometimes feel overlooked
and/or were raised in a culture that attaches a stigma to seeking counseling.

**Alumni/Parent Office**

The college-sponsored network for on campus and alumni contacts was one
of the three most trusted sources of career related information and personal
connections for participants in this study. Alumni offices should therefore consider
creating a TCK specific alumni group. This group could also be made accessible to
students by the career services office via a LinkedIn (or similar forum) TCK group,
with possible industry specific subgroups. Alumni offices could also sponsor
gatherings in international locations. By strengthening ties with alums who are
living abroad, the institution has the potential to create a network that can work on
behalf of admissions to attract Third Culture Kids who are living internationally, but
who may not be able to visit the campus in person before applying. These alums
could serve as valuable ambassadors and alumni interviewers for the admissions
office and may be more willing to engage with the career services office by offering
internships and career advice to students.

Alumni and parent offices could also consider disseminating stories and
newsletters that focus on the contributions and lived experiences of Third Culture
Kids on campus. Participants in this study listed parents as one of the top resources
for career advice. Enhancing institutional outreach to parents of accepted students
before they matriculate, as well as parents of matriculated students, could
strengthen a support network that is already present for Third Culture Kids. Given
the global placements of many parents, the parent outreach office could create an online forum or community for TCK parents. Resources for TCKs on campus (if available) could also be highlighted during on-campus parent orientation events and parent/family gatherings for those who are able to attend.

General Strategies

As participants in this study shared, the question of “home” can be a challenging one for Third Culture Kids, both emotionally and practically speaking. Advisors and student affairs professionals can acknowledge this struggle by shifting how they engage with all students around the question of home. Instead of simply asking, “Where is home?”, advisors can ask, “Where or what do you consider home when you aren’t on campus?” In addition, whenever students are asked about home address or citizenship on a form or application, a text box can be added to allow for additional context and a range of entries. This would address the concern shared by four of the participants about their lack of understanding/comfort with being forced into labels or binary classifications by external forces. Advisors and mentors can also provide TCKs with honest and situational specific feedback as they work to articulate the strengths and competencies that emerged from their TCK experience, without appearing arrogant.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the findings from this study shed light on the factors that influenced career related decisions for 23 U.S and non-U.S. students at an elite university, they also suggest additional areas for future research. First, future research should consider transferability of findings to other institutional contexts. This study was
conducted with 23 participants at a single institution, a large university with a prestigious business school. Similar research questions could be explored at an institution without a business school, which may reveal different patterns regarding major selection and professional aspirations. This study could also be replicated at an institution of a different size, such as a liberal arts college, or at an institution with less of a pre-professional focus.

Second, a limitation of this study is that it is cross-sectional and considers only students’ perspectives at one point in time. Additional research could address this limitation in a variety of ways. Longitudinal studies that track projected and actual career trajectories for Adult TCKs, possibly 2, 5, and 10 years post graduation, would contribute to the current research. Updated longitudinal studies on career choices and levels of academic attainment would build upon earlier studies (Cottrell, 2002; Fail, 1996; Useem and Cottrell, 1993; Wisecarver, 2014).

At select points throughout the study, participants posited that their perceived competencies and contributions could be attributed to their Third Culture Kid experience, but that they could also be personality traits. They also wondered if mono-cultural students grappled with the same questions as them. This points to the limitations of self-reported benefits and competencies and presents opportunities for a third topic of research. Comparison studies between mono-cultural peers and TCKs could contribute to the literature by addressing a range of important topics: adolescent influences on school selection and major selection, descriptions of academic and career mentors, form and location of pre-professional engagement activities, and utilization trends for career related services on campus.
Fourth, Gerner and Perry (2000) revealed consistent differences between female adolescents who had always lived in the U.S. versus those who had lived abroad in regards to openness to other cultures, languages, national groups, travel, and interest in international careers. Future research could build upon this study by examining gender differences in the career planning process for TCK college students.

Fifth, additional research from the vantage point of supervisors of Third Culture Kid employees could provide a valuable perspective. Study participants described a range of professional competencies, and provided examples to support their assertions, but the competencies were self-reported. Supervisors could provide insight into how the perceived competencies actually translate into professional skills and contributions in the workplace. In a similar vein, three participants described struggles with articulating the strengths and professional competencies associated with their Third Culture Kid experience in cover letters and interviews. Considering this, research with hiring managers could provide insight into how interview responses and cover letters are perceived and received from a hiring perspective.

Sixth, the findings in this study provided insight into the experiences of both U.S and non-U.S. passport holding participants. The incorporation of a range of citizenships represented a shift away from the focus on U.S. TCKs that has dominated the literature. Future research could build on this by studying the career decision making processes in a college or university outside of the United States, or by comparing U.S.-based and non-U.S. based universities. Greater understanding of
career-related practices outside of the United States can inform the policies and procedures of international student support offices in the United States. By gaining a deeper understanding of differing cultural norms and the experiences of students in other countries, professionals can potentially be better equipped to serve incoming international students.

In particular, research regarding the career exploration process for college aged Third Culture Kids could build upon recent research that has focused on the experience of TCKs in Japan (Hylmo, 2002; Kanno, 2005; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Yoshida et al., 2002). As Cottrell (2011) points out: "Based on existing U.S.-centric TCK literature, one might easily forget that not only do TCKs go everywhere in the world; they also come from everywhere. Japan is an exception to the paucity of research on TCKs from countries other than the United States". (p. 67) Cottrell provides an overview of the research focus on Japanese TCKs:

Japanese interest in the topic of returnees stems from the fact that Japan moved from being relatively isolated to finding itself internationally involved in a short period of time. The number of Japanese living abroad exploded in the 1970s with the growth in Japanese international business interests...The kikokushijos (returnees) were seen as so woefully unprepared for the rigors of Japanese schools or university that in the 1970s Japan introduced special schools, separate university admissions exams and reserved places in some universities or university departments for kikokushijos...The number of TCKs has continued to grow, but as Japan has globalized the prevailing view of them has shifted from the focus on shortcomings – largely cultural, especially linguistic – to focus rather on their advantages – knowledge of Western ways, and superior command of English. (p. 67)

The research on Japanese TCKs largely considers the impact of the returnees on Japanese society more broadly, which reflects an emphasis on collectivist values, as opposed to the focus on the impact of the TCK experience on the individual. A
study that compares the career decision-making processes for students in two different countries, with differing dominant values systems (collectivist vs. individualist), would represent an expansion in the current literature.

Finally, future research should consider the effectiveness of various structures and supports for the college and career-related experiences of TCKs. This study examined the career decision-making process at an institution that does not have institutional support structures in place dedicated to Third Culture Kids. Future research could focus on the career planning process for students at a college or university, such as Lewis and Clark College, that advertises and provides designated resources for Third Culture Kids. Lewis and Clark College currently enrolls approximately 140 TCKs (6.5% of the degree seeking student body), and shares the following message with prospective students: “Lewis and Clark recognizes that TCKs/Global Nomads bring something special to the campus. Their experiences, their talents and different “world view” enrich the classrooms and the residence halls” (www.lclark.edu, 2017). Future research could also compare the career planning process for students who choose to be designated as international students versus those who choose to be designated as domestic students at institutions where students are afforded the option to choose.

Concluding Thoughts

Enhanced visibility serves as the foundation for the majority of these recommendations. Visibility begins with listening. These participants exhibited great trust in sharing their personal and professional journeys with me. I was honored and humbled by their insights and contributions. They were visibly excited
by the potential for enhanced awareness and support for Third Culture Kids on college campuses, particularly as they navigate the career planning process, and were generous with their insights and suggestions. The most surprising part of the research process was the sincere appreciation they expressed, simply for being heard. On a personal level, three participants followed up in writing to say how much they valued the opportunity to speak so freely and honestly about their career plans and aspirations, and to reflect on the childhood experiences that shaped them in so many formative ways. Institutional leaders and student affairs professionals can honor their voices and stories by endeavoring to learn more about the experiences, contributions, and needs of the Third Culture Kids on their own campuses.
### Table 1: Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Passport(s)</th>
<th>Parental Occupation/Industry</th>
<th>Major(s)</th>
<th>Languages Spoken</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Spain &amp; Mexico</td>
<td>Housing Industry</td>
<td>Math</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Biology &amp; Stats</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Tech</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Malaysia &amp; Switzerland</td>
<td>Oil Industry</td>
<td>Finance &amp; Stats (likely)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Comparative Literature</td>
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<td>Tech</td>
<td>Biology &amp; English</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Tech</td>
<td>Finance &amp; Stats</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
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<td>Cognitive Science</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Energy Industry</td>
<td>Art</td>
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<td>Major</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>International Studies &amp; Economics</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Participant Information
Appendix I: Sample Outreach to Student

My name is Kelly Wilcox and I am doctoral student at GSE. I am currently working on my dissertation and I am hoping to interview former Third Culture Kids (or Global Nomads) about their career decision-making process at [college]. I reached out to [colleague] and he thought you might be good to talk to.

I do hope you will consider speaking with me. The interview would take about 60-90 minutes and you will receive a $25 gift card to Starbucks. If possible, it would be great to speak in person. But we can also make arrangements to talk through a different medium if you are off campus or abroad. Please let me know if this is something you might have an interest in doing. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary and you can decide to opt out at any point. Please don’t hesitate to be in touch if you have any questions.

Thank you very much for considering.

All my best,

Kelly Wilcox
Appendix II: Sample Outreach to Administrators

I hope this finds you well and enjoying a slower pace this summer.

I am writing to ask for your help in identifying potential students that I might interview for my dissertation at GSE. I am doing a qualitative study on the career decision-making process for Third Culture Kids at [college] and my advisor suggested that I reach out to you. I am hoping that some upper class students (sophomores, juniors or seniors) may come to mind. Third Culture Kids may also identify as Global Nomads or Third Culture Individuals. To provide a bit more context, Third Culture Kids are students who spent time in a culture outside of their home or passport culture while growing up. They often accompany their parents to another country (or several) due to their job placements. They may also refer to themselves as Missionary Kids, Army Brats, Tech Kids, Ed Kids, or something similar. You do no need to worry about screening them. If anyone comes to mind that might fit this description, I hope you will consider emailing me their name(s). Participation in this research project is completely voluntary for the students and they can opt out at any point.

I really do appreciate you taking the time to read this. Please feel free to forward to colleagues who might also know potential students. I welcome any and all questions or suggestions. Thanks so much for considering.

All my very best,

Kelly Wilcox
Appendix III: Consent Form

Information Sheet

Title of the Research Study: A study of the career decision-making process for college-aged Third Culture Kids

Principal Investigator: Kelly Wilcox

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This is not a form of treatment or therapy. It is not supposed to detect a disease or find something wrong. Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you can also remove yourself from participation at any point. If you decide to participate or not to participate, there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision, you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study, and what you will have to do if you do decide to participate.

Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained on this information sheet. Keep this sheet for your personal reference, as in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you or submitted in an alternative format.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to learn more about the experiences of upper-class (sophomore, junior or senior) Third Culture Kids as they navigate the career exploration process during college. This is a dissertation project for the Graduate School of Education, Higher Education Management Program of the University of Pennsylvania.
Why were you asked to participate in the study?

You are being asked to join this study because you were identified as a potential Third Culture Kid (or comparable identifier – e.g. Global Nomad, Third Culture Individual, Cross-cultural Kid, etc.) at [college].

How long will you be in the study? How many other people will be in the study?

The study will take place over a period of less than one year. This means that I will interview you for approximately 60-90 minutes and after that possibly follow-up once with clarifying questions. You will also have the opportunity to voluntarily take part in a follow up debriefing session (with other participants) in which initial findings are shared.

You will be one of about 15 participants in the study.

Where will the study take place?

Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and will take place in a private classroom or meeting space on or near campus. If you are unable to take part in person, arrangements can be made for a remote interview via a secure medium (Adobe Connect or other secure channel).

What will you be asked to do?

You will be asked a series of questions related to your experience as a Third Culture Kid as it relates to your career exploration process. Initial interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes. All interviews will be audiotaped. When possible, all interviews will be held in person. If in person interviews are not an option, arrangements will be made for a remote interview through a secure medium. In the presentation of findings and in the final dissertation document, any quotes from you will be given a pseudonym of your choosing and will not be identified by name.
What are the risks?

The risks to you will be minimal. The content of the interviews will not be of a sensitive nature that could cause you embarrassment, psychological distress, or physical harm.

How will you benefit from the study?

There is no benefit to you. However, your participation could help us better understand the collegiate experience for Third Culture Kids, particularly as it relates to the career exploration process. This information could possibly be used to create or strengthen effective support and mentoring programs for current and/or future Third Culture Kids.

What other choices do you have?

You may choose not to be in the study. You may also choose to offer feedback on the interview protocol without being included in the study.

What happens if you choose not to join the research study?

You may choose to join the study or you may choose not to join the study. Your participation is voluntary.

There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study. You will lose no benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would come to you in the future.

When is the study over? Can I leave the study before it ends?
The study is expected to end after all participants have completed all interviews and all of the information has been collected. The study may be stopped without your consent for the following reasons:

*The PI feels it is best for you safety and/or health. You will be informed of the reasons why.

*You have not followed the study instructions.

*The PI, the sponsor, or the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania can stop the study at any time.

You have the right to drop out of the study at any time during the study. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to you if you do so.

If you no longer with to be in the research study, please contact Kelly Wilcox and take the following steps: Tell her you no longer wish to participate.

How will confidentiality be maintained and your privacy be protected?

The researcher will make every effort to keep all of the information you tell her during the study strictly confidential, as required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pennsylvania is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research volunteers like you. The IRB has access to study information.

If you agree to audiotaping, data from this interview will be transcribed by a transcript service and the audio file subsequently erased upon completion of the project. I will use direct quotes from this interview in my research. A pseudonym of your choosing will be the only form of identification on the transcript. Neither your name nor any distinguishing characteristics will appear with a quote from this interview. You will never be identified by name in any publications or presentations resulting from this research. All tapes, notes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at all times. The electronic data will be securely stored on a password-protected laptop during the project and destroyed after the project is
completed. Finally, none of the information in this interview will be discussed during the interviews with other participants. Identifying information will not be discussed in the debriefing session, should you choose to take part.

Who do you contact if you have questions about your rights and welfare?

If you have questions about your rights and welfare as a volunteer in the research study please contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania at 215 898 2615 and/or the PI named on the first page of this document.

Who do you contact if you have any questions about the study?

If you have questions about the research study, please contact the PI named on the first page of this document.
Appendix IV: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. What is your home (passport) culture?
   b. How old were you when you lived there, if at all?
   c. Why did you live there?
   d. Where else have you lived?
   e. Where did you live before enrolling at [college]?

2. Can you tell me a bit more about your life growing up?
   a. What were the highlights of living in different countries?
   b. What were the challenges?
   c. Can you tell me more about your schooling? What type of school did you attend? What curriculum did they follow?
   d. What languages were you exposed to? How many languages do you speak now?

3. Do you prefer the term Third Culture Kid, Global Nomad, Third Culture Individual, or another term to describe your experience growing up?

4. What made you decide to apply to, and enroll, at [college]?

5. Can you tell me why you chose your major? Who did you seek for advice when choosing this major? Has this always been your major?

6. In what ways has your global lifestyle impacted the academic choices you have made?

7. What are your career or post-graduation plans in the short term, if applicable? How about 5 years from now? Do you have any long-term goals or career aspirations?
8. Is this path something that has been decided for a long time or did it evolve during your time at [college]? How has your experience at [college] shaped this potential path?

9. What curricular and major choices did you make with this potential career path in mind?

10. How has your global lifestyle impacted your professional choices (internships, externships, professional aspirations, etc.)?

11. Do you think you will follow in the steps of your parents? Please tell me more.

12. Do you have any siblings already engaged in post-graduate opportunities? How has their path impacted yours?

13. If applicable, please describe any pre-professional activities (internships, job shadowing, research, etc.) that you engaged in while at [college] in order to explore potential careers or gain valuable competencies.

14. How did your TCK experience impact your extra-curricular and leadership activities on campus? In what ways did it impact your classroom experiences?

15. Who were your main sources of guidance or mentorship as you explored potential career paths?

16. How do your experiences as a Third Culture Kid impact your potential to succeed in this potential career? What are the greatest strengths and/or competencies that a TCK can potentially bring to a professional workplace? What are the potential drawbacks to hiring a TCK?

17. What advice would you give to college administrators (academic advisers, admissions staff, career services) seeking to support the career exploration process for Third Culture Kids at [college]?
18. What questions do you have about career planning that you are having trouble addressing?

19. Is there anything you would have done differently in terms of your career decision making-process while at [college]? Please tell me more.

20. Are there any questions you would have liked me to ask, but didn’t?

21. Is there anything you would like to add?
Appendix V: Glossary of Terms

Adult Third Culture Kid (ATCK) – A Third Culture Kid who has reached the age of 18.

Biz Kid – An individual who has spent time in a host culture due to their parents’ work in the business sector.

Ed Kid – An individual who has spent time in a host culture due to their parents’ work in the education sector.

Expatriate – An individual who leaves his or her own home/passport country in order to reside in another country, typically for employment purposes.

Global Nomad – This term has been used synonymously with Third Culture Kids in the literature. (McCaig, 1996)

Global Soul – This term was coined by Pico Iyer (2011) and has been used synonymously with Third Culture Kids in the literature.

Home Country/Culture – For the purpose of this study, participants designated the host country/culture as either their passport country, the country they were born in, or the country/culture they identify with as home.

Host Country/Culture – The country or culture in which the participants resided in as Third Culture Kids, often due to placements related to parents’ occupation.

International Baccalaureate (IB) – Curriculum offered at many international schools. “The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect”. (www.ibo.org, 2017)

Internationally Mobile Adolescent – This term has been used synonymously with Third Culture Kid in the literature. (Gerner et al., 1992)

Military Brat – An individual who has spent time in a host culture due to their parents’ work with the military.

Missionary Kid (MK) – An individual who has spent time in a host culture due to their parents’ involvement/work with a church

Mono-cultural - An individual who has spent the majority of their developmental years in one cultural setting.
**Oil Kid** – An individual who has spent time in a host culture due to their parents’ work in the oil industry.

**Repatriation** - The process of returning to one’s home/passport country after living as an expatriate in a host country.

**Third Culture Kid (TCK)** – A person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents’ culture. (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001)
References


