

The College Choice Experiences  
of Pakistani Undergraduates in the United States

by

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For Cindy Hamrick and Jenny Hamrick.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Special thanks to the students who volunteered to participate in this study.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and Background**

For more than fifty years, international students have had an increasingly important role in higher education in the United States. Since the end of World War II, international enrollments at U.S. institutions have increased exponentially, from 30,000 in 1954 to a peak of 586,000 in the 2002-2003 academic year (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2006). Internationals, who make up 3.9% of all enrollments in American colleges and universities, benefit their host institutions in several ways. They enhance student diversity on campuses. Many serve as graduate teaching assistants, and in some disciplines, such as engineering, they make up the majority of graduate enrollments. At the undergraduate level they help to “fill seats” on many campuses, and at many state-supported institutions, internationals make up a large percentage of students who pay non-resident tuition. Because internationals must meet stringent financial requirements in order to receive a student visa, the majority of international students do not burden their institution’s financial aid resources.

International students are an important human resource for the nation’s research capacity. Without international enrollments, many graduate programs would suffer from a lack of qualified students to serve as research and teaching assistants, thereby limiting universities’ capacity for scientific and technological research and development (Gates, 2004). While the United States continues to be the leading producer of Ph.D.s in science

and engineering, these disciplines are becoming increasingly globalized. The United States' leadership position will be challenged as other nations and regions develop their own academic, governmental, and corporate systems of research and development, limiting the United States' ability to recruit the best graduate students (National Academies, 2005). And there are indicators that not only is the world catching up, but the United States' leadership position is in decline. Among several of the world's leading host nations, including Australia, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom, only the United States has seen drops in international enrollments in 2004, 2005, and 2006 (NAFSA, 2007). Reductions in applications to graduate programs after the 9/11 terrorist attacks underscored the fact that the United States' leadership position cannot be taken for granted. Altbach has argued that if post-9/11 immigration barriers are not eliminated, institutional quality will be negatively affected: "The U.S. will inevitably see a decline in both the quality and the influence of its universities—and this will have lasting implications for the economy, for science and research, and for America's global role" (2004, p. 3).

International students also bring benefits to the nation as a whole. International students' tuition and living expenses function as a major export. Internationals contribute nearly \$12.85 billion annually to the nation's economy (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003). The presence of internationals in the United States is a significant resource in the nation's "soft diplomacy" objectives (Hamilton, 2003). While students are in the United States, they give first-hand reports to family and friends, describing their experiences in ways that are likely to be more trusted (if not more reliable) than information from government sources or media outlets. After students

complete their degrees at American universities, they are more likely to look to the United States as their first choice to build business, professional, and academic ties (Smith, 1989; Tocco, 1996).

For all the benefits that internationals bring to the United States and its campuses, the country has never had a comprehensive policy for international education in general, or international student recruitment in particular. Few American institutions include internationals as a part of their enrollment management strategies, and few have systematic international student recruitment policies and procedures. Those that do have such policies and procedures find themselves in an increasingly competitive environment, for as the number of international students around the world grows, the United States' share of the total population shrinks. Of the more than 2.5 million students who study abroad (UNESCO, 2007), the largest number still choose the United States (IIE, 2006). But a steadily increasing number of students are choosing other nations, particularly Australia and Britain (McMurtrie, 2001; MacLeod, 2005). Australia and the United Kingdom have had systematic, government-funded programs designed to attract internationals to their universities. Nations such as China, Singapore, and Malaysia have recently developed policies designed to attract internationals to their campuses. The European Union has made great strides in developing a cohesive higher education environment, which expedites procedures for European students who wish to study in other European countries, and for students from outside Europe who wish to study in Europe.

From 1982 through 1995, the United States' market share of international students declined ten percent (NAFSA, 2003). Australia, with an aggressive national program of

international student recruitment, saw enrollment increases of 16.5% in 2003 alone (Gates, 2004). In the post 9/11 period, the United States has lost more than market share. Enrollments have dropped by more than 20,000 students. International students, who accounted for 4.6% of total American enrollment as recently as 2002, accounted for only 3.9% of enrollment in 2005 (IIE, 2006). Most observers attribute the decline to post 9/11 student visa restrictions and perceptions abroad that the United States has become less welcoming to international students (Jacobson, 2003).

For policy makers and campus officials who want to recruit internationals, or who want to better understand how students choose to go abroad, there is little information about the college choice activities of students who come to the United States. Much of the literature on flows of international students considers aggregate flows of students to and from nations or regions. Other bodies of literature consider policies that influence those flows. The literature that considers student flows from the perspective of student choices is limited to a handful of studies (Hamrick, 2003). This absence of data leaves enrollment managers with little guidance as to how to design recruitment activities or how to tailor those activities toward the needs of specific international audiences. Admissions officers and recruiters are left to rely on “best guesses” and “conventional wisdom” in determining the activities that will best assist international students in choosing their institutions.

Another problem for enrollment managers is that they must deal with very diverse populations of prospective students. The needs and interests of Japanese students are undoubtedly different from students from Senegal. Unfortunately, much of the literature considers the college choice processes and behaviors of *international students* – as

opposed to distinct cultural and national groups. In describing the United States college choice literature, Litten has pointed out that researchers look for “patterns and meaning in very complex phenomena. Both social environments and personality vary widely, and the interactions of the two create further permutations in the college choice process” (1991, p.2). By comparison, the phenomenon of international student college choice is likely to be even more complex than that of students in the United States.

The extensive literature on college choice in the United States and Britain indicates that students from particular academic, socioeconomic, or ethnic communities go about the college choice process in different ways (Freeman, 1997; Hearn, 1991; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Perna, 2000). Unfortunately, most researchers who look at international students have chosen to consider internationals as a single population in the United States (Waters 1992; Zikopoulos & Barber 1986) or Australia (Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998). But there is little reason to believe that international students as a whole share particular characteristics, or that they utilize common behaviors or strategies when making college decisions. In the absence of evidence that international students share common characteristics, the most useful research activity would examine the behaviors of individual students and their immediate communities or cultures. Gathering information from one student and one nation or culture at a time is an inductive process from which valid conclusions can be drawn about individual and common behaviors in the college choice process.

The phenomenon of being an international student is a construct bound by a host institution’s (or host nation’s) norms and values. Each international student may consider herself “foreign” or “international” to a greater or lesser degree, but each student also

brings along a perception of her own identity which may or may not fit into established American or Western academic categories.

Research on the college choice experiences of international students as a group, regardless of methodology, has resulted in a wide range of key variables and effects, and in general the research has simply confirmed intuitive understanding about how and why students choose to study abroad (Hamrick, 2002). In the early 1990s, Litten (1991) complained about researchers' efforts to understand the choice process in the United States:

In spite of all the attention, however, we do not have a very satisfactory understanding of just what is done by whom, and why. Our telescope has turned out to be a kaleidoscope with lots of brightly colored pieces that form engaging but shifting patterns. (p. 59)

To extend Litten's metaphor, our knowledge of *international student* college choice has been viewed neither through a telescope, nor a kaleidoscope, but a wide-angle lens.

In this study I have approached international student college choice activities with the assumption that just as different categories of students in the United States approach the college choice process differently, so do different categories of internationals. It is my view that the processes and decisions that result in international student mobility can be best understood by returning to the telescope, and examining the behaviors of distinct groups of students. Therefore, in this study I will consider the college choice experiences of a single national group of students who have chosen to study in the United States. I have chosen to study the college choice experiences of students from Pakistan. Although the experiences of any particular national group would be a suitable starting point for gathering basic data on international students' college choice experiences, I chose to work with Pakistani students for several reasons. First, I had done a previous study of

Pakistani undergraduates at a single institution (Hamrick 2003). This study allowed me to expand on the 2003 study by increasing the numbers of participants and types of institutions that they had chosen. Second, I had reason to believe that Pakistani students were accessible to me, both in terms of geography and via the support of foreign student advisors on their campuses. Third, Pakistanis represent a population that is just as likely to study in other countries besides the United States, and thus I anticipated that Pakistanis' decision to come to the United States might reflect a broader array of choices than students from other populations. Fourth, because Pakistan has been a focal point for the United States' post 9/11 security measures, I believed that a study of Pakistani students might reveal insights into the effects of security measures on students' college choice process. An in-depth discussion of the choice of Pakistanis, as opposed to other national groups, can be found in Chapter 4, Research Design.

#### Problem Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to better understand the college choice experiences of Pakistanis who have chosen to enroll as undergraduates at American universities. College choice experiences are defined as the behaviors, processes, influences, and perceptions that are associated with the students' plans to continue their education at the postsecondary level. The goal of the study is to not only describe the students' college choice experiences, but to also develop an understanding of how the students themselves perceive their experiences of choosing to study in the United States.

The study seeks to answer the following primary question: How did the students decide to study in the United States? The following sub-questions will guide the research process:



- (a) What processes and strategies do the students use to choose to study abroad and to select a college? Are the strategies and processes for choosing to study abroad the same as for selecting a college? Selecting a destination country or area?
- (b) What, and who, influences the students?
- (c) What is the cultural context for the above influences?
- (d) What meanings and understandings do the students themselves have regarding their decision to study in the U.S.?
- (e) How do the college choice experiences of the students who attend different types of institutions compare?

Answers to the above questions are useful to anyone with interests in international student mobility. The answers allow college recruitment specialists to market their programs more effectively to students from Pakistan, and the results may be of use to those who are responsible for recruiting students from other regions, such as other parts of South Asia and the Middle East. The results of this research also provide some basic conceptualizations of Pakistani students' choices to study abroad. These conceptualizations can guide researchers who seek to understand the college choice behaviors of other national and cultural groups. The results can be used to compare those behaviors and experiences with the general international student population, and as other research is conducted on other populations of students, the data can be compared and contrasted to determine if there are "international student behaviors" or if various populations of students tend to choose overseas study in distinctive ways.

## Overview of Pakistan and its Educational System

Pakistan is located in East Asia, west of India and east of Iran and Afghanistan. It was founded in 1947 as a part of the post-World War II dissolution of British India from the Empire. Pakistan was conceived as a state on the Indian subcontinent that would be a homeland for Indian Muslims. The entire concept of Pakistan and the resulting state was opposed by many local leaders (notably Mahatma Gandhi), and the creation of the separate state has resulted in continual conflict with India. The conflict with India has become less pronounced in recent years, due in part to the development of nuclear weapons by both Pakistan and India.

Pakistan's population is approximately 165 million. Its literacy rate is 46%, with a per capita GDP of \$2,000 (U.S.). Ninety-seven percent of Pakistanis are Muslim, predominantly Sunni. There are small groups of Hindus and Christians. There are two official languages, Urdu and English, with English being the preferred language of most government functions. Pakistan is a federal republic which is influenced by multiple political parties. The current chief of state, Pervez Musharraf, assumed power in 1999 in a military coup. The military and Islamic clergy are the most influential political forces in the country (World Factbook, 2007).

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Pakistan's government has assisted the United States' efforts to eliminate Al Qaeda and affiliated organizations. A considerable segment of the general population in Pakistan has remained sympathetic to Al Qaeda. As a result, Pakistan has been designated by the United States Department of State as a terrorist-sponsoring nation, with the result that Pakistanis

seeking visas to the United States are subject to additional scrutiny and security clearances.

The Pakistani educational system is patterned after the British system, with rigorous admission tests determining access to education at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Approximately 48% of the primary and secondary school age population participate in school (UNESCO, 2003). Students who plan on continuing their education to the postsecondary level must prepare for the Advanced Level exams (A-levels). Passing the A-levels requires two years of preparation and then sitting for rigorous examinations. Many educators equate the A-levels with some lower division college coursework in the United States.

Rates of participation in postsecondary education are not available. In general there are a very limited number of spaces available in public universities, at which tuition is heavily subsidized by the national government. A rapidly increasing per capita GDP and disposable income in the past five years has resulted in a greater demand for education at all levels, including higher education abroad. Pakistan, like its neighbor India, has seen an increase in foreign investment in recent years, particularly in the financial and technological sectors. These business concerns have resulted in increased demand for employees with a postsecondary education and a foreign education (British Council, 2007). Private postsecondary education providers are thriving, and their offerings vary greatly in terms of quality and method of delivery. Pakistan's government is also investing in postsecondary education by building of local institutions and by approving campuses of foreign universities. Currently there are 49 public universities and 36 private universities.

The limited access to subsidized public higher education results in some students looking abroad for educational opportunities. The Pakistani government has recently increased scholarship awards available for foreign study, but the majority of Pakistanis who study abroad do so with personal funds. Given the expenses of travel and study abroad and the limited wealth of Pakistan (relative to other nations), students who choose to go abroad are generally from wealthy families. Traditionally, Pakistanis have looked to the United Kingdom and the United States for postsecondary education opportunities. Since 2001, enrollment of Pakistanis in the United States has been declining. In 2002-2003, 8,123 Pakistanis were enrolled as international students in United States, and they were the fourteenth most numerous nationality enrolled (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2003). Of these, approximately sixty percent were enrolled as undergraduates. For 2005-2006, there were 5,759 Pakistanis enrolled, and they were the twentieth most numerous nationality (IIE, 2006).

#### Overview of Research Design and Methodology

This research provides new knowledge of the college choice behaviors and experiences of a particular group of students. Although there is considerable research on the college choice experiences of students in the United States, there is limited research available on the college choices of international students. There are certainly no established theoretical perspectives, data sets, or demonstrated research findings that serve as a basis for this study or other college choice studies. As such, the study is exploratory in nature, and the findings serve as a model or template for research on other student populations.

*Sensitizing Concepts Affecting the Research Design*

Although there is no established research or theory that informed the design of this study, I did bring certain sensitizing concepts to the study. Grounded theory researchers describe sensitizing concepts as beliefs and views of the researcher that guide and direct the generation of the research problem and design (Bowen, 2006, Charmaz, 2003). Sensitizing concepts also arise through literature review and interaction with participants and in some qualitative methods they serve as an analytical framework (Holloway, 1997). Several sensitizing concepts guided my understanding of study abroad and being an international student. For example, I viewed international students as beneficiaries of many educational opportunities arising from socioeconomic advantages. I believed that most international students came from intact and strong extended or nuclear families. I also believed that motivations for study abroad varied greatly, but that they could be categorized as either professional and occupational (students were seeking a career) or linguistic and cultural (students were seeking a cross-cultural or linguistic experience). Most of my sensitizing concepts derived from my twenty-five years of experience as a teacher and administrator in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs.

As for Pakistani students in particular, however, my sensitizing concepts were entirely derived from my previous research on the college choice experiences of Pakistani students at a single campus in the United States (Hamrick, 2003). Prior to that project I had no experience dealing with Pakistani students, nor was I familiar with Pakistan's culture or history. From the previous study, I had formed beliefs that Pakistani undergraduates had strong career orientations that influenced their choices, that their

college choice decisions were rushed, and that their decisions were heavily influenced by personal contacts with institutional staff. One of my goals with this study was to determine if similar results could be obtained from an expanded sample at different institutions, as I did not believe that the 2003 sample was sufficiently large, nor my analysis sufficiently rigorous, to be confident of the findings.

I had one additional observation from the 2003 study. The students had described their college choice experiences in ordinary terms; they did not view their opportunity to study in the United States as extraordinary in any way, nor did they seem to frame their college choice experiences as atypical. That is, the students did not talk about their decision in terms of outstanding academic ability, nor did they see their decision as a privilege or special opportunity that required them to make special efforts to make the most of the opportunity.

These sensitizing concepts affected my decisions in designing this study. In particular, I wanted to interview an increased number of students at several different types of institutions. I also wanted to ensure that my research questions and interview protocol included a focus on information sources, influencers, and the timing of students' college choice decisions.

### *Qualitative Design*

Given my desire to understand *how* college choice is experienced in this particular setting, I chose a qualitative design. Creswell (1998) has pointed to the value of using qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, designs in determining what happens in social or human phenomena:

In a qualitative study, the research question often starts with a *how* or *what* so that initial forays into the topic describe what is going on. This is in contrast to

quantitative questions that ask *why* and look for a comparison of groups (e.g., Is Group 1 better at something than Group 2?) or a relationship between variables, with the intent of establishing an association, relationship, or cause and effect. (p. 17)

By using a qualitative design, I hoped to minimize the possibility of overlooking important perspectives or factors of the students' experiences (Creswell, 1994). I also recognized the value of a qualitative design, given that the phenomenon of college choice is multifaceted and complex.

Of the qualitative methods, the most appropriate for this study was the use of phenomenological procedures, which allowed me to focus on the experiences and viewpoints of the students who participated in the study. Given the fact that I was dealing with a culture different from my own, phenomenology was particularly useful because it provided a mechanism by which my experiences and prejudices regarding how students choose a college could be recognized, allowing the voice and perceptions of the students to rise to the surface of the study.

### *Participants*

My initial plan for data collection was to recruit students at three different institutions, with the institutions selected on the basis of their distinct Carnegie classifications and admissions requirements. Two were large research universities and one was a community college. When recruitment efforts at the community college proved unsuccessful, I chose to use the interview data from my 2003 study, but I re-analyzed the data using the same procedure that I used at the other two schools (and different from the procedure I used in the 2003 study). I conducted semistructured interviews on participants' campuses. Follow-up with the participants included post-analysis requests

for clarification and requests that participants review and confirm my completed analyses of their interviews.

#### *Data Analysis and Reporting*

The phenomenological analysis resulted in development of multiple descriptions of each participant's experience, as well as a composite description of all of the participants' experiences. This description serves as a collective summary of the findings for all of the students who participated in the study. The final "product" of this study is a thorough understanding of how eighteen Pakistani students chose to come to the United States for higher education.



## **Chapter 2**

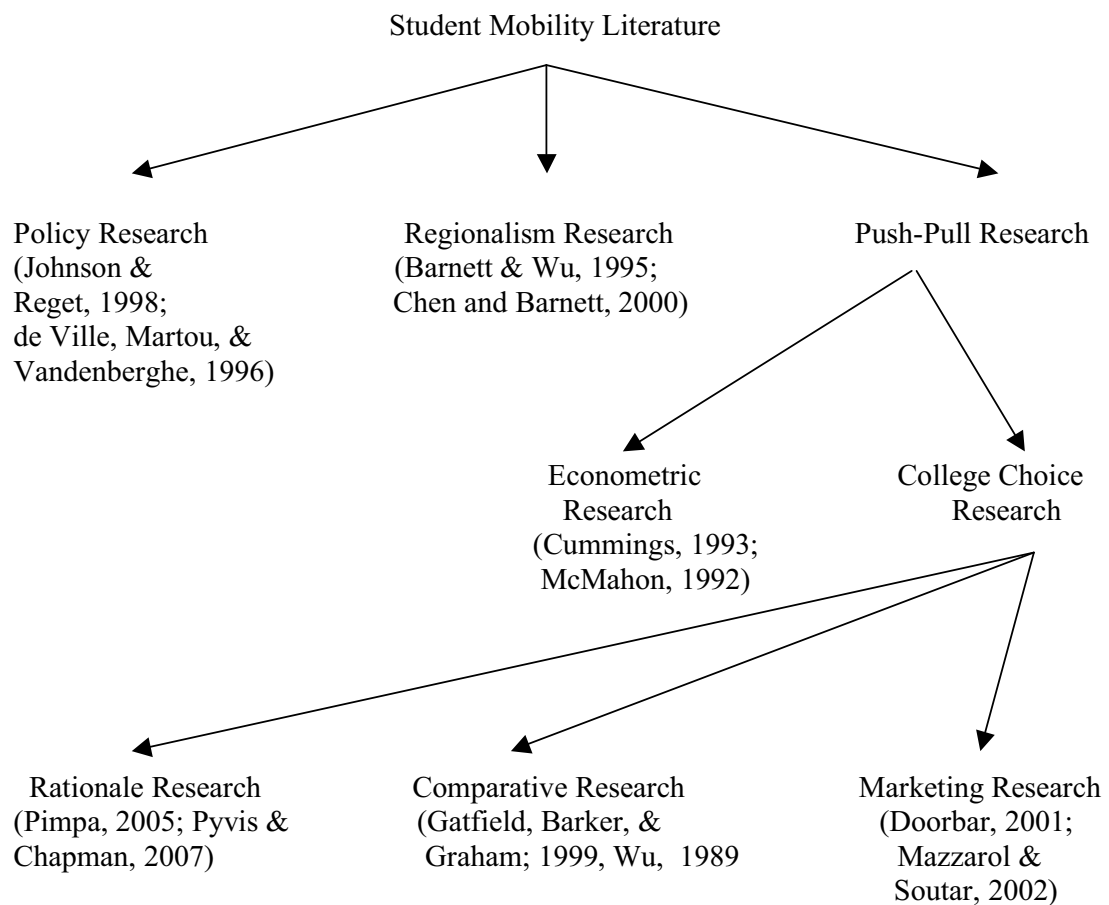
### **Literature Review**

This chapter begins with a review of the broader literature related to student mobility--the movement of students across national boundaries for the purposes of postsecondary education. The chapter then reviews the literature that is more narrowly defined as *international student college choice* research--literature that examines the predispositions, motivations, and behaviors of students who go abroad for postsecondary education.

#### Student Mobility Literature

The broader literature is frequently referred to as “student mobility” literature, and it can be divided into three general categories. Figure 1 provides an overview of the three and examples of the studies in each of the categories. The first category is that of policy research. Policy researchers want to understand the effects of governmental and institutional policies on the flows of international students. The second category is regionalism. Researchers with interests in regionalism seek to understand how geographic, economic, or political regions influence student movements. The third category can be called push-pull research. Push-pull researchers examine two types of variables--variables that encourage students to leave their homes, and variables that attract students to particular places institutions or places. I classify international student

college choice studies (including this dissertation) as a subset of the push-pull category, and thus this chapter provides an extensive review of relevant literature within that category.



*Figure 1.* Overview of the Student Mobility Literature

### *Policy Studies*

Policy studies are the most common type of research concerning flows of international students. Governments and institutions have interests in managing international student enrollments, and these interests have been evaluated and guided by scholars who seek to understand the effects of a range of laws, regulations, and policies, and programs. Major topics covered in the policy studies include (a) the costs and benefits to nations and institutions of educating international students (de Ville, Martou, & Vandenberghe, 1996; Heaton & Throsby, 1998; Williams, 1981); (b) the “brain drain” and “brain circulation” (Glaser, 1978; Johnson & Reget, 1998; Rao, 1978); and (c) the “diploma disease” (Dore, 1976; Ezeala-Harrison, 1996). There has also been discussion on the effects that international students may have on the education of domestic student populations (English, 1995; Goodwin & Nacht 1983; Lambert, 1993).

There are three primary perspectives that can be used to organize the wide variety of policy studies. Some policy-oriented researchers have focused their work on the geography or locus of student flows. Others are concerned with particular domains or variables that affect, or are affected by, student flows. Other researchers have considered flows in the abstract, examining policies that influence the direction of student flows. Table 1 provides an overview of the various emphases of policy researchers.

### *Regionalism*

The second perspective used to analyze international student flows is regionalism. This perspective has European roots, perhaps driven by the needs and interests of scholars and policy makers affiliated with or located in the European Community. Blumenthal, Goodwin, Smith, & Teichler (1996) have provided an overview of the utility

Table 1

*Perspectives and Categories of International Student Policy Literature*

Perspective	Categories
Locus	Transnational, National, Institutional,
Domain	Legal, Political, Economic, Educational, Strategic (military)
Direction	Outbound (sending country policy), Inbound (host country policy)

of this perspective in the context of international higher education. Though just a few empirical studies are associated with this conceptual perspective (Barnett & Wu, 1995; Chen & Barnett, 2000; Denny, 1999; Gillespie, 1999), regionalism enables researchers to consider a wide variety of variables and thus have a more comprehensive view of student flows.

The term *regionalism* here is used more broadly than in its common geographical sense. Skilbeck and Connell (1996) point out that regionalism may be defined in terms of the economic, religious, cultural, or political affinities within and among nations: “Conventional definitions, relating for example to geo-political structures or natural geographical features, are inadequate when considering boundaries, spaces, patterns, and other emerging formations in the domains of knowledge, ideology, and socio-economic life” (p. 67). In this sense, the Middle East, the Islamic world, and the oil-producing states are each separate regions of the world.

An example of a study with a regional perspective is a doctoral dissertation by Gillespie (1999), who examined China’s educational exchange activity with African nations, using an economic development perspective. In another dissertation, Denny

(1999) conducted qualitative research among twenty ethnic Chinese students in Malaysia who were enrolled in an American university (two plus two) transfer program. He concluded that Malaysia's public assistance of ethnic Malays has contributed to increasing ethnic divisions in Malaysia. Additionally, he found that students had selected the American university transfer program because of their lack of access to the government supported national university system.

Barnett and Wu (1995) used network analysis to determine the number and concentration of connections among and between the top fifty nations involved in student flows. Their assumptions were based on world system theory's understanding that capitalistic global organizations influence national development (Shannon, 1989), which in turn influences student flows. Barnett and Wu found that core nations--the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Canada--stayed at the center of the network throughout the period. African nations moved to the periphery of the network, while Asian and Middle Eastern nations moved closer to the core. Barnett and Wu also found that colonial and linguistic influences were diminishing in their overall effects on student flows, while economic development factors were becoming increasingly associated with high levels of participation in the network.

Chen and Barnett conducted a study to determine "the structure of the international students exchange network" (2000, p. 437) for 1985, 1989, and 1995, with particular interest in the changes that structure after the decline and breakup of the Soviet Union. Their primary independent variable was per capita GNP. Using a network analysis, Chen and Barnett measured each nation's position in terms of an international student flow network. Chen and Barnett concluded that student flows are best understood

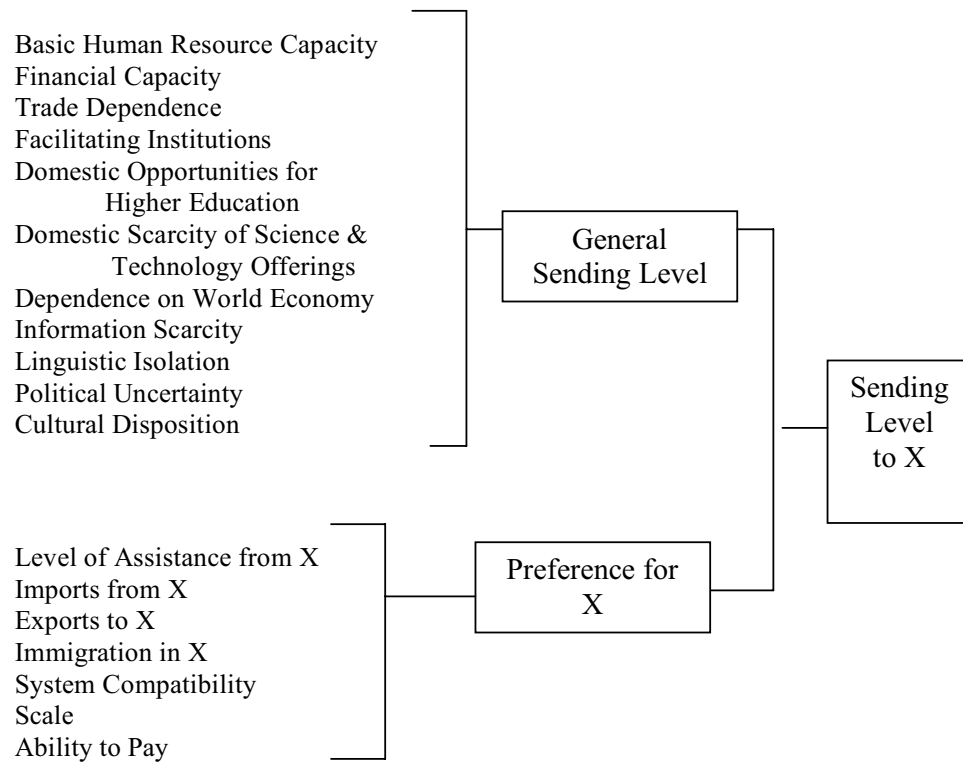
as an extension of the economic power of the economically developed nations which are at the core of the world's economic, and international student, networks. In their analysis, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Canada were always at the network's core, while other undeveloped nations remained peripheral to the network. Changes in the network of student flows occur as a result of broader economic and political trends. For example, between 1985 and 1995, East Asian nations and Eastern European nations moved closer to the core nations, and away from the peripheral nations in terms of student flows. Chen and Barnett's measures of each nation's position in the network were consistently correlated to per capita GNP.

#### *Push-Pull Studies*

The push-pull research is the largest body of empirical studies of international student flows. Although push-pull researchers most commonly examine aggregate economic data sets to examine patterns of student flows, push-pull researchers also conceive of individual students who make individual decisions to go abroad. Those decisions are made in the context of a number of economic, political, social, and personal variables.

Cummings described the push factors as "the factors that influence the national differences in the likelihood of going overseas," and the pull factors as "the factors affecting the likelihood that a student from a given country will select an institution in a particular host country" (1993, p. 39). Figure 2 summarizes the push-pull factors as outlined by Cummings. He does not make any suggestion as to the magnitude of the effects of the push and pull forces. Cummings does, however frame the factors in the context of a student making a college choice decision in a particular national context:

“In most cases, the decision to go overseas, including the search for information and finances, is a largely personal effort. But this effort is shaped by the national context of each student” (1993, p. 38-39).



*Figure 2.* Factors influencing the flow of students to host country (X) From Cummings, W. K. (1993). Global trends in overseas study. In C. D. Goodwin, (Ed.), *International investment in human capital: Overseas education for development* (IIE Research Report No. 24), (pp. 31-46). New York: Institute of International Education.

The push-pull studies can be categorized into two types: econometric studies and international student college choice studies (heretofore *college choice studies*).

Econometric studies use national-level aggregate data with the flows to and from nations

as the units of analysis. College choice studies use the individual student as the unit of analysis, and these studies examine the characteristics and behaviors of those students.<sup>1</sup>

Econometric researchers use aggregate national economic and educational indicators, and they seek to determine the relationship of those indicators to student flows. These studies are called econometric research because they are typically conducted by economists, and they rely on standard economic measures as variables. Most of the published push-pull research can be placed in this econometric category. Due to the considerable expense involved in collecting data on GNP, GDP, per capita income, and the like, these studies use existing data sets from governmental sources and UNESCO. The analysis involved in the econometric studies requires considerable expertise.

The econometric research uses dependent variables that are defined as flows to one or more receiving nations or from one or more sending nations. Many of the studies employ time-series analyses. The econometric studies do not account for explicit student characteristics such as socioeconomic status, educational aptitude, or major, with the exception of one study that has separated graduate from undergraduate students. These studies generally consider eight different variables which are summarized as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *college choice* differently than it is used when describing the United States-based college choice literature. The U.S.-based college choice literature includes studies that have used both economic (econometric) and sociological (status attainment) orientations (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In addition, I believe that the U.S. literature includes a third category of research, that which considers the behaviors of students as they interact with an array of information and beliefs about college (see discussion in Chapter 3, *Theoretical Perspectives*). The literature on international student flows is bifurcated by the econometric studies and other isolated studies which are so few in number that they are not easily categorized. Because these other studies use the individual student (or groups of students) as the unit of analysis, and because they focus on choice behaviors and processes, I refer to them as college choice studies.



(a) *Social Policy/Political Affinity*. Various social and political events and policies affect student flows. One recent example is the movement of Arabic speaking students from Palestine and Israel to universities in Europe and the U.S. Another example is the increased numbers of Saudi students who enrolled in U.S. colleges in 2006 and 2007 as a result of massive financial assistance from the Saudi government.

(b) *Local Education System*. Deficiencies in local education systems of sending countries encourage student movement. Such deficiencies include inadequate scientific educational opportunities (Lee & Tan, 1984), high secondary education completion rates (Cummings 1984), high educational expenditures (resulting in a large number of secondary school graduates seeking higher education), and inadequate postsecondary educational availability.

(c) *Local Economic System*. Characteristics of local economies (such as trade, industrialization, and general capacity) affect demand for postsecondary education. For example, a nation whose rapid economic development is unmatched by development of educational systems will have excess demand for postsecondary education.

(d) *Culture*. Students are more likely to go abroad to nations that share language or culture. For example, many U.S. students study abroad in Australia or England (Cummings 1984; Lee & Tan, 1984). These factors are less likely to result in increased flows out of a nation than they are to direct those flows to specific nations.

(e) *Distance*. Students are more likely to go abroad to study to nearby locations than to distant locations.

(f) *Information Resources*. Students cannot choose to study in places of which they are unaware. This variable includes measures of student awareness of educational

opportunities and measures of sources of information available to students, including media and prior migrants.

(g) *Cost*. High cost (considered in relative terms based on available options) deters student flows. For example, the European Union has created a common academic system (known as the Bologna Process) which allows European students to study in other E.U. countries at the same cost as in their home country, which, in turn, has increased student mobility within Europe.

(h) *Immigration Opportunities*. Benefits and resources associated with immigration serve as pull factors.

*Review of the econometric studies*. This section reviews the published econometric research, which includes five empirical studies, as well as a theoretical model.

A useful starting point for considering econometric research is the work of Anderson, Bowman, and Tinto (1972) who posited a probability model to predict the likelihood that a given student will enter a given postsecondary institution. Their model was developed to assist in determining the utility of creating new postsecondary institutions for the purpose of increasing access to education in the United States. Their model included the following seven factors: (a) cost; (b) advantages in career prospects to those who attend the institutions; (c) selectivity, including academic selectivity as well as other limitations to admission (women's colleges, sectarian colleges); (d) the individual's access to funds; (e) student preferences (in context of the institution's characteristics); (f) a student's general knowledge of higher education opportunities; and (g) a student's specific knowledge of an institution.

Agarwal and Winkler (1985b) developed a theoretical model in which they proposed five factors that affect international student flows to the United States. The factors are (a) opportunities available for study in the students' home countries; (b) cost; (c) students' ability to pay; (d) benefits of study in the United States; and (e) social, political, and policy issues, such as religious or political persecution in various countries, home country military service requirements, economic and natural catastrophes, and the like. Agarwal and Winkler did not include the last three factors suggested by Anderson et al. (1972), and their final factor recognizes the diversity of political and social environments around the world. Their factor titled *benefits of study in the United States* substitutes easily for the advantages in career prospects given by Anderson et al.

Agarwal and Winkler's (1985b) factors emphasized the importance of educational opportunity in students' home nations. The notion of opportunity reflects the intuitive recognition that limited access or opportunity in a given country pushes students to consider study in nations with relatively greater access. Whereas Anderson et al. (1972) were looking at the affects of making postsecondary education increasingly accessible, Agarwal and Winkler assumed that home country opportunities were unavailable to many individuals seeking education. Put in other words, for Agarwal and Winkler, limited access requires students to go abroad for study. The issue of limited access to postsecondary education is important in all of the econometric studies, though in some studies it is viewed as a function of increasing the sending country's secondary completion rate.

In an empirical study, Agarwal and Winkler (1985a) used four variables to estimate international student demand in Asian, Mediterranean, and Mideast nations for

United States higher education. (In this study, the cost and ability-to-pay variables described above were collapsed into one proxy variable, per capita income.) They also introduced a factor that replaced the general “benefits of study in the United States (see factor *d* discussed above) with one that estimated the expected benefits of immigration to the United States from students from a given nation. They therefore assumed that students traveling to study in the United States would do so, in part, because their travel would increase opportunities for future immigration. They also added dummy variables for nations whose principle language was English or French on the assumption that proficient users of English would be more likely to study in the United States than those who were not proficient, and that French speakers would be more likely to choose Francophone nations for their studies. Again, this assumption is based on the fact that not having to learn a new language reduces the cost of an education. The sample nations were selected on their status as “principal Eastern Hemisphere importers of U.S. higher education” (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985a, p. 630). The study included both time-series and cross sectional analysis for the years 1972 through 1974, and separate analyses were conducted for graduate and undergraduate students.

Log-linear regressions indicated that the factors had the expected signs, with the exception of per capita income and French language. The analyses resulted in a small and positive association between per capita income with demand for undergraduate study, and no association with graduate study. The effects on graduate study were expected on the basis that many international graduate students in the United States receive financial support from various sources. As for undergraduate demand, perhaps differences in nations’ per capita income do not reflect the capacity of wealthy elites to pay for

education in the United States, or among the same population there may be little interest in the benefits associated with immigration to the United States. In general, the results indicated that there may be broad income elasticity with regard to educational demand. As for the effects of limited access to postsecondary education in the sending nation, the factor was not significant in the overall model. A weakness in their model was the use of only four variables (plus the language variables). In general, the factors they utilized were rather blunt instruments that did not account for any interdependence between the United States and sending nations.

Two economists, Wobbekind and Graves (1989), relied on human capital theory to develop a model of world demand for higher education in the United States. Their research was longitudinal, and their dependent variable was defined as demand for United States higher education in a given year by students from thirty-seven countries, including developing and developed nations. Their regression model was based on the following factors: (a) benefits of an education in the United States; (b) benefits from home country education; (c) costs of education in the United States; (d) cost of home country education; (e) financial aid amounts; (f) per capita income in the home country; (g) the probability of home country nationals receiving residency in the United States; (h) the level of industrialization of the home country; (i) the level of educational expenditures in the home country; (j) stock, or the number of prior migrants to the United States from a particular country; and (k) language, which serves as a dummy variable with a value of one for students who are from English-speaking nations.

Wobbekind and Graves' (1989) use of factors that "compared" the value of home country education as opposed to study in the United States (e.g., the factors measuring

benefits to education at home and in America) was an important contribution, though there were considerable difficulties in operationalizing many of the variables, most notably with the two benefits variables. In cross sectional analyses, the language variable proved to be significantly related to student demand. The stock variable had a positive association, though not at statistically significant levels. Adjusted  $R^2$  values for the entire model ranged from .30 for the 1962 sample to .57 in the 1973 sample. Overall, the model appeared to account for a considerable amount of variance in the data. As was the case in Agarwal and Winkler's (1985a) study, limited access to education in the sending country did not appear to affect flows.

In the time series analysis (in which data were considered over time for each of the sending nations in the study), the overall model appeared to fit well for some countries, but not for others. Several variables had strong associations with student flows. Stock, home country per capita income, and financial aid were positively associated with student flows, especially for the regressions run on the nations of the Middle East, Central America, and South America. The excess demand factor proved to be significant for just a few nations (Argentina, Guatemala, Japan, Greece, Italy, and Portugal). Wobbekind and Graves' research is the most comprehensive to date, based on its inclusion of economic, educational, language, and immigration related factors.

The studies discussed above examined flows to the United States. Three additional studies used econometric methods to look at student flows from less developed nations. In a study designed to determine the effect of sending country higher educational infrastructure on student outflows, Lee and Tan's (1984) primary hypothesis related to the limited access factor. Using simple linear regressions, the limited access variable was

found to be significant for student outflows to each of the three receiving nations tested, as well as to the aggregated receiving nations. The variable was also the most important when included in regressions with nine additional sending country variables. The variable for home country educational opportunity, titled excess demand, was operationalized as the ratio of secondary enrollment to postsecondary enrollment, just as it was by both Agarwal and Winkler (1985b) and Wobbekind and Graves (1989). The contrasting results may be based in the fact that Lee and Tan limited their study to developing nations, while the other studies considered flows of students from a range of nations to the United States.

Cummings (1993) was also interested in economic development and its effects on sending rates. He conceptualized push pull factors in terms of two important economic perspectives: economic development theory and world systems theory. As for economic development, in the econometric studies (discussed above) in which flows were viewed as a result of inadequate postsecondary opportunities in sending countries, Cummings viewed increasing economic development as a positive force that resulted in increasing postsecondary educational demand. Whereas the previously mentioned econometric researchers used variables that accounted for available space in postsecondary institutions, Cummings used postsecondary completion rates, assuming that as those rates increased, demand for additional education would also increase. Cummings was also the first to attempt to account for the student flows in terms of the economic dependence and interdependence characteristic of world systems theory. He was the first to recognize the importance of economic linkages, and was the first to use a measure of economic trade as a variable in his analysis. It is important to note that his model did not account for any

“pull” factors specifically. That is, he only looked at conditions in sending nations to determine their capacity to send students abroad.

Cummings (1984) examined the outflows of thirty-six different Asian nations in 1978. The factors that appeared to have high predictive value in Cummings study were as follows: (a) a nation’s involvement in the world economy, and (b) the relative presence of information about study abroad. Cummings work has some significant weaknesses. For one, his analysis is limited to a single year. Second, Cummings’ choices in operationalizing some variables are suspect. Take, for example, the factor he labeled *facilitating institutions*--advising agencies in sending countries that promote international study. As a proxy for this variable, he used the number of students studying abroad five years previously, assuming that as the number of individuals studying abroad increased, the number of facilitating institutions would also increase. He used that proxy in spite of his statement in the text that “the best predictor of how many students a given nation will send overseas in a given year is the number it sent in the previous year” (1984, p. 133). In spite of these weaknesses, Cummings’ work is important, because he based his model on more than human capital theory. He recognized the larger economic and social issues that would influence international study.

McMahon (1992) also examined flows from developing to developed nations, but she framed the flows in market terms. Nations should manage their educational products, and those who consume those products, strategically, much as they have traditionally managed other resources. McMahon posed two regression models, one “push” model with “variables which may affect the outflow of third world students” (p. 468) and another “pull” model with “international systems variables which may affect the



concentration of overseas student in one world center” (p. 469). In this sense, McMahon’s work, like that of Cummings, has a world systems approach. Unlike Cummings, though, the factors she proposes in her regression models look very much like those of the human capital theorists. Table 2 lists the variables found in both of McMahon’s models.

Table 2

*Factors used in McMahon’s Push and Pull Models*

<b>PUSH MODEL</b>		<b>PULL MODEL</b>	
<b>Push variables</b>	<b>Operationalized as:</b>	<b>Pull variables</b>	<b>Operationalized as:</b>
Economic power of sending nation (+)	GDP	Relative national size within the world system (+)	Sending nation GDP/receiving nation GDP
Economic involvement (trade) (+)	Imports and exports relative to GDP	Economic linkage between host and sending nation (+)	Trade with host nation/total trade
State priority on education (+)	Educational expenditures relative to GDP	Host nation political interests in sending nation (+)	Host nation assistance/sending nation GDP
Availability of educational opportunities (-)	Secondary school enrollment/age cohort	Host nation support of international students (+)	Students funded by host nation/total students from sending country in host nation

Note: expected correlation sign is in parenthesis beside each factor.

The hypothesized correlation for the push factor titled state priority on education is positive. Like Cummings, McMahon believed that nations which had invested in their educational systems would produce increased numbers of high school graduates who would seek to further their education. Also, like Cummings, McMahon did not include

any factor that directly measured the availability of tertiary education in the sending countries.

McMahon ran regressions on all developing countries included in her sample, and then she split the sample and computed figures for the poorest (least developed) and the wealthiest (more developed) nations. Regarding overall economic capacity as a push factor, McMahon (1992) found that it was negatively correlated with increased numbers of students overseas, with significant results for both of the split sample calculations. This may be because her model did not account for home country educational opportunities that might be associated with developing nations with comparatively greater economic capacity. Or, as McMahon suggests, it may be that all of the nations in the study had reached a threshold level of development at which further economic growth did not account for additional variance. In the inbound or pull model, it appeared that a nation's economic strength relative to that of the United States was an important factor. By comparison, the factor measuring trade with the United States was found to be significant for the wealthier set of nations, but not for the poorest nations.

The limited access (McMahon referred to it as educational opportunity) factor was found to be negatively correlated with the phenomenon of students going overseas for the overall model. In the wealthier nations set, there was a positive, though statistically insignificant, correlation between educational opportunities and students going to the United States. McMahon hypothesized that "For the higher income nations, their educational need surpassed economic need in importance and was a strong factor in "pushing" students overseas" (1992, p. 473). Another possibility not articulated by McMahon is that greater economic ability simply increased the range of choices of

students from the higher GDP nations. Even though those students may have had better opportunities at home, their greater wealth may have also opened up opportunities in other nations, not just the United States.

This matter of the relative importance of a sending nation's economic strength points out perhaps the greatest weakness of McMahon's work. Her model did not attempt to account for the costs associated with the notion of students' choice process, as did that of Agarwal and Winkler (1984a) and Wobbekind and Graves (1989). Because her research did not account for costs or perceived benefits to students, it is difficult to make judgments as to the cause of this phenomenon. It could well be that students in less wealthy nations find opportunities at home, or in other nations, which are more cost effective than study in the United States.

#### International Student College Choice Studies

The econometric research is not the only body of literature that considers the factors that push and pull international students. The econometric studies assume that individual students will make rational choices that can be estimated through the analyses of aggregate data that motivate those choices. In contrast, college choice studies make no assumptions of rationality, and instead examine the characteristics and behaviors of individual students and postsecondary institutions in an effort to better understand the process of choosing a college. The college choice studies use the individual student as the sending unit and the nation or institution as the receiving unit. The nature of and influences on this choice process for international students are obscure, as relatively few researchers have used the individual student as a unit of analysis.

Some readers may object to placing college choice studies under the push-pull heading. As will be demonstrated, however, the college choice studies seek to understand the external variables that influence students' decisions, as well as the individual student characteristics which may affect their choices.

Some college choice research is produced by professional marketing firms, is not made available to the public, and is available only at considerable expense.<sup>2</sup> The expense of such research is understandable when one considers the problems associated with trying to collect and measure student characteristics such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, parental education, and academic ability across national boundaries. Although this type of research is common in the United States college choice literature, there is no such research on international students. Collecting such information across national boundaries presents logistical, cultural, linguistic, and political problems for researchers. Consider, for example, the difficulty researchers would have in making comparisons of socioeconomic status or ethnicity among students in Taiwan, The Philippines, and Malaysia. There are no international or national data sets currently available to researchers, though the expansion of higher educational cooperation among European Community members may eventually result in the development of transnational survey data sets based on data collected through surveys. Note that the following chapter titled *Theoretical Perspectives* provides an overview of the theoretical constructs that characterize the United-States based college choice literature.

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<sup>2</sup> The costs involved in collecting data across barriers of distance, culture, and language, are significant. Private Australian research organizations have written market analyses, copies of which cost more than \$400 (U.S.) at the student discount rate (see <http://www.eduworld.com.au>). Another Australian marketing firm involved in market research is LD&A Pty Ltd. Perhaps Australia's leading role in this type of research is a result of the government's extensive efforts at promoting Australia as a destination for foreign study.

### *Review of College Choice Studies*

The college choice studies can be divided into three categories. The first category examines characteristics of international students and their reasons for choosing a particular institution, or institutions. The second group examines international students' choices by comparing them with domestic students. This second group also includes a study in which students' beliefs about institutional pull factors compare with institutional administrator's perceptions of pull factors. The third category – marketing studies -- examines the college choice process from the perspective of how institutions market themselves. This review of college choice studies concludes by considering meta-analysis (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) that examines the college choice process of international secondary school students from a number of nations.

*Students' reasons for choosing an institution.* An early college choice study was conducted by Noorani and Abolghasem (1980) who worked with Iranian students in the San Diego area. They reported descriptive statistics of the survey results. Most students had chosen to study abroad because they had not been accepted at Iranian institutions. Of those who had been accepted for study in Iran, nearly 40% chose to come to the United States because of their dissatisfaction with majors offered at the Iranian institution to which they had been accepted. In addition, a majority of the students reported that their education in America would provide them with better opportunities for employment upon returning to Iran. Forty-four percent of the students had been encouraged by their parents to leave Iran for study.

In one of the few large-scale college choice studies, Zikopoulos and Barber (1986) surveyed 1,065 international students from a stratified random sample of United

States colleges and universities. Their primary research questions were broadly defined; they sought to determine why students chose the United States as a destination and why students chose to apply to particular schools. Zikopoulos and Barber's study reported descriptive information; their findings were not analyzed for statistical inferences, and the only student characteristic collected was country of origin. Most of their findings were reported by region, as the authors believed that the sample sizes of individual countries were not large enough to make generalizations. Their major findings were reported as follows: (a) 30 percent of students found the costs of studying in the United States higher than they expected; (b) the primary attraction of the United States as a destination for international students is the perceived high quality of institutions in the United States; (c) the most frequently used source of information for international students was publications produced by institutions (as opposed to information from friends and or family, educational agents, or government information agencies); (d) the most important influence on students' decision to apply to a given school was the advice of parents, relatives, and friends who had studied in the United States.

Although Zikopoulos and Barber's (1986) work points to sources of information for international students, it does not provide insight into the choice process used by students, or the alternatives that students may have considered. Zikopoulos and Barber's findings are less useful to researchers than they are to practitioners involved in the promotion and marketing of postsecondary educational programs. Nevertheless, their research represents the most extensive and comprehensive view of the influences on student choices. A primary shortcoming of their work is that they did not use multivariate techniques to determine if particular factors were characteristic of particular types of

students; it appears that their data set could have supported such analysis. In addition, they did not seek to elicit information regarding educational alternatives considered by students in their sample. This oversight is important, given the researchers' stated purpose to learn why the students chose to study in the United States.

Austin (1988) surveyed twenty graduate engineering students at one of the University of California campuses. The purpose of the survey was to determine the importance of factors that brought the students to the campus, and to determine factors that might influence students' post graduation plans. Austin found that the most salient factors for study in the United States were the perceived quality of academic programs and the increased opportunities that resulted from a study abroad experience.

Waters (1992) surveyed newly enrolled graduate students at two Big Ten universities to determine the entire range of influences on their college choice decisions. The survey collected information on student gender and funding source. It included 36 items, which after factor analysis were reduced to three a priori categories of personal influences, institutional influences, and market strategies. ANOVA and MANOVA tests resulted in indications of strong and moderate, effects for factors in two of the three categories. Personal influence factors with strong effects were: (a) personal contacts (friends, family, professional relationships); (b) persons in the home country for students who receive governmental support from home; (c) educational agencies (advising centers) for students who were self-funded. Institutional influence factors with strong effects were: (a) reputation of the institution; (b) institutional cost for self-funded students; and (c) level of university funding for student receiving such. As for the effect of market strategies, Waters found no strong effects.

Waters' (1992) design was sound and there were no methodological shortcomings. Unlike Zikopoulos and Barber (1986), Waters did not seek to determine why a student chose the United States as a destination. Her choice of graduate students at research institutions as a population limits the study, but her inclusion of funding source in her analysis is useful. Her results should encourage other researchers to use similar methods with other populations in the United States, as well as transnational student populations.

In an Australian survey similar to that of Zikopoulos and Barber (1986), Baker, Creedy, and Johnson (1996) surveyed international students who had graduated from the University of Melbourne in an effort to determine institutional characteristics that influenced student choices. The most common reasons graduates gave for choosing to study in Australia were institutional quality, the perceived high reputation of programs of study, and the anticipation of good career prospects. In this study, like that of Zikopoulos and Barber, there was no attempt to account for educational alternatives, available at home or in other countries, that might have affected student choices.

Wang (1998) used a survey of 201 Taiwanese students at the University of Southern California to determine demographic characteristics and the effects of those characteristics on college choice. ANOVA procedures showed significant differences in several areas. Undergraduate students had spent more time in the United States than had graduate students, and undergraduates were from wealthier families. Male students were older than female students, and had scored higher on entrance exams than had females. Wang did not find any significant differences between any groups regarding their motives for study in the United States or attending the university.



Pimpa (2005) examined effects of family on choices to study abroad among Thai students in Australia. Pimpa's research design initially used focus groups from which it was determined that a sequence of five basic decisions characterized the decision to study abroad: (a) the decision to study abroad; (b) the choice of country; (c) choice of city; (d) choice of academic program; and (e) choice of institution.

In addition to describing the sequence of the decision process, Pimpa's focus group data indicated that there are five categories that describe family influence on the decision to study abroad. First (and perhaps most obvious) is finance. Family members are typically students' most important means of financial support, and the power of the purse has clear influence on the options that might be available and unavailable to students. The second category reported by Pimpa was that of information, which took the form of family members sharing their own knowledge about educational opportunities abroad. The third category of family influence is expectation. In some families it was simply an expectation that children would be educated abroad, with the assumption that study abroad would offer outstanding academic training and experience using a foreign language. The fourth category was that of competition, with some students saying that there was some competitiveness among siblings and extended family members with regard to academic qualifications. The fifth category of family influence reported by Pimpa was that of persuasion—this meaning that family members heavily influenced the college choice decision, and in some cases family members selected a particular nation or institution for study. Pimpa used findings from the focus groups to develop a survey of Thai students in Australia. The categories of family influence were compared across nuclear families, extended families, and alternative families. In addition, the survey

gathered information on another variable – whether families had experience in study abroad. Analysis indicated that students whose families had experience with study abroad were more likely to be expected (by their families) to study abroad, and in turn those families were more likely to exert greater influence in the other choices categories. Pimpa reported that students from “alternative families” were less likely to be influenced by family members than are students from nuclear or extended families. The study also found that Thai students experienced high levels of competition in their choice experiences, with social competition influencing the decision to study abroad and choice of academic program.

Pyvis and Chapman (2007) did a qualitative study among students enrolled at an Australian university’s branch (offshore) campus in Malaysia. They interviewed twenty students, some from Malaysia, and others from different regions (including East Asia, the Middle East, Kenya and Canada) to learn how students understood their own identity and why they chose to study at the university. One purpose of their study was to deal critically with the notion that Australian education was sought after by internationals because of its superior quality. The study concluded that for Malaysian students, a degree from the Australian university did have a quality dimension. The Malays perceived quality in terms of preparation for careers with Western multinational businesses. The non-Malays perceived their educational experiences less in terms of quality and more in terms of an “international” education. They chose the school because they believed it would prepare them to function effectively in international business and academic settings. Whereas the Malaysian students were seeking improved employment

opportunities (no doubt in Malaysia) upon graduation, the non-Malaysians were seeking to become global citizens.

*Comparisons of international and domestic students.* Overall (1981) compared international and domestic freshmen at the University of Southern California using data sets from HEGIS and the ACE Freshman Survey. Overall found little difference in reported characteristics of the two student groups, with the exception of academic majors, in which significant differences were found in male and female international students, with male students expressing a greater preference for engineering and other professional programs, with the exception of business programs, which were more favored by women internationals.

Wu (1989) used inferential statistical tests to analyze differences in survey responses provided by foreign students and American students. He found that international students and American students reported that an institution's reputation, cost, scholarship and employment opportunities and fast responses to inquiries were more important than more general characteristics of the college (location, climate, student activities, and alumni contacts). For international students, cost, entrance requirements, inquiry response time, opportunities for part-time employment, public (as opposed to private) governance, and proximity to an urban area were significantly more important than they were for American students.

Gatfield, Barker, and Graham (1999) compared perceptions of institutional quality among Australian students and international students at an Australian university. Using focus groups and interviews, they developed a set of quality components which were then examined more thoroughly via a survey of 351 students. Their analysis showed

that both Australian students and internationals rated academic programming as the most important quality, but components of academic quality were different for the internationals and Australians. Table 3 provides a rank order of academic instruction quality components.

Gatfield, Barker, and Graham argue that their data support the need for some modifications of academic programs to fit the need of different national groups. They fail to mention that their findings are of use to those marketing academic programs. In essence, the same degree program should be marketed differently to different international audiences, assuming that different audiences have different notions of quality.

Table 3

*Rankings of Academic Instruction Quality Components for Australian and Internationals (Gatfield, Barker, and Graham, 1999)*

Quality Factor Ranking	Australians	Internationals
1	Fair grading	Good teaching
2	Good teaching	Course content
3	Library facilities	Fair grading
4	Intellectual stimulation	Library facilities
5	Course content	Computer facilities

Kim (2001) surveyed and interviewed international undergraduates at three SUNY campuses. Her goal was to identify contrasts between institutional characteristics

which were attractive to students and those characteristics which institutional administrators believed were attractive to international students. Kim also wanted to identify factors which might be attractive to various subgroups of international students in an effort to guide student recruitment. Kim found that students were influenced by institutional reputation and costs. Student services and campus characteristics were relatively unimportant to the students in Kim's sample. Kim's research provided some very practical findings for those involved in recruiting internationals. Among those findings were the usefulness of simplified applications and the importance of students building relationships with student recruiters.

*Marketing studies.* Four recent studies have examined issues related to marketing higher educational programs among international students. Joseph and Joseph (2000) surveyed two hundred students from randomly selected high schools in Indonesia in an effort to determine important attributes to these students in selecting an overseas university. All of the participating students expressed interest in studying abroad, though the authors failed to indicate how this fact was determined. The highest ranking attributes for choosing a college were as follows: (a) course and career information, (b) facilities, (c) cost, (d) content and structure of a degree program, and (e) value of education. Rotated factor scores for the attributes indicated that the factors accounted for 63% of the variance in the students' choice of attributes. Joseph and Joseph's article did not provide adequate detail to assess their methodology or analysis. Nevertheless, their approach appears to be effective. They provided no theoretical base for the design of their survey instrument, except to say that it was based on a college choice model that the authors had developed in New Zealand. They did not discuss how their model compared to other

models, nor did they refer to any explicit theory to guide the development of their survey instrument. An increased sample size and collection of demographic data would improve the usefulness of their study, which could be conducted in a number of settings.

In Kemp, Madden, and Simpson's 1998 study, 746 Indonesian and Taiwanese secondary and English as a second language students were surveyed in an effort to identify factors that influenced student choices of Australia, the United States or "the rest of the world" as a study destination. Their sampling frame included schools which would have a high proportion of students who would be interested in overseas study (e.g., language schools, international schools). Their focus was pragmatic, with a market emphasis. Taiwanese students indicated a strong preference for study in the United States over Australia; Indonesians preferred the United States but by a much smaller margin. Binary and multinomial logit models were used to relate student preferences to individual student characteristics. Results indicated that prospective students' perceptions of educational quality, the availability of information, and the general national environment were important influences on student choices. Their multinomial logit model fit well, with an R<sup>2</sup> of .812.

A weakness with the published study is that the authors provide little information as to how the sample was selected, and they do not state how the dependent variable of preferred study location was measured. One assumes that the dependent variable was intended destination as opposed to a longitudinal study which would have looked at actual student choices.

In a conference paper, Doorbar (2001) reported on findings of a survey of more than 700 East Asian students who were enrolled in postsecondary intensive English

language programs in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Sixty-nine percent of the students reported that they considered a destination country first, before looking into the type of program or particular institution. They also found that students did not express quality as a concern in terms of selecting a program of study; rather students were more interested in finding cost-effective programs. When asked about reasons for choosing their particular institution or program, the leading reasons indicated were program reputation and cost, findings quite similar to those of Zikopoulos and Barber (1986).

*Mazzarol and Soutar's Meta-Analysis of Asian Students.* Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) conducted a meta-analysis, compiling data from previous studies conducted by Mazzarol in an effort to analyze factors that pushed students to study abroad and pull students to particular nations and particular institutions. Data were analyzed from studies of more than 2000 students in Taiwan, Indonesia, China, and India. They found the following push factors: (a) perception of higher quality of study overseas; (b) limited availability of high selectivity of academic programs available at home; (c) opportunities to learn about other (Western) cultures; and (d) possibility of immigration upon completion of studies. Mazzarol and Soutar's paper is particularly useful for their examination of pull factors. They examined several categories of influence, including students' knowledge and awareness of destination countries, friends and family's recommendations, cost, environment (weather, cultural and recreational opportunities), and social and geographical linkages. There was no analysis of factors across categories, but the study includes a thorough investigation of a complete set of factors within each of the categories. Survey findings were presented as percentages for each nation. Although

there is little discussion of issues of comparison among the four nations, it is relatively simple for the reader to make some inferences regarding specific countries. For example, it comes as no surprise that larger percentages of Chinese students reported low fees as important, as compared with students from Taiwan, India, and Indonesia. One of the more interesting aspects of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study is their presentation of a decision process for students who study abroad. The process has three sequential stages: First, the student decides to study abroad. Second, the student selects a nation, and third, an institution is selected. This process is presented as an assumption, and there is no citation that points to research on the topic. (Note that Doorbar (2001) and Pimpa (2005) provide data that support Mazzarol and Souter's assumption.)

#### *Implications of the College Choice Research*

The research, as summarized above, indicates that relatively little is known about the specific processes, activities, and challenges of the college choice process for students who wish to study abroad. There is considerably more knowledge about the factors that influence those choices (institutional characteristics, receiving or host-nation characteristics, home-country educational characteristics). Most of the research affirms "common-sense" knowledge regarding those factors, which can be summarized as follows:

(a) *Access*. Students with limited home country educational opportunities are more likely to seek education abroad than students from nations with many educational opportunities (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Noorani, & Abolghasem, 1980).

(b) *Information*. Students' choices are affected by the information available to them. Information sources include family and friends, school-provided literature, recruiting



personnel and advisors, and the Internet (Pimpa, 2005; Waters, 1992, Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). Course descriptions, whether provided by the institution or other sources, are particularly useful (Joseph & Joseph, 2000).

(c) *Quality*. Students seek the best educational quality (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Zikopoulos and Barber, 1986), whether that is measured in terms of subsequent career or immigration opportunities (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996, Pyvis & Chapman, 2007), facilities (Joseph & Joseph, 2000), institutional reputation or standards (Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Kim, 2001; Wu, 1989), or curricular design (Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Joseph & Joseph, 2000)

(d) *Cost*. Students will seek opportunities which are cost-effective, whether cost is determined in terms of school expenses, financial assistance, or employment opportunities (Doorbar, 2001; Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Kim, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wang, 1998; Waters, 1992).

(e) *Culture*. Some students seek to expand their knowledge by living and learning in new cultures (Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996, Pyvis & Chapman 2007).

(f) *Location and governance*. Some students prefer institutions in major urban areas (Wu, 1989) and in the United States (Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998). Some prefer public institutions (Wu, 1989).

As can be seen from above, what is known about *why* students choose to study abroad is limited. What is known about *how* students choose to study abroad is even more limited. Very little information is available about how students gather information, who

and what influences their judgments and decisions, and how they process the information they receive. There is some evidence that the decision to study abroad begins with the selection of a country (Doorbar, 2001; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa 2005), but this evidence is scant. Similarly, there is much evidence that study abroad decisions are highly influenced by friends and relatives. Students with parents and or friends who are knowledgeable or supportive of study abroad are more likely to pursue education abroad (Pimpa, 2005; Waters, 1992; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986), but little is known as to how this influence extends beyond students' predisposition to study abroad.

Even less is known about how prospective students gather data and make judgments of institutional characteristics such as quality, culture, and environment. By comparison, there is considerable data as to how students in the United States make college choice decisions, complete with foundational theory that guides scholarly discussion and research. As researchers seek to learn more about how students make study abroad decisions, the United States-based college choice literature can and should be a useful point of departure. The following section describes theoretical perspectives that guided this study, and it is appropriate that much of the theory is taken from the United States college choice literature.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Theoretical Perspectives Underlying International Student College Choice Research**

A consideration of the theoretical perspectives that will frame this study should start with the literature that has focused on the college choices of students in the United States. For more than thirty years, researchers in the United States have considered college attendance and choice patterns, using a range of research designs, methodologies, and conceptual frameworks. In this chapter I will first examine the general approaches (or designs) used by these researchers, and I will then summarize several models that have been used to describe the college choice process. I will then consider the theoretical frameworks that have guided college choice research. This section will conclude with a review of other theories that are applicable to researchers interested in international students' college choices.

Before considering the approaches used by United States researchers, I should note that in recent years there has been considerable interest among Australian researchers on the college choice factors and decisions of students who choose to come to Australia for higher education (Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Gatfield, Barker, & Graham; 1999; Kemp, Madden & Simpson; 1998, Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Much of this research is a product, directly or indirectly, of the efforts of government and higher education institutions to recruit additional numbers of internationals to Australia (Fraser,

1984). In fact, Australia has been quite successful in increasing numbers of foreign students to its institutions (Gates, 2004). The Australian research does not appear to have any explicit theoretical basis. For the most part the researchers have provided descriptions of student behaviors and the overall effects of institutional policies on those student behaviors, and how institutions might influence those behaviors.

#### Approaches to Studying College Choice in the United States

Paulsen (1990) has divided the college choice research into two basic categories. Macro research examines aggregate enrollment patterns at institutional, state, regional, or national levels. Micro research examines the enrollment behaviors of individual students and the factors that affect those behaviors. Although this dissertation is of the micro category, it is nonetheless useful to consider the perspectives that guide macro level research. McDonough (1997a) has further divided the macro research into three categories. The first category, psychosocial research, considers factors that affect students' choices, the phases of the choice process, and the fit between student and institution. The second category includes economic studies, which examine aggregate econometric data to determine college attendance patterns. McDonough's third category includes status attainment studies. These studies examine the effects of social status on individual choices.

McDonough's and Paulsen's categorizations are useful, but they fail to highlight all the characteristics of the various types of college choice research. Specifically, they fail to consider how researchers view the activity and agency of students themselves in the college choice process. In order to include student-focused research, I propose three broad categories of college choice research. The categories based on the primary

analytical approaches: (a) economic studies, which examine aggregate demographic and economic data to determine enrollment patterns; (b) sociological studies, which consider the effects of factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and academic preparation; and (c) behavioral studies, which consider the behavior or activities of students, their parents and friends, and colleges, and how those activities influence individual choices on the students' choices. Table 4 gives an overview of these three categories.

Table 4

*Three Categories of United States College Choice Studies*

Category (examples)	Methodology/ Metric	Focus	Data useful to	Phase
Economic (Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Heller, 1997; Hoxby, 2004; Jackson, 1978)	Quantitative/ Enrollments	Aggregate economic and demographic sets, enrollment patterns	Policy makers	NA
Sociological (Hearn, 1984; King, 1996; McDonough, 1997a; Flint, 1992)	Quantitative and Qualitative/ Enrollments	Choice factors as mediated by SES, social status	Policy Makers	Predisposition and Search
Behavioral (Bers 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Galotti & Mark, 1998)	Quantitative and Qualitative/ Choice Activities	Institutional actions, student, parental behaviors	Admissions staff	Search and Choice

In the economic studies, little attention is given to effects of student behaviors. Instead, institutional or regional or national enrollment patterns are considered in the context of tuition costs, unemployment rates, ethnicity, and the like. In many cases little or only speculative attention is given to the reasons that various factors affect enrollments. These studies may assist national policy makers in predicting enrollment trends, or institutional leaders in estimating effects of changes in their environment or institution, but they do little to inform this study, which focuses on how students make their choices. Excellent examples of recent economic studies can be found in Hoxby (2004).

The sociological studies, which include status attainment research and research on gender and ethnicity effects, provide a better conceptual foundation for this study, because they explain the effects of particular influences on student behavior. Examples of sociological studies include Hearn, (1984), King (1996), McDonough, (1997a), Flint, (1992), and Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004). But for the most part, these studies focus on broad sociological patterns and student attributes about which students themselves can do little, if anything. If student behaviors are considered, they are considered in the context of the student's fit within a sociological, ethnic, or socioeconomic category.

By contrast, the behavioral studies examine the effects of student and college admissions personnel behaviors. As a result, these studies provide insight into things that students do, and things that institutions do, that may effect enrollments or student opportunities. Because this dissertation falls into the behavioral category, a consideration of several of the behavioral studies follows.

Galotti and Mark's (1994) examination of the college choice process among 322 high school students provides a powerful view of how the choice process is structured. The students were surveyed three times over the course of a year. Galotti and Mark examined students' use of various information sources and various information-gathering activities. They also examined the types of criteria students used, how those criteria were used, and the choice sets of the students. In general, Galotti and Mark found that over the course of the decision the structure of the students' decision was generally consistent, though there were variations in importance of specific criteria over time. They also found differences in decision processes by parental education, gender, and academic ability.

Another good example of a behavioral study is that of Bers (2005). This study considers the beliefs, attitudes, and activities of parents and the relationships between those beliefs, attitudes, and activities and student choices behaviors. Among Bers' findings was that a majority of parents initiated their child's consideration of the college that their child attended, but that most parents viewed the final decision as that of the child.

### College Choice Models

Several common models describing the college choice process serve as useful point of reference for this study. Chapman's (1983) pioneering efforts to examine students' decisions to attend college initially focused on factors affecting students' choices. Chapman developed a model that included student characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, aptitude, and aspirations, and external influences on the students' choices, such as college characteristics, college recruiting or marketing activities, and personal influences. Figure 3 gives an overview of factors proposed by Chapman (1983).

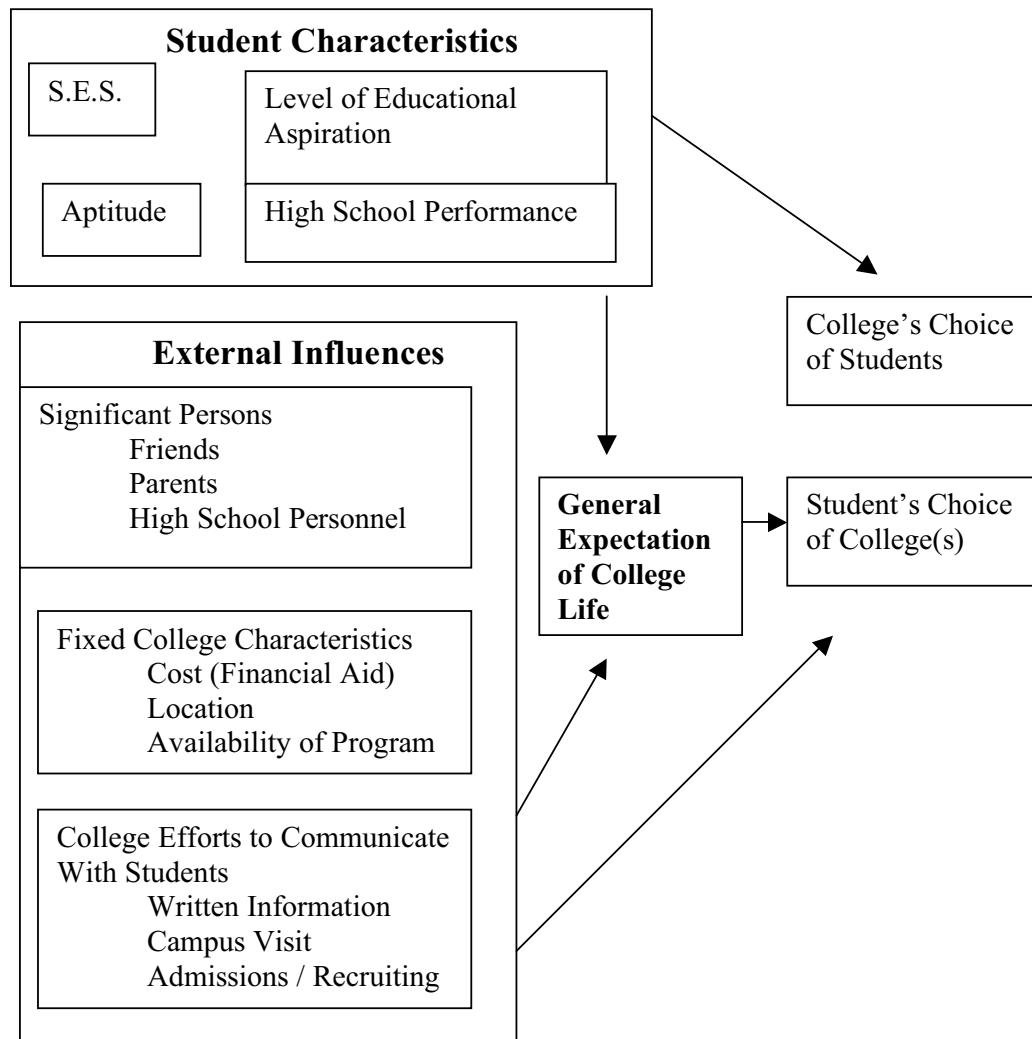


Figure 3. Chapman's Model of College Choice. From Chapman, D. W. (1983). A model of student college choice. *Journal of Higher Education*, 52, 5, p. 492.

Research on the factors described by Chapman led scholars to conclude that the factors manifest themselves in distinct phases of a college choice process. This process is described as having three distinct phases: predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler,



Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989, Hossler & Gallagher (1987). The three-phase conceptualization of the college choice process is a paradigm that has guided many college choice studies. Table 5 gives an overview of the phases and the factors associated with each phase.

Table 5

*College Choice Phases and Factors*

Phases	Factors
Predisposition	Parental encouragement and support Parental saving for college Socioeconomic status Parental collegiate experience High School academic resources Student ability Information about college
Search	Parental encouragement and support Educational aspirations Occupational aspirations Socioeconomic status Saliency of potential institutions
Choice	Educational aspirations Occupational aspirations Socioeconomic status Student ability Parental encouragement Perceived institutional attributes Perceived ability to pay

Note: Adapted from Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the college choice process. In Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (Eds.), *Understanding the college choice of disadvantaged students*. New Directions for Institutional Research, 107, vol. 27, no 3, 5-22.

Kotler and Fox (1985) proposed a seven-stage college choice model that reflects the needs and interests of admissions specialists and others who are interested in how institutions can market themselves to prospective students. Their model views the college

choice process as a series of decisions that every college matriculant must make. In the model, students and their parents must determine (a) life options (college, trade school, military service, employment); (b) institutional type (large or small, public or private); (c) a total set of institutions; (d) an awareness set; (e) a consideration set; (f) a choice set; (g) and a final decision. Kotler and Fox's marketing emphasis is reflected in their model, which allows admissions staff to perceive the choice process in terms of institutional types and how to promote a particular type of institution. For the purposes of this study it is useful to consider the college choice process in terms of a series of activities over which the prospective student has control.

More recent models of the college choice process are more complex than those proposed by Chapman (1983), Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989), and Kotler and Fox (1985). McDonough (1997b) used regression analyses of CIRP data to propose a "cultural capital" model of college choice. In her model, students' decisions are a result of their efforts to use existing cultural capital in an effort to acquire increased cultural capital or economic capital. Southerland (2006) has proposed that the same variables influencing college choice also influence persistence. In his model there are three basic decisions made by each student: (a) to participate in college; (b) to enroll in an institution; and (c) to persist. For each of these decisions Southerland proposes a group of variables such as predisposition, self-perception, and goal commitment. Many variables overlap the three decisions. Southerland suggests that many of the decisions are precipitated by a particular event in the student's life.

The college choice models described above offer useful viewpoints for examining the decisions of students who choose to go abroad. There has been insufficient testing of

the models to determine which of them might be most appropriate in guiding research. Much of the recent research on international student college choice, in particular that of Australian researchers (e.g., Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Kemp, Madden & Simpson, 1998; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007) has tended to avoid specific reference to college choice models.

#### Theoretical Influences on the United States College Choice Literature

The college choice literature has its theoretical foundations in the academic disciplines of the researchers. Those disciplines are economics, psychology, and sociology (Paulsen, 1990), and they all have contributed to the overall understanding of college choice. In recent years, scholars from schools of education have been more likely to use synthetic approaches to conceptualizing college choice. Nevertheless, all of the literature is based on theories that are representative of the three disciplines. The following section will provide an overview of the theories that have guided scholars.

#### *Rational Choice Theory*

Implicit in much of the economic literature on college choice are human capital and rational choice theories. Rational choice theory underlies a number of political and economic theories; it assumes that individuals understand their choices, understand the outcomes of those choices, and act in such a way as to maximize their benefits. The research implications of these assumptions are numerous: maximization must be consistently defined and measured, variables must function consistently across individuals and circumstances, and individuals must be the agents of action (Green & Shapiro, 1994). Much of the U.S. college choice literature conforms to these assumptions in several ways. It generally assumes that students are responsible for their choices (not

accounting for the possibility that those who “influence” those choices may exert sufficient influence so as to effectively make the choice for students). It also assumes that maximization in terms of economic benefits accrues to individuals, and to a lesser degree communities. Such assumptions can be questioned in a context of a single nation’s students and their choices. In the context of a cross-cultural decision, the assumptions of rational choice theoretical foundations need to be carefully scrutinized, if not disregarded, primarily because it is extremely difficult to define variables consistently across cultures. So while rational choice theory may be useful to researchers who consider large economic and demographic data sets in a single culture or economy, it is limited in its applicability to diverse data sets in which influences will vary according to individual and local custom.

### *Human Capital Theory*

Human capital theory has significantly influenced research on the choice factors that influence a student’s enrollment decision, and the studies that I have categorized as economic (e.g., Heller, 1997; Hoxby, 2004) are heavily influenced by the theory. Human capital theory is based on the notion that people make choices about college with a view toward future benefits. College choice, like other investments, is a function of individuals examining the costs of furthering their education and determining that those costs will be returned in the form of increased future earnings or other benefits. Human capital theory is based on classical and neo-classical economics, with roots dating back to Adam Smith. It seeks to explain the role of human resources in economic development. Human capital theorists view education, or any other form of human resource development, as an investment. As with any other investment, investors act on the basis of expected returns.

In terms of postsecondary education, a student will choose to invest in a college education if she believes that the expected returns are greater than the costs. The cost of education and its returns must be compared to the costs and expected returns of other investments.

Mincer (1993) has described human capital theory's approach to educational activities:

The central idea of human-capital theory is that, whether deliberate or not, these activities involve costs and benefits and can, therefore, be analyzed as economic decisions, private or public. The costs can involve direct expenses and earnings or consumption forgone by students, trainees and workers engaged in labor mobility. Since production and consumption benefits from these activities accrue mainly in the future, and are for the most part quite durable, the costly acquisition of human capacities is an act of investment. (p. 286)

Human capital theory posits that education is not the only means of investing in human capital: "The many forms of such investments include schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, *migration*, and searching for information about prices and incomes" (Becker, 1975, p. 9, emphasis added). Thus, while formal education has been the primary area of interest of human capital theorists, the movement required for people to participate in education is included in an individual's overall investment.

There is an implicit assumption that students' college choices are rational choices, and that the consequences of various choices can be known (or approximated) by those making the decisions. As a result, researchers influenced by human capital theory tend to focus on the factors that affect choices made by individual students, with aggregate data sets reflecting the decisions of multiple decision makers.

Much of the econometric research described in Chapter 2 explicitly relies on human capital theory (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985a; Lee & Tan, 1984; Wobbekind & Graves, 1989). Human capital theory has considerable power to explain phenomena associated with student mobility, including issues of immigration, access, and return on

investment. The chief disadvantage of human capital theory in studying college choice is the difficulty associated with calculating the non-pecuniary costs, and benefits, of education.

#### *Status Attainment Theory*

The studies categorized as sociological rely heavily on status attainment theory. Whereas human capital theory investigates choices in terms of the cost of and expected outcomes of educational investment, status attainment theory suggests that multiple variables related to social status have effects on educational attainment and college choices. The social status of parents is assumed to affect the educational attainment of their children (Duncan, Featherman, and Duncan, 1972). Socioeconomic status (SES) typically serves as a proxy for social status. The components of student's SES, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, are indices such as the educational level of both of a student's parents, family income, the father's job, and possession of various household items. Assuming that these indices are useful in fairly determining a student's social status, it is reasonable to assume that such estimates of status would influence aggregate educational aspirations or attainment for various social groups.

Researchers who focus on status attainment theories have tried to understand the relationship between SES and choice behaviors by using Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of social class status and how education facilitates the reproduction of that status. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) have described the concepts of cultural capital, social capital, and habitus to account for the role of culture in transmission of social status. The discussion of these concepts that follows is derived from Grenfell and James' (1998) reflective analysis of Bourdieu's contributions to educational theory. Cultural

capital, like economic capital, can be shared, acquired, distributed, or exchanged. Cultural capital has three specific forms. One form of cultural capital is tied to an individual person's knowledge and skills set. Another form is found in objects, such as books, works of art, or machines. A third form of cultural capital is the system of academic degrees, or credentials, which gives individuals a specific power or authority within the social system.

Social capital refers to the friends, contacts, and connectedness of an individual to other individuals. Social capital can be considered as the resources available to a person through that person's sphere of personal contacts. Some researchers have emphasized social capital as a component of communities (Fukuyama, 2001; Putnam 1996), while others view it as a component of nuclear and extended families (Coleman, 1988).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus refers to a person's own conceptualizations of the social environment, or a person's cognitive structuring of that environment. Habitus is the individual's perceptions of his or her own cultural and symbolic capital. These conceptualizations, including values, beliefs, and dispositions serve to limit or constrain a person's choices. Put another way, if a person does not think of certain options in her choice set, those options are not actually possible, and therefore habitus has considerable influence on the decisions a person makes. Thus, for Bourdieu, the educational choices for any given person are a function of that person's habitus. And those educational options can be conceptualized as cultural capital, which in turn sets the boundaries for a person's social class or status. In this sense, scholars who view educational attainment and college choice through status attainment lenses can recognize and sort the myriad effects of social class (as indicated by cultural capital, symbolic capital, and habitus).

Put in Bourdieu's terms, social status influences college choice activities because the choices made by students and encouraged by their families are the manifestation of the expectations of what type of education is expected to maintain or change social status. Status attainment theory conceives of students making rational choices, but the outcomes of the choices are economic in the sense that they allow for the maintenance of acquisition of cultural capital. It is cultural capital that allows individuals and parents to maintain social or class status, and it is cultural capital that is the conduit for economic resources. Choices that affect cultural capital are not rational, because they are bounded by various social groups' perceptions of the meaning and utility of educational opportunity (McDonough, 1997a). Perhaps most important, it is cultural capital that influences the students' educational choices, and students are influenced by bounded rationality that in fact limits the choice set to be considered. This conceptualization of the college choice process is entirely appropriate to the sociological studies in that those researchers are primarily concerned with the effects of social class and status on college choice.

#### Theoretical Perspectives and International Student College Choice

There are a number of other theoretical perspectives that can inform college choice research, particularly research that deals with students who choose to study abroad. These perspectives have particular emphasis on the social aspects of the choice to leave one's homeland and study in another country.

##### *Immigration Theory*

Immigration theory is rooted in neoclassical macroeconomic theory and is related to human capital theory. It posits that individuals who have invested in human capital



will be likely to migrate to locations where they will reap the highest returns on their investment (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Peligrino, & Taylor, 1993). This means that individuals with special education or skills will travel to locations in which their knowledge or skill is in short supply. In addition, migration itself is a human capital investment: individuals who migrate anticipate that their action will result in benefits that exceed the cost of relocating, learning a new language and culture, and severing social and psychological ties to the old culture. With respect to students' choices for attending college, it may be that costs and benefits of immigration are important factors in students' decisions.

In recent years, some economists have moved away from the human capital oriented theories, and have viewed immigration not as an individual decision, but as a family decision that is designed to reduce economic risks (Massey, et al., 1993; Stark & Bloom, 1985). In this view, migration is not an individual decision, but rather the decision of a family unit that sends its members to other locations so as to reduce dependency on single sources of income. This risk reduction behavior is likely to occur in families located in nations with relatively fewer economic safety nets such as insurance systems and unemployment programs. The same phenomenon may be at work in the decisions that families make when sending their children off for an education. The family's goal may be less an investment in their child, and more of a hedge against economic calamities. Other immigration theorists incorporate world systems theory, and posit that immigration patterns are set by the activities of large transnational organizations. Information on world systems theory will be discussed in the following section.

### *Regionalism*

Another theoretical perspective that can be used to understand student's choices to study abroad is regionalism, which has been described in Chapter 2. Regionalism has European roots, driven by the needs and interests of scholars and policy makers affiliated with or located in the European Community. A very useful volume edited by Blumenthal, Goodwin, Smith, & Teichler (1996) provides an overview of the utility of this perspective in the context of international higher education. The term *regionalism* is used more broadly than in its common geographical sense. Skilbeck and Connell (1996) point out that regionalism may be defined in terms of the economic, religious, cultural, or political affinities within and among nations. They go so far as to call the member nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) a region. Regionalism is a useful lens for student mobility research, because it encourages researchers to go beyond basic physical or political geography and consider the full possibility of connections that might stimulate, or inhibit, international study.

### *World System Theory*

World system theory is related to regionalism, in that it considers areas of the world not in terms of geographical proximity but rather in terms of economic similarity. World system theory is associated with the work of sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (see Wallerstein, 2004) and economic historian Andre Frank. World system theorists divide the world into three categories associated with economic production. First, there are core areas of the world that control economic production and capital markets. Core nations include the United States, Canada, Western European nations, and Japan. Second, there are peripheral areas of the world, which contribute low cost labor to the world

system, which is controlled by organizations from the core. Peripheral nations include those of South America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Semi-peripheral areas of the world compose the third category, and these areas are characterized by possessing characteristics of both core areas and peripheral areas. Nations such as Malaysia and Argentina are considered semi-peripheral. An important premise of world system theory is that no single nation or organization has full control of the system. Multinational corporations, the World Bank, and even universities serve as powerful agents in the system (Shannon, 1989, Wallerstein, 1974). World system theorists' view of the world is not so distinct from that of business leaders such as Ohmae (1993), who tout the advantages of interlinked economies that diminish the authority of national governments. World system theorists, however, view the powerful organizations of the core as self-serving, with organizational interests that preclude them from taking an active role in contributing to the economic, political, and social development of peripheral nations. For the purposes of understanding student flows and college choices, it makes little difference. World system theory views international student flows as a subset of the larger activities of the organizations that control the world system. Students travel overseas and study as a result of the benefits and advantages afforded them by participating in the world system. This view is consistent with the trend in the policy and push-pull literature to view flows in terms of economic interdependence.

#### *Network Theory*

A second perspective associated with regionalism is network theory, which is rooted in sociology, anthropology, and communication studies. It is used to examine the nature and intensity of individual and organizational interactions in large-scale situations

(Mitchell, 1974). Those interactions are patterned and can therefore be viewed as networks (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). For international student flows, the networks can be viewed as interactions between nations (Barnett & Wu, 2000), interactions between individuals and organizations (Denny, 1999), or interactions between individuals. Network analysis seeks to recognize the patterns of interaction, and then explain those interactions in terms of various phenomena. Thus, network theory can be considered a subset of regionalism, and it is consistent with the activities of researchers who would use network analysis. For those interested in student mobility research, network theory researchers examine, and then evaluate, a full range of economic, social, and cultural factors that promote student flows.

#### Theoretical Perspectives and the Design of this Study

The theories described in this section have obvious reference to college choice decisions to study abroad, regardless of any particular student's circumstances, background, or intended destination. Because this is an exploratory study, and because the study was designed to determine how students perceived their own experiences, it was inappropriate to suggest a particular framework or perspective to guide the study, and therefore I chose a research design, described in chapter 4, that did not follow a particular theory. However, many of the theoretical perspectives described in this chapter are helpful in framing and organizing the findings of this study which appear in Chapter 6.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

In this chapter I explain the general design of the study, as well as the procedures used for selecting sites, recruiting and interviewing participants, and processing, analyzing, and verifying the data supplied by the participants. I conclude the chapter with a consideration of the limitations of the design.

#### Purpose of Study and Rationale for the Research Design

My purpose for this study was to better understand the college choice experiences of Pakistanis who have chosen to enroll as undergraduates at American universities. I defined college choice experiences as the behaviors, processes, influences, and perceptions that are associated with the students' plans to continue their education at the postsecondary level. The study describes the students' college choice experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. The study answers the following primary question: How did the students decide to study in the United States? The following sub-questions shaped the design of the research:

- (a) What processes and strategies did the students use to choose to study abroad and to select a college? Are the strategies and processes for choosing to study abroad the same as for selecting a college? Selecting a destination country or area?
- (b) What, and who, influences the students?
- (c) What is the cultural context for the above influences?

(d) What meanings and understandings to the students themselves have regarding their decision to study in the U.S.?

(e) How do the college choice experiences of the students who attend different types of institutions compare?

Two fundamental principles guided my research design. First, the research was exploratory in nature. This study was designed to provide new knowledge of the college choice behaviors and experiences of Pakistani students, and its results may eventually serve as a template for research on other student populations. There were no theoretical assumptions or empirical data to suggest that Pakistani students go about the college choice process or perceive their college choice experiences in any particular way. Simply put, there was no explicit theoretical or empirical foundation for this research. Of course there has been research into the behaviors and experiences of international students *as a population* who come to the United States (Waters 1992; Zikopoulos & Barber 1986) and Australia (Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998; Joseph & Joseph, 2000). But there was no reason to believe that international students as a whole share particular characteristics, or that they utilize common behaviors or strategies when making decisions about where to attend college. In fact, in the United States and Britain, college choice researchers have demonstrated that students of different academic abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnic backgrounds employ different strategies in making college choice decisions (Freeman, 1997; Hearn, 1991; Hurtado et al., 1997; Perna, 2000). In the absence of evidence that international students share some common characteristics, I believed it was best to proceed by conducting basic research that provides information on students as individuals, and information on individuals as members of a community or culture. As

more data are gathered from individuals or groups of students, conclusions will eventually be reached, inductively, about shared or common behaviors in the college choice process.

The second principle that directed my research design involves the potential bias on the part of me, the researcher. In the case of research involving international populations, there is considerable risk that the researcher's perspectives and worldview will distort or mask findings and effects. Nearly twenty years ago, Altbach (1991) noted that virtually all research on international student flows had been conducted from the perspective of Western, "first-world," receiving nations. Little has changed since Altbach made that observation, and during the same period the global "marketplace" for international students has become increasingly competitive. For policy makers, student flow researchers, and recruiters, it is becoming increasingly important to understand how students make their college choice decisions. The best way to develop a complete understanding of those decisions is to include the world-views and perspectives of those who are making the decisions.

Therefore, my design incorporated methods that aimed to maximize understanding of behaviors as they were experienced by the students themselves. The design also needed to account for my own notions of how students from abroad go about the college choice process. Therefore the study had to be designed in a way that it could detect student responses and findings that do not fit traditional constructs (including those of the researcher), and it had to be designed so that it was not bound to any particular theory or model of college choice behavior. In essence, the study gave participants the opportunity to tell about their experiences in choosing an American university, and then rigorous

procedures were used to analyze individual participant responses and to develop themes that describe the participants' experience as a whole.

The data from this study help describe and explain the college choice behaviors and experiences of Pakistani undergraduates who have come to colleges and universities in the United States. In time, the data from this study can be used to compare those behaviors and experiences with those of the general international student population and other specific populations of students. Data can then be compared and contrasted to determine if there are international student effects, or if various populations of students tend to choose overseas study in distinctive ways.

#### *Rationale for Research Method*

This study required a qualitative design that minimized the possibility of overlooking important perspectives or factors of the students' experiences (Creswell, 1994). A qualitative design assured that "the subject of the study, be it an organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to a hypothesis, but is viewed instead as a part of a whole" (Bogdan, 1975, p. 4). This is consistent with the research of college choice researchers who focus on U.S. students. Although those researchers rely on considerable empirical and theoretical foundations, they nevertheless use qualitative approaches in their research designs (e.g., Freeman, 1997; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper 1999; McDonough, 1997a).

Given the need for exploratory or basic research that would not overlook the participants' own understanding of their college choice experiences, it was necessary to hear from students in their own voices, using interviews (as opposed to focus groups, or surveys, for example). Weiss (1994) points to the value of such interviews:



Interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life ... about people's interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affected their thoughts and feelings. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves. (p.1)

The interviews were conducted after-the-fact of the study abroad decision. Students who had already chosen to study in the U.S. were recruited as participants, and the interview gave them the opportunity to reflect on their college choice experience.

Information provided by the participants through interviews then needed to be analyzed in a way that would allow for maximum expression of their experiences, and to have their perceptions and beliefs about those experiences underscored in both the data collection and analysis stages of the research. Toward this end, I turned to phenomenology as the best method of analyzing the interview data. Giorgi (1985) described phenomenology as “precisely the discipline that tries to discover and account for the presence of meanings in the stream of consciousness. It is the discipline that tries to sort out and systematize meanings . . . ” (p. 6). Phenomenology allows researchers to perceive the essential structure of a process, experience, or interaction, with particular emphasis on the participants' own perspectives.

Phenomenology as a research method is rooted in the twentieth century philosophy associated with Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl. They held that human consciousness does not occur in isolation, but is always associated with some object or some circumstance. Their goal was to understand *human perception* or consciousness as the central issue in philosophy, and to develop rigorous means of describing human consciousness.

Husserl developed three philosophical concepts that provide a framework for phenomenological researchers, which have been described by Holloway (1997) and Spiegelberg (1960) and are summarized as follows. First is *intuition*, by which Husserl meant that understanding human consciousness requires description and interpretation that can only result from being immersed in a phenomenon. Thus, to properly interpret things, a researcher must either have experienced a phenomenon or have significant contact with those who have experienced the phenomenon. Second, Husserl also believed that it was necessary to understand the *essence* of a phenomenon, and that there is an absolute truth or structure to human experiences. To get at this truth requires the use of the third concept, *reduction*. To understand human consciousness or perception, one must eliminate prior assumptions and rely on one's experience or observation of the experience of others as those experiences are grounded in specific events.

Phenomenological philosophy offers a view of the world in which the inclusion of human *thought* or *perception* brings different conceptualizations of reality. Polkinghorne (1989) describes phenomenology's contribution to philosophy:

In the return to the investigation of experience itself, phenomenological philosophy has produced an understanding of experience that undercuts some of the commonsense assumptions that inform Western science. The form and continuity of experience are products of an intrinsic relationship between human beings and the world. The error of the traditional approach is the result of separating mind and body into two independent spheres. This separation has produced two contradictory pictures. On the one hand, the world is understood to be made up of the random buzzing of electrical particles, and it is mind that imposes the notions of form and substance on this confusion. On the other hand, the world itself is understood and ordered and structured, the mind making no special contribution to experience and merely passively mirroring the natural order (Rorty, 1979). The phenomenological correction holds that experience consists of the reception of worldly objects by the processes of consciousness to constitute what presents itself in awareness. (p. 42)

Brentano's and Husserl's philosophy has been a foundation for qualitative research methods in health sciences, psychology, and education. Given the fact that phenomenological philosophers seek to understand and structure fundamental human consciousness, researchers have been reluctant to prescribe specific procedures or techniques, and have instead emphasized the role and attitude of the researcher and appropriate responses to the human phenomenon being studied (Holloway, 1997).

Phenomenology was especially appropriate for this study in that its emphasis on reduction, by which the researcher's experiences and prejudices can be minimized, allows the voice and perceptions of the students to rise to the surface of the study. It is also appropriate in that it recognizes the power of persons' perceptions of events, which is particularly important in conducting research across cultures. A phenomenological approach provides a philosophical and methodological template that can serve as a "logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). This is especially critical given the circumstances of this study, where there is little in the way of theory to guide the research, and much room for bias and misinterpretation of participant responses if those responses are not subject to rigorous analysis.

Other qualitative procedures could have given voice to the participants' own perceptions of their experiences, but phenomenological procedures allowed for understanding of the basic or essential structure of the participants' experience. Phenomenological procedures have evolved over the years and are used in a variety of social science research settings. The procedures used in this study follow those of Moustakas (1994) and are prescribed in detail in the section on data analysis below.

### Research Participants

Another aspect of the design of this study was selection of participants and the sites from which participants were to be recruited. Some studies assume that international students on the whole behave in certain ways regarding decisions to study abroad. Underlying those studies is the assumption that internationals from different backgrounds (cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, economic, etc.) behave in similar ways. While there may be behaviors that are common to all groups of international students, the assumption needs to be tested. Thus, this research examines a single national group (Pakistanis) in an effort to determine how they perceive the college choice experience. From this point of view, the selection of Pakistanis (as opposed to another national or ethnic group) was irrelevant. What was relevant was building insights into the experiences of a particular group of students that could be used, in subsequent studies, as a basis for comparison with other groups of students.

As for my decision to choose to study Pakistani undergraduates, however, there are several reasons why this population is well suited for the purposes of this study:

(a) Pakistani students usually receive their secondary education in English. Even though their first language is typically Urdu, their significant educational experience with the English language means that, because I am a native English speaker, it was possible to minimize the confusion associated with conducting interviews and analyzing language used by individuals with limited English proficiency.

(b) Pakistanis come to the United States for undergraduate study in significant numbers. They are currently the twentieth largest national group studying in the United States (IIE, 2006).

(c) Pakistani students have numerous options for study, both in Pakistan and at other nations besides the United States. Traditionally, many Pakistanis have chosen to study in the United Kingdom. And although postsecondary education is somewhat underdeveloped in Pakistan (*World Factbook*, 2007), there are a number of private, public, and distance education opportunities for students who wish to remain in Pakistan.

(d) Pakistani students represent a group that has a significantly different cultural background (Asian, Islamic, developing country) than that of many nations that send students to the United States.

(e) Pakistani undergraduates were enrolled at several institutions that were accessible to me.

(f) I previously conducted similar research with Pakistanis (Hamrick, 2003).

(g) Pakistan, unlike Korea, Japan, or other countries, does not have a highly developed advising system for students interested in going abroad. Had I worked with students from countries with such advising systems, it may have been difficult to distinguish the effects of student behaviors from those of advisors.

In terms of the numbers of students who choose to come to the United States, Pakistani enrollments are not atypical. The Institute for International Education (2004) reported that 7,325 Pakistanis were enrolled as international students in U.S. colleges and universities in 2003-2004. Of these, approximately 4,600 were enrolled as

undergraduates. By the 2005-2006 academic year, Pakistani enrollments in the United States declined to 5,759 students, or the twentieth most numerous nationality (IIE, 2006).

To reiterate, I do not believe that there are any particular characteristics of the Pakistani student population that will make the *results* of my project more useful, but this population offers several advantages in comparison to other student groups that I might have selected.

### Research Sites

Although selecting students from randomly selected institutions would have been adequate for this study, I chose to recruit students from several different types of institutions (Carnegie classifications) based on the possibility that students who enrolled at different types of institutions have different college choice experiences. My previous research among Pakistanis (Hamrick 2003) had occurred at a campus that was aggressively recruiting international students. The campus also had relatively low admissions requirements. Neither SAT or ACT was required of international applicants, and students with a *C* average in high school were typically admitted. Studies in the U.S. and Britain have demonstrated that students of different academic abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnic backgrounds employ different strategies in making college choice decisions (Freeman, 1997; Hearn, 1991; Hurtado et al., 1997; Perna, 2000), and a lingering question from the 2003 study was whether the results were characteristic of Pakistani students in general, or whether the findings were characteristic of students who had chosen to attend that institution. And because the 2003 institution had relatively low admission standards, I was especially interested to collect data from students who were attending more selective institutions

It was not feasible to design a study that would allow for recruiting participants based on background characteristics or on academic ability. But I assumed that that attendance at a particular institution was indicated to some degree by academic ability. The use of several types of institutions as a “sampling frame” would allow for comparison of college choice experiences across institutional types, and in particular, across institutions with different admissions standards.

In the fall of 2004 I began to look for campuses at which I might be able to recruit participants for the study. I communicated with foreign student advisors on several campuses, inquiring about campuses that had significant enrollments of Pakistanis. Through these informal communications I became aware of several institutions in a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States where large numbers of Pakistani students were enrolled.

After identifying the metropolitan area, I used the following procedure to select institutions as research sites. Using the 2000 Carnegie classification listings (Carnegie, 2000), I identified twenty-three institutions in the metropolitan area. Institutions that were categorized as for-profit or specialized were eliminated on the basis that Pakistani students would be unlikely to attend there in great numbers. This left thirteen institutions that were designated as public or private not-for-profit, and that offered associates or bachelors degrees. Appropriate offices at each of these institutions were contacted to determine if undergraduate, non-immigrant Pakistanis were enrolled. Three institutions were found to have sufficient student populations to support this study.

I assigned pseudonyms to each of the three institutions. The first was Technical State University (TSU), a research-intensive public institution, well known for its

technical engineering programs. The second was State University (SU), a large, public research institution located in the center of the metropolitan area, with a reputation for enrolling many local students. The third was Associates College (AC), a public community college with multiple campuses in the metropolitan area. Each of the institutions had distinct admissions standards. TSU's average SAT score for freshmen admitted in Fall 2003 was 1339. TSU's average for the same year was 1082. The average at AC was 902, although the college is open to all high school graduates. The institutions' Carnegie classifications and other characteristics are described in Table 6. Approximately 40 Pakistanis holding F-1 student visas were enrolled as undergraduates at the three schools.

Table 6

*Institutions Initially in the Study, their Carnegie Classifications, and Pakistani Students Enrolled*

Institution (Abbreviation)	Average SAT (new admits)	2000 Carnegie Classification	2005 Carnegie Classification	Pakistanis enrolled
Technical State University (TSU)	1339	Doctoral Intensive	RU VH	13
State University (SU)	1082	Doctoral Extensive	RU H	6
Associates College (AC)	902	Associate's	Assoc./Pub-S-MC	21

### Recruiting and Interviewing Participants

After obtaining appropriate Human Subjects Protection approvals from the University of Michigan and from the institutions where participants were enrolled, I



began the process of recruiting participants at the three sites. At each institution I was assisted by foreign student advisers who provided contact information of Pakistani students. At TSU and SU, the advisers put me in touch with leaders of the campus Pakistani Student Associations. I met with those leaders at the beginning of the Fall 2005 academic year to explain the purpose of the study and to explain procedures for assuring the confidentiality of students who volunteered to participate. I also indicated that I was seeking funding in order to provide a thank-you gift to volunteers. I eventually received funding from the University of Michigan's Rackham School of Graduate Studies and was able to provide each participant with \$10 gift card.

Using the rosters provided by the foreign student advisers, I sent e-mail messages to students, explaining the research and requesting their participation (see sample in Appendix A). I responded to students who expressed interest in participating with e-mail and telephone calls, explaining the consent process (see consent form in Appendix B) and scheduling an interview time and location. Interviews were conducted at various locations such as libraries or conference rooms on or adjacent to students' campuses.

#### *Eliminating AC as a Research Site*

Interviews were conducted September 2005 through April 2006. I was successful in recruiting participants from TSU and SU, the two four-year institutions. Efforts at recruiting participants from the AC, however, were unsuccessful. After initial efforts to communicate with AC students by e-mail resulted in no responses, I attempted to communicate with students by other means. I visited a Mosque not far from the AC main campus and asked for the Imam's assistance. He referred me to several attendees who knew some AC students. I also contacted the faculty advisor of the AC Muslim Student

Association (AC had no Pakistani association) and requested his assistance, and he offered to communicate my request to Pakistani students. In March 2006, the Foreign Student Adviser at AC personally e-mailed each Pakistani student to encourage participation in the research. I followed up with my standard recruitment e-mail in March and April, and received two responses. Of those responses, one student agreed to be interviewed. On the day of the scheduled appointment, I received a phone call from a man who said he was the student's father canceling the interview. In late April a student contacted me to request an interview. Prior to the interview I hoped that the student would encourage friends to contact me (as had happened at TSU and SU), but he explained that he was finishing his first semester at AC, that he did not know other Pakistanis there, and that he was returning to Pakistan before transferring to a school in another state. My initial analysis of the interview indicated that this student's experience resulted in no new themes (an indication that I was coming to a point of saturation with the data). Because he was the only student to respond from AC, I chose not to include his interview in the study, and to instead seek an additional research site.

Although it is impossible to know with certainty why students were unwilling to participate, there are several possible explanations. The foreign student adviser on the campus expressed concerns that since the September 11 terrorist attacks, several Pakistani students at AC had been apprehended on immigration violations and this resulted in a climate that discouraged students from participating in projects that might invite scrutiny of their activities. Another explanation may have been that the students had significant extra-curricular commitments (employment and family) which made them reluctant to commit time to interviews. This explanation is based on my observations of

the students who had responded to my e-mail announcements about the project. Some of the students appeared to have significant family connections in the United States, and as a result may have had aspirations to immigrate. These aspirations may have resulted in students wanting to forego their identities as Pakistanis. If those students had intentions to immigrate illegally, or if they were failing to abide by the regulations affecting their student status, they would naturally prefer to avoid situations which might shed unnecessary light on their circumstances in the United States.

*Seeking an Additional Research Site*

After numerous failed attempts to recruit participants from the AC, I considered other institutions in the metropolitan area that might be similar to the AC in terms of admission standards, but no other institution in the metropolitan area enrolled significant numbers of Pakistanis. I then considered other institutions in the U.S. with significant Pakistani enrollment and with open admissions or less competitive admissions requirements. I considered other geographical areas but was unable to find an institution comparable to AC which had significant Pakistanis enrolled and which was accessible to me.

Because I could not find another institution, I chose to use data collected from my prior study (Hamrick 2003) at a Masters L university in a small city in the Midwest. I assigned the school the pseudonym Regional State University (RSU). Table 7 shows the final group of institutions and their Carnegie classifications.

*Including Data from RSU*

By the time I decided to include the RSU data, I had done sufficient analysis of the TSU and SU interviews to determine that the basic themes and issues in the TSU and SU interviews were similar to those in the RSU data. No new themes had emerged from the TSU and SU interviews. In addition, I believed that including RSU was a suitable substitute for AC because both had relatively low admissions requirements compared to TSU and SU.

Table 7.

*Institutions in the Study, their Carnegie Classifications, and Pakistanis Enrolled*

Institution (Abbreviation)	Average SAT/ACT	2000 Carnegie Classification	2005 Carnegie Classification	Number of Pakistanis enrolled
Technical State University (TSU)	SAT 1339	Doctoral Intensive	RU VH	13
State University (SU)	SAT 1082	Doctoral Extensive	RU H	6
Regional State University (RSU)	ACT 21	Masters Comprehensive	Masters-L	Unknown

There are several problems associated with using data from the prior study, which will be discussed below. As discussed above, in the initial design of this study it seemed appropriate to examine the experiences of students who had selected different types of institutions. Implicit in this is the notion that students who choose different types of schools *might* employ different strategies or *might* have different perceptions of their

experiences. But there was no a priori assumption that students attending different types of institutions employ different types of choice behaviors or experience the choice process in different ways. Thus, the design of the study did not require the use of any particular types of institution.

There remain several concerns associated with the inclusion of the data from RSU. First, one might assume that AC and RSU would attract students of different academic goals. While this may be the case, many international students attending two-year colleges in the United States do so with the intent of eventually transferring to a four-year institution to receive a baccalaureate degree (Evelyn, 2005). At the same time, some students who start out with the idea of attending an associates college are advised to apply to four-year colleges, because of the perception that students admitted to four-year programs are less likely to be denied students visas. This is to say that the long-term academic objectives of students attending AC and RSU may not be so different.

Second, one might assume that students attending AC would have lower academic ability than students attending a four-year school such as RSU. The schools had quite similar admission standards, however. AC required only proof of completion of high school. RSU required only a *C* grade point average for international students. Its minimum TOEFL (English proficiency) requirement was higher than AC's, but because RSU would admit students with no TOEFL to its English language program, it attracted students without regard to English proficiency. Neither school required ACT or SAT scores for international applicants.

Other problems are associated with substituting data from RSU. One is the age of data, which was collected in 2002, with the concern that different issues affected the

choices of students during the different time periods. My initial analysis of the data sets did not reveal any major issues related to time. I am not aware of any significant events that would have affected student decisions between 2002 and 2006. In a few cases the data collected in 2005-2006 are about participant behaviors that occurred in early 2001 or 2002. That is, some of the students interviewed in 2005-2006 were nearly at the end of their bachelor studies and were therefore reflecting on decisions that occurred at a time not too different from the students in the 2003 study. Obviously the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the ensuing restrictions of student visas of students from several countries, including Pakistan, may have affected the perceptions of students as they reflect on their college choice experiences. But Pakistani students were subject to extensive security measures as far back as 1998. In addition, my initial analysis did not indicate that security checks were an overriding concern of the students in this study. And, after all, they were ones who were issued visas.

Another issue involving changing sites for data collection is geography. No doubt students attracted to a campus in a large metropolitan area might not be interested in a college in the Midwest. However, preliminary analysis of all the data, as well as the data in the 2003 study, indicated that most students are not so much aware of geographical regions in the United States, and factors such as family members living near the institutions or friends attending the institutions are far more important than the institution's location.

An important issue to consider regarding the use of the data from the 2003 study is the purpose of the studies. The 2003 study was designed as a pilot study in preparation for this study. The overall purpose statements for the projects are practically identical

(see Appendix C for research questions for 2003 study). The interview protocols for the two studies had only minor differences, as the protocol used in 2005-2006 (Appendix D) was a refinement of the protocol used in the 2003 (Appendix E) study. Most of the changes in the protocol were made with the intent of ensuring that key concepts or issues were not overlooked in the interview process.

One final note needs to be mentioned regarding including the RSU data in this study. Phenomenological studies typically do not occur at multiple sites with separate groups of participants, as phenomenological studies are not designed to compare populations. However to understand Pakistani students in the broadest way, it is important to work with participants who have experienced the phenomenon of study in the United States but in different contexts and situations. I have no reason to believe that there is differentiation in choice strategies based on type of institution attended. In fact, my previous research (Hamrick, 2003) indicated that Pakistani students do not begin their college choice process with particular institutional types in mind. Interviewing students from a variety of types of institutions reduced the possibility that the results would be biased with respect to students' academic goals or type of institution (including the selectivity of institution).

#### Participant Interviews

A participant data sheet (Appendix F) requesting basic demographic information was collected from each participant prior to the interview. A semistructured interview protocol (Appendices D and E) provided a basic framework for data collection, allowing for consistency across interviews and for participant input to add to or redirect the interview process, where appropriate. The interview protocol allowed each participant to

provide information that brought each student's individual experience to the overall collection of data (Creswell, 1998). Major themes explored with the participants included: (a) influences on the students' predisposition to attend college and predisposition to study overseas; (b) influences on the students' choice decisions; (c) students' choice sets; and (d) strategies students used in choosing a college.

#### Processing and Confidentiality of Data

Interviews were recorded on audiotape (participants gave consent to the interview and to taping of the interview) and transcribed using word processing software.

Transcripts were stored on the personal computer in my home office and printed for purpose of analysis. All audiotapes and transcripts were stored securely in my home office. Although no data collected in the interviews could be considered sensitive, no names of persons or institutions appear in this study that could result in identification of participants. Audiotapes and transcripts had no information that would identify participants, as numbers were used to tag all tapes and transcripts. This and other reports of student data use pseudonyms so that participants cannot be identified. The names of the institutions the students attended appear only as fictitious abbreviations, and the cities and states in which they are located are not identified. All procedures for processing data were approved by appropriate human subjects protection and review offices.

#### Data Analysis

Several scholars (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989) have prescribed techniques or procedures for phenomenological analysis of interview data. Creswell (1998) has commented that most of the procedures are similar, and that individual researchers need to adapt procedures to the particular circumstances of a given



study. Several key issues framed my decisions regarding which analytical procedure was appropriate for this study. First, some techniques assume that the researcher has some personal experience of the phenomenon. In my case, I have never studied abroad nor did I have any basis to anticipate what participants experienced or how they might have perceived those experiences. Second, some approaches (e.g., Giorgi, 1985) assume that there are overarching themes which can be derived from an initial experience with participants or analysis of interview data. In the case of the data in this study, my initial experience with the data revealed no such overarching themes. Third, most phenomenological studies assume more consistent context (participants have very similar background characteristics, or participants share very similar experiences). In this case the college choice experiences were varied, and the college choice process is complex and varies greatly from person to person. Therefore, I chose to use the procedure described by Moustakas (1996) as a modification of Van Kaam's (1966) method. This procedure emphasizes careful examination of each individual's experience, and it emphasizes the importance of using "imaginative variation" – considering varying frames of reference and alternative explanations for various components of the experience. This procedure consists of the following steps:

- (a) For each participant, list every expression relevant to the experience (sometimes known as *horizontalization*, or determining the complete "horizons" of the experience). These expressions may have been a short phrase (e.g., "needed a job to pay for college) or noun clause (e.g., family assumption of college attendance).
- (b) Determine invariant constituents of each participant's experience by testing each expression found in step *a*, and rejecting those that are not necessary to understand the

experience or those that cannot be labeled. This step resulted in eliminating some expressions, combining some expressions, and retaining others. The resulting list of expressions forms the set of invariant constituents for each participant. For example, in this study all of the participants spoke of some sort of parental influence on their college choice process. This influence manifested itself differently with different participants. For some participants, their parents simply expected them to attend college. For others, their parents expected them to study abroad, or parents expected them to attend a particular institution. Each of the above manifestations was listed as an “invariant constituent” of the participant’s experience. This process of listing invariant constituents and combining them among all participants resulted in a list of invariant constituents for the participants as a whole. Table 9 in Chapter 6 provides a complete listing of the invariant constituents.

(c) Cluster the invariant constituents. This step involved putting invariant constituents into categories and labeling the categories as themes. The two invariant constituents described above obviously fit under the theme of “parental expectations.” Further analysis, however, indicated that some parents’ roles were more influential than having expectations that their children study. Eventually this theme was labeled “parental involvement.”

(d) Validate the invariant constituents by determining if there is any inconsistency or information that would not validate the constituent. This validation requires that each invariant constituent be checked for accuracy by re-reading the participant’s transcript. This step results in modification of the invariant constituents, or re-categorizing them.

(e) Write a textural description describing what the participant experienced. The textural description is an effort to describe what happened to each participant, or what each

participant did. An example of a textural description appears in Appendix G. The textural description includes the invariant constituents (organized by themes), and the invariant constituents are highlighted by quoting extensively from the interview.

(f) Using the technique of “imaginative variation” (considering alternative frames of reference and divergent objectives) to refine the overall description of the participants’ experience, write a structural description describing how the participant understood the experience and how the participant connected constituents. Whereas the textural description explains what happened, the structural description allows the researcher to interpret what happened. These interpretations include why things happened, or how activities or events or perceptions are related to one another. This step allows for examination of the consistencies, inconsistencies, and rationale for the experience as described by the participant. At this stage the researcher must resist the temptation to insert his or her own interpretations of the events; rather the interpretations need to be derived from information found in the interviews. Appendix H provides an example of a structural description. Because writing the structural descriptions is the step in which I insert my interpretations, conclusions, and explanations of participant statements, I have included copies of all the structural descriptions in Appendix J.

(g) Write a textural-structural description of each participant’s experience—combining components of the textural and structural description. A sample textural-structural description is in Appendix I.

(h) Using the textural-structural descriptions for all of the participants, develop a composite description (sometimes called exhaustive description) that represents all of the participants’ shared experiences. This composite description is the researcher’s best effort

at describing the phenomenon as it was experienced by all of the participants. It is the ultimate expression of the findings associated with the study. The composite description does not include themes or invariant constituents that were not shared by all participants.

(i) Upon completion of an initial draft of the composite description, member checks were conducted. This step is not prescribed by the Moustakas procedure, but I believed that the member checks would increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings. The member checks are described in more detail in the section on verification below. Participant comments from the member checks were incorporated into final drafts of the structural descriptions and the composite description.

#### Verification of the Findings

Creswell (1998) has surveyed the qualitative research literature and come up with eight procedures to help verify findings of qualitative research, and he recommends that at least two of them be used in a given study. Three of Creswell's recommended procedures were applicable to the design and methods in this study: (a) "prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field;" (b) "member checks;" and (c) "rich, thick description" (1998, pp. 201-203).

The study included prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Although my total "interview time" was no more than twenty hours, I have spent considerable time since 2002 interacting with Pakistani students in the United States, learning about Pakistan's history, culture, and social and political climate. These interactions occurred in both informal settings and professional contexts.

The study also included member checks that were conducted after I wrote the initial draft of the composite description. I contacted each participant from TSU and SU,

requesting their assistance. Participants from RSU were not contacted for this purpose, due to the time lapse between their interviews in 2002 and the drafting of the composite description in late 2006. Of the eleven participants from SU and TSU, six agreed to review their individual textural-structural description, and the composite description. Of those, three participants requested that I make edits to their textural-structural descriptions. These edits involved accuracy regarding people or events (e.g., I had mistakenly made a comment about a participant's father which should have been attributed to his grandfather). None of the participants had objections to the concepts in the textural-structural descriptions, and none recommended any changes to the composite description.

As for the third criteria described by Creswell, the study includes rich, thick description of student behaviors in the form of the textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and the textural-structural descriptions. All of the invariant constituents described are directly attributed to participant statements. While the themes represent categories that I imposed on the invariant constituents, the themes themselves do not make up the composite description, which instead describes the predominant invariant constituents from the participant interviews.

Where Creswell's (1998) recommendations apply to qualitative procedures in general, Polkinghorne (1989) has considered verification of phenomenological procedures in particular. He lists five questions that, if satisfactorily answered, should remove doubts about the reliability of findings from phenomenological studies. I will address each of those questions in turn:

(a) “Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects’ descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects’ actual experience?” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57). The language and intent of the interview questions were designed to elicit broad participant responses on general subjects regarding their experience. The interview protocol avoided references to specific college choice behaviors or influences. For example, although every participant in this study commented on his parents’ involvement in the choice process, no questions about parental roles were included in the interview protocol.

(b) “Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?” I personally transcribed each of the interviews in an effort to ensure their accuracy.

(c) “In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives and demonstrated why they are less probable than the one decided on?” In the analysis of the data and in my description of the findings of this study, I have been careful to avoid conclusions that could not be directly attributable to participant statements. For example, some students indicated that they sought campuses which were near relatives because they wanted personal or emotional support from family members. Others indicated that they wanted to find campuses where there were other Pakistanis. One could guess that these students also hoped to receive emotional support from Pakistani compatriots, but because they did not say they hoped for such support, I put the desire to be at colleges with other Pakistanis in a separate category from the desire to be at a college near relatives.

(d) “Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experiences?” In Chapter 5, which presents the findings of this study, I have included tables that link themes and invariant constituents to specific participants statements.

(e) “Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?” This study was designed to include multiple institutions in an effort to increase the likelihood that its findings could be applied to other Pakistani students at other institutions in the United States. After comparing notes from TSU and SU interviews, and comparing those with analysis of RSU interviews, I found that no new themes were emerging, and that a saturation point had been reached.

Ultimately, the most important factor in assuring the verification of findings is adherence to the phenomenological procedures, in this case those prescribed by Moustakas (1994). This involves describing participant experiences in ways that are faithful to participants and credible to both participants and readers. It also involves bracketing data in ways that eliminates (or illuminates) researcher bias and eliminates unsubstantiated explanations. It also involves presenting results in ways that fit with existing theory or demonstrate explanations for divergence from theory. In the midst of analysis, there were times when I was likely to question the utility or validity of the findings. Adhering Moustakas’ (1994) procedures allowed me to look at participant data from multiple perspectives, explaining the data in multiple ways, and eventually generating conclusions or themes that reflected the participants’ own perspectives. Following the procedures relieved me from having to develop my own insights; rather the

procedures allow insights to emerge in a natural and verifiable fashion. As a result, I have come to trust the findings presented in this study.

#### Limitations of the Research Design

Qualitative research designs do not lend themselves to results that can be generalized beyond the study participants or their particular circumstances. Among the qualitative research traditions, phenomenological studies are designed to understand experiences as they are perceived by the study participants. By definition, therefore, insights gleaned from studies such as this one should not be extended to other settings or research subjects.

Another limitation is the possibility that the phenomenon experienced by the participants in this study was not “choosing to study in the United States” but rather “choosing a particular institution.” In general I believe that the data of this study indicate that cross-institutional experiences are similar.

Other limitations of this study’s design relate to matters of cost, time, and access. A research design that would have allowed for data collection while students were in the decision process (i.e., before coming to the United States) would have the advantage of offering more direct information about the student’s choice process, but identifying prospective students would not have been feasible, nor were funds or time available for me to travel to students homes (in Pakistan) to collect data.

In this study I asked participants to reflect on their experiences. The participants’ reflections may have been affected by time--in some cases the students were three years removed from their college choice experiences. A design that would allow for interviews to occur over a period of time and during the choice experience would perhaps result in



participant observations that are not only more accurate but perhaps of more practical relevance.

Because I was an outsider to the participants' community, older than they, and in a position of some authority (a researcher from another institution), their observations and reflections may have also been influenced in a desire to present a coherent picture of their circumstances to me. A researcher who was younger and who already had other ties to the participants' community may have been able to gather information that would have been less likely to be affected by participants' desires to represent themselves in a positive light.

College choice decisions are rarely made by students in isolation. The importance of parents in the decision process has been documented, and other relatives, friends, classmates, and counselors are a part of the process. Phenomenology precludes the use of data from individuals not directly experiencing a phenomenon. But a case study or other design that accounts for data provided by significant others in students' decision process would be beneficial.

The design of this study also required that students reflect on their experiences. The *ex post facto* nature of the data collection is useful for collecting participant *perceptions* of their experiences, and in the case of cross-cultural research there are advantages in trying to gather information from another cultural vantage. But there are always concerns that people's descriptions of their experiences may not accurately describe the experience as it happened (Fidler, 1983; Svenson, 1989). For the purposes of this study, and for all phenomenological studies, concerns about the accuracy of people's reflections are overridden by the objective of understanding how they actually perceive

their experience. Phenomenological research is concerned less with what happened to people and more with how they experienced the events.

Finally, all of the participants in this study had experienced the decision to study in the United States. They were the individuals who had seen the process through. An alternative design would include individuals who *considered* study abroad but who had decided to remain at home, or who had gone to some other nation. Such a design would offer insights that would be particularly useful to researchers and practitioners, as it can be helpful to understand why some individuals choose not to study abroad.

In spite of the limitations of this study, the design has the power to describe how students go about the college choice process, and how they perceive and experience that process. Chapters 5 and 6 provide descriptions of the participants' college choice experiences.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Participant Descriptions**

This chapter includes general descriptive information about each of the participants. Table 8 below supplies information, including the college attended, sex, high school location, major, and time spent in the United States.

The chapter also provides a brief narrative or overview that summarizes each participant's experience. The narratives were derived from the textural descriptions of each participant's experience. For each participant I have provided background information, an explanation of his or her decision, and the rationale behind each decision. These narratives were not a part of the analysis. They are presented in this chapter in order to provide readers with a brief overview of what each participant experienced in the decision to come to the United States.

A more detailed description of each participant's experience can be found in Appendix J, which provides the structural description for each participant. The structural descriptions combine a description of the participant's experience with my interpretation of the experience.

Table 8

*Participant Information*

Name	Sex	School	High School Location	Major	Time as a student in the U.S.	Notes
Riaz	M	TSU	Karachi	Electrical engineering	3 years	Seeking prestige
Fazia	F	TSU	Rawalpindi	Electrical engineering	3 years	Parental influence, sister of Rizwan
Rizwan	M	TSU	Rawalpindi	Electrical engineering	1 year	Parental influence, Brother of Fazia
Adil	M	TSU	TSU city	Industrial engineering	2.5 years	High school in U.S.
Shahzad	M	TSU	Islamabad	Electrical engineering	6 months	
Adnan	M	TSU	Hyderabad	Chemical Engineering	2.5 years	Transferred from nearby university.
Sharhan	M	TSU	Karachi	Computer Science	3.5 years	
Sharafat	M	SU	Dubai	Business	1 year	lived in Dubai
Ali	M	SU	SU City	Economics and Mgmt. Science	3 years	High school in U.S.
Razia	F	SU	Karachi	Accounting	3 years	Medical school in Pakistan; transferred from comm. college
Osman	M	RSU	Jeddah	Computer Science	3 years	One college application
Raheel	M	RSU	Karachi	Undecided	6 months	
Omar	M	RSU	Pakistan	undecided	1 year	Parental Influence, transferred (Turkey)
Pervez	M	RSU	Kuwait City	undecided	2 years	One college application
Hussain	M	RSU	Karachi	Computer Science	10 months	Doing something extraordinary
Zeeshan	M	RSU	Kuwait City	Engineering	2 years	Sacrificing a university space in Pakistan
Ismael	M	RSU	Jeddah	Electrical/ Structural engineering	1 year	Parental influence, transferred (Cyprus)
Eisa	M	RSU	Karachi	Business	3 months	BA from Pakistan; sought prestige of study in U.S.

School: TSU = public research intensive university in large city in the Southeast  
 SU = a doctoral extensive university in a large city in the Southeast  
 RSU = public, comprehensive university in Midwest

### Brief Overviews of Participants' Experiences

The following narratives provide an overview of each participant's experience.

For each participant I have provided background information, an explanation of his or her decision, and the rationale behind each decision.

#### *Riaz (male)*

**Background:** Riaz was born and raised in Karachi where he attended a Catholic high school. Both parents had college degrees from Pakistan. His father had business interests in Europe, and his brother had spent some time attending high school in the U.S.

**Decision:** Riaz chose TSU, majored in electrical engineering. Had a very small choice set, and did not consider study in Pakistan.

**Rationale:** Sought the "best" education within cost limits that were set by parents.

Notes: Riaz was not concerned about career or other specific opportunities after he completed his degree. He had a natural curiosity about life and nature which drove his education.

#### *Fazia (female)*

**Background:** Fazia was the older sister of Rizwan. Her father had a Ph.D. from TSU and her mother had a Master's from the United States.

**Decision:** Fazia followed her father's advice regarding the college application process, including the decision to attend TSU where she was studying engineering. She recognized that it was unusual given Pakistani norms for her parents to allow her to study

abroad, so she did not have complaints about having little to do with the college choice made for her.

**Rationale:** She followed in her father's footsteps at TSU. She also chose TSU because of an aunt who lived in the city.

***Rizwan (male)***

**Background:** Younger brother of Fazia. His father had a Ph.D. from TSU, and his mother had a Master's from the U.S.

**Decision:** His parents wanted him to study in the U.S., and they were particularly interested in his attending TSU. He was interested in schools such as Stanford and MIT, but he felt compelled to follow in his father's, and sister's, footsteps at TSU.

**Rationale:** He was attracted to the high *U.S. News* rankings of TSU, though after enrolling and studying there, he questioned its academic rigor. He was also attracted to TSU's co-op program.

***Adil (male)***

**Background:** Adil was born and raised in Karachi, but as a 14-year-old, his parents decided that he should go to the U.K. and attend high school near an uncle. After a year in the U.K., it was decided that he should attend school in the metro area where TSU was located, where he lived with his sister and attended a high school where he received the International Baccalaureate.

**Decision:** He was focused on receiving a high quality education, and considered studying at Penn and MIT, both of which would have required him to receive considerable

financial assistance. He also considered a community college because he wanted to save money.

**Rationale:** He ended up at TSU because he felt it was the best school that he could afford. Even so, he anticipated needing to work in the U.S. after graduation in order to recoup his investment—he did not believe that employment in Pakistan would justify the sizable investment his family had been making in his education.

*Shahzad (male)*

**Background:** Shahzad was from Islamabad, and from a social setting where there was an expectation for young people to attend college. Many of his relatives had studied in the U.K. or Canada.

**Decision:** He considered schools in Pakistan, Canada, the U.K. and the U.S., but eventually settled on TSU where he was studying electrical engineering.

**Rationale:** He made his decision on the basis of academic quality and cost, and he relied on information provided by relatives (some of whom had studied at TSU) and published college rankings. He was particularly interested in finding the best school that offered his desired major.

*Adnan (male)*

**Background:** Adnan was from Hyderabad, where his family had a business. He could have foregone college and gone to work in the family business. He was the first in his immediate family to attend college, though some of his relatives had attended college in the U.S., in particular a cousin who had studied at TSU in the late 1990s.

**Decision:** He considered schools in Singapore, the United States and Pakistan. He was denied admission at UT-Austin, and eventually settled on TSU as his best option.

**Rationale:** In addition to looking for the best academic quality, Adnan's decision was "forced" on him by the fact that he received a U.S. visa. Once he was granted a visa, he felt that it would be unreasonable *not* to take the opportunity to study in the U.S., even though his studies had left him with considerable debt.

***Sharhan (male)***

**Background:** Sharhan grew up in Karachi, where he attended a high school from which many graduates went abroad for college. His mother and his two sisters had attended college. His father was a civil servant.

**Decision:** Sharhan applied to six U.S. colleges, plus one school in Pakistan and one in Singapore. He was interested in schools that offered engineering or computer science. Over time, he came to a point where he simply wanted to study in the U.S. He attended TSU, which over time became his top choice for college.

**Rationale:** A high school faculty member and a cousin encouraged him to consider TSU, which he found attractive because of its cost (other U.S. schools that interested him were too expensive). The most important factor in his decision was TSU's policy of admitting students who had not completed A-levels. This allowed him to focus on TSU early on in his choice process.



***Sharafat (male)***

**Background:** Sharafat grew up in Dubai, where his father was an expatriate worker and where he attended a high school for Pakistanis.

**Decision:** He never considered Pakistan for college, but did think about schools in the Persian Gulf region, in particular a medical school in the U.A.E. He looked at schools in Canada, as well as Boston University, Pace University, and two schools near the metro area. He felt that among most high school students that he knew, interest in study in the U.S. had declined in the post 9-11 period. Sharafat decided to enroll at SU.

**Rationale:** He decided on SU because of a relative in the area, and because he had visited the city in 2000. Although he was most interested in another school near the metro area, his parents ruled that out because they had learned of its reputation as a “party school.”

***Ali (male)***

**Background:** Ali considered Pakistan home, but he had spent much of his life in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where his father was employed. At the time of the interview, Ali’s mother had returned to Pakistan and his father was still working in Riyadh. Ali’s father and mother had bachelor’s degrees from a school in Lahore. Ali had completed his final two years of high school in the metro area where TSU is located, living with an aunt and uncle. The decision to attend high school in the United States was a part of a larger plan to get a bachelor’s degree in the United States.

**Decision:** Ali considered studying at the American University of Sharjah (in the U.A.E.), and he applied to UT-Austin, another large state university not far from the metro area, and SU.

**Rationale:** Although he was in the U.S. and his parents in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Ali allowed them to decide which school to attend. Ali's mother knew a graduate of SU, and his parents did not want him to go too far away from his relatives in the metro area.

***Razia (female)***

**Background:** Razia had started college at a medical school in Pakistan. Dissatisfied with her experience there, she entered the U.S. on a visitor's visa to visit relatives, and eventually enrolled in a community college in the metro area.

**Decision:** She chose to study accounting at SU, based on information she received from relatives in the metro area and from faculty at her community college. She viewed her college education as good preparation for her personal and family life, and not just professional preparation.

**Rationale:** She believed that SU offered a strong accounting degree, and she felt the cost was reasonable.

***Osman (male)***

**Background:** Osman had done his high school work in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where his father worked and his immediate family resided.

**Decision:** After ruling out study in Pakistan and Canada, Osman decided to attend RSU.

**Rationale:** Osman had an aunt and uncle, both physicians, who lived about 75 miles from RSU. He chose RSU largely on the advice of his aunt and uncle, as well as his aunt's sister who was an RSU alumna who had returned to Pakistan.

***Raheel (male)***

**Background:** Raheel was from Karachi, and although he could have foregone college to go to work in his family's business, he was encouraged to attend college by his parents. He also had many relatives who had studied abroad.

**Decision:** He gave some thought to study in England, but he decided against that because it involved the inconvenience of traveling to another city to take the standard English proficiency exam for colleges in England. He applied to a school in Indiana, not far from where his uncle lived. But when the application and acceptance process at the Indiana school bogged down, Raheel decided to apply to RSU, which he had learned about through a friend.

**Rationale:** Raheel chose RSU because of the flexibility and efficiency of the admissions process.

***Omar (male)***

**Background:** Omar's parents were heavily involved in his college choice process. They were both college-educated, and they had always portrayed college as a positive experience. His parents encouraged not only college but also college abroad, and Omar had cousins who had previously studied in the U.S. When Omar's admission to a

prestigious institution in Pakistan was delayed, his parents sent him to a college in Turkey where he studied for an academic year.

**Decision:** While in Turkey, Omar quickly became dissatisfied with his college. Apart from the one school in Pakistan that he applied to, Omar felt that Pakistani universities were of low quality. A friend at the university had learned about RSU, where he decided to enroll.

**Rationale:** Omar was interested in finding an engineering school, and one that his parents could afford. He also explained that the opportunity in the U.S. was too great to pass up, and that he would have attended almost any university in the U.S. that offered engineering.

***Pervez (male)***

**Background:** Pervez attended high school in Kuwait, where his family lived. His father was an expatriate worker there. He described his search process as a 50-50 process between him and his parents.

**Decision:** Pervez had no interest in going to school in Pakistan, where he felt conditions were unsuitable for study. He had begun his search process rather late, and felt compelled to find a college quickly. A friend told Pervez about RSU, and he quickly made the decision to attend there.

**Rationale:** He wanted to attend school in an English-speaking country, and he had decided that study in the U.K. was too expensive. He also thought that U.S. universities had the best reputation in the world, and so when the opportunity arose to come to RSU he decided to study there.

***Hussain (male)***

**Background:** Hussain was from Karachi where his father had a career in the Pakistan army. Hussain considered joining the military himself, but decided against it. In particular his mother wanted him to go to college.

**Decision:** Hussain decided to attend RSU. He learned about the school from friends, and a group of friends applied to RSU together. He did not report applying to any other college.

**Rationale:** Hussain found RSU appealing because he believed that he would have a good social life there among other Pakistanis. He and his parents were also pleased that there were relatives who lived within driving distance of the RSU campus, and Hussain spent holiday breaks with them.

***Zeeshan (male)***

**Background:** Zeeshan had completed high school in Kuwait, where his father was employed. His mother lived in Lahore, along with Zeeshan's two siblings who were attending college in Lahore. Both Zeeshan's mother and father strongly encouraged him to attend college, though not necessarily in the U.S. or abroad.

**Decision:** Zeeshan had applied to GIK, the engineering school in Pakistan founded by A. Q. Khan. While his application was still pending at GIK, Zeeshan and some friends started looking on the Internet for schools in the U.S. They had been referred to the state where RSU is located by a friend who said that there are many jobs available there. The web search led them to RSU, where Zeeshan enrolled.

**Rationale:** Zeeshan's decision to attend RSU was based primarily on positive responses he received from RSU staff to his telephone and e-mail inquiries.

*Ismael (male)*

**Background:** Ismael attended high school in Jeddah, where his family lived and his father was an expatriate engineer. Ismael's mother had a master's degree, and many of his aunts and uncles on both sides of the family had professional degrees. He had spent a year studying at a college in Cyprus before coming to the U.S. The decision to study in Cyprus was based on the college's quick acceptance of his application. Ismael acknowledged that he had begun the college search process too late during his high school years.

**Decision:** Ismael's father directed his college search. Both Ismael and his father had learned about RSU at a college fair in Jeddah. His father settled on RSU and Ismael did not apply to other universities in the U.S.

**Rationale:** Ismael felt that RSU was a better place for him than large universities in larger cities where large numbers of Pakistanis were enrolled. RSU was also attractive because of its proximity to relatives, its ability to process Ismael's application quickly, the campus's safety, and its cost.

*Eisa (male)*

**Background:** Eisa was from Karachi. He already had a degree from a private college in Pakistan. He had worked for a time in the MIS department at a paint company in Pakistan.

**Decision:** Eisa chose RSU, which he learned about via e-mail communication with a friend who was already studying there.

**Rationale:** When he became aware that MBA programs would not accept his Pakistan undergraduate degree, he decided to enroll for a second bachelor's at RSU.

## Chapter 6

### Findings

In this chapter I will describe the information that emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts and the resulting descriptions of each participant's experience. The chapter is organized as follows. First, I summarize the themes and the invariant constituents that were generated by the data, including descriptions of how the invariant constituents were manifest in specific contexts. I then consider the relationships between and among the themes and invariant constituents. I conclude the chapter with a composite description of the college choice experiences shared by all of the participants.

#### Themes and Invariant Constituents

Six themes were developed through categorizing all of the invariant constituents described by the participants. Whereas student comments were the source of the invariant constituents, the themes were my way of labeling and organizing the data, both in terms of analysis and presentation. After developing the themes, they were then checked against the structural descriptions to ensure that they fairly represented the participants' experiences. The themes are as follows:

- (a) *Student background characteristics*, which include parental influence, social environment, role models, and educational experiences.
- (b) *Aspirations*, or the perceived outcomes that students associated with their college attendance.



(c) *Choice criteria*, which are characteristics of particular colleges and which influenced student decisions.

(d) Characteristics of students' *choice sets*, which include the number of schools each student considered as well as students' interests in various countries and institutional types.

(e) *Information sources* used by students.

(f) *Search strategies* used by students in gathering information about schools, deciding where to apply, and where to attend.

An outline of the major themes and the invariant constituents that made up each theme is in Table 9. Table 10 provides a tabulation of the invariant constituents and the participants to which each is attributed.

Table 9

*Outline of Themes and Invariant Constituents* (themes are major subject headings in bold)

**I. Student Background Characteristics**

A. Postsecondary educational experience

1. Abroad
2. In Pakistan
3. In the U.S.

B. Cosmopolitan experiences

C. Alternatives to Attending College

D. Social expectations to attend college

E. Role models for study abroad

1. Family members
2. Classmates

F. Parental Involvement

1. Expectation to attend college
2. Encouraged study abroad
3. Influenced study abroad
  - a. influenced country
  - b. influenced choice of college
  - c. guided choice process

**II. Student Aspirations**

- A. Employment
- B. Professional credential
- C. Life training
- D. U.S. culture and English language
- E. Status associated with education
- F. Social freedom in the U.S.
- G. Study in the U.S.
- H. Serve Pakistan

**III. Choice Criteria**

- A. Closed campus
- B. Perceptions of institutional quality
  - 1. Best college
  - 2. Best college for major
  - 3. Alternative to low quality of Pakistan
  - 4. Alternative to low quality of the U.K.
  - 5. Reputation
    - a. From rankings
    - b. From friends, relatives
  - 6. Facilities
  - 7. Not a party school
- C. Speed of acceptance
- D. First admission
- E. Admission requirements: A-levels not required
- F. Cost
  - 1. Unlimited resources
  - 2. Resources limited choice set
  - 3. Needed U.S. job after college
  - 4. Needed loans
  - 5. Needed co-op (student employment)
- G. Security
  - 1. Location
  - 2. Relatives
  - 3. Friends
- H. Any U.S. school
- I. Social opportunities
  - 1. School with friends
  - 2. School with other Pakistanis
- J. Research opportunities

**IV. Student Choice Sets**

- A. Size of choice set
  - 1. One application
  - 2. 2 or 3 applications

- 3. 4 or more applications
- B. Preferred Pakistan but was denied admission
- C. Considered Pakistan but preferred other options
- D. No interest in Pakistan
- E. Considered only U.S.
- F. Considered other nations
  - 1. Canada
  - 2. U.K.
  - 3. Singapore
  - 4. Europe
  - 5. U.A.E.

#### **V: Information Sources**

- A. Friends
- B. High school counselor
- C. High school or college faculty
- D. Relatives
- E. School web site
- F. Web index
- G. U.S. News
- H. Advising Center
- I. Communication with admissions or international staff
  - 1. via e-mail
  - 2. via telephone
- J. School brochure
- K. College fair

#### **VI. Search Strategies**

- A. Likelihood of admission based on SAT or school selectivity
- B. Likelihood of visa
- C. Rushed process (compressed)
- D. Sought admission after completing A-levels
- E. Sought admission without completing A-levels
- F. Student made decision alone (without parental or other assistance)
- G. Applied with friends



Invariant Constituents (by theme)	Riaz (TSU)	Fazia (TSU)	Rizwan (TSU)	Adil (TSU)	Shahzad (TSU)	Adnan (TSU)	Sharhan (TSU)	Sharafat (SU)	Alli (SU)	Razia (SU)	Osman (RSU)	Rahel (RSU)	Omar (RSU)	Pervez (RSU)	Hussain (RSU)	Zeeshan (RSU)	Ismael (RSU)	Eisa (RSU)
<b>3. Influenced study abroad</b>	*	*	*										*					
a. influenced country		*	*										*				*	
b. influenced college		*	*														*	
c. guided choice process		*					*		*								*	
<b>II. Student Aspirations</b>																		*
A. Employment		*	*						*	*	*	*	*				*	
B. Professional credential	*	*	*						*	*	*	*	*				*	
C. Life training									*	*	*	*	*				*	
D. U.S. culture & English							*							*				*
E. Status associated with education													*					*
F. Social freedom in the U.S.		*											*					
G. Study in the U.S.											*		*				*	
H. Serve Pakistan																*		
<b>III. Choice Criteria</b>									*									
A. Closed campus																		
B. Perceptions of institutional quality	*	*	*			*					*	*	*	*				
1. Best college																		
2. Best college for major	*				*				*	*					*			
3. Alternative to low quality of Pakistan											*	*			*			
4. Alternative to low quality of U.K. or Canada			*		*						*	*						
5. Reputation	*	*	*		*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*					



Invariant Constituents (by theme)	Riaz (TSU)	Fazia (TSU)	Rizwan (TSU)	Adil (TSU)	Shahzad (TSU)	Adnan (TSU)	Sharhan (TSU)	Sharafat (SU)	Alli (SU)	Razia (SU)	Osman (RSU)	Rahel (RSU)	Omar (RSU)	Pervez (RSU)	Hussain (RSU)	Zeeshan (RSU)	Ismael (RSU)	Eisa (RSU)
J. Research opportunities	*																	
<b>IV. Student Choice Set</b>																		
A. Size of choice set											*			*				
1. One application												*						
2. 2 or 3 applications		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*				*		
3. 4 or more applications	*												*					
B. Preferred Pakistan but was denied admission													*			*		
C. Considered Pakistan but preferred other options					*	*	*				*			*			*	
D. No interest in Pakistan									*		*			*			*	
E. Considered only U.S.		*	*								*						*	
F. Considered other nations	*				*		*	*			*							
1. Canada																		
2. U.K.				*	*	*						*						
3. Singapore						*												
4. Europe									*									
5. U.A.E.							*		*									*
<b>V. Information Sources</b>	*								*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*
A. Friends							*		*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*
B. High school counselor	*			*		*	*		*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*
C. H.S./college faculty					*	*	*		*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*
D. Relatives	*		*		*	*	*		*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*
E. School web site				*	*	*	*		*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*





The themes derived from the participant interviews were (1) *student background characteristics*; (2) *aspirations*; (3) *choice criteria*, which are all characteristics of particular institutions; (4) *characteristics of students' choice sets*; (5) *information sources used by students*; and (6) *search strategies* used by students in gathering information about schools, deciding where to apply, and where to attend. Each of the primary themes will be considered by examining the invariant constituents associated with each theme.

#### *Student Background Characteristics*

All of the students reported background characteristics or experiences that influenced their decision to attend college or study abroad. These background characteristics were not a part of the students' decision processes, but they were a part of the personal, family, educational and social contexts described by the students. All of the student background characteristics are listed in Table 11, along with representative statements from the participants.

Four students had some *previous postsecondary experience*—in the United States, Pakistan, or in other countries. Razia had the most college experience. Before enrolling at SU, she had spent time at a medical school in Pakistan. She dropped out of the school because she felt it was of insufficient quality, and she was wanting an education with higher standards: “But my standards for even, I don't want to say even higher, but I want to say even different for myself, and I thought ok big deal, I'm here, I don't think I've achieved anything.” Razia had also enrolled in a community college in the United States

Table 11

*Student Background Characteristics: Participant Statements Representing the Invariant Constituents*

Invariant Constituent:	Participant statement
A. Postsecondary educational experience A.1 abroad	Omar: But in the meantime my parents were getting worried about me, so they sent me to Turkey. Cause in Turkey they just see your certificates and your transcripts that you passed your high school and they take you in.
A.2. In Pakistan	Razia: No, I went to medical school in Pakistan for a year and a half, about. You know through the process of elimination I found that was not for me . . . it was very competitive, and to be something like in the medical school over there was a very gorgeous thing that could happen to you. But my standards for even, I don't want to say even higher, but I want to say even different for myself, and I thought ok big deal, I'm here, I don't think I've achieved anything.
A.3. In the U.S.	Adnan: Yea, it's kind of a long story. So I started out, I applied to <i>name of school</i> and TSU, and what happened was I got accepted to both, but the TSU they were offering me admission summer, instead of the regular fall, and I couldn't get my visa by then, by the start of summer . . . so I had to go to <i>name of school</i> . For my first year.
B. Cosmopolitan experiences	Riaz: 101: Yea, in Pakistan like when I was young with my brother and my sister and my mom, my mom is from Lahore, so we used to go to my Mom's side, to my grandparents, like every two months in a year. We would go our summer over there, then I've been to Islamabad once for a competition, and then outside Pakistan I traveled to Canada in 96, my family had [unintelligible] migration, but my dad didn't want to pursue that, then I've traveled to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and London, and I've been to the U.S. before too.
C. Alternatives to Attending College	Omar: Because my mind was always for electrical engineer, and in the meantime I was a little a bit patriotic too, I wanted to go to Pakistan Air Force, cause I mean when I was in Pakistan, because my first studies were in Pakistan from my first standard to seventh grade, I was in Pakistan in Air force school there, I used to study there and I used to see our military men, our forces, they used to do prayers there, I used to see our jet planes, the fighting planes there, you know for a child this is a big thing you know, on a base. Yea, and so that was my first ambition that I had to become a pilot, so but then I looked at myself and I came to Saudi Arabia and even when I was in high school you know I started thinking, and I said 'No, I'm not suitable for a pilot.'
D. Social expectations to attend college	Sharhan: Well it's kind of not accepted for people not to get to college. It's like "oh, you did your high school, and decided to join a job, it's just not really done." Rizwan: Like going to college you've got to go to college because like my parents are educated, I mean now your son not going to college that's yucky, I don't think that's possible.

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E. Role Models for study abroad	Adnan: It was like always since my childhood, one of my cousins went to the U.S. for studies, for higher studies, he's still here and yea, when he went there I was like twelve, and my mom and dad [said] you can do that too you know
E.1. Family members	
E.2. Classmates	Omar: He was doing nuclear engineering in States, so he visited our high school because he was graduated from high school, so when he was almost completing his degree he came to see his high school, and we had a conference, or you can say a meeting with that guy, because he brought a very reputation to our school, because he graduated from our high school, and he went to states, he started studying there, and now he's becoming a nuclear engineer, you know so that's a big thing, so we all went there, some strange feelings inside myself, you know, I started feeling them then, like I'd be in that position some day.
F. Parental involvement	Rizwan: I think it would be that, there was an assumption that you're going to go to college after high school, pretty much.
F.1. Expectation to attend college	
F.2. Encouraged study abroad	Omar: So I went to Turkey cause my father had a plant there. Actually this was my parents' decision, they always wanted me to study abroad you know. States, or Europe, or somewhere.  Raheel: Well, I wanted to go and study abroad as most of the members of my family and relative came abroad to study for their degree. I had a choice, and my parents also wanted me to go abroad, so I took this decision, and went for it.
F.3. Influenced study abroad	Rizwan: Cause like there's this thing, I don't know whether it's true or not, our dad had put in our minds that the U.S. colleges, they're the best in the world, and when he said that alright TSU is number 4 in the U.S., that's what I read in <i>U.S. News</i> , so alright that means that TSU is number 4 in the world, cause automatically all U.S. colleges then the rest of the world, which is probably not true.
F. 3.a. influenced country	
F.3.b. Influenced choice of college	Fazia: My father, he's like an alumni, over here at TSU. And my mother studied here [in the city] as well, so for me it was like basically I knew from day one that I was going to do my bachelor's from here. So, for other people it's like I had to decide am I going abroad, and then for me it was like, it's settled, you're going to go there for your undergrad. So I didn't think about it. For me it was that certain that you know I will be going.
F.3.c. Guided choice process	Ismael: Actually he [Ismael's father] played a most important role too, for my admission, and he made all the decisions, because when I was in Cypress all the documentation he did that time.

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before enrolling at SU. She chose the community college because of its convenience (near relatives), its modest tuition, and because she believed that there would be

resources there for her to give more careful consideration to several of the 4-year schools in the city.

Omar had studied in Turkey before enrolling at RSU. He had been put on the waiting list at a college in Lahore, and when he was not admitted, his parents quickly arranged for him to enroll at a college in Turkey, where his father had business ties. Omar's experience in Turkey was negative, and he felt that study at RSU would open up good career opportunities in the future. Ismael had started college in Cyprus. He would have preferred to begin his studies in the United States, but he delayed his search and choice process and he was able to be admitted to the Cyprus school quickly.

None of the TSU students had done previous college work except for Adnan. He transferred to TSU from another state institution about one-hour drive from TSU, and he enrolled there only because he could not get a visa in time to join a special admission cohort at TSU. Once he received his visa, he felt that he should go ahead and enter the United States and begin his studies, rather than wait another year to enroll at TSU. Adnan's case was unusual among the TSU students.

None of the TSU students except Adnan had any previous college experience, and in Adnan's decision to attend another college was because of problems in enrolling at TSU, his first choice. In contrast, Razia's, Omar's, and Ismael's decisions could be characterized as choices that had unsatisfactory results, if not poor choices. Omar and Razia spoke of the poor quality of their previous institutions. Ismael saw that study in the United States was an improvement in quality that would result in better job prospects: "Because of the American degree. You know the American degree is very valuable in all

the countries, especially in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. If you have an American degree it means that you really know something special, or, excellent.”

If one views the initial decisions of Razia, Omar, and Ismael as poor choices or mistakes (in that each of the students was dissatisfied with the school he or she had chosen), then the question arises as to why none of the TSU students made the same mistake. Perhaps TSU’s highly selective admissions requirements meant that it attracted (and admitted) students who were not only ambitious but certain about their educational goals, whereas students at the less selective institutions may have been less certain about their goals for college which took them on more circuitous paths—attending other colleges before enrolling at RSU or SU.

Most of the students had what I have described as *cosmopolitan experiences*, which are defined as travel abroad or living abroad, either personally, or vicariously through an immediate family member. Five of the students had lived abroad (away from Pakistan) with their families in the Middle East, where their fathers were employed. Adil’s family had sent him abroad, initially to England, when he was in the eighth grade (he eventually returned to Pakistan and then came to the United States to complete his high school). Ali had also done high school work in the United States. Many of the participants had traveled abroad during vacations, and some of their parents received degrees in the United States, Iraq, and the United Kingdom. For those participants who had not traveled extensively themselves, virtually all had some vicarious experience, through family members or friends, with international travel or with living in another country.

In addition to the students' personal travel experiences, or the experiences of immediate family members, many of the students had relatives who lived abroad, especially in the United States. In many cases the students chose colleges that were near relatives. The topic of proximity to relatives will be discussed further in the section on choice criteria.

The main point to consider here is that many of these students had life experiences which had disposed them to study abroad. Had their travel experiences raised their awareness of educational opportunities abroad? Had their experiences abroad increased their comfort level in living away from family and familiar surroundings? Or were their cosmopolitan experiences a proxy for membership in a social class whose members were not expected to live or study in Pakistan? Pervez, who had lived in Kuwait, pointed out that he and other Pakistanis who had lived outside Pakistan were "raised differently in these countries. Things are like we have a lot of facilities over there, and Pakistan is like slow." Fazia, who only considered schools in the United States, noted the influence of cosmopolitan experiences when she described why she would not study in Pakistan:

No, that was never an option. Cause I'll tell you one thing. Like people, like Pakistanis who live abroad, for like some time, I mean live there, not just go for two months every year, actually live there, and then they come back to Pakistan, they're never really really happy.

Perhaps the cosmopolitan experiences described by many of the students had conditioned them to a lifestyle or goals that did not appear to be possible in Pakistan.

All but two of the participants said that they had no *alternatives to attending college*. Of the two, one had considered the military, and another considered going into the family business. But for the most part, the participants' *parents expected college*

*attendance*. Four of the TSU students (none of the SU or RSU students) said that there were *social expectations to attend college*. Rizwan pointed to both the parental and societal expectation that he would attend a college somewhere: “Like going to college, you’ve got to go to college because like my parents are educated, I mean now your son not going to college that’s yucky. I don’t think that’s possible.” Shahzad reported that “everyone goes to college” and that he had always expected he would attend a college. When pressed, he said that he was aware that many, if not most, people do not attend college, but he added, “Like the people I know everyone goes there.” Even the individuals who said that they might have pursued a college alternative acknowledged that they had always expected to go to college.

Most of the participants reported some type of *role model* for their study abroad experience. These role models were not informants, nor did they have any direct influence in participants’ decisions. And the participants had no expectations of the role models. The role models simply served to plant thoughts of study abroad in the minds of the participants. Adnan described a cousin who had studied in the United States:

It was like always since my childhood, one of my cousins went to the U.S. for studies, for higher studies, he’s still here and yea, when he went there I was like twelve, and my mom and dad [said], you can do that too you know.

Many of the role models were relatives, but in a few cases they were friends, or even classmates. Omar described an alumnus of his school who returned to Pakistan, and the school, for a brief visit during his study in the United States:

He was doing nuclear engineering in States, so he visited our high school because he was graduated from high school, so when he was almost completing his degree he came to see his high school, and we had a conference, or you can say a meeting with that guy, because he brought a very reputation to our school, because he graduated from our high school,

and he went to states, he started studying there, and now he's becoming a nuclear engineer, you know so that's a big thing, so we all went there, some strange feelings inside myself, you know, I started feeling them then, like I'd be in that position some day.

In Omar's case, the role model served as an inspiration that studying abroad was a viable option. For many of the other participants, the role models served to bolster confidence about success in going abroad with participants recognizing that if a friend or relative could succeed as a student in the U.S., then she could do the same. Raheel described his cousins who had been abroad for study:

They [cousins] told me about their experience, how they felt, and how it helped them to have a better future, better job, so they were pretty helpful about it. And that also motivated me and gave me some confidence.

The most powerful of the background characteristics was the students' *parents*. Eleven of the students reported that their parents expected them to attend college. Three indicated that their parents *encouraged study abroad*. In some cases the encouragement was strong. Omar said, "No, they didn't order me [to study abroad] but they said this is their wish." For Fazia, not only did her parents expect that she would study abroad, but they expected her to attend TSU. Six students (including Fazia) reported that their parents influenced some aspect of their decision, be it the country of study, the city, or the particular college that they had selected. Three reported that their parents had a major role in directing the college choice process, and two of those, Ismael and Fazia, said that their parents actually completed application forms and registered the student for tests such as TOEFL and SAT. But in most cases, the students themselves were the initiators in the process that led them to study abroad. Parents tended to become involved after their children initiated the process. The most frequent area of involvement was the decision about where (what city or region) to study, with parents wanting their children to



study in a safe area, or to find a college that was close to relatives or friends. Many of the students themselves said that they wanted to find a college where they could be near family, or friends, and so the parents' influence was consistent with the student's own desires.

All of the participants showed appreciation or respect for their parents' assistance in the choice process. One of the females in the study, Fazia, was especially grateful for her parents allowing her to come to the U.S.: "I'm a girl, and if you're a girl in Pakistan, and your parents let you go to college alone, like and not like an all girls college and everything, study in a normal college alone, well that's a pretty big step for them." She also recognized that her parents' influence was based on her best interest: "And you know parents have their funny ideas, and they just want to choose like the safest. You know what they believe is the safest option for their children." Fazia was the only participant who expressed doubt or reservations about her choice of college and major. Perhaps that was because for the most part her decision was not really her own. Rather it was her parents' decision. But for the most part, the students themselves were the initiators in the process that led them to study abroad.

Given the strong role that parents played in most of the students' decisions, I anticipated that some of the students would describe some conflict with parents or disagreement with the decisions. But none of the students expressed any reservations about their parents' role in the process. Perhaps this was because all of the students were relying on their parents for much, if not all, of their financial support. Some of the students said that their parents were sacrificing financially so that they could study in the United States. Rizwan described his parents' financial support succinctly: "My parents

are so awesome. I know, it is, yea, it makes me want to cry sometimes.” Or perhaps the parent-child bond was extraordinarily strong. Regardless of the cause, these students expressed nothing but respect and appreciation for their parents.

Of course most of the student background characteristics can be attributed to some degree to the students’ parents. In Bourdieu’s terms, parents were the primary force in the transmission of social capital to their children. They were the primary source of the habitus that resulted in these students perceiving college attendance as normative and study abroad as a reasonable college option. Perhaps the students were aware of their privileged position and their respect for their parents was an indication that they appreciated their position. Or perhaps the students were culturally indisposed toward any indications of disrespect or lack of appreciation for their parents.

The students’ descriptions of their background characteristics fit the overall pattern described by Pimpa (2005) insofar as there were parental expectations for college study (though not for study abroad). Parents were supportive of international study, and relatives and friends supplied information about study abroad. What Pimpa described as family members sharing information seems similar to the role models experienced by the students. Pimpa also pointed to family expectations of college attendance, though family expectations in this were less important than those described by Pimpa. Some of the students’ choice experiences were heavily affected by parental activity, also described by Pimpa. The only characteristic of these students that deviates from Pimpa’s findings is the matter of competition for academic achievement among family members. The participants in this study did not report any such competition.

### *Aspirations*

The participants described a number of *aspirations* for study in the United States.

The aspirations theme includes participant goals for attending college, or expected outcomes of their college experience. Table 12 provides examples of participant statements.

Table 12

#### *Student Aspirations: Participant Statements Representing the Invariant Constituents*

Invariant Constituent:	Participant statement
A. Employment	Omar: And that's why I'm sure in the states if I do my studies if I go back home for my job, or if I go to the Middle East or somewhere, I will get a job easy. So every student what he thinks after his graduation? Definitely about jobs, right? So if he's studying and he won't get any job, then there's no use to study.
B. Professional Credential	Razia: and while I was there you know I was interested in TSU as well, but then I realized that if I want to do accounting, I should go to SU. And being you know, University of [name deleted] was one other option for a good business school, but I didn't want to go out, so I wanted to stay locally in the city, so SU was the best option for me.
C. Life training	Razia: Yea, and I thought that a good education would help me be a better person myself so that I can build a better family.
D. U.S. Culture and English Language	Pervez: I decided that like I have never tried to study in some other country, and I wanted to learn more English, and English is the most widely used language all over the world, USA studies is also very well recognized everywhere, so that's why I decided to come over here and study.
E. Status associated with education	Eisa: You know for me education is most important. As my dad, he studied a lot, and now he's a specialist, he's a surgeon, even he's old, now he's old, but he has some respect like if he goes to any party or something, people respect him and they give him, they treat him very nice. Omar: I don't know it's kind of [unintelligible] going on if someone goes abroad for his studies, people consider him more seriously. I don't know, even if it is the same thing, the same university providing you transcripts, and your certificates, no matter where you are studying, maybe they do have their campus, maybe they have their campus in India or somewhere, I don't know, that was kind of you know we do have desires that we have to go abroad for studies, we have to communicate with other people, you know, among the international students and that's kind of the feelings inside myself too,

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F. Social freedom in the United States	Fazia: And being a girl in Pakistan, even for a guy, you know you don't really do these things yourself. Like over here I like my lifestyle, like I can go out, I can go to the gym, I can work out, blah blah. I like stuff like that.
G. Study in the United States	Omar: Like I was searching the internet, that should be cheap for me, I mean suitable, and, then, I was even thinking for ranking too, but I mean I should be honest here, at that time I was not worried about rankings, I was just worried about how I get in the states and how I start my studies there.
H. Serve Pakistan	Zeeshan: Actually, the environment we had back home in Pakistan actually is like that everybody, most of the people, they want to go somewhere else, some different country and study abroad you know. But I was not like that, I was not one of them, because my first attempt was in Pakistan, I tried to get admission there, . . . they have like countable universities very few good universities, very few universities in Pakistan, so everybody goes for those first, then we have very intelligent, good students in Pakistan so they don't have enough money but they are good, they are intelligent, so they try to get in those universities because these are not that expensive, so I think they deserve to get in there first rather than us, because we can pay more that's why we can afford anywhere we want to study. . . But this whole situation came to mind you know, and there was one other guy at the same time who was trying with me, at the same university, and their financial situation was not that good, either I or he would have gotten admission to that university, so I choose here, not there.

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Three invariant constituents under the aspirations theme were frequently mentioned. Seven students tied their college plans with aspirations for *employment* (e.g., careers in engineering, computer science, or in the family business). Incidentally, none of the seven were from TSU. Closely related to the goal of employment was that of obtaining a *professional credential*, with the distinction being that there were some students who spoke of getting a professional degree, but they did not describe specific job goals. Six students spoke about getting such a credential.

Four students expressed their college objectives in terms of *cultural goals* – they wanted to learn about the U.S., or they wanted to enhance their English language skills. Pervez explained this aspiration:

I decided that like I have never tried to study in some other country, and I wanted to learn more English, and English is the most widely used language all over the world, USA studies is also very well recognized everywhere, so that's why I decided to come over here and study.

Another dimension of cultural goals included becoming familiar with business practices, or the culture of business, in the United States. Several students wanted to develop business skills and build connections that would lead to future business opportunities.

Students from RSU had the strongest career orientation in their college aspirations. All of them spoke of college as either a means for a better job, a professional credential, or to become better integrated into the culture, language (English) and community of business. Omar's hope that his study at RSU would result in a better job were based on his observations of his cousins: "I do have some cousins they have studied in the States, and then they got good jobs, I mean besides all these facts the one main factor I was concerned about was job opportunities."

Several other aspirations--not related to career or academic attainment--were each expressed by one or more students and deserve comment. Razia at SU saw her college experience in terms of *life training*, in general, and marriage and family life, in particular: "I thought that a good education would help me be a better person myself so that I can build a better family." Eisa and Omar at RSU felt that study in the United States would result in increased personal *status associated with his education*. Eisa had observed the respect the community had shown for his father, a medical doctor, and he hoped that obtaining a degree would afford him the same type of social status. Zeeshan believed that he was *servicing Pakistan* by not taking one of the limited seats available in a university in Pakistan. By his logic, his family could afford to send him abroad, and that by doing so he was making a space available to someone less fortunate than he in Pakistan. Fazia was

eager to experience the *social freedom* she had in the U.S. – something that was not at all her experience in Pakistan. Sharhan and Omar acknowledged that their main concern was being admitted to *any* school in the U.S. They were not so concerned about which school, but they felt that admission to a U.S. university would open up future career opportunities. It should be noted that in some cases the desire to attend *any* school in the United States is an indication that a person's primary interest is to immigrate. Neither Sharhan nor Omar showed any such inclination.

To summarize the invariant constituents in the *aspirations* category, the most common aspiration envisioned by participants in this study was the hope of improved employment prospects as a result of their education in the United States. If one includes the concept getting a professional credential as primarily a career or job goal (which may or may not be the case), the aspiration of improved employment opportunities was a dominant characteristic of the participants. The importance of job opportunities as a motivation for study abroad has been noted in other research (Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996, Noorani & Abolghasem, 1980). The students who saw their education in the United States as an opportunity to become familiar with this country's culture and language share that aspiration with the Malay students in Pyvis and Chapman's (2007) study and the graduate students in Austin's (1988) study

#### *Choice Criteria*

Participants had many different *criteria* for their college choices. The choice criteria theme contained nine different invariant constituents, many of which had several additional components, or sub-constituents.

Table 13 provides participant statements which are representative of the *choice criteria* theme.

Table 13

*Choice Criteria: Participant Statements Representing the Invariant Constituents*

Invariant Constituent	Participant Statement
A. Closed campus	Ali: I personally liked closed campus rather to an open campus. Open campus being something like [name of school] which is open, it's not closed, as in all the building are together, something like maybe [name of other school], it's like a whole university experience. I preferred that greater.
B. Perceptions of institutional quality	Riaz: I came to know if I going to Germany and study at the state school, some policy there education is free, all the way to PhD, you have to be just fluent in German, so at one point that also came into my mind, actually my dad wanted me to do that. Go to Germany. But I was like no, once I'm leaving home then I'm going to go to the place of best possible opportunities. I really don't care how far.
B.1. Best college	
B.2. Best college for major	Riaz: Just not the academics, just the all-round experience and everything that I liked about TSU, and being the third best engineering university for graduate school right now, it was a great choice for me.
B.3. Alternative to low quality of Pakistan	Raheel: Well the educational standard teachers, and the exam evaluation is not good over there [in Pakistan]. Yea. You don't get good grades and all based on how hard working you are, I mean they have their own standards for evaluating and all, and nobody knows how it works out.
B.4. Alternative to the low quality of the U.K.	Adil: It [education in the U.K.] was ok, it was just that I thought it would be a lot better if I came to the States.
B.5. Reputation	
B.5.a. From rankings	Rizwan: Plus, the second one was like TSU is always high up in the rankings I think it's number 4 or 5 for engineering in the United States. So that was another reason [for attending].
B.5.b. From friends, relatives	Sharhan: I think I wasn't quite well aware of how good Urbana's reputation is, so that perhaps a misnomer on my part, but I already had seniors from my high school who had come here (TSU), and they were pretty good. So, yes, they played a huge part in my decision to come here.
B.6. Facilities	Raheel: Another thing is that over there [in Pakistan] there are just a handful, I mean just a few universities that are as big as the ones over here. I mean this university has a proper campus, it has all the facilities, sports and all, over there usually not all the universities have the all the sports facilities, and all, they just stress studies, they don't have the extracurricular activities, so that's the reason too.

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B. 7. Not a party school	Shahzad: I searched over the internet and University of Wisconsin Madison came over to be the best party school and stuff, so I opted for TSU instead.
C. Speed of acceptance	Raheel: I wanted to go to Indianapolis . . . but it was taking a bit long to apply there, and some of the universities I was applying to didn't have my major, so my friend told me that I should try over here, that this was a good place, and that I should go for it, so I went for it.
D. First admission	Ali: It was actually a serious consideration, but the thing is I got accepted to SU first, so I decided to just go to SU instead of UT Austin, because Austin one it was far, and second, far from the relatives, and then it'd just be a whole new place.
E. Admission requirements: A-levels not required	Rizwan: I did, like I wanted to go to Stanford or MIT, but the problem with those was that I think they required your full A-levels, 2 years of A-levels, and these guys didn't, so that was the main thing. I asked my Dad why didn't I do my whole A-levels and apply to Stanford or MIT or a better place, and sometimes still I think that I should totally transfer out of here this place is not that challenging, it's pretty challenging.
F. Cost F.1. Unlimited resources	Eisa: So my dad told me it's up to you can go and if you can manage and you can live and all this stuff, he's supporting me, because in my culture, in Pakistan or India it doesn't go like this that if you're 21 or over 18 your parents aren't going to support you, it's not like this, like my Dad is responsible for everything which I need, he sends me money, he sends me stuff from back there from the country, and he's in contact with me all the time, I usually talk to him on instant messenger.
F.2. Resources limited choice set	Riaz: I really didn't apply to the California side because I knew that it was pretty expensive over there, so mostly I was focused between the right side of the US, you can say, the East side, and the Midwest, I went to apply to Drake and then IIT, about these colleges I remember.
F.3. Needed U.S. job after college	Adnan: So I at least want to work here [TSU city] for 2 or 3 years, and get my money back, and then I'd go back to Pakistan to start a business or something like that.
F.4. Needed loans	Adnan: I have loans. I took, ok for my first year my parents did it at [name of previous school]. After that I've been at TSU for three semesters, one of the semesters I paid with my co-op earnings, but the other two semesters I took out study assist loans, which now have totaled up to \$20,000.
F.5. Needed co-op (student employment)	Riaz: In the end I think it all boiled down to the co-op program that brought me here, yea, cause I know all major universities do research, all have engineering, and at that time since it was honestly computer science, UT Austin had a higher ranking than TSU, so the natural choice was to go.
G. Security G.1. location	Ismael: So my father kind of interested, my father is getting afraid to send me to some big place, you know, because of some cases, he said crime rate and this and that, so he wanted me to stay on safe side, some small city.
G.2. Relatives	Adnan: No, the parents it wasn't any issue, because I had relatives over here they were always comfortable. The reason I wanted to come here was I had relatives here in [TSU city], some really close relatives, so it would have been very easier to come here instead of going somewhere else in the U.S.

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G.3. Friends	Eisa: Uh, I got it from internet, we have our own 24-hour internet access in our home, so I was searching for the universities, and as one of my friends was over here he told me that I'm RSU, this is the university's name, so I searched for this university, and few more universities. First I thought that it's better to go to this university, to come here, because as I know one person who is already here, and he's my friend. The first time I am entering American culture, so it would be easier for me to communicate between the people and I would be comfortable with him also.
H. Any U.S. school	Omar: Like I was searching the internet, that should be cheap for me, I mean suitable, and, then, I was even thinking for ranking too, but I mean I should be honest here, at that time I was not worried about rankings, I was just worried about how I get in the states and how I start my studies there.
I. Social opportunities	Hussain: Plus I had a couple of my friends coming here, my colleagues in school they were saying we're going overboard if you want to come, you can come along, and I talked to my family and I said sure, why not. Yea, they were also coming over here, I was like, cause we sort of like we were in school, we would take the same classes and stuff like that, so I would always just go along with the group you know where they were going.
I.1. School with friends	
I.2. School with other Pakistanis	Sharhan: In retrospect, I don't think I would have had a more fun college experience than this had I [gone] to any of the other places, cause the friends played out like way better than I could have expected. They often joke [TSU city] is like the American Lahore. I came here and by now I don't feel that different about living here, considering that I have friends who are from the same place, and they do some of the same things, so it's been a really good experience, yes.
J. Research opportunities	Riaz: Two main things, its ranking in electrical engineering, and the research funding. I know like TSU is a lead research university, and a lead university for co-op program, and I definitely wanted work experience and research experience both for my education.

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One of the most common criteria was that of institutional *quality*. Quality refers to students' view of the benefits or value that students attributed to an institution, which is distinct from an institution's reputation, which is discussed below. Nearly all of the participants in the study assumed that by coming to the U.S. they were getting a better education than they would get elsewhere. Ismael described it this way:

The main purpose is to come over here because of good education, very good education, USA is the number one, what we heard and it is, too, for studies. So that's I just think about to come over here for study to get a very good and good quality education, and so far it's going good.

Ismael believed that an American degree as something particularly valuable in Pakistan or the Middle East:

Because of the American degree. You know the American degree is very valuable in all the countries, especially in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. If you have an American degree it means that you really know something special, or, excellent.

The participants' desire to find a high quality education led them to look for quality in a variety of ways. Six said that they wanted the best possible education, or the best possible college. Rizwan, for example, said:

Cause like there's this thing, I don't know whether it's true or not, our dad had put in our minds that the U.S. colleges, they're the best in the world, and when he said that alright TSU is number 4 in the U.S., that's what I read in U.S. News, so alright that means that TSU is number 4 in the world, cause automatically all U.S. colleges then the rest of the world, which is probably not true, because I read a lot of other studies now.

Others conceptualized quality in terms of their desired major. Hussain believed that the quality of his major at RSU, computer science, was comparable to what was offered at MIT. Perhaps he believed that the skills and knowledge he was acquiring at RSU were more akin to what was offered at MIT than what he would have been offered in Pakistan. He certainly believed that the curriculum offered at both institutions was far superior to what was offered in Pakistan.

Several students perceived quality education in blunt terms – Pakistan universities were of low quality, and to study anywhere else was an improvement. Some complained of poor facilities, and some of the lack of specific degree programs. The most important complaint regarded instructional techniques in Pakistan, which were viewed as traditional and overly theoretical. Osman put it this way:

The quality in Pakistan is they made you learn things but it's not much clear to the student. They don't go into details whatever the subject is, they just go over the subjects and it gets quite difficult for the student in future life. As compared to the USA, in the USA they give a deep knowledge, they are more hard working, and they require students to do hard work more.

Other students described the quality of their chosen university by comparing it to the poor quality of institutions in Canada and the U.K.

The international student college choice literature points to quality as an important motivator or "pull factor" for internationals in various settings (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). The participants in this study tended to understand quality in comparative terms; that is they believed that by coming to the United States they could get a better education than they could find in Pakistan or in other nations. The most important component of quality for these students was particular degree programs or majors, which is consistent with findings of Noorani and Abolghosem (1980) and Gatfield, Barker, and Graham (1999).

Closely related to the students' own judgments of institutional quality is a school's *reputation*, which I define as another person's or organization's estimate of an institution's quality. For six students, most of whom were at TSU, reputation was described in terms of *U.S. News* rankings. Sharhan shared his view of those rankings, saying, "*US News*, it's a ranking system, very flawed in my opinion, but it's something, right? I basically looked up the top 20 masters programs, the top 20 bachelor's programs." Other students received information about a school's reputation from relatives or friends.

The power of published reports about schools was made evident by Shahzad and Sharafat. Neither wanted to attend a *party school*. Both had decided not to attend other institutions because of reports that they were party schools. In their minds, these reports diminished the perceived quality of those institutions. They were unable to separate their notion of academic quality in terms of the curriculum offered from reports of campus social activity.

*Speed of acceptance* was an important criterion for Raheel, Ismael, and Sharhan. For Raheel and Ismael at RSU, they were impatient with the search process and wanted to move ahead with their studies. Ismael was pleased with the fact that it took a relatively short time -- only a month -- to receive an acceptance from RSU. Like many other participants, Ismael perceived his search process as rushed (see section below describing rushed time as one of the search strategies), and he wanted to be accepted to some school quickly.

For Sharhan (TSU) and for Ali (SU) they were influenced by the fact that TSU and SU were the *first schools to offer admission*. For Sharhan, TSU was not only the first school to accept him, and the only school that accepted him before he had completed his A-level exams. This relieved him of the stress often associated with those exams, and it allowed him time to think about his future college experience. Because there was no longer any doubt about whether it was *possible* to attend TSU, his thoughts regarding TSU included a degree of certainty. By contrast, he could only consider other colleges as possibilities. Thus, the TSU thoughts were more concrete, and this in turn led him to think about TSU more favorably and realistically. Sharhan himself believed that those concrete thoughts influenced his final decision to attend TSU.

*Cost* was mentioned as a criterion for all but one of the students. Six students chose not to seriously consider certain institutions because of cost of attendance. In general, the students were not looking to save money or to find the lowest cost institution, but rather they were looking to exclude schools that were out of their price range. In a few cases students chose not to consider schools that they thought were expensive. For example, Riaz said that he did not consider schools in California because he assumed that the cost would be too great. In several cases, a student's resources resulted in a *limited choice set*. Analysis of cost came after other examination of other criteria. Students became interested in schools first, and then examined the feasibility of attendance based on cost. Shahzad and Omar both said that their schools were relatively inexpensive and that was the primary reason for their choices. Two of the TSU students chose TSU because they *needed a co-op program* which gave them not only work experience but also the opportunity to earn money to cover college expenses. Several other students had obtained on-campus employment, not because they felt that they needed the funds, but because they were aware of the cost their parents were bearing and they wanted to relieve their parents of some of that burden. Adnan had taken out loans to pay for school. Adnan and Adil voiced the need to work in the United States upon completing their degrees, out of fear that if they were to return to Pakistan, where wages were relatively low, they would not be able to justify the investment they and their families had made in their education.

Another important criterion for eleven of the students, or for their parents, was *security*. This invariant constituent had three distinct manifestations: physical safety and

security based on the institution's *location*; emotional security resulting from proximity to *relatives*; or emotional security resulting from proximity to *friends*.

Ismael reported that he was seeking a college in a location free of crime. That Pakistani students would seek physical security in the United States may come as a surprise for people who perceive Pakistan as a dangerous terrorist haven. Riaz at TSU was surprised that campus authorities discouraged him from walking at night in the neighborhood around his residence hall. He compared that with his neighborhood in Pakistan where he could go out, alone, at any hour of the night. For all of the students, it should come as no surprise that nineteen and twenty-year-old students who are traveling to live around the world would want to find some sense of security at their college.

For Ismael, security meant a physical environment that had limited crime. Other students perceived security in other ways. Students or their parents selected schools that were nearby family members or friends. Students and their parents felt more comfortable about the separation for their home support networks if they knew that there was someone nearby who would be able to provide assistance or emotional support if their circumstances turned negative. Seven students at all three institutions sought security by finding a college that was near relatives. Adnan was the first person in his family to go abroad to study, and his parents were fearful, but "because I had relatives over here they were always comfortable." Osman chose RSU because of nearby relatives. He ruled out another school because "I don't have any relatives there, so it's quite difficult to go there." Some of the students, including Osman, limited their interest to schools that were located close to relatives. Others applied to various schools, but their final decision on where to attend was based on proximity to relatives.

Another criterion closely related to the need for security was the need for *social opportunities* with *friends*, or with *other Pakistanis*. Three of the students chose their college because they knew there were Pakistani friends already there. For Hussain at RSU, it was essential to find a school where there would be friends:

Like I said because I was always going where I would feel comfortable, I wouldn't want to go to a place where I wouldn't know anyone, you know, it all natural, it's human nature if you go to a new place where you are a foreigner and you don't know like you know how the system goes and things like, so that that could be a problem so that's why I chose this university.

Whether the students were seeking security through relatives, through friends, or through a safe physical environment, it can be inferred that they had concerns that they would encounter problems in adjusting to the culture, academic, or social life of the United States. For all of the students, their decision meant separation from family and friends. For some it meant separation from girlfriends, religious moorings, or beloved sports and social activities. By seeking security in this country, the students and their parents were tacitly acknowledging the difficulties of separation, and recognizing the challenge of adapting to life in the United States.

For several of the RSU students, the need to be with friends, or with other Pakistani students, went beyond a need for security. They chose RSU because they knew they could find a Pakistani community there. Hussain described the importance of his desire to be with his friends:

Plus you know my buddies, I have this thing you know I always go around what my buddies are doing, I don't want to be left out of the group, so as to say I don't want to be cut off, even then if they decided to come here for some reason, or whatever, be it studies, not anything else, I mean so I would have gone on back then too.

None of the TSU or SU students described the need to be near friends as a main criterion for their choice, but several shared that their experience in the metropolitan area had been enhanced because of the significant Pakistani community in the area. Sharhan described the TSU metropolitan area as “an American Lahore.”

Students’ expressed needs for *security* or *social opportunities* have not been considered in the international student college choice literature. Given that nine of the students in this study expressed a concern for these needs, they may represent a criterion for study abroad decisions that have been overlooked by student mobility researchers.

#### *Choice Set*

Many of the invariant constituents described by the students related to their *choice sets*. For the purposes of this study, the theme of choice set includes any institution or group of institutions (e.g., “universities in Singapore”) that a participant mentioned in the interviews. Thus, this theme also includes groups of schools that students specifically noted that they *did not* consider, such as “Canadian colleges” or “universities in Pakistan.” Representative participant statements for this theme can be found in Table 14.

Seven participants applied to one or two colleges. The TSU and SU students tended to have larger choice sets than the RSU students. Two TSU students had choice sets of more than five colleges. Their choice sets included prestigious engineering schools throughout the United States, such as the University of Texas at Austin or MIT.

Four of the students considered study in Pakistan. Several of the RSU students were denied admission to the school of their choice in Pakistan; other students considered Pakistan schools but eventually came to believe that studying in the U.S. was their best



Table 14

*Student Choice Sets: Participant Statements Representing the Invariant Constituents*

Invariant Constituent	Participant statement
A. Size of choice set	Pervez: But I didn't start at that time [in high school], I was late, and this is the first thing that came into my mind, so here I am now.
A.1. One application	
A.2. 2 or 3 applications	Rizwan: I did, like I wanted to go to Stanford or MIT, but the problem with those was that I think they required your full A-levels, 2 years of A-levels, and these guys didn't, so that was the main thing.
A.3. 4 or more applications	Shahzad: Then I applied finally and a bunch of institutes, Arizona, Like the state universities, Arizona and all of them, they were like my backup. So my major or my first priority was Cal Tech, I couldn't get in. Yea, I applied, TSU and UT Austin, and University of Wisconsin Madison, so I got into University of Wisconsin Madison and TSU. And UT Austin. University of Wisconsin.
B. Preferred Pakistan but was denied admission	Omar: OK, when I graduated from my high school I had to do something for my future, right, so I applied basically in Pakistan first of all, that was my first priority, I applied in Pakistan University in [unintelligible] engineering and technology, it's a very famous institute, then I applied in university of engineering and technology in Lahore, so I mean when I passed the admission test, because we have a different system of getting admitted there, we have to pass a admissions test besides our transcripts and school certificates, to show we are eligible to take the entry tests, so I passed them then they put me on the standby list, and I was on the waiting list for a long time.
C. Considered Pakistan but preferred other options	Adnan: And I applied to a University in Pakistan too and I was like all set to go there. So but then I got the visa and you know everyone was saying you got the visa, you have to go.
D. No interest in Pakistan	Ali: Well, Pakistan I never did. I never wanted to study in Pakistan, I wanted maybe to go on the foreign side, maybe go to either Europe to study.
E. Considered only U.S.	Osman: After high school you can't study in Saudi Arabia. The universities are only for the residents of Saudi Arabia. And I'm considered an international there, a foreign student. So, I have to go to school somewhere, either back to my country Pakistan or to somewhere else. So I decided to come here because of the value of the degree.
F. Considered other nations	Riaz: In the end, I applied to 12, and but I completed full applications to about 8, including Washington University in St. Louis, I did Ohio Wesleyan, I did Georgia Tech, UT Austin, McGill in Canada, and I did Waterloo.
F.1. Canada	

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F.2. U.K.	Shahzad: UK, first of all, like for the first whole two months I was decided to go to the UK. I had heard from people that getting a visa and all that stuff it takes you too long, and takes a hell of a time, and you've already taken a year off, and it's going to mess things up if you don't get a visa and another year off. And another, it was messed up, so you better apply for UK.
F.3. Singapore	Adnan: And I applied to a university in Singapore too, which they didn't accept me either.
F.4. Europe	Ali: I wanted maybe to go on the foreign side, maybe go to either Europe to study, or the U.S. So Europe was a consideration in the beginning, like I was very fond of the economic school in the UK
F.5. U.A.E.	Ali: But another one besides UK was also Dubai, it was UAE was the choice, because they had recently opened up an American University of Sharjah, I believe.

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choice. Four of the students said that they never considered college in Pakistan. Of those, two attended RSU, one TSU, and one SU. Only two of the students seriously considered nations beside the United States or Pakistan, though quite a few students gave some thought to other countries, primarily Canada and the United Kingdom.

There were two noteworthy characteristics of the RSU students. As mentioned above, the RSU had small choice sets. Osman and Pervez did not apply to any other schools besides RSU. Ismael, who transferred to RSU from a school in Cyprus, did not apply to other schools once he decided to leave Cyprus. Two additional RSU students did not mention applying to other schools in the interviews, though they may have done so. In addition to the small size of their choice sets, the RSU students were more intent on finding a college in the United States. Only two RSU students considered other nations.

The students' descriptions of their choice sets indicate that there was a relatively even distribution of interest in attending schools in specific countries. Three of the students preferred or considered study in Pakistan but were denied admission there. Another three indicated that they considered Pakistan but preferred other options, while

four reported no interest whatsoever in Pakistan. Another four only considered the United States. Seven students said that they considered schools in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Singapore. For the students in this study there was no discernible pattern, except that the RSU students were less likely than the TSU or SU students to consider other countries for study.

Several studies have found that students first consider a country and then select a college in that country (Doorbar, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). The students in this study did not hold to such a sequence. Some clearly wanted to find a school in the United States, and two said that their primary goal was to get admission to any institution in the United States. Others would have preferred a school in Pakistan. But on the whole, the students described their decisions as a fluid interplay between consideration of countries and institutions. Riaz, for example, gave serious consideration to schools in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Shahzad, who enrolled at TSU, had applied to several other institutions in the United States. He said that if he had only been admitted to one particular school among those to which he had applied in the United States, he would have instead enrolled at a college in Singapore. He also said that if he could have been admitted to a particular school in London, he would have enrolled there and not TSU. Ali, who had completed his final two years of high school in the United States, considered attending a college in the U.A.E. In general, the students in this study had an overall preference for study in the United States. But, taken on the whole, the decision sequences for the students in this study appear to be inconsistent with the findings of previous research.

### *Information Sources*

The theme of *information sources* refers to the ways that participants received information about not only the school they chose, but about other schools as well. Participants described ten primary information sources, which compose the categories that make up this theme. Representative participant statements for this theme can be found in 15.

The participants used a wide range of *information sources* to learn about colleges. Five of the RSU students and one TSU student learned about the school through friends. Three TSU students, one SU student, and one RU student learned about their schools

Table 15

#### *Information Sources: Participant Statements Representing the Invariant Constituents*

Invariant Constituent:	Participant Statement
A. Friends	Hussain: Yea, so [a friend] told me like you know I have my cousin over there, and it is a good campus, and they have good programs, it's a good locality and all, and basically the staff is very friendly and all that. And I said ok, I just apply to it.
B. High school counselor	Ali: The high school counselor was pretty much answering all my questions.
C. High school or college faculty	Sharhan: My high school [counselors], yes. They processed the applications for us. I was interested in going into CS. And they were like it's a really good place for CS, and I was like yes, TSU
D. Relatives	Osman: My aunt's sister graduated from this university, so I got information from her and from the web site. And from the brochure which I asked from RSU and they sent me.
E. School web sites	Adil: I guess I did go to the TSU web site, and just look at various information.
F. Web index	Zeeshan: Yea, we were using the college web site, [name of site unintelligible], we searched [state name] because someone told us that you could find better jobs and things like that.

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G. <i>U.S. News</i> (print or web)	Shahzad: Checking web sites, Princeton review, US World News and everything, just checking everything. Then a couple of friends, a friend of mine, and cousins studying here, it's far better here than Wisconsin
H. Advising Center	Shahzad: No, well back in grade 11 or 12 I had made my mind for U.K., not the U.S. It was like ok, I'll go to the U.K. And I had been to the British Council a lot of times. But to the American Council, never.
I. Communications with admissions or international staff	
I.1. E-mail	Pervez: Yea, it was helpful, and then I didn't call him but we were in contact with [advisor's name] with e-mail.
I.2. Telephone	Ali: Well initially it was admissions as well, because I had to ask them about some of the information and everything, and they were really helpful and all that. And I was also in contact with the admissions office to meet the requirements and everything, I was in contact by phone and e-mail
J. School brochure	Adnan: Yea, like online you could request materials, but they would never send it. TSU would never send it. But other, UT Austin would send it. I would like request it from a hundred universities, but TSU would never send it for some reason. UG actually sent some.
K. College fair	Ismael: Actually, every, in Jeddah, every year, there are a lot of universities that come over there, and there is some big exhibition about the universities, about 200 to 300 universities. So my father and me used to go, from since 5 years, continuously over there, and we got a lot of information, so I applied over here, and I got admission, so I came over here.

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from relatives. Five students reported using school web sites. Of those five, one reported using a web index. Four students received information from high school teachers of counselors. Three TSU students used print or web versions of *U.S. News* to gather information. Two students had received information from advising offices in Pakistan, and one student had attended a study abroad fair in his city. Two RSU students gathered information by telephoning the school. Three RSU students and one SU student communicated with their schools by e-mail. Three reported using school brochures or catalogs.

There are two primary observations to be made regarding the students' descriptions of how they learned about schools. First, students from all three schools used, and relied on, information from persons they knew (family, friends, or high school

counselors and teachers) more than information from published sources, school representatives, or from advising offices. Second, five RSU and two SU students reported personal communications with college staff in their decision making process. Several RSU students reported that those personal communications with the RSU staff helped them get to know the character of the institution. This was the sentiment shared by

Zeeshan:

Basically when I e-mailed here back and forth to the Office of International Programs, I was like I was getting the appropriate response, I would even ask sometimes about the weather and I would still get a response, so I guess I came here because I thought the people here would be more friendly.

Zeeshan compared the responsiveness of the RSU staff with that of other universities:

The big universities we e-mailed and everything, we didn't get a reply, they didn't care much about us, so we didn't care too much about them, that's why we e-mailed here and called [name of staff member] and everything, he was good to us, he replied back and everything.

None of the TSU students reported any useful personal communication with TSU staff prior to admission. Two TSU students said that there was no use in communicating with the admissions staff because the staff would just refer them to the web site for answers to their questions. The importance of the "personal" information sources was described by Shahzad, who was aware of the difficulty in conducting a college search knowing that he would never have the opportunity to make a campus visit. "It's not like you can go there for a visit or anything," he explained. In the absence of a campus visit, individuals have to rely on other information sources, and perhaps there is a tendency to weigh "human intelligence" more heavily when a person has no personal experience on which to base a decision. Except for Razia, Adil, and Ali, none of the students had the

option of visiting the campus, talking face to face with personnel, and verifying the information they had gathered about the institution. Without the benefit of a campus visit, informal information by way of friends, alumni, and university staff becomes all the more important.

### *Search Strategies*

The theme titled *search strategies* includes all the behaviors or activities described by the students as a part of their search process. There were ten invariant constituents that are categorized as search strategies. Many of them were reported by just one or two students. Table 16 provides participants statements that are representative of the *search strategies* theme.

One student, Fazia, was able to articulate an overall “strategy about the college choice process for Pakistanis in general. She believed that most Pakistanis would “choose a major, and then choose an appropriate college, that’s basically how the whole process

Table 16

### *Search Strategies: Participant Statements Representing the Invariant Constituents*

Invariant Constituent	Participant Statement
A. Likelihood of admission based on SAT or selectivity	Adnan: So, and I wanted to do engineering, so when I got my SAT scores, so I had to be realistic could I be accepted or not, I got like 1390 on the SAT. Like you can say the top universities like MIT and Cal Tech, they, you need at least a 1450 to get in those schools, so I was pretty much down to these schools, UT Austin and, I could have a realistic chance to get into. So that was a factor in choosing TSU.
B. Likelihood of visa	Adnan: Yea, they did not. I might have gone there, especially after the visa thing, I really wanted to go to TSU in engineering, and Singapore University was really good in engineering but didn’t accept me either. And I applied to a University in Pakistan too and I was like all set to go there, because my visa was getting so delayed. So but then I got the visa and you know everyone was saying you got the visa, you have to go.

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C. Rushed process (compressed)	Pervez: If not here, then somewhere else. You never know, not in this city, this state, some other state, maybe in some other country. You can get an opportunity anywhere. But I didn't start at that time, I was late, and this is the first thing that came into my mind, so here I am now.
D. Sought admission after completing A-levels	And coming here was since I completed my A levels in 2004, and then I took a gap year, it was like a whole year since I hadn't applied my A-levels to any university or college, so then after it was a whole year off. Pretty much I applied.
E. Sought admission without completing A-levels	Shahzad: TSU kind of pre-empted my decisions, cause you get the acceptance before you're done with our A-levels. So I didn't have time to finish my A-levels and then decide, pretty much before Oh, you're in to TSU, so pretty much that's that. I didn't have time to consider any other options. I was pretty set on coming here.
F. Student made decision alone (no assistance)	Adil: It [the choice] was pretty much on my own.
G. Applied with friends	Hussain: Yea, they [friends] were also coming over here, I was like, cause we sort of like we were in school, we would take the same classes and stuff like that, so I would always just go along with the group you know where they were going.

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goes back home.” For her it was clear that an appropriate college meant one that was highly ranked or prestigious. Although Fazia was able to articulate a strategy, the process did not really work that way for her. And in spite of her idea that students first choose a major, she was the only one who had reservations about her major. She said that it was important to use one's SAT score to gauge the likelihood of admission to particular schools before submitting applications.

Other students offered hints or suggestions of strategies that had worked for them in determining schools to which they should submit applications. A common strategy was to make some judgments about the *likelihood of admission* to specific schools. In the case of TSU students, this was done by comparing SAT scores with ranges of scores that were published by the schools or in various indexes. One student considered the *likelihood of getting a visa* to the United States as an important part of the decision. Shahzad, Omar,



and Adnan feared the likelihood of getting a visa was small, and their fear caused them to apply to other schools in other nations as “backup” schools. When Adnan received his visa to the United States, he felt that it would have been unreasonable not to take advantage of the opportunity.

Several students at all of the schools had a strategy I labeled as *rushed process*. For various reasons, they felt that they were delayed in the search process. In some cases the delay was the result of not beginning their searches until *after completion of A-levels*, which would be comparable to an American high school senior delaying her search until the spring of the senior year. Note that this is not a result of procrastination on the part of the students. Rather, the rigor of the A-level exams is not conducive to students investing significant time in the college search process. Note that some other students were attracted to TSU because of its policy of admitting students *without completing A-levels*, which in fact was a criterion for choosing TSU. In at least one case the delay in applying to schools in the U.S. was due to an unexpected rejection from a school in Pakistan. For some of the students, procrastination probably was a part of the process. Pervez acknowledged his delay in starting the search process: “I was late, and this is the first thing that came into my mind, so here I am now.” Most of the students who had a “rushed process strategy” feared that they were wasting time in the search process, and wanted to begin college as soon as possible. This fear manifested itself in desires to receive communications from colleges in a timely fashion. TSU and RSU did not require completion of A-levels for admission, which made them attractive to many students (though most students had completed A-levels). It also made RSU attractive, because RSU had a rolling admissions policy which meant that students could be notified of

admission in a relatively short time. In contrast to the students who felt that their choice process was rushed, Riaz and Shahzad each took a year off before attending TSU. Riaz spent a year studying languages (French and German) as well as assisting in his father's business before enrolling at TSU. For Shahzad, he simply needed time to sort out the college search process. In both cases these students wanted to take the time to find the right college.

Two additional strategies were noteworthy. Hussain, Adnan, and Zeeshan said that they and their *friends had applied to colleges together*. So not only did the friends consider institutions and discuss the choice process, but they also submitted applications as a group. In contrast, Adil said that he had made his *decision alone*, without much in the way of influence or assistance from family members or friends. Perhaps it is telling that only one of the 18 students in this study saw his decision as one that was his to make. Many other students pointed directly to the influence of parents, or, in the case of Hussain, Adnan, and Zeeshan, they involved friends in their search process in a significant way.

#### Interrelationships Among the Themes and Invariant Constituents

The themes and invariant constituents described above are interrelated in various ways. In this section I will describe the most important of those relationships.

##### *Parents*

The role of parents in the students' choices was powerful. Every student in the study made note of his or her parents' role. One can guess that parents in Pakistan have more influence on children's affairs than is common in many Western cultures, including the United States. This is in keeping with Pakistan's Muslim heritage and is consistent

with the strong ties among extended and nuclear families that characterize Southern Asia. Although only a few of the parents were heavily involved in the choice process, their influence was the most common factor in student's decisions. One of the most obvious ways that parents influenced choice decisions was related to finances and the cost of college. None of the students in this study was offered any financial aid before college. These students, like the vast majority of international undergraduates in the U.S., were reliant on their parents. Several students decreased their reliance on their parents by working on campus or in college co-op programs<sup>3</sup>. Unlike American undergraduates, foreign undergraduates in the United States are seldom offered financial aid. For them there is no difference between full tuition and the discounted price of attending college. As a result, parents' ability to pay was important as students included and excluded schools in their choice set. The fact that students were reliant on their parents to fund their education perhaps ensured that parents had a strong influence on the choice process.

Given that the full cost of attending even the lowest-priced college, RSU, was well over \$14,000 per year at the time of the interviews, the parents of the students in the study were economically advantaged by any standard. By Pakistani standards, where per capita GDP is \$2,600, these families are in the upper reaches of economic status in the nation. Note that economic status or wealth did not appear as an invariant constituent or theme, because the students did not raise the issue of wealth in terms of their economic status; although they did express gratitude toward their parents for supporting their education. Only one of the participants in the study raised the issue of family wealth or privilege. This was Zeeshan, who had concluded that since his family had the wealth to

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<sup>3</sup> All the students in this study had F-1 (student) non-immigrant status. In this status, work opportunities are limited to curricular experiences (practica, co-op) and part-time on-campus employment.

send him abroad, he should do so because he did not want to take a university seat in Pakistan that might be occupied by someone who could not afford to go abroad. In contrast, one of the students objected to the description of being called *wealthy* when he reviewed his textural-structural description. He preferred to be called middle class. Apart from self-perceptions of economic status, most of the students were well aware of the great cost of study in the U.S., and several were aware of the burden that their studies was placing on their families.

Another parent-related invariant constituent reported was the expectation to attend college (not necessarily abroad). This may have been due to the fact that in most cases, one or both parents had attended college themselves (which no doubt relates to the overall economic status of the students). Another theme is the cosmopolitan experiences of which most of the participants spoke. Many of the parents had worked, traveled, or studied abroad themselves, and the students who had had such experiences had not done so independently. If they had lived or traveled abroad it was because they had accompanied their parents or were sent abroad by their parents. Several of the students' fathers were employed outside of Pakistan in the Arabic Gulf countries, and Riaz reported that his father had business interests in Europe. Cummings (1984) reported that among Asian nations, a country's involvement in the international trade and available information resources were "push" factors for study abroad for its citizens. In more general terms, McMahon (1992) found that a sending country's overall economic power and interdependence with host countries is positively related to student flows between those countries. One can surmise that for the students in this study, their parents'

involvement in international business may have resulted in not only the financial wherewithal but also an abundance of information about study opportunities.

There were four cases in which parents were very much involved in directing the search process. In most cases, however, parents did not initiate the process of looking abroad for study. Once the students initiated the process and began to develop a choice set, then parents became involved, usually in the form of offering financial direction or by steering their children to schools near relatives or friends. The students' need for security, both physical and emotional, was clearly related to their parents' concern for their safety, comfort, and perhaps even moral direction while studying in the United States. It is natural that parents who have a large influence on their children's decision to go abroad would want to take measures to ensure that their children were in safe locations. Parents would naturally be concerned if their children were placed in hostile, unsafe environments, or if their children were to lose their moral, spiritual, or social bearings because they had moved to a strange country. Whereas Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) reported that parents have strong influence on students' choice of country and institution, this study points to the possibility that such influence may be based on non-academic objectives such as seeking physical and emotional security and ensuring that the school fits the family's budget. This study also indicates that other relatives may influence college choices as much as parents, particularly if those relatives have direct knowledge of or experience with the institutions or communities under consideration. It may be that the parents who are inclined to have significant involvement in their child's decision may defer to the knowledge and experience of other relatives.

At this point, there is the temptation to assume that the interconnected relationships of the parents, their economic status, and parental college expectations would also be related to a social expectation study abroad. But the students did not report that there were strong expectations for these students to study abroad. This finding is inconsistent with Joseph and Joseph's (2000) and Pimpa's (2005) finding that the strongest influence on students' decisions to study abroad was family influence. Most of the students said that it was expected, presumably by parents and friends, that they attend college somewhere. The expectation was highlighted in the data by the absence of alternatives to college. The students felt that college was expected, but only in a few cases did the students feel that going abroad for college was expected, and in those cases the expectation came from the parents, not from other sources.

One way of understanding the influence of parents is that virtually all of the constituents that make up the student background characteristics theme can be attributed to the influence of the students' parents. In Bourdieu's terms, parents were the primary force in the transmission of social capital to their children. They were the source of the habitus that resulted in these students perceiving college attendance as normative and study abroad as a reasonable college option. Some of the students expressed awareness of the privileges that they had experienced as a result of their parents' status. All of the students demonstrated respect for their parents, which was perhaps an indication of their gratitude for their parents. Or perhaps the students were culturally indisposed toward any indications of disrespect or lack of appreciation for their parents.

*Friends*

Although the students did not believe that there were social expectations for them to study abroad, their social connections were conducive to foreign study. As high school friends or former classmates reported that they were going abroad, or were considering going abroad, many of the participants in this study began to think more about doing it themselves. Many described friends or family members who had studied abroad and who served as role models, inspiring students that study in the U.S. was feasible and that they could successfully obtain a U.S. degree. They also served as sources of security, insuring both parents and students that there would be emotional and social support on the U.S. campuses. In some cases, friends chose to apply to schools together, and in other cases students chose to apply to and attend schools because friends were enrolled there.

Friends also served as information sources, communicating with the students the advantages and disadvantages of their campuses, programs of study, and validating information that the students may have found on the web or in brochures. Friends were an important part of how students built their perceptions of a college's quality. Of course the *U.S. News* rankings played a part, but those rankings were sometimes communicated indirectly from friend to friend. For the students at RSU, which did not appear in the rankings, perceptions of the college's reputation were derived entirely from friends or relatives. And in the case of RSU, important information such as admission requirements and deadlines were transmitted from friend to friend. For students at all three schools, information about choice criteria such as campus facilities, desirable majors, and campus security were communicated informally from friend to friend. It seems that the widespread use of electronic communications (e.g., e-mail and instant messaging)

multiplied the power of friends serving as information sources. The value of friends as information sources was vital to most of the participants in the study, who were conducting the search process from abroad and for whom campus visits were impossible or impractical, and for whom direct contact with campus personnel was limited by time zone and geography.

For students who were seeking a college where they would find a Pakistani community, friends already enrolled at the school insured that such a community existed. In this way, the presence of friends at the school served as a means of security. Students could be sure that the academic, cultural, and social adjustments that they would face in the U.S. would be buffered by a group of friends who would share their values and understand their problems.

In most of the participant experiences, friends had some role in the search phase of the process, and in some cases a large role in the choice phase of the process. This is in contrast to the role of parents, who were more involved in the predisposition process, and to a lesser degree in the search phase.

Friends played a very important part in the overall choice process of these students. Given their importance in this study, it appears that they are an important but largely overlooked influence in the international student college choice literature. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) have noted that friends and relatives are an important influence on student decision. Zikopoulos and Barber (1986) found that friends, parents, and relatives had the most influence on the decisions of international students in the United States. The tendency to put relatives, parents, and friends in the same information source or resource category may mask the importance of friends. And where previous



research indicated that parents, friends, and relatives served as less important sources of information than official institutional publications (Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986), this study points out that friends may be as or more important than publications or web sites.

### *Quality*

Students consistently reported that they were looking for a high quality institution. They conceptualized quality in terms of reputation, facilities, their major, and comparisons with opportunities in the U.K., Canada, and Pakistan. They conceptualized it in terms of post-graduation job opportunities and income. Thus, for some of the students, this search for quality was related to their aspirations for employment, or professional certification, or prestige and status. This search for quality was also related to their parents expectation for college attendance – their parents could not be expected to pay for college and experience long separations from their children if the American college experience was not superior to other options.

This study reinforces the consistent finding in the international student college choice literature that students go abroad in pursuit of educational quality (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1986; Doorbar, 2001; Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1988; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). The issue of quality is related to that of access. Lee and Tan (1984) have pointed to inadequate technical education resources as a push factor, while Cummings (1984) has pointed to overall lack of educational opportunity (i.e., insufficient institutional capacity) as a push factor. None of the students in this study reported that they could not find educational opportunities in Pakistan. But several reported that they could not get admitted to a school of their choice in Pakistan, and others pointed out that while they

could have studied in Pakistan, they were drawn to the superior quality of education in the United States.

The findings of this study placed several components of quality under the larger category of “perceptions of institutional quality.” The multifaceted aspect of quality has been studied by Pyvis and Chapman (2007) who found that students at Australian institutions (in Malaysia) viewed quality in terms of getting an “international education.” While two students in this study indicated they were seeking cultural knowledge or language skills in their American education, most students simply believed that the general quality of their American educational experience was superior to other options.

#### *Cost*

Of course, educational quality has a price. Doorbar (2001) found that Asian students were more conscious of cost than of they were of educational quality in their study abroad decisions. In this study, students appeared to be equally concerned, if not more concerned, about educational quality. Students’ search for high quality education was mediated by their ability to pay. In several cases students eliminated schools from their choice set on the basis of total cost, which the students usually described in terms of tuition (not living expenses). The elimination of the choices did not result in the perception that quality was being sacrificed, though in some cases preferences were sacrificed. The availability of a strong co-op program at TSU, which allowed students to reduce their parents’ payments, was very attractive to many of the TSU group. None of the students indicated that they were seeking an “inexpensive” education or school, but students at all three schools mentioned cost as an important concern. Several of the TSU students pointed out that they believed TSU was comparable in quality to some of the

nation's more prestigious science and engineering schools (such as Stanford, Cal Tech, Carnegie Mellon) but that they believed they could obtain an education of similar quality for a much lower cost at TSU.

As discussed above, parents had involvement in assessment of costs and the feasibility of attending schools based on cost. The parents' influence occurred after students had initiated interest in, or application to, particular institutions.

### *Security*

As described above, the participants sought two types of security. Ismael wanted a campus that was free from crime. This was also an important criterion for many of the parents, and in some cases parental concerns about certain campuses being "party schools" may have had some relation to this concept of security. A more common conception of security was the importance that many students, as well as their parents, placed on finding a school that was near relatives or other Pakistani friends. There was the assumption that the difficulties encountered in the experiences of living abroad and adjusting to college life would be buffered with the support of friends or family nearby. And while this need was expressed by many of the students, it was also important to some parents, which in turn affected the parental influence on choice of city, and in some cases the choice of college. No doubt the criteria for "social security" was closely related to the criteria that some of the students had for attending a college that offered social opportunities for interacting with high school friends, or interacting with a broader Pakistani community.

*Role Models*

Many students described friends, family members or classmates who served as role models and framed the students' initial concepts of college life and the benefits of attending college abroad. This concept is closely related to the cosmopolitan experiences described by many of the students, for as the students lived or traveled abroad it increased the likelihood that they would interact with individuals who had studied abroad and who would serve as role models. In a few cases, students' parents who had studied abroad themselves were the role models. The role models also influenced the students' personal aspirations and goals for attending college. And in a few cases the role models were also individuals who served as information sources for students.

The international student college choice literature has noted the general influence of parents, relatives, and friends who influence choice decisions. Their influence is typically assumed to be that of information sources (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2005), and, in the case of parents, they may have expectations that their children study abroad (Pimpa, 2005). Many of the participants in this study spoke in specific terms about persons who inspired them to consider going abroad, or who gave them confidence that they had the ability to succeed abroad. The importance of role models has been noted in the United States college choice literature (Litten, 1982), but it is absent from the international student literature. The influence of role models in the students' predisposition and college aspirations will be considered further in Chapter 7.

*Composite Description of the Students' Experience*

I will conclude this chapter with a composite description of the students' experience. It is the end product of the procedures prescribed by Moustakas (1994). This

description is based on the textural-structural descriptions of the participants' experiences. In writing the composite description, I used the invariant constituents that were common to most of the participants. If an invariant constituent did not appear in a participant's textural description, I examined the textural description to determine if it was in conflict with or inconsistent with the participant's experience. If no conflict or inconsistency were found, then the invariant constituent was included in the composite description in an effort to describe all of the common elements in the participants' perceptions of their experience.

#### *Composite Description*

For the Pakistani students at TSU, SU, and RSU, the college choice process is rooted in a strong predisposition to attend some type of college. This predisposition results largely from social and parental expectations. The predisposition is grounded in the understanding that college is necessary to maintain social status and to acquire advanced or professional skills. The decision to study in the United States is rooted in personal cosmopolitan experiences (such as living abroad or foreign travel) and the vicarious experiences of role models such as family members or friends who studied abroad. In spite of the strong predisposition toward college attendance, many students compress the search and choice phases of the process and most have small choice sets of three schools or less. Students choose not to study in Pakistan because they believe that an education abroad, and particularly in the United States, is of higher quality. They also believe that a degree from the United States, when compared to other countries, will result in higher paying jobs with higher levels of responsibilities. The search for quality is bounded by a concern about the overall cost of college. While students are not reliant on

financial aid, their decision is sensitive to cost. Students use a wide range of information sources to make their decisions. Information provided by family members or friends is more likely to affect a decision than information through other sources. When choosing among schools in the United States, students opt for locations that provide the security of nearby family or friends, and they tend to choose schools where friends are attending, or where there is a Pakistani community. As a result, students have limited concern for issues of cultural adaptation or separation from family and friends at home.

*Implications of the Composite Description*

The key elements of the composite description are: (1) students have a predisposition to attend college based on parental and social expectations; (2) decisions to study in the United States are rooted in cosmopolitan experiences; (3) students have role models for study abroad; (4) the search and choice phases of students' decisions are often compressed; (5) students have small choice sets; (6) students prefer the United States institutions because of their perceived quality; (7) choice sets are limited by cost; (8) information about schools provided by family and friends greatly influences decisions; (9) students seek security by enrolling in schools that are near relatives, or at schools where other Pakistanis are enrolled; and (10) as a result of the security offered by other Pakistanis, students do not express concern about cultural adaptation or separation from friends and family at home.

Each of the above elements of the composite description has particular ramifications for understanding the participants' perceptions of the college choice experience, which are discussed in the following section.

(1) *Students have a predisposition to attend college based on parental and social expectations.* Not attending college was not an option for these students. Although they were expected to attend college, for most students there was not an expectation to study abroad. Rather, studying abroad or in the United States was perceived as one among several options. The perceived advantages of study in the United States far outweighed any disadvantages.

(2) *Decisions to study in the United States are rooted in cosmopolitan experiences.* Although no data was collected on student SES or other economic factors, the participants in this study were privileged insofar as they had opportunities to travel abroad, work in international businesses, or have direct contact with individuals who had such opportunities. None of the participants expressed any discomfort with the notion of living a great distance from home or with adjusting to local culture.

(3) *Students have role models for study abroad.* These students had contacts with parents, relatives, or friends who had studied abroad. Interaction with these people inspired the participants, and gave the participants confidence that they too could succeed as a student overseas. If nothing else, the role models helped the participants see study abroad as a reasonable option for their educational goals.

(4) *Students prefer United States' institutions because of their perceived quality.* Almost all of the students believed that higher education in the United States was the best in the world, and that a degree from the United States would result in numerous benefits. The nature of the quality perceptions varied among the participants, as did the information sources on which their perceptions were based. For students at RSU, quality was

conceptualized in terms of post-graduation job opportunities. Students at TSU and SU were more likely to describe quality in terms of superior academic programs.

*(5) The search and choice phases of students' decisions are often compressed.* Students felt rushed to make a college decision for a variety of reasons, including the rigor of the high school curriculum, failure to become admitted to a desired local school, procrastination, or dissatisfaction with a previous college choice. As a result of feeling rushed, many participants wanted to make a college decision quickly and were attracted to institutions that processed applications quickly.

*(6) Students have small choice sets.* Choice sets were small because of the compressed time factor, or because of the complications involved in applying from overseas. Students at the most selective institution in the study, TSU, tended to have larger choice sets than the students at SU or RSU.

*(7) Choice sets are limited by cost.* Participants' families provided all of, or the vast majority of, funds for college. As a result, students sometimes had to limit their choice sets to institutions that they viewed as affordable. Many of the participants were aware of the financial burdens placed on their families as a result of their study in the United States.

*(8) Information about schools provided by family and friends greatly influences decisions.* Although students used many different information sources, the most frequently cited information source was personal contacts. In a world in which there are many different ways of getting information, students appeared to trust information shared by friends or relatives more than information from official sources.



(9) *Students seek security by enrolling in schools that are near relatives, or at schools where other Pakistanis are enrolled.* Students frequently pointed to proximity to relatives as the deciding factor in their college choice. Parents were especially eager that their children enroll at schools near relatives. These decisions were made in an effort to avoid social or personal problems that might result from loneliness.

(10) *Students are not concerned about cultural adaptation or separation from friends and family at home.* Students expressed confidence in their ability to adapt to academic life and culture in the United States, perhaps as a result of the security that resulted from interaction with relatives and friends. Rarely did they express doubts about their ability to succeed in their academic programs.

## Chapter 7

### **Fitting the Themes and Invariant Constituents to Theoretical Models**

In this chapter I examine the relationships between the findings discussed in the previous chapter and the theories and theoretical models, considered in Chapter 3, that have been used to conceptualize college choice experiences.

#### Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith's Three-Phase Model

The phases and factors described by Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) are useful in organizing and conceptualizing the data. Several of the invariant constituents of the students' experiences can be easily categorized using the three phases. Table 17 categorizes the primary themes and invariant constituents under the predisposition, search, and choice phases.

The three-phase model is very helpful with respect to the Pakistani students in its conceptualization of a predisposition phase. All the students interviewed viewed college as a normative experience. The students themselves expected to attend college. They believed that their parents expected them to attend college. They also believed that there were social expectations for them to attend college (i.e., the students' peers and others in the students' social communities expected that they would attend). Many of the students had cosmopolitan experiences which had prepared and conditioned them to the idea of study abroad. Many had friends or relatives who had studied abroad and served as a role

Table 17

*Invariant Constituents and their Fit with the Three Phase College Choice Model*

(Themes indicated in boldface type)

Predisposition	Search	Choice
<b>Background</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>Characteristics:</b>	<b>Characteristics:</b>	<b>Characteristics:</b>
Parental involvement	Postsecondary educational experiences	Parental involvement
Social expectations	Parental involvement	<b>Aspirations:</b>
Cosmopolitan experiences	<b>Aspirations:</b>	Employment
Role Models	Employment	Professional credential
<b>Aspirations:</b>	Life training	U.S. culture/English language
Employment	Professional credential	Social freedom
Status	Study in the U.S.	Serve Pakistan
	<b>Choice Criteria:</b>	<b>Choice Criteria:</b>
	Perceptions of Institutional quality	Closed Campus
	<b>Security:</b>	Cost
	Admissions requirements	Speed of acceptance
	Cost	Not a party school
	Social opportunities	Speed of acceptance
	<b>Choice Set:</b>	Security
	Size of choice set	Social opportunities
	Preferred Pakistan	Communication with school staff
	Considered Pakistan	<b>Information Sources:</b>
	No interest in Pakistan	Friends
	Considered U.S. only	Relatives
	Considered other nations	Communications with Admissions or international staff
	<b>Information Sources:</b>	<b>Search Strategies:</b>
	Friends	Likelihood of visa
	High school counselor	Rushed process
	Relatives	Choosing first admission
	School web site	
	Web index	
	U.S. News	
	Advising center	
	School brochure	
	College fair	
	<b>Search Strategies:</b>	
	Wait for A-levels	
	Friends apply together	

models for the experience. All of the students had expressed their college experience in terms of some goals (e.g., career, learning, status) that could not likely be achieved apart from attending college. These factors resulted in a strong predisposition to attend college, and in some cases to study overseas. They were so strong that only two participants in the study had ever entertained any thought of *not* attending college, and they had never given those thoughts very serious consideration.

The three-phase model's search and choice phases fit with some of the themes and invariant constituents, but in many cases there is some blurring of the boundaries between search and choice. Under the information sources theme, friends and relatives were involved in helping students search for, or identify, colleges in the United States. Parents assisted in this as well, but their influence tended more toward helping their children identify criteria (such as cost or proximity to relatives) that guided the search. The students themselves tended to gather information about admission requirements that resulted in the development of a choice set—a process characteristic of the search phase. Cost became a big factor, as several students (or their parents) ruled out schools as too costly, or they reasoned that they were unlikely to get work or co-op opportunities. Some students ruled out colleges that they understood to be party schools. For some students who viewed their decision as a rushed process, speed of acceptance was an important factor. Because they felt rushed, they wanted to enroll in a school as soon as possible. In other cases, once certain students were accepted to a particular college, they focused their attention on the possibility of actually attending that school. Over time they became more aware of the school's advantages, and this led them to become more comfortable with the notion of attending. It was also in the choice or final stages of the decision process that

students' goal of finding good social opportunities (with friends or other Pakistanis) became evident (although this constituent was also related to the information that friends provided in the search phase). Finally, the students who gathered information by communicating with the admissions or international staff of the college did so in the choice phase.

Some aspects of the students' experiences do not fit well with the three-phase model. I have already described above the blurring of boundaries between the search and choice phases. In some cases the boundaries were blurred because of the rushed process constituent (usually self-imposed) that was indicated by some students who expressed a desire to rush their search so that they could move forward with their education. Five students explicitly expressed that their search process was rushed, and that delay in attending college would result in wasting time. For these students, it could be said that their choice and search phases were compressed to such an extent that there were no clear boundaries between the two phases. For other students, there was no evidence to suggest that they perceived a distinct search and choice phase. This rushed time phenomenon may have also led to small choice sets. Of the two students who applied to only one school, Pervez's experience was characterized by rushed time.

These blurred boundaries between the phases may be the result of the rigorous A-level exams that most of the students completed before attending college. It may be that the difficulty of those exams left the students with little time to tend to college decisions. For the students who had applied to schools in Pakistan, they were also required to sit for exams for those schools as a part of the application process. It may be that these exam schedules prevented many students from taking the time to consider colleges in the way

that is customary for American students, whose experiences are the basis for the three-phase model. Another possible explanation for the blurring of the boundaries between phases is geography. The American tradition of making college visits was obviously impractical for these students. For that matter, Razia, the SU student who attended a community college in the same city in which SU is located, did not visit SU's campus until after she had been admitted. If, by chance, the boundaries between the search and choice phases for American students are marked by college visits, then no such boundary would exist for most of the participants in this study.

#### The Kotler and Fox Model

Kotler and Fox (1985) proposed a seven-stage model that pertained to the needs of admissions specialists who needed to frame and sequence marketing activities. The stages are: (a) life options (college, trade school, military service, employment); (b) institutional type (large or small, public or private); (c) a total set of institutions; (d) an awareness set; (e) a consideration set; (f) a choice set; and (g) a final decision. Two features of the Kotler and Fox model are relevant to the findings of this study. First, the stage of considering life options may appear irrelevant to the students in this study, which is after all about college choice. But five of the students did report that they had given some (although limited) thought to joining the military or going into business. Either the students or their parents ultimately decided that college attendance was a better choice than the alternatives. Second, Kotler and Fox's "awareness set" stage implies that students have to have some ways of becoming aware of particular colleges. The participants in this study became aware of colleges in several ways (see Theme V, *Information Sources*). Absent from these themes are direct mail, targeted e-mail, or

general or targeted media. Without these information sources, the sources used by the students became all the more important in terms of the students gaining awareness of particular schools. The fact that many of the students learned about schools from friends, relatives, and high school counselors shows the power of these human resources in helping students build an awareness set. These human resources were more important than more traditional and formal media, such as listings on Internet indexes, participation in college fairs, or advice from advising agencies.

#### Rational Choice Theory and Human Capital Theory

Rational choice theory is used to build political and economic models that are based on the assumptions that individuals understand their choices, understand the outcomes of those choices, and act in such a way as to maximize their benefits. Human capital theory is based on rational choice theory, and it is based on the notion that people make choices with a view toward future benefits. College choice, like other investments, is a function of individuals examining the costs of furthering their education and determining that those costs will be returned in the form of increased future earnings or other benefits (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1993).

Most of the students recognized the significant financial cost that their parents had assumed. Few, however, tried to *explain or justify the cost in terms* of particular benefits or outcomes. Most of the students made no attempt to make claims about what was being purchased. They viewed their college experience as expensive and that they were grateful that their parents were willing to pay. A few did frame the cost in terms of some expected benefit. Eisa and Sharhan expressed the job and professional goals that motivated their decision to study in the United States. Others believed that they were purchasing an

education of higher quality than they might find in Pakistan or in other countries, or even of higher quality than could be found at other institutions in the United States. But for most of the students, their “purchase of quality” did not have any explicit connection to a benefit. For most, the purchase of quality was connected to enhanced job prospects after earning a degree. But the point here is that the students did not directly link the cost of their education to a goal or hope of *increased earnings* upon completion of their degree. Two TSU students did say that they would need to get a good job in the United States after graduation so that they could repay loans. Getting a good job was not the goal of their education, but it was a way to justify the overall investment that had been made in their education. This was the closest any student came to tying the cost of education with an expected or desired benefit.

Implicit in this notion of “purchase of quality” was the view that the students would be able to benefit from advantageous careers in the future. The benefit was also associated with non-pecuniary costs, such as separation and distance from family or friends. Razia, who was getting an accounting degree, perceived the value of her education in terms of the acquired knowledge that would serve her throughout her life, particularly as a wife and mother. So in this sense, human capital and rationale choice theories help provide at least some explanation for some student perceptions of their investment and the expected benefits from that investment. But none of the students described the economic cost of their education as reasonable or suitable in terms of expected benefits. A few did say that they believed the sacrifices of being separated from family and friends were fair exchanges for the benefit of a superior education, and a few assumed that there would be enhanced job opportunities upon completion of their



degrees. Nevertheless, these theories had little power to explain or even conceptualize the choices the students were making. In the case of the financial cost of college, availability of funds, either through parents or through co-op programs, influenced choices more than the expected benefits of those choices.

There are two areas in which human capital theory does seem to have application to the findings in this study. First, human capital theory may account for the gender imbalance in this study's sample. There are no data sets available that would point to whether this sample was representative of the overall Pakistani undergraduate population in the United States, but my personal observation is that very few Pakistani women come to the United States as undergraduates. Fazia recognized that the opportunity to study in the United States was unusual for Pakistani women, and she was grateful to her parents for allowing her to study abroad, and that she was experiencing an opportunity afforded to very few Pakistani women. Razia spoke of her experience in contrast to female undergraduate friends in Pakistan who were "in the wait of getting married." It may be that many families are unwilling to invest in their daughters' education, assuming that such an investment will have limited returns in a society in which women may have few opportunities for employment or career advancement.

The second application of human capital theory relates to immigration. Human capital theory posits that people with greater abilities are more likely to migrate for educational purposes, their incentive being the likelihood of higher marginal rates of return on their educational investment (Mincer, 1993). This study did not account for different student abilities. But one can assume that all of the students, by virtue of their admission to academic programs in the United States, were of high ability, at least

relative to the general population of Pakistan. But it would seem that this high ability may also be related to the students' general socioeconomic status and a function of their cosmopolitan experiences. This concept is best understood not by human capital theory but by status attainment theory.

#### Status Attainment Theory

The concepts of cultural capital, social capital, and habitus as described status attainment theory provide several useful ways of conceptualizing some aspects of the students' experiences. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) proposed that individuals attain social status through the transfer or acquisition of certain "assets," namely cultural and social capital. Cultural capital has three forms: knowledge or skills, artifacts (such as books, recordings, homes) and academic degrees. The aspirations theme fits well within the concept of cultural capital. Students in the study were obviously seeking to acquire knowledge and skills, along with academic degrees. Some of the students perceived their college experience in terms of the job skills that they were gaining that would ultimately lead to some professional credential or career skill. Others expressed less of a career orientation, but wanted knowledge that could be obtained in a college setting. Others saw benefits in learning at a college located in the United States, the center of world economic power. Some expressed the desire to learn the language and culture of that economic power. Several other students expressed the value of an American degree in the job market in Pakistan or in parts of the Middle East.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is powerful in that it incorporates all of the above-mentioned constituents in the student aspirations theme. What is not so clear is the concept's ability to explain *why* the students sought an American education, or even a

foreign education. While the acquisition of cultural capital might result in maintaining or increasing status for all of the participants in the study, only Eisa and Omar directly expressed a desire for the respect and prestige that they hoped would result from their educational experience. Other students expressed their reasons for studying in the United States as an opportunity to improve their job prospects. Others described their desire for professional work. Of course all of the students could have increased their cultural capital in other ways, and one might assume that studying in the United States is an effort to acquire more cultural capital than could be acquired in other places, and particularly in Pakistan.

Bourdieu's concept of social capital also has considerable value in conceptualizing some student choices that the students made, and their expressed rationale for those choices. Note that under the constituent *security* are subcategories of family and friends. The students expressed their need for social support while pursuing their degrees in a foreign land. The idea of traveling abroad and studying in a new culture was never expressed as extraordinary or unusual, and in fact the students did not express concerns about separation from family or cultural adaptation. But for many of the students, the very idea of living in a place where they would be separated from other Pakistanis, either friends or relatives, was intolerable. A closely related constituent was social opportunity. For some of the students, finding a school with a Pakistani social life, or finding a school where friends were already studying was an important criterion. In Bourdieu's terms, this desire for security via a Pakistani community or the desire for a Pakistani social setting was an expression of the value the students placed on social capital. In some cases, students wanted to maintain their social networks by attending

schools where friends were already attending. In other cases, students or their parents wanted to be sure that there were relatives nearby, or that there was a Pakistani community at their school. Clearly students valued networks of friends and human contacts and they did not want to pursue their studies outside of a Pakistani community. Put another way, students were willing to pay a high cost for their American degrees, in terms of finance, separation from family and from their home surroundings. But they were not willing to forego their primary social capital--the network of Pakistani friends and contacts--for their college degrees.

Had the students chosen to study in Pakistan, they would have likely been extending their existing social capital by using their college experiences to add to their existing networks of friends and contacts. In coming to the United States, these students were loosening ties with some friends and relatives, which was perhaps a worthwhile sacrifice in light of the perceived utility of an American degree. Even those students who expressed interest in remaining in the country after graduation had strong ties to other Pakistanis in their college or community.

Perhaps the most powerful function of social capital in explaining the choices made by the students is the importance of family members and friends who informed the students about college choices. In some cases the students would have had no knowledge of the college they chose, or of others in their choice set, apart from the information they received from family and friends. The transmission of this information via social and familial networks is a prime example of the powerful effects of an individual's social capital. Most of the students would have been unlikely to study in the United States without the resources offered by their social capital. In many other cases, apart from their

large amounts of social capital, students would have had insufficient information to make good choices about study in the United States. Or, at the very least, they would have had to rely on information sources such as school brochures, web sites, or communications with school personnel – all sources which students may have deemed less valid and reliable than their personal social networks or family networks. In the terminology of Kotler and Fox (1985), social capital contributed to the awareness sets of these students.

Given the importance of social capital in the student's choice processes, it should be pointed out that each student's given network of family, friends, and other contacts would, by definition, limit the information available to the student. Thus, the student who had a large network of contacts, or who had experience or knowledge of a large number of schools, had more of this type of information than did students with a smaller or less diverse network. In comparing the students at TSU, SU, and RSU, the students attending TSU spoke of broader networks of contacts, and thus more social capital, than the students who attended both SU and RSU. In a few of the RSU cases, the search process was clearly limited due to the limited information available to the student's immediate family or close friends. One possibility here is that there is a relationship between a student's academic ability and her social capital (Bers, 2005; McDonough, 1997a). The direction of causality is uncertain. But it is certain that the TSU students exhibited the larger choice sets and they reported a larger circle of individuals who shared information about institutions in the U.S.

There is an additional observation about the importance of social capital vis à vis the information that was available to these students via the Internet. The web offers individuals easy and cost-effective access to a vast amount of information about higher

education. One can imagine that students who have no access to the web are at a distinct disadvantage. In this sense the Internet serves as a means of building knowledge or as a mechanism for acquiring cultural capital. But given the volume of information available to prospective students on the web, and given the limitations of students doing a campus visit or having personal contact with college personnel, the power of social capital becomes multiplied. Students seeking to verify information on the web or seeking to find what life might *really* be like on a particular campus are going to rely on information shared by people they know and trust. In this sense, given the ubiquity of college information available, it may be possible that students perceive the information shared by friends as especially useful and reliable, thereby resulting in an increase in the power of social capital in the college choice process.

The third primary construct of Bourdieu's status attainment theory is habitus, which is the individual's perception of his or her social and cultural capital. In this study, the intersection of cultural capital and social capital was the strong and pervasive view among the students that not attending college was not a viable option. Students reported that it was expected that they attend some sort of college, with the expectations coming from their parents and from the general social group in which they lived. Thus an academic degree, which was a boost to an individual's cultural capital, intersected with the individual's relationships with others in his community and family--the individual's social capital. Whether the students' perceptions that college attendance was in fact mandatory is not the point here. The point is that the students perceived this to be true, which is an indication of the habitus that each individual occupied. And in each student's perception, because he or she was expected to attend college, enrollment at any college

was just meeting expectations – or in terms of status attainment, it was just a way of maintaining the status that family and friends had already attributed to them. In some cases the choice to study abroad, and in the United States, may have been a way of increasing status by going above and beyond mere college attendance. Note that Fazia and Rizwan were raised with the expectation that they would study in the United States and thus their study at TSU was just a means of maintaining status. But for Razia, who had studied for a year in Pakistan and found the experience unsatisfactory, it is possible that she was increasing her status by enrolling in the United States.

Habitus was also indicated by the effects of role models. Whether the role models were friends, classmates, relatives, or just someone a student had heard about, they served to form a perception in the minds of the students that studying abroad was feasible in terms of finances, cultural adaptation, and academic ability. The role models served to create a “study in the United States” category in the minds of the students. It is possible that without such a category the students would not have considered study in the United States, or if they did consider it, they might not have had any basis for judging its feasibility. In addition to the role models, other persons contributed to habitus. The parents of Rizwan, Fazia, Ismael, and no doubt others made such contributions. Riaz, Ali, and Sharhan had high school counselors who contributed to habitus. And while most often habitus is viewed as a factor that limits or bounds a person’s choices, for many of the students, their individual habitus included persons that influenced them to think more broadly about education, and specifically about opening their mind to consider study abroad.

### Network Theory

Network theorists examine the nature and intensity of individual and organizational interactions in large-scale situations (Mitchell, 1974). Because these interactions are patterned, they can therefore be viewed as networks (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Network analysis looks at interactions between nations, and between people and organizations, and between people. Network theorists seek to recognize the patterns of interaction, and then explain those interactions in terms of various phenomena. They also look at large scale data sets that can be analyzed for patterns. But network theory can also be applied to interactions between individuals. For most of the students in this study, their choice sets and decisions were informed largely through informal interactions with friends and relatives, and in some cases alumni of the school they attended. This was especially true of students at RSU.

Among the four students who reported that they did not consider colleges in Pakistan, three (Ali, Pervez, and Ismael) had completed their high school degrees outside of Pakistan. The fathers of these three were employed in the Gulf Arab states. The fourth student who did not consider Pakistan was Rizwan, whose father had been educated in the United States. Network theory would suggest that these students were also connected to the patterns of social and business interaction in which their fathers were involved. Those patterns would likely push the idea of study abroad among these students. But network theory does not account entirely for the students not being interested in Pakistan, because the fathers (and their children) had maintained social and family ties with Pakistan.



### Regionalism

Regionalism assumes that there are some specific shared activities among nations or organizations and individuals within a group of nations. Instead of viewing flows of students *across* national or geographic boundaries, researchers view flows of students within regions. Those regions are composed of economic, political, and social phenomena (Skilbeck & Connell, 1996). Regionalism allows researchers to look at a range of options for “connectedness” and incorporate those options into better understanding student mobility. And while the study abroad patterns of a large group of Pakistanis may very well be conceptualized by regional associations, there was no such pattern in the choice processes and rationale that were described by the students. The students in this study did not make their decisions on the basis of particular ties to businesses or other organizations. It may be possible to say that the career aspirations of the students in this study are in fact reflective of regionalism, because several suggested that they had career interests that would involve using their skills in multinational settings. But they did not refer to existing relationships or contacts that affected their choices. Another possibility is that the students’ socioeconomic status and cosmopolitan experience gave them some connection with businesses or organizations in the United States, though there was no evidence of this. This would assume that these students were more “citizens of the world” than they were citizens of Pakistan. But there was no evidence from the research to suggest this.

### Immigration Theory

Some economists suggest that individuals seek to add to their human capital by migrating to locations where they will reap the highest returns on their investment

(Massey et al., 1993). More recently, theorists have suggested that immigration is the product of a family (organizational) decision designed to reduce economic risks to the family (Massey, et al., 1993, Stark & Bloom, 1985). In the case of this study, none of the students that I interviewed expressed any interest or goal of immigrating to the United States. And there was no suggestion that the decision to come to this country was based on reducing economic risks to their family.

Two of the students expressed concern that they would need to work in a high wage country in order to recoup their educational investment. For these two, immigration might be a logical consequence of a future decision to remain in the U.S. for employment purposes. One might guess that many of the students would eventually immigrate. But there was nothing in the responses of these students that suggested that their decision to study in the U.S. was the result of a desire to immigrate.

One aspect of students' experience can be accounted for by immigration theory, and that is the tendency to seek colleges in communities in which there was security or social opportunities. The students (or their parents) frequently made college decisions that offered emotional security that resulted from proximity to family, or social opportunities that resulted from proximity to friends and other Pakistanis. It is possible to view these behaviors as hedges against the risk of the student suffering from homesickness or some other problem which would result in having to drop out of college or, worse, becoming emotionally dysfunctional. Put in economic terms, either case would risk wasting the significant investments that families were making in their children's education. Decisions that minimized this risk serve as a hedge against loss of the families' investments.

### Utility of the Theories and Models

The decision made by a student to pursue education outside one's home country involves complex social, familial, psychological, academic, cultural and economic phenomena. Needless to say, no single theory or model has been able to account for all of the factors involved in the college choice process. The discussion in this chapter has pointed to theories which are applicable to the experiences of the students in this study. The following chapter will help explain how further research can fill in theoretical gaps that will allow for a more complete theoretical basis for understanding the college choices of Pakistanis as well as international students in general.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Limitations, Future Research, and Implications for Policy**

In this chapter I will provide an overview of the study and its general findings, and then consider those findings in the context of previous research. After discussing limitations of the findings, I will then pose suggestions for future research. The chapter will conclude with the implications of the findings for policy makers, first for enrollment management personnel at institutions, and then for those who make or influence policy on international students in the United States.

#### Overview of the Study and its Findings

The purpose of this study is to better understand the college choice experience of Pakistanis who have chosen to enroll as undergraduates at American universities. The context for this study includes the increasingly competitive global environment for recruiting and attracting foreign students. Most of the literature on foreign student mobility has examined student flows in the aggregate, and international student college choice studies have tended to examine the behaviors and experiences of foreign students as a group, assuming that different national, social, or ethnic groups behave in similar ways. Enrollment management personnel and others have had little research to guide international recruitment efforts. This study seeks to provide some guidance by

answering the following primary research question: How do Pakistani students decide to study in the United States? The study's sub-questions, and their answers, are as follows:

(a) What processes and strategies do the students use to choose to study abroad and to select a college? Are the strategies and processes for choosing to study abroad the same as for selecting a college? Selecting a destination country or area? Students' decisions to study in the United States are rooted in their cosmopolitan experiences. Students tend to compress the search and choice phases of the process, and they tend to have small choice sets. There is no clear sequencing of the choice (e.g. first choosing a nation, then choosing a city). The students described their decisions as a fluid interplay between consideration of countries and institutions

(b) What, and who, influences the students? Information about schools provided by family members and friends greatly influences decisions. Students use many information sources, but the most frequently cited information source is personal contacts. Many students also have role models who previously studied abroad and who give the students confidence that they too can succeed abroad.

(c) What is the cultural context for the above influences? The students have a predisposition to attend college based on parental and social expectations. Students also seek security by enrolling in schools that are near relatives, or where other Pakistanis are enrolled.

(d) What meanings and understandings do the students themselves have regarding their decisions to study in the United States? Students prefer study in the United States because of the perception that American universities are of the highest quality. They are confident

of their decisions and do not express concerns about cultural adaptation or separation from friends and family at home.

(e) How do the college choice experiences of the students who attend different types of institutions compare? Students attending more selective institutions are likely to have larger choice sets, and they are more likely to have role models for study abroad.

Students at less selective institutions are more likely to anticipate enhanced job opportunities as a result of studying in the United States.

### Findings

For the 18 Pakistani students at the three institutions, the college choice process was rooted in a strong predisposition to attend some type of college. Parents expected their children to attend college, and in a few cases parents expected their children to study abroad. The predisposition is grounded on the understanding that college is necessary to maintain social status and to maintain or improve economic status. The students also perceived that other relatives and friends expected them to attend college, and in several cases, relatives, friends, or other personal contacts served as role models for study abroad. None of the students gave serious consideration to alternatives to college attendance. Many of the students had cosmopolitan experiences, such as living or traveling abroad, or attending international high schools. These experiences resulted in awareness of opportunities for study abroad.

For the most part, students were self-directed in their college search, though in a few cases parents were significantly involved. In most cases the students themselves initiated the search for study abroad and then sought parental approval at some point in the search or choice process.

In spite of their strong predisposition toward college attendance, six students rushed their college search, which resulted in compressing the search and choice phases of the process. In a few cases, the rushed process was the result of dissatisfaction with schools in Pakistan or abroad, or the result of not being admitted to a desired school in Pakistan. More commonly, students rushed the search because of the demands of time and attention required to pass A-level exams. Most students had small choice sets of three schools or less. As students approached a final decision about where to attend, parents, who were particularly concerned for the physical and emotional security of their children, became more involved in the process. The parents tended to encourage their children to choose universities that were near family members.

Many students were aware of the difficulties of getting a student visa to the United States. This was true even of students who arrived pre 9/11. But their perception of the quality of education trumped their fears about being rejected for a visa.

#### *College Choice Criteria*

Students chose not to study in Pakistan, or in other countries, because they believed that an education abroad was of higher quality. They considered schools in the United Kingdom, and to a lesser degree Canada or Singapore. A few students considered studying in schools in the Middle East (U.A.E., Turkey, Cyprus). For the most part they tended to consider study at specific schools, as opposed to specific countries. As they considered schools around the world, they were attracted to the United States because of their belief that the United States had the highest academic standards. Many believed that a degree from the United States would result in better career prospects.

The search for a quality education was bounded by a concern about the overall cost of college. The decision process was sensitive to cost issues, and students tended to rule out colleges that they considered too expensive. They were also attracted to co-op or other student employment opportunities. Students were also attracted to schools that could process applications quickly, and schools that did not require completion of A-level examinations.

When choosing among schools in the United States, students frequently opted for schools that provided the security of nearby family or friends. Parents were particularly concerned that their children find schools that were close to relatives. Students also valued schools where friends were attending, or where there was already a Pakistani community. Apart from the desire to study near family or friends, students expressed little concern about adapting to American culture or dealing with anxiety regarding separation from family and friends at home.

#### *Information Sources*

Friends or relatives in the United States were more likely than parents to influence the search process. Friends served as information sources about colleges. In some cases friends chose to apply to school together, or students chose colleges because they knew friends were enrolled there. In both cases students seemed to be looking for ways to buffer the potential hardships of separation from family and culture that would result from their experience in the United States. Parents became more influential in the search process when students had to make a final decision about which school to attend, and as a point of decision neared, factors of cost and security became increasingly important.



Students used a wide range of information sources to make their decisions. Information provided by family members or friends was more likely to affect a decision than information from other sources. The information shared by family or friends was particularly valuable because most students had no opportunities to make a campus visit and had limited opportunities for personal communication with campus personnel. Students who had opportunities to communicate with admissions staff or international office staff described those communications as helpful. Few students reported using web indexes, college fairs, or advising agencies. In general, the students made use of school web pages, but there was little use of printed brochures or catalogs.

*Variations in Choice Processes by Institutional Type*

For the most part, the students at the three institutions shared similar college choice experiences. There were some tendencies associated with students at particular institutions. The three institutions and their Carnegie classifications were Technological State University (TSU, a Doctoral Intensive, institution, RU VH), State University (SU, a Doctoral Extensive institution, RU H), and Regional State University (RSU, a Masters Comprehensive institution, Masters-L).

Students at TSU were more likely to have larger choice sets than students at SU or RSU. TSU had highly competitive admission standards. It is likely that TSU students were uncertain about whether they would be admitted to TSU (or any of the highly competitive schools to which they applied) and were more likely than the RSU or SU students to “hedge their application bets” by applying to multiple schools.

TSU students were also more likely to have role models (parents, relatives, school friends) who had previously studied in the United States. This again may have been

linked to their strong academic ability. It certainly points to the possibility that the TSU students had significant habitus that supported their college goals and ambitions. The TSU students also were more frequent in their references to *U.S. News* rankings in their discussions of quality and their choice criteria.

The students at TSU did not refer to their college experience as a means for improved job prospects, as did students at RSU, and to a lesser degree, at SU. This may have been because TSU students were pursuing technical degrees (e.g., electrical engineering, computer science) and assumed that they would find lucrative employment or move on to graduate school after college. In contrast, many of the RSU students referred to their college experience in the United States as something that would open up many job opportunities, with enhanced salaries, upon completion of their degrees.

In contrast to the TSU students, students at RSU and SU had small choice sets. Several of the RSU students did not apply to any other schools, and they were more likely to have had some previous college study. One of the SU students had been at a community college and a school in Pakistan before transferring to SU. Several of the RSU students had previous college experience abroad before coming to RSU. Many of the RSU and SU students described the importance of contact with staff of the admissions office or international office prior to admission. This contact was usually by e-mail but it also occurred via phone. In that the Pakistani students relied on persons (friends, relatives and others) for much of their information about colleges, they seemed to be grateful for personal contact with the institution in the decision making process. Several TSU students were critical of the lack of opportunities to communicate with school personnel.

### Findings Compared to Previous Literature

Previous research on the college choice experiences of international students has pointed to the following issues related to students' decisions:

(a) *Access*. Students seek opportunities abroad when there are limited opportunities at home (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Noorani, & Abolghasem, 1980).

(b) *Information*. Students make use of a wide range of information sources, including family and friends, school-provided literature, recruiting personnel and advisors, and the Internet (Pimpa, 2005; Waters, 1992, Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). Course descriptions, whether provided by the institution or other sources, are particularly useful (Joseph & Joseph, 2000).

(c) *Quality*. Students seek the best educational quality (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Zikopoulos and Barber, 1986), whether that is viewed in terms of subsequent career or immigration opportunities (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996, Pyvis & Chapman, 2007), facilities (Joseph & Joseph, 2000), or institutional reputation or standards (Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Kim, 2001; Wu, 1989), or curricular design (Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Joseph & Joseph, 2000)

(d) *Cost*. Students are sensitive to a range of cost issues apart from and including tuition (Doorbar, 2001; Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Kim, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wang, 1998; Waters, 1992).

(e) *Culture*. Some students seek to expand their knowledge by living and learning in new cultures (Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996, Pyvis & Chapman 2007).

(f) *Location and governance.* Some students prefer institutions in major urban areas (Wu, 1989) and in the United States (Kemp, Madden, & Simpson, 1998). Some prefer public institutions (Wu, 1989).

Many of the findings of this study are consistent with previous research. This study contributes to the literature by reinforcing previous findings, and by providing some context and specificity to the findings of previous studies. I will summarize the contributions of this study by looking at several key components of the decision to study abroad: (a) seeking educational quality; (b) the role of parents, relatives, and friends; (c) the use of information sources; (d) cost; and (e) the sequence of decisions in studying abroad.

#### *Seeking Educational Quality*

This study is consistent with previous research that indicates that students report academic quality as a very important reason for their decision to study abroad (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Noorani & Abolghasem, 1980; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). Students in this study conceived of quality in terms of institutional reputation, specific academic offerings (major), post-graduation opportunities, or in comparison to education offered in Pakistan or other countries. Results from this study indicated a pervasive view that the quality of education in the United States was superior to any other nation. Whether or not institutional quality should be portrayed in terms of future job prospects (Joseph & Joseph, 2000) may depend on institutional type, as this study showed that the students at RSU were distinct in their interest in post-graduation job opportunities.

This study adds to the understanding of educational quality by showing that students' perceptions of quality are based on rankings (primarily those in editions of *U.S. News and World Report*) and on informal information shared through personal networks of family, friends, and others, such as high school counselors or teachers. For the students in this study, those at RSU tended to conceptualize quality in terms of post-graduation job opportunities, which is consistent with previous findings (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996, Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Those at SU and TSU tended to conceptualize quality in terms of their majors, but they did not refer to specific courses or design of the curriculum as did students in previous studies (Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Joseph & Joseph, 2000).

Seldom were student judgments about educational quality related to specific institutional or curricular characteristics. That is, students did not speak about things such as faculty qualifications or acceptance rates of graduates into graduate or professional programs. Assumptions of institutional quality were connected to the students' assumptions about overall educational quality in the United States.

Several students at RSU indicated that they valued their education in the United States because of the opportunity to learn in the language and culture of the world's leading nation for business and technology. Their view is similar to that of the Malaysian students in Pyvis and Chapman's (2007) study who wanted an Australian degree because they wanted to be connected to the Australian and English-speaking community of international commerce. This leads to a broader question regarding the students for further study: Do students perceive a nation's educational quality in terms of academic issues (e.g., institutional characteristics, particular programs of study, research capacity),

or do they associate the quality of education with a nation's general economic or technological capacity?

*The Role of Parents, Relatives, and Friends*

Previous researchers have pointed out the importance of parents and relatives in setting expectations for study abroad (Pimpa, 2005; Wang, 1998), and the importance of relatives and friends in providing students with information about study abroad (Waters, 1992; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). This study points to four additional functions in the college choice process that involves parents, relatives, and friends. First, the cosmopolitan experiences of these students were a function of their relationship with their parents. Students who had traveled abroad, lived abroad, or who had attended international schools did so with the support and direction of their parents. Parents were the providers of the cosmopolitan experiences, which in turn resulted in a predisposition for study abroad. Second, parents, relatives, or classmates served as role models for study abroad. Third, students sought schools that offered some type of emotional security, which parents often desired and which friends or relatives provided. Fourth, students sought schools that offered opportunities to socialize with other Pakistanis, who in some cases were friends whom students had known prior to college.

These many functions in the students' choice process point to a broad question: were the students products of family and social networks which both pushed and pulled them to study abroad in general, and to the United States or specific institutions in particular? Cummings (1984) and McMahon (1992) showed that flows of students tend to follow the economic linkages of the sending and host nations. Many of these students' decisions were influenced by family and social connections. Many had parents who

worked out of Pakistan and relatives who were working in the United States. It could well be that the family and social connections are part of a larger phenomenon that is best described as socioeconomic status, and like students of high socioeconomic status in the United States who are more likely to attend elite institutions (Hearn, 1984; Zemsky & Oedel, 1983), the socioeconomic status of the Pakistanis in this study resulted in an increased likelihood for study abroad. Of course this assumes that all three schools in this study are elite institutions, at least from the perspective of the Pakistani population.

#### *Use of Information Sources*

This study points out the importance of relatives or friends as information sources, as opposed to official information sources such as school brochures or web sites. This finding is consistent with previous research (Pimpa, 2005, Wang 1998, Waters, 1992, Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). In this study, however, relatives and friends appear to have more influence than has been reported previously. In this study, students frequently mentioned relatives and friends as information sources, and in many cases their actions in the choice stage of the decision were strongly influenced by relatives or friends.

As to why family and friends were so important, there are several possible explanations. For one, the information provided by friends and relatives is magnified in importance when students have little chance for their own personal observations, either through campus visits or interactions with institutional officials. Another possible explanation is that students are eager for any personal source of information, which would explain why students at RSU were pleased with their e-mail and telephone interaction with RSU personnel, and why TSU students were displeased with the lack of such communication. It may also be that the sheer amount of information on the Internet

increases the demands on students to sort through the information, and as a result, students put more reliance on personal sources of information. Or, it may simply be that Pakistani culture values personal communication.

#### *Cost*

This study is also consistent with previous research that points to cost factors as very influential in students' decisions. Students will seek opportunities which are cost-effective, and students are aware of the many issues that affect cost, including cost of living and employment opportunities (Doorbar, 2001; Joseph & Joseph, 2000; Kim, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wang, 1998; Waters, 1992). This study adds to the literature by showing that cost factors become important as students develop their choice sets and as final decisions are being made. For the students in this study, issues of cost were not important early on in the choice process. This study's findings appear to be inconsistent with those of Doorbar (2001), who reported that cost was more important than quality in the decisions made by Asian students.

#### *Sequence of Decision to Study Abroad*

Previous marketing-oriented research (Doorbar, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa 2005) has assumed a sequence of decisions: students first decide to go abroad, then they select a country, and they then seek an institution. The findings of this study indicate no comparable sequence. Students in this study indicated a clear preference to study in the United States, based on their broad perception of overall educational quality. But apart from this preference, there was no clear sequencing of the decision, and while stating a preference to study in the United States, many of the students considered schools in Pakistan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Canada very late into their



decision process. What is clear is that student awareness and familiarity with institutions interacted with their general awareness of particular nations or cities, and that awareness was usually the result of friends or family members.

#### Limitations of the Research

Several limitations related to the design of this study were discussed in Chapter 4. There are some additional limitations to the findings of this study. Most important, this study only considered Pakistani undergraduates in the United States. While one could assume that some findings would be applicable to most or all internationals, one of the major concerns described at the outset of this study is that there is no evidence to suggest that one cultural or national group behaves similarly to other groups, or to international students as a whole. Individuals who have interests in student mobility and college choice behaviors of other groups of students might surmise that there are other nations with cultures and economies that bear *some* similarity to Pakistan (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka), and that *some* of the findings of this study could be applied to those countries. But researchers should avoid making such generalizations from an exploratory study of one nationality such as this.

There are several other issues that raise concerns regarding the validity of this study's findings. First, the number of participants is lower than might be expected in some qualitative studies, though Creswell (1998) notes that phenomenological studies usually include from five to twenty-five participants. Assuming that the phenomenon involved was choosing to study in the United States, then the sample size is sufficient. But if in fact the phenomenon was choosing to study at a particular institution, then the number of participants is a limitation. This said, it would be wise to avoid making

generalizations regarding the variation in participant behaviors at the different institutions.

Another limitation regarding this study and its findings is related to the difficulty in recruiting participants from AC, the community college. I can only speculate as to the reasons students at AC were unwilling to participate in the study. It is possible that those reasons have little or no relationship to the college choice experiences of those students as compared to the students from TSU, SU, or RSU. But it is possible that their experiences might shed some new light on the phenomenon as it has been described here, and it is also possible that those students had some completely different college choice experience.

A final limitation to be considered relates to post 9/11 visa policies and the place of Pakistan in the United States' "war on terrorism." Since the time data were collected for this study, Pakistan's role in that war has changed. Initially viewed as an ally of the United States in efforts to fight Al Qaeda, Pakistan is increasingly viewed as a possible sanctuary for Al Qaeda. If, as has been discussed above, the students who chose to participate in this survey are members of a socioeconomic elite that has significant social and economic ties to the United States, one can assume that their views might be quite different from the views of other Pakistani students who may be considering study abroad.

#### Future Research

It would be beneficial for researchers to look at college choice experiences of Pakistani students while those students are in the process of selecting a college. Perhaps a more useful design for this type of research would be a case study or phenomenological

study with data collected for a year preceding a student's projected enrollment experience (e.g., see Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1999). A case study method that would include data for parents and other influential persons such as classmates and school counselors would result in findings that will allow for better understanding of the role of social and family networks in the college choice process. Such a design could also include participants who were interested in studying abroad but who chose not to do so, or who were prevented from doing so. While an advantage of the design of this study is that it guides host country practitioners who want to learn "what works," there may also be important lessons to be learned from Pakistanis who chose not to study abroad.

For researchers who would seek greater confidence regarding the findings from studies such as this, data from this study (or from further studies described above) could be used to design surveys whose results could be analyzed using relatively simple statistical procedures.

As described in the introductory chapter, in-depth, qualitative, and exploratory research needs to be conducted among various cultural and national groups to determine which, if any, behaviors and perspectives are shared, and which are not. Basic exploratory data could be collected among students in the United States, or as described above, researchers in other nations could explore the college choice activities of students while they are in the choice process. This shared data could then be used to make judgments about the most effective ways to promote and inform students about opportunities to study in the United States, or elsewhere. Of course it would be impractical to conduct similar studies among students who come from hundreds of countries around the world. A more practical approach would be to take a group of

several common “sending” countries to the United States and then examine the themes and constituents from students. As shared themes and constituents are discovered, they could be used as a basis for the design of quantitative instruments that could be administered to students from nations that send fewer students. These data could then be used to build a composite view of choice behaviors of all internationals, to dismiss the notion that internationals share common behaviors, or to show “clusters” of similarity between cultures and groups.

This study and previous research has described the importance of quality as a criterion for the college choice decision (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Noorani & Abolghasem, 1980; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986). However, very little is understood as to the components and dimensions of quality from the perspective of international students. The students in this study believed that education in the United States was of the highest quality, but their statements shed little insight into how they understood that quality or on what basis they made judgments about quality. More research along the lines of Pyvis and Chapman (2007) who studied the components of quality as perceived by Malaysian students could help understand how quality is understood by different groups of students.

Finally, this study has pointed to the importance of interpersonal relationships (usually with relatives or friends) in the college choice process. These friends and relatives provide prospective students with information about schools. They serve as role models. They offer security for students who have fears about adapting to another culture and university life. In the language of status attainment, they form much of the habitus from which aspirations to study abroad emerge (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These

friends and relatives, who in the case of this study were scattered around the world, formed a social network that had powerful influence on the students and their decisions. Scholars with interests in network theory should examine the networks of friends and relatives in an effort to better understand their effects on student decisions.

#### Implications of Pakistani Student College Choices for Enrollment Managers

There are several findings in this study that should be of interest to enrollment managers and other institutional personnel responsible for marketing their institutions to Pakistani audiences.

#### *Quality*

Students in this study chose to come to the United States because they perceived that education in this country was the world's best. The perception of quality was manifest in numerous ways. Students indicated that they wanted the best college or institution, the best college that offered a particular major, an alternative to poor quality institutions in Pakistan and elsewhere, a college with good facilities, or a college that was not a "party school." Also included in this concept of quality was the importance of an institution's reputation, which students derived from personal communications or from rankings such as those supplied by *U.S. News*. Recruiters and admissions personnel should be aware of these various components of quality, and should make efforts to include these components in recruitment media and in personal communications with students. Although it is difficult to quantify or clarify aspects of quality in undergraduate programs, admissions staff should become familiar with distinctive quality aspects of their programs (particularly if there are distinctive majors) and promote those aspects of their program. Such indicators could include *U.S. News* rankings, program assessment

indicators, and faculty expertise, information about facilities or campus resources, or job placement data. It may also be important for admissions staff to be able to dispel inaccurate information, or information that may be easily misconstrued by audiences unfamiliar with the United States educational system. For example, if there are published reports that point out institutions as “party schools,” admissions staff should explain the meaning of that type of information in the larger context of American higher education. Or, in many countries, including Pakistan, public institutions are regarded more highly than private ones. Admissions staff should be prepared to help clarify the characteristics of their institutions within the broader context of higher education in the United States and throughout the world.

Quality judgments, by definition, involve comparison. None of the students in the study questioned the quality of higher education in the United States. Regardless of the school or program of study that they selected, they assumed that they were getting a quality education. Thus the most important task of enrollment management personnel may be to present their institutions as a contrast to what students might experience in other parts of the world, such as Pakistan, Australia, or the United Kingdom. Facilities, class size, faculty credentials, and campus employment opportunities may show off American education in comparison to other national models.

The RSU students, when compared with the TSU and SU students, were particularly focused on post-degree career and job opportunities as a component of institutional quality. Regardless of the reason for this contrast, schools such as RSU should promote themselves in terms of career placement. Broadly speaking, admissions

officers would be well advised to learn about the aspirations of their current students and use that information in the design and development of appealing promotional materials.

### *Cost*

In addition to perceptions of quality, students and their parents were very concerned about cost. The matter of cost came into play as students began to consider which schools to which they should apply. Unlike domestic students who apply to colleges in hopes of getting financial aid, the students in this study were not eligible for financial assistance, and they were well aware of that fact. Almost all the students in this study were concerned about cost of education. As they began to develop choice sets, they looked at school costs, usually tuition alone, and eliminated schools that they believed were too costly. College admissions personnel should be aware that Pakistani students are particularly sensitive to cost. Whereas many promotional materials prepared for domestic students do not emphasize costs (because many domestic students do not expect to pay full tuition), admissions personnel can assist students and their parents by providing accurate cost information in brochures and web spaces designed for internationals. This would allow students and their parents to consider costs early in the process. Schools must be aware that tuition is only a part of the full cost of attendance. They should clearly state what other expenses that students are expected to pay, as there is great variation among universities in costs for dormitories or apartments and mandatory health insurance. Schools that offer opportunities for student employment should promote those opportunities prominently. Ultimately, given the importance of cost and the steadily increasing cost of higher education in the United States, institutions will attract increased numbers of Pakistani students by setting up scholarships designated for Pakistanis.

*Security*

Some students and their parents were concerned about safety issues on and around campuses. It is difficult for admissions staff to communicate safety and security issues because different individuals and different cultures bring very different expectations regarding safety and security. Admissions staff should provide helpful information regarding campus safety, and all information should be shared with care to consider the context of the information and that of the intended audience.

*Friends and Relatives*

Friends and relatives played an important role in the decisions of the Pakistani students in this study. They served as information sources and role models. Their presence on or near a campus served students' need for security and social support. In some cases, friends or relatives must have had a role in creating a social expectation that students attend college or consider going abroad for study. School admissions personnel must not underestimate the power of students' personal contacts and the influence those personal contacts have on college decisions. Given this influence, the admissions professional that wants to recruit Pakistani students should ensure that local Pakistanis have accurate and current information about the institution, its admissions procedures, and benefits of study. Alumni should be contacted and encouraged to communicate about the institution in their spheres of influence. When possible, admissions staff should follow up with high school counselors and advisors from high schools that have sent Pakistanis to the college in the past. The admissions and recruiting staff should cultivate contacts with the Pakistani community locally and internationally. Given the importance to Pakistanis of using personal contacts in gathering college information, admissions staff



should communicate with prospects or applicants personally, using e-mail or phone calls to answer questions and offer assistance to students.

Given the experiences of the students in this study, these types of contacts are far more important than the more formal (and costly) activities of participating in recruiting fairs, being listed on web indexes, or developing contacts with overseas advising agencies. Of the students in this study, one student attended a recruiting fair, one used a web index, and one visited an advising agency. And each of those students did not rely on those information sources exclusively; each also relied on personal contacts with other students or friends. Therefore, schools that already have Pakistanis enrolled should concentrate on cultivating existing contacts and expanding those contacts; they should not invest time or money using other information sources. Only schools with no Pakistani enrollments should use the other information sources as a means of building some initial contacts with Pakistanis.

#### *Getting a Visa*

Many students were concerned about the visa application process. They were well aware of security-related delays in getting a student visa to the United States. Several students had back-up plans in case visas were not issued. Two of the TSU students had to significantly alter their study plans due to visa delays. Given the anxiety related to the visa process, schools would be advised to communicate success stories with prospective students and applicants in an effort to alleviate anxiety and offer recommendations for successfully navigating the visa process.

The TSU students who were negatively affected by visa delays were also affected by TSU's inflexibility regarding dates when students could commence study. Institutions

should aim to develop flexible start dates so as to accommodate students who cannot get visas through no fault of their own. Although TSU was not flexible regarding start dates, it was flexible regarding completion of the A-level exams. Several students pointed out the advantages of receiving admission to TSU on this basis. Admissions personnel should offer such admission if they want to increase numbers of Pakistani students.

#### Implications of Research Results for United States Policy Makers

Historically, government agencies in the United States have taken a *laissez faire* approach to flows of international students into the country. Government and higher education leaders have assumed that hosting internationals benefits institutions, and indirectly the nation, and there has been little need to influence flows of students, except to ensure that students do not present security risks or become recipients of various forms of public assistance. The results of this study have implications to guide the thinking and action of policy makers and those who influence policy makers.

First, this study as well as other studies (Austin, 1988; Baker, Creedy, & Johnson, 1996; Noorani & Abolghasem, 1980; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986) show that the primary reason students come to the United States for degree programs is their belief that American education is of the highest quality. Although there is considerable question about what makes for quality in higher education, there is no question that the students in this study believed that by coming to the United States they were getting the best possible education. The United States' position of leadership in this area has gone unchallenged for more than half a century. With the passage of time and with the rapidly expanding means of exchanging knowledge, this country's continuing preeminence cannot be assumed. Over time, we can expect that different nations and regions will become leaders in particular fields and

disciplines. Policies and strategies that sustain this country's leadership position will serve to attract students. To the extent that United States' leadership diminishes, and as other countries become more competitive in their educational capacity, the United States will have to become more strategic and purposeful in attracting internationals. Organizations such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2006) and the American Council on Education (2006) have already begun efforts to inform policy makers the effects of declining international student populations and to lobby for a national strategy for student mobility.

The findings of this study point to the importance of interpersonal communication and relationships in student decisions. Just as institutions aim to build relationships with prospective students and their communities, policy makers can positively affect flows of Pakistanis to the United States by promoting various "people to people" initiatives. Fulbright scholar exchanges are perhaps the most well known of such programs. Perhaps more important are programs which promote exchanges of students at various levels of instruction. The United States Department of State funds short-term summer undergraduate cultural programs for Pakistani undergraduates. Expansion of such programs to include more students would allow for more opportunities for students to build networks that would in time result in students referring friends and relatives to the United States.

Given the importance of friends and relatives who served as information sources, policy makers should take steps to increase the number of people who can serve as such a resource. One step toward this end would be to eliminate what is known as the "two-year bar," or two-year home residency requirement, for students who come on short-term government-funded programs. The logic behind this requirement is that it is in the best

interest of the United States (and sending nations) if participants in such programs return home to share their experiences in the United States with their countrymen. In reality, many program participants find the requirement frustrating, and given the state of modern communications and travel, participants in these programs are able to share their experiences without having to return home for extended periods. Unlike visitors of 50 years ago, today's visitors can use inexpensive technology to maintain daily contact with friends and relatives. In addition, there was no evidence among the students in this study that during their time in the United States they had become so acculturated to life in this country that they were not connected to the Pakistani community, both in the United States and abroad. It is likely that they were valuable information sources to people back home who themselves were interested in study in the United States. Policy makers who seek to build and expand networks among Pakistani students should do so by encouraging the continued presence of scholars and students already in the United States.

One of the most important institutional characteristics affecting students' choices was cost of education. Many of the students who attended TSU did so because of the school's co-op program, which offered not just professional experience but also a paycheck. Given the continuing increases in tuition at American institutions, policy makers need to consider relaxing restrictions on international student employment.

Policy makers who see the need to maintain and increase access to internationals seeking to study in the United States are also charged with ensuring that international students do not pose security risks, or that people who intend to immigrate use a student visa as a means to enter the United States. Policy makers need to balance these competing goals of student visa policies. As for the issue of security, Pakistanis are subject to

intense security checks when applying for a student visa and when entering and departing the United States. Participants in this study were aware of the heightened security to which Pakistanis are subjected, and although none expressed disagreement with procedures, several did express frustration with processing delays and the accompanying uncertainty about their travel and enrollment plans. The State Department's Consular offices in Pakistan could help alleviate frustration by providing prospective students with front-end information regarding processing times. It should also develop notification mechanisms to inform visa applicants of unexpected delays in processing.

Consular officials are also charged not to issue student visas to individuals whom they believe intend to immigrate. Current policy (known as 214(b), referring to the section number of the Immigration and Nationality Act) requires that student visa applicants demonstrate to consular officers that they do not intend to immigrate. Some wags have suggested that this is akin to having bank customers "prove" that they do not intend to rob a bank before being allowed entry to the bank. None of the students in this research indicated that they had any intent to immigrate. One could argue that this was the case because these students had been successfully screened in the visa application process. A competing view is that these students were well aware of the economic and professional benefits of remaining in the United States, and that they intended to depart the country in spite of the benefits they had observed and experienced. Results from this study could be used to guide consular officials in at least raising awareness of the types of student visa applicants who might *not* be intending to immigrate.

Implementation of the above policy recommendations would result in increased numbers of Pakistani students enrolling at colleges and universities in the United States.

As the results of this study have shown, increased numbers of students would increase the number of friends and family members who can be influenced and encouraged to study in the United States. This type of soft diplomacy will not only benefit American colleges and universities, but it should do much to assist both Pakistan and the United States in providing opportunities for their citizens to increase global and cultural understanding.

## Appendix A.

## Text of Participant Recruitment E-Mail

DATE

PARTICIPANT NAME

Subject: Pakistani student research

Dear PARTICIPANT NAME:

My name is Jim Hamrick. I am a graduate student at the University of Michigan, and I am seeking your assistance in a research project on Pakistani undergraduates in the METRO AREA. I received your name and contact information from ADVISOR NAME at OFFICE NAME on your campus.

The purpose of my research is to learn more about the experiences of Pakistani students who come to the United States for college study. I would like to interview you for about one hour. During this interview I would ask you questions about your college choice decision process. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be free to stop the interview process at any time.

I plan to record the interviews on audiotape. You will be free to stop the interview process at any time.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please contact me (contact information below) so that we can set up a time and place on your campus for the interview.

Please let me know if you have questions about my project or this request. You may also contact ADVISOR NAME if you have questions about this project.

If you do not respond to this e-mail, I will send another e-mail message to request your participation in the study.

Thank you for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Jim Hamrick

Email address

Phone address

Fax address

## Appendix B.

## Participant Consent Form

College Choice Experiences of Pakistani Undergraduates

University of Michigan Human Subject's Protection Office, Behavioral Science and Health  
 Science Institutional Review Board # B05 00007677-1  
 [Institution Name Deleted] Review Board # HO5388

You have been invited to participate in a research study. The following information is provided to help you decide if you want to participate in this study. You are free to decide not to participate, or to withdraw at any time. If you withdraw, you will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the University of Michigan, or [institution deleted].

The purpose of this study is to better understand the college choice experiences of Pakistanis who have chosen to enroll as undergraduates in the United States. Students who participate in the study will be interviewed for about 60 minutes. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions in the interview. In some cases the interviewer will ask you for a second follow-up interview, or a follow-up telephone call.

Recordings and transcriptions of your interview will be kept secure. Your name and college will not be associated with the research findings, and your identity will be known only to the researcher. All information collected will remain confidential except as may be required by federal, state or local law, or by the [institution deleted] Institutional Review Board.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study at any time during your participation. The findings of the study will be made available, upon request, when the study is completed. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefit associated with your participation is the information shared through the interview process.

Please sign your consent, indicating that you are at least 18 years of age and that you have read this consent form. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_

*signature of participant*

\_\_\_\_\_

*date*

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview recorded on audio tape and if you are willing to participate in a follow-up telephone call. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded or if you wish not to be telephoned.

I am willing to have this interview recorded on tape.

\_\_\_\_\_

*signature of participant*

\_\_\_\_\_

*date*

I am willing to be interviewed by telephone, at a later date.



---

*signature of participant*

*date*

Jim Hamrick

Doctoral Student, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education

University of Michigan Phone: 865-974-1371 Fax: 865-974-6383

**Should you have questions regarding your participation in research, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Office, 540 East Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2210 Phone: (734) 936-0933 Phone: 734-936-0933 e-mail: [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu). You may also contact the Institutional Review Board, [institution information deleted]**

## Appendix C.

## Research Questions from 2003 RSU Study

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following primary question: How did these students themselves view their decision to study in the United States? As a part of this question, I want to better understand the following:

- (a) What processes and strategies did the students use to choose to study abroad, and to select a college?
- (b) What, and who, influenced the students?
- (c) What was the cultural context for the influences above?
- (d) What meanings and understandings do the students themselves have regarding their decision to study in the United States?

## Appendix D.

## Interview Protocol for Current Study

Interview Protocol: The College Choice Experiences of Pakistani Undergraduates  
Time of Interview:

Date:

Interview #

Description of the study:

The purpose of this study is to understand the college choice experiences of Pakistani undergraduates at U.S. colleges and universities. The college choice experience is defined as the processes, influences, and perceptions that students associate with their decision to pursue higher education. The goal of this study is to understand how Pakistani students themselves perceive their college choice experience.

Questions:

Ice Breaker: Tell me about your studies here at this institution.

1. Tell me how you decided to study at this institution.
2. What other life options did you consider before choosing to study here?  
Probes: work travel  
family/marriage
3. When did you know you wanted to attend college? (in general, not overseas) When did you decide to study overseas?
4. How did you learn about this university?  
Probes: family members printed literature alumni  
electronic media friends counselor, agency
5. What other educational options did you consider before choosing this college/university?  
Probes: remain in Pakistan other nations other U.S. schools
6. How did you learn about those other options (the schools you didn't choose)?
7. Why did you decide to study here?
8. What problems or difficulties did you have in deciding to come to this college/university?  
Probes finances visa family obligations
9. How do you feel about your decision to study here?
10. What do you wish you had known BEFORE coming to study here?
11. Who should I talk to learn more about how students from Pakistan decide on a college?

## Appendix E.

## Interview Protocol for 2003 Study

**Choosing to study in the United States: The experience of Pakistani undergraduates**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interview #

Description of the study:

The purpose of this study is to understand the college choice experiences of Pakistani undergraduates at U.S. colleges and universities. The college choice experience is defined as the processes, influences, and perceptions that students associate with their decision to pursue higher education. The goal of this study is to understand how Pakistani students themselves perceive their college choice experience.

Questions:

Ice Breaker: Tell me about your studies here at this university.

12. Tell me how you decided to study at this university?

13. How did you learn about this university?

Probes:	family members	printed literature
	alumni	electronic media
	friends	counselor, agency

14. What other educational options did you consider before choosing to at this college/university?

Probes:	remain in Pakistan	other nations
	other U.S. schools	

15. What other life options did you consider before choosing to study here?

Probes:	work	travel
	family/marriage	

16. What problems or difficulties did you have in deciding to come to this college/university?

Probes	finances	visa
	family obligations	

6. How do you feel about your decision to study here?

7. Who should I talk to learn more about how students from Pakistan decide on a college?

## Appendix F.

## Participant Data Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

City of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of High School: \_\_\_\_\_

Languages: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's educational attainment (location) \_\_\_\_\_

Father's educational attainment (location) \_\_\_\_\_

Friends or relatives who studied abroad? (describe friends, relatives, no names)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Colleges applied to (name &amp; location):

1.

2.

3.

(Others may be listed on back)

Current major \_\_\_\_\_

Other Colleges Attended (name and location): \_\_\_\_\_

Relatives or close friends in the U.S. (describe friends, relatives, no names)

## Appendix G.

## Sample Textural Description

## Razia

Razia grew up with the expectation that she would attend college. This expectation was in part due to her parents' expectations and experience. Her father had attended graduate school in Pakistan, and her mother had attended college in Pakistan, though she did not complete a degree. She was also from a social background in which most people attended college. Given her family and social background, it was unusual for her brother who chose not to attend college. That was "outside the norm", according to Razia. His decision was somewhat difficult on Razia's parents, according to Razia: "I mean initially it was hard for my parents to adjust to that, but when they saw the potential in him, and when he kept proving what he had explained, what he believed in, then now I mean they don't have an option but to be ok with it. They still want him to have a degree you know maybe when he settles in his career, and to go back to school someday, just for the heck of it."

The expectations to attend college were countered by an expectation to marry and have children, at least for females. Razia acknowledged that many of her high school friends chose to go to college simply because they were "in the wait" for getting married. Razia explained that this was not her case, but she also recognized that one of her reasons for attending college was so that she could better prepare herself for family life. "I think you should be mature enough to get married, and education helps you know yourself before you know someone else," and "I thought a that good education would help me be a better person myself so that I can build a better family, Apparently her parents viewed marriage

as a more important matter than education. Razia sometimes disagreed with her parents about the overall goal of her education and getting married, but she acknowledged that she always sought her parents consent, including their consent on her college decision.

Razia began her college life as a medical student in Pakistan, but “by process of elimination” she dropped out of the program after being enrolled for more than a year. She dropped out in spite of disapproval from friends who believed that she was wasting a great opportunity. She perceived her medical school experience as a “waste of time” because she was eager to move ahead with her life and complete her undergraduate degree. But her perception was also based on her dissatisfaction with the academic quality of the medical school. She approached her education with different standards: “But my standards for even, I don’t want to say even higher, but I want to say even different for myself, and I thought ok big deal, I’m here, I don’t think I’ve achieved anything.”

She initially came to the U.S. on which a visitor’s visa, visiting some family members in the metropolitan area where she eventually enrolled in college. She spent about six months in the U.S. before enrolling in a community college (changing her immigration admission status to “student” along the way). She considered several schools but decided to enroll in the local community college because it allowed her to “jump right into something,” preventing her from, as she put it, “wasting” additional time. She chose the community college because she did not want to leave the community which she was visiting. And she also liked the idea of being in a small-college environment which would

allow her opportunities to explore four-year schools in the area. This choice was also consistent with her desire not to spend too much money on her education: “That’s why I chose the one school not just because of its name or anything but I also put cost into that, and you know put that as a factor in deciding where I wanted to go.”

Early on in her community college experience she continued looking at options to complete her bachelor’s in the metropolitan area. She was looking for colleges which offered her major (business and accounting). She also wanted high quality schools (which she associated with accreditation), and she wanted a school that would not drain her financially. “That’s why I chose the one school not just because of its name or anything but I also put cost into that, and you know put that as a factor in deciding where I wanted to go.” She considered three different colleges, two in the metro area and one about an hour away by car. All three were state-supported schools. She ended up choosing “State University” which she believed had two primary advantages over the other schools. It had a strong academic program in her desired major, and it would accept more transfer credits than the other schools, allowing her to save money. (She considered studying at TSU, but she would have been required to take a different sequence of science requirements than what she had already taken at the community college.

Through the choice process, Razia was focused on her major (business and accounting) but not focused on a career. She even acknowledged that some day she might return to Pakistan, though by the time of the interview her parents had immigrated to the U.S. and were living in the metropolitan area.



Razia used several information sources as she chose her college. She spoke with her cousin who had applied to schools in the metro area before her. She read brochures her cousin had provided, and she talked with current students at State University. She consulted with faculty at the community college about her choice, and she also talked with advisors at the community college. She did not communicate with staff at State University. She did use the school's web site and she had visited the campus for social and study purposes.

Razia was satisfied with her choice for college, as she believed that she was well prepared for a career, and she had a commitment from an accounting firm that would hire her upon completing her degree. She was also glad that she had chosen State University because she believed that it was the fastest and most efficient route toward college completion. As she said, she did not want to “waste any more time.”

## Appendix H.

## Sample Structural Description

*Razia*

Razia was a female in her final year of study at SU. She majored in accounting, and at the time of the interview she had already lined up an accounting job with a national firm.

Razia had transferred to SU after spending two years at a local community college.

Razia's family was well educated, extremely so by general Pakistani standards, and as such she always expected that she and her brother would attend college. Her parents had a hard time accepting her brother's decision not to attend college. In addition to parental expectations, there were expectations from others in her social group in Pakistan. Many of her friends chose to attend college because they were still waiting for marriage opportunities, and so college was a suitable thing for a single woman of Razia's social status to do in Pakistan. Given this expectation, Razia had a very pragmatic approach to her education, though not in the sense of career preparation. Though she already had a job offer with an accounting firm lined up after graduation, she saw her college experience in terms of preparation for life in general, and family life in particular. She chose to leave a college program in Pakistan and come to the U.S. in part because the school did not meet her academic expectations.

Razia did not report that her parents had a lot of influence on her college choice, and perhaps this was related to the notion that college was for young women who expected eventually to get married and forgo a career. As such, the decision on which college to attend may not have had significance in terms of expected professional or career outcomes. Razia said that she and her parents sometimes disagreed on the importance of education, vis-à-vis marriage, in her life, with her parents putting more emphasis on marriage. It is also possible that the lack of parental influence was because much of her college choice experience occurred after she had left Pakistan (and her parents). She initially came to the U.S. to visit relatives, and the search process that led her to enroll at SU occurred while she was in the U.S., and away from her parents. After several months in the U.S., and prior to enrolling in SU, she chose to enroll at a community college in the metropolitan area that she was visiting.

Much of her rationale for choosing a school was based on her desire not to “waste time.” She felt that her college experience in Pakistan had been a waste of time, and that she was behind others of her age in completing college and joining the work force. She desired to find a school that had a good reputation in her major, and she wanted to avoid spending too much on her education. It seemed that she wanted a good education, and one good enough that it could not be had in Pakistan. It may seem contradictory that she did not want to spend too much money on her education, but that may also relate to the fact that her primary motivation for college was personal, not professional. She wanted to learn and grow in personal ways, and she assumed that her education would make her a better family member (wife and mother) in the future. She was pleased to have a job lined up

after graduation, but she was not focused in a strong way on the job or on building a career in her profession.

She initially attended a two-year college in the metro area before transferring to SU. She chose the two-year college because of convenience, and because she believed that there would be resources there for her to give more careful consideration to several of the 4-year schools in the area. She was also convinced that the degree she would get SU had a strong reputation that would result in good job opportunities, and she was even considering attending graduate school after getting some work experience.

In her decisions to attend the community college and State University she relied on information from relatives. She also was grateful for her community college experience, in which faculty gave her advice about the 4-year colleges that she might attend. She indicated that she used a wide range of information resources, including the web, academic advisors at the community college. Perhaps the most important information source was discussions she had with family members and friends who were already attending State University. All in all, because she was already in the U.S. and in the city where she would eventually enroll, she was able to use a variety of resources, and unlike students who were applying from abroad, she had a larger number of “less significant” information sources.

## Appendix I.

## Sample Textural-Structural Description

## Razia

Razia's father had attended graduate school in Pakistan, and her mother had attended college in Pakistan, though she did not complete a degree. And so her parents expected her to attend college. She was also from a social background in which most people attended college. She also felt that she was expected to marry and have children, though the source of this expectation resulted more from friends and society than from her parents. Razia acknowledged that many of her high school friends chose to go to college simply because they were "in the wait" for getting married. In other words, they were filling time until an opportunity for marriage arose.

Razia was not waiting on marriage, but she acknowledged that one of her reasons for attending college was so that she could better prepare herself for family life. In her view, the knowledge and experiences she was getting in college would make her a better wife and mother. In spite of this view, Razia had career ambitions that seemed to equal her family ambitions, and she had already arranged for a job with an accounting firm upon graduation. Her parents, on the other hand, viewed marriage as a more important matter than education. Even though Razia disagreed with her parents the relative importance of career and family, she acknowledged that she always sought her parents' consent, including their consent on her college decision.

Before coming to the U.S., Razia had enrolled in a medical college in Pakistan, but she dropped out because she believed the program was of poor quality. Her choice to come to the U.S. was based on the view that she could get a better education in the U.S. It was clear that if Razia were going to go to college, she wanted something academically challenging and she wanted to distinguish herself. She viewed her medical school experience as a waste of time. She withdrew from the medical school over the objections of some friends.

After her medical school experience, Razia came to the U.S. on a visitor's visa, visiting some family members in the metropolitan area where she eventually enrolled in college. She spent about six months in the U.S. before enrolling in a community college. She wanted to remain in the community because of the security of staying with her relatives. She considered several other schools but decided to enroll in the local community college because it allowed her to "jump right into something," preventing her from, as she put it, "wasting" additional time. This likely meant that the college's admission requirements were quite flexible. She also liked the idea of being in a small-college environment which would allow her opportunities to explore four-year schools in the area. She also liked the community college because of its low cost.

Early on in her community college experience she looked for transfer schools where she could complete her bachelor's degree. Her primary focus was for colleges which offered her major (business and accounting). She also wanted high quality schools (which she associated with accreditation), and she wanted a school that would not drain her financially, which meant remaining in the metropolitan area so that she could keep her living expenses low. She considered three different state supported colleges: SU,

TSU, and another school about an hour away by car. She chose SU because of its strong academic program in her desired major, and because SU accepted more of her transfer credits than did the other schools (which in turn saved her money).

Razia used a wide range of information sources as she chose her college. She spoke with her cousin who had applied to schools in the metro area before her. She read brochures her cousin had provided, and she talked with current students at State University. She consulted with faculty at the community college about her choice, and she also talked with advisors at the community college. She did not communicate SU staff. She did use the school's web site. In addition, she had visited the campus for social and study purposes.

She was also glad that she had chosen SU because she believed that it was the fastest and most efficient route toward college completion. As she said, she did not want to "waste any more time."

## Appendix J.

## Structural Descriptions of Each Participant's Experience

*Riaz*

Riaz was born and raised in Karachi. He was studying electrical engineering at TSU. His parents were both college educated, with degrees from Pakistan. Riaz's college aspirations were clearly marked by his goal in attending the best possible university that offered the major he wanted. As for study abroad, he wanted the best possible education and was determined to seek that education wherever it may be found. He perceived that the U.S. offered the best options in his field, and as such he gave little thought to schools in Pakistan or in other countries. He did not even think of such schools as "backup" schools. Yet in his search for the "best" school, he set some financial boundaries, ruling out top schools that were too expensive (several U.S. public schools) and eventually selecting a school that had a strong reputation for work opportunities that were related to the curriculum (e.g., co-op programs). Even in this limiting factor, Riaz chose the school that he believed offered the "best" co-op opportunities. Riaz was clearly ambitious, as evidenced by his search for the best universities. Though his ambition was not self-serving; he just saw no reason to limit himself to sub-optimal opportunities. Even though his father preferred that he study in Europe, it being closer to Pakistan, Riaz chose the U.S., using the logic that if he was going to leave his country he might as well go wherever the greatest educational opportunities were. Riaz did not define the "best" college in terms of career or professional opportunities, which is somewhat surprising given his concerns that he not spend too much money on his education. While his family



was relatively well off and certainly rich by Pakistani standards, there was not the offer of a “blank check” for college.

Riaz’s search process and later college experiences were guided in large part by his desire not to spend too much money on his education. Perhaps this thrifty approach to college attendance had the consequence of him not being too concerned about job opportunities after graduation – had he been spending larger sums of money he may have been more inclined to land a high-salaried position upon graduation.

For a student who was remarkably “self-aware” regarding learning styles and educational goals, Riaz was surprisingly unconcerned about life options after graduation. It is possible that he was considering returning to Pakistan to work in his father’s business, though given his leadership experiences and the general demand for workers with his anticipated degree, he probably could have taken a job in the U.S. at least temporarily, that would have had an attractive salary by U.S. standards.

And it may also have been for Riaz that his educational interests were more a result of his personal goals for learning than for professional goals. He showed that he had a fundamental curiosity about that life and nature, and he appeared to be the type of person that would have attended college even if college attendance resulted in no career prospects. Again, one of his reasons for choosing an American education was because he liked the opportunities for research that were available to American undergraduates; he felt such opportunities would be limited in other nations and practically non-existent in Pakistan. Some of his natural curiosity spilled over into his general self-awareness. He understood his learning styles (and even before college realized that his style was inconsistent with that needed for medical school). In the same way, Riaz’s college search

was largely his own personal search. He made use of typical resources (high school alumni, school counselor, parental advice), but he felt no compulsion to follow in the footsteps of friends or other graduates of his high school. Early on he chose a major which deviated from his mother's stated goal of having him attend medical school.

Some of Riaz's self-direction may have resulted from the fact that his family background appeared to be quite "cosmopolitan." Riaz's brother had spent some time doing high school in the U.S. (which was brought short due to family financial limitations). Riaz's father had business interests in Pakistan and Germany, and as a young person he had traveled widely throughout the world, with his family. He had even attended a Catholic school in Pakistan, which was in and of itself something that would link his worldview "outside" of Pakistan. This cosmopolitan worldview may have been the primary reason that Riaz was intent on finding the best educational opportunities without regard to political or cultural geography or distance from home.

#### *Fazia*

Fazia was one of two female participants in the study. At the time of the interview she was in her third year of an electrical engineering program at TSU. It is hard to talk about Fazia's college choice experience because her experience was directed and in some respects undertaken by her parents. Fazia had always assumed she would attend college, and she never considered any educational options outside of the U.S., and she eventually chose to study at TSU, where her father had done his Ph.D. Her father handled the process of submitting applications and registering for the SAT. The decision to study at TSU was made in part because Fazia's aunt was a resident of the city in which TSU was located. The presence of Fazia's aunt gave Fazia and her parents a sense of security about

the school decision. Fazia expressed her view that her parents' allowing her to study abroad was unusual for Pakistanis, and possibly having her study in her Aunt's city made the situation more palatable for the parents as well as Fazia. If Fazia herself felt the need for familial security, she made no indication of that. To the contrary she expressed her appreciation for the relative freedom afforded by her life in the U.S. – even though that freedom also meant that she didn't have the support of servants or family members to take care of household chores, laundry, and other life responsibilities.

So, Fazia really made a choice that was totally bounded by her parents: choosing a college with a close relative nearby, in a city where both of her parents had studied, choosing a college that her father attended, and allowing her parents to choose a major for her.

Fazia was comfortable with her parents' role in the process, in part because of her trust that they were motivated by her best interests, and in part because she realized that her parents' decision to send her abroad would be perceived negatively by many Pakistanis. As a result she chose to go along with her parents' influence, in part because she trusted them, and in part because she realized that she was experiencing something few Pakistani women could ever imagine.

Fazia's experience may have framed her own perception of her choice process. She perceived her experience (and that of other Pakistanis) as one of choosing a major, finding the "best" colleges that offered that major (based on rankings in U.S. News), and then judging one's likelihood of admission to such a college before submitting applications. While this may have well been the process that Fazia and her parents used

in selecting TSU, it is a possible that this was simply her own view of how the process *should* work

Yet her trust in her parent's decision making may have resulted in some misgivings or uncertainty about her choice of majors, and certainly some uncertainty about eventual career options. "Like I'm an electrical engineering student right now, it's my sophomore year, and I've even co-oped, and I still believe you really can't tell what you're going to be doing for a career." Perhaps she might have had more certainty about her major and more confidence about career options had she had more say-so in her choice of a major.

*Rizwan*

Rizwan was a second-year student at TSU. He was the brother of Fazia, who was two years his senior. Like his sister, Rizwan felt that he was expected to go to college. The sources of that expectation were family members and the sub-culture in which he lived in Pakistan. Rizwan also recognized that he did not have viable life options that were not related to college. His grandfather had a business that was apparently in decline, and Rizwan had no work skills. And thus the co-op opportunities at TSU made it an especially attractive school for him.

His parents' expectations included not only college, but also college in the U.S. His father believed that the best educational opportunities were in the U.S. Because his father held a Ph.D. from TSU, it was only reasonable that he give strong consideration there. Rizwan was interested in Stanford and MIT, but those schools required that he complete his A-levels and TSU would accept him without completing the A-levels. It is safe to say that given his father's and sister's experience at TSU, Rizwan had little real

choice not to attend there, and this is perhaps why he questioned whether TSU had sufficient academic rigor for him. He talked about transferring to other schools such as Cal Tech or MIT, but there is no evidence he actually considered making such changes. Rizwan accepted his parents' influence on the process. He was grateful for their generous financial support of this education, and he believed that they looked out for his best interests:

As mentioned above, Rizwan was attracted to TSU because of its co-op programs. He was also attracted to TSU due to its high place in the *U.S. News* rankings. He believed that TSU was ranked number 3 or 4 for engineering in the U.S., and he reported that he would not have attended there if the ranking were considerably lower. And as a student he had learned more about the rankings and he had developed some skepticism about using the rankings to guide his college choice process. But it is difficult to imagine a situation in which he would have chosen some other college, given the influence of his father and sister. (No doubt his sister and father were attracted to TSU because of its strong reputation and ranking).

Rizwan's primary information sources were the magazine and information he received directly from his sister, and from his father. He said that he did not use any printed literature from TSU. He complained about the advice offered by TSU admissions staff and other staff. He felt that they generally directed him to the university's web site, which had answers to questions that were not applicable to international applicants.

Whereas Fazia had had some reservations about her major, Rizwan had reservations about whether TSU had sufficient academic rigor. He found the academic work somewhat easier than he anticipated, and as a result he questioned his choice and he

considered transferring to schools such as Stanford, MIT, or Cal Tech. Rizwan also worried that he was too dependent on his sister for personal and academic support.

Rizwan had not experienced any problems with visa and immigration issues. He attributed that in part to the fact that his father had worked for the United Nations and had sufficient connections which might have reduced the bureaucratic tangles that affected many Pakistanis since 9/11. This was perhaps yet another reason that Rizwan was grateful for the influence and support he had received from his parents.

### *Adil*

Adil was a TSU student majoring in industrial engineering. He was taciturn, not given to expressing opinions or beliefs. He was originally from Karachi where he had been raised and where both he and his parents expected that he would attend college. He also saw college as something to be achieved. So he saw his college experience as something that was expected of him, but it was also an achievement in the sense that he could not assume that he would have the scholastic ability or performance to go to college. He only applied to very competitive colleges, but he also considered the community college in the metropolitan area (which was open to all high school graduates), which had the advantage of low tuition.

Adil's decision to study in the U.S. for college was rooted in his family's decision to send him to the UK for school when he was 14. Adil did not recall his time in England as traumatic, largely because he studied in a city in which other relatives, aunts and uncles, arrived. But after an academic year, he was disappointed in his school situation and so his parents decided to send him to the U.S., to a city in which his sister and her husband were living. He finished the academic year in England and then returned to

Pakistan for a short time before leaving for the United States. He completed his high school years at an international school in his sister's city, earning an International Baccalaureate secondary degree.

While attending the international school, he began looking for colleges, with no interest in leaving the U.S. for study. He believed that the quality of education offered in the U.S. was better than any other option, particularly in the U.K. In his search he quickly targeted TSU, which was in the same city he was living, and which he believed had a strong reputation, both locally and regionally. He also applied to Penn and MIT, with the understanding that he would have to receive financial aid to attend those schools. He assumed that his application to those schools was treated differently because he required financial aid, and he also assumed that he might have been accepted there had he not needed financial assistance. Given Adil's strong academic ability (good enough to get him in to TSU), it was surprising that Adil also considered a local community college that was open to all high school graduates. He did not apply to the community college, but he considered it because he realized that his family might not be able to pay his way to TSU.

Adil never visited the TSU campus in his search process. He relied on the web and on his high school counselor for information. He knew some high school friends who were attending TSU, but he did not ask them for advice. His sister supported the decision, though she did not offer him particular advice. In general, Adil felt that the college decision was his alone to make.

Adil's decision was not the result of a systematic or in-depth search process. He chose to attend TSU because it was accessible, because of its outstanding reputation, and because he was admitted there. Had he not been admitted, one could surmise that he

would have opted for the community college and then moved ahead with the opportunities that would become available thereafter.

Adil did not have particular career plans, and one might guess that he would approach his job search after college much the way he approached the college search—examining opportunities as they came available and not pushing to find a particular job in a particular setting. Adil eventually believed he would work for himself in a business setting. He also believed that he would remain for work in the U.S. That was because one significant consequence of Adil’s decision was an effect of the financial investment his family was making. Adil planned to complete college and then seek employment in the U.S. He reported that the financial investment his family had made could not be recouped in Pakistan. And so his decision to attend school in the U.S. resulted in a situation in which he now felt he had to remain in the U.S. to justify the expenditure for his education.

#### *Shahzad*

Shahzad was a freshman studying electrical engineering at TSU. He reported that “everyone goes to college” and that he always expected he would attend a college, though not necessarily in the U.S. He was aware that many, if not most, people, particularly in Pakistan, do not attend college, But he added, “Like the people I know everyone goes there.” Indeed, many of Shahzad’s friends and relatives in Pakistan had not only gone to college, but they had gone abroad for study, primarily to the U.K. or Canada. A sibling and a brother-in-law had studied overseas. It seems that the expectations were more societal or family norms, but not parental, as his parents had virtually no involvement in his college choice process. He acknowledged that he was the



youngest child and as a result his parents tended to give him what he wanted. Their largesse may have extended to not pushing him toward any particular college experience. It is interesting that Shahzad described one of his brothers as uninterested in academics: “No my brother, he was never interested. He was never interested in study either.” When asked for details about his brother’s experience, Shahzad reported that “Yea, he go (sic) to college. He went there. He did a Masters in computer science, and he did a Masters in accounting, he did both. He was not that interested.” It is thus evident that Shahzad’s family had expectations of academic achievement.

In spite of Shahzad’s expectation to attend college, and perhaps even study abroad, he did not begin his search during his 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. He delayed the process until after he completed his A-levels in Pakistan. He described his year after A-levels as a “gap year,” though he did not mention any specific activity for that period except his college application process. Shahzad also felt compelled to begin college work as soon as possible after his gap year. He had no interest in taking additional time away from his education. The search process took him five months, and he made a final decision to attend TSU in January of 2005. In spite of the family tradition of attending college, Shahzad said that his parents had nothing to do with his choice process. They were supportive of Shahzad, encouraging him to do whatever he wanted to do regarding college. One of his brothers assisted him in the search by filling out application forms.

Shahzad had a very broad choice set. He considered colleges in Pakistan, the U.K., the U.S., and Canada. American schools to which he applied included Cal Tech, the University of Texas-Austin, and Wisconsin. He had application forms for Stanford and MIT, but their deadlines passed before he could complete the applications. The

University of Arizona and Texas A&M were his American back-up schools.” He was well aware of the difficulties in getting a visa due to security concerns for Pakistani males, and so he applied to several Canadian schools in case he would not be admitted to a U.S. college, or in the case that he could not get a visa to the U.S. His absolute last resort was to remain in Pakistan for study. He considered GIK, the technical university founded by A.Q. Khan, but he felt that G.I.K. had slipped in quality in recent years and that he would much prefer to study abroad.

Shahzad made use of a very wide range of information sources in his search process. He had a high school teacher who had recommended that he consider Cal Tech, which was his top choice of schools (he was not admitted there). He referred to relatives who had studied abroad, primarily in the UK, although he did not speak of any specific information that they provided him. He had many friends who had studied abroad, and some cousins (not necessarily *first* cousins given the Pakistani use of the term) and a few acquaintances that had studied at the college he eventually chose. These cousins told him that TSU was better than the University of Wisconsin-Madison, one of the other schools he had strongly. Although these cousins influenced his search, he did not have friends who were enrolled at the school during the time of his search. Shahzad relied heavily on the Internet, particularly on college rankings sites (such as *U.S. News*), which he trusted, and he also used university web sites to gather information and application materials. In his Internet search he decided that the University of Wisconsin would not be a good fit because it was a noted “party school.” Shahzad’s concerns were not due to lifestyle issues, but rather he felt that a school with such a reputation was, by definition, less academically reputable. During the initial stages of his search, when he was focused on

attending school in the U.K., he sought advice from British Counsel offices in Pakistan. He did not communicate directly with staff from colleges (e.g., admissions counselors or others) until after he had been admitted to TSU. His communications, by phone and e-mail, were primarily about immigration documents and arrival schedules.

The criteria that Shahzad described for choosing a college were primarily academic quality and cost. In his search for quality he focused on finding schools that were highly rated in his preferred major, electrical engineering. He was particularly interested in electrical engineering because he believed that the degree would open career opportunities in the telecommunications industry, which he felt would bring him many employment opportunities. Had he been interested in science instead of engineering, he would have wanted to study at Carnegie Mellon. Shahzad judged school quality by reviewing rankings and published reports about schools, but he also considered the advice of relatives who had studied in the U.S. Eventually Cal Tech became the school he most wanted to attend, but he was not admitted. He was also interested in Wisconsin until his Internet searches led him to information indicating that Wisconsin was a “party school.” In spite of not being admitted to his first choice, Cal Tech, he was pleased that he was admitted to TSU, which he considered as an “Ivy League” school, at least during the search process. As for cost, Shahzad’s parents were paying for his education, and he did not share any specific issues or concerns that led to the conclusion that cost was a significant factor in his search process.

Shahzad had a very thorough search, and certainly considered a wide range of options, both in the U.S. and abroad. His search led him to TSU, where some relatives

had studied in the past, but he appeared to have a very open mind about finding the university that would best fit his academic needs and concerns.

*Adnan*

Adnan's was in the second year of a chemical engineering degree at TSU. His choice to attend college at TSU was a long and complex process that included visa delays and some disappointments concerning college ambitions. Adnan began his college choice activities as a junior in high school. He said that he could have gone to work after high school, possibly joining in the family business. But with his overall academic ability and interests the best investment of his time seemed to be pursuing a college education. An older brother was handling the business and attending college on a part-time basis. The idea of going abroad to college was originally planted by some cousins who had attended college in the U.S. One cousin had graduated from TSU in 1999 or 2000. Another cousin had left for college in the U.S when Adnan was 12, and from an early age Adnan's parents had supported the idea: "It was like always since my childhood, one of my cousins went to the U.S. for studies, for higher studies, he's still here and yea, when he went there I was like 12, and my mom and dad [said] you can do that too you know." His parents' support did not mean that his parents had particular goals or demands, and Adnan had considerable latitude to choose a college wherever he wished. Perhaps this was because he was the first in his family to attend college. Their support did not extend to their writing a blank check for study. At the time of the interview Adnan said that he was already \$20,000 in debt, and that he hoped he could find more co-op opportunities to help cover his educational costs. He also hoped to get a job in the U.S. after graduation in hopes of earning sufficient funds to pay back his debts quickly.

Adnan never considered staying at home for his education. He considered attending a school in Hyderabad, about 1000 miles from his home. His ultimate decision to leave Pakistan for college was accepted by his family.

Adnan was the first in his immediate family to study abroad. His younger sister had herself gone to college in Hyderabad, and Adnan said that she was thinking of transferring to the U.S. If she made that decision he expected that she would follow him to the metro area where TSU was located, or wherever he might be residing at the time. In the same way, much of Adnan's decision to attend TSU was the result of having a cousin in the same city as TSU

Adnan's choice process was complicated by factors of time, visa delays, and acceptances and denials to colleges. Two years before graduating from high school, Adnan and a high school friend decided that they both would try to study abroad. This required registering for, and preparing for, the TOEFL and SAT exams. The friend soon began to focus on a school in Singapore, believing that in the post 9/11 environment getting a visa to the U.S. would be difficult. When the friend wasn't accepted to the school in Singapore, he chose a college in Pakistan.

For Adnan, his search included schools in Pakistan, Singapore, and the U.S. He did not consider schools in the U.K., as he believed that they were expensive and he found the application process cumbersome. He began applying to U.S. colleges in earnest the year after he completed his secondary school. He used his SAT score (1390) to gauge his chances for success to particular colleges, quickly realizing that he would not be admitted to MIT and Cal Tech. He was also interested in the University of Texas at Austin, as well as a school in Singapore and another in Pakistan, and he applied to both

schools. Due to his cousin's influence, he was very interested in TSU. Not only was she able to tell him about TSU, she still lived in the metro area. His cousin's influence, or perhaps the prospect of having family support while abroad, was strong. Had his cousin lived in another city, he "would have definitely applied there." His cousin also assisted Adnan in getting information from the school.

In addition to the cousin as an information source, Adnan used *U.S. News and World Report*, and college brochures as information sources. He requested and received brochures from the University of Texas, but TSU would not send materials even though he requested them. He also communicated with TSU admissions counselors.

Adnan's was seeking a college that had a strong reputation. He was less concerned about the particular degree he might receive. He was flexible in his choice of major. Although his preferred major was engineering, he applied as a business major to a college in Pakistan because that is what it was famous for. At that time I was not totally decided what to do, I was like ok, I will apply to a department that the university is good at, so that university was good in business, so I applied for that program." Thus, Adnan appeared to be seeking an academic credential more than a particular career or set of skills to be used in a career. Cost was also a factor, and Adnan ruled out a number of private schools in the U.S. The relative low cost of the college in Singapore was a factor that made the school appealing. Eventually, Adnan settled on TSU as his first choice, but only after his application to the University of Texas was denied. Adnan was attracted to TSU's strong academic reputation and its proximity to his sister. He had also applied to another large public institution in the state, not far from the metro area. He decided that if he were denied admission or a visa to the U.S., he would attend the university in

Singapore. If all else failed he would go to the college in Hyderabad. His family even paid a non-refundable tuition deposit to the Pakistan school, not wanting to lose a seat there if that were his only choice.

As it turned out, visa issuance affected Adnan's path to TSU. He was accepted to TSU in March for a special admission cohort for the summer session. He was admitted to take special courses in the summer session that would serve as a gateway for regular freshman courses in the Fall Semester. Although he perceived the courses "as a waste of time," he moved forward and applied for a visa that would allow him to enter the U.S. to attend TSU. To his surprise, the visa interview went smoothly. But before a visa could be granted his case had to undergo a post-9/11 security screening, which took several months, and which extended beyond the date of the summer session to which he had been admitted. He requested that his admission be deferred until the Fall Semester, but TSU denied the request by that time he had also been denied admission to the school in Singapore. Eventually, in late summer, his visa was granted. But going to TSU was not an option. But he still wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to study in the U.S. He quickly decided to attend another public university not far from TSU, where he was offered a scholarship consisting of resident tuition. He was admitted there and used his U.S. visa to enter the country and enroll with the hope of transferring to TSU as soon as possible. Unfortunately, he did not take advantage of academic advising or even published documents of articulation between the schools, and he ended up taking some courses that did not transfer to TSU. After an academic year at the university and transferred to TSU with a 4.0 G.P.A.

Adnan was pleased with his experience at TSU, although he had been involved in the co-op program, he was taking on debt and assumed that he would have to work in the U.S. before returning to Pakistan so that he could pay off the debt.

*Sharhan*

Sharhan was a computer science and applied math major at TSU. He was from Karachi, and grew up in a family atmosphere that had the financial means to send the children to college, and there was an expectation that family members would attend college. His mother and two sisters had attended college. Sharhan was unsure if his father had attended college, as he was a civil servant, many of whom sit for civil service exams upon completing secondary school. Sharhan attended a high school which “sent” many of its graduates abroad for study. Both of Sharhan’s sisters had gone on to get MBAs in Pakistan. In Sharhan’s view, MBAs were “flowing like water” in Pakistan. It is possible that Sharhan’s choice to go abroad for a bachelor’s degree at a prestigious technical school in the U.S. was an effort to further distinguish himself, given his view that even advanced business degrees from Pakistan were common, and possibly of limited professional value. Sharhan was aware that people of his social status generally went to college: “Well it’s kind of not accepted for people not to get to college. It’s like “oh, you did your high school, and decided to join a job, it’s just not really done.” Sharhan’s parents also expected him to attend college. He might have considered following his father into the civil service (bypassing a college education), but civil service exams were taken after completion of A-level exams, and by the time he completed A-levels he had been accepted to TSU and he was focused on attending there. He acknowledged that he might have attended college in the U.K. or in Pakistan if he had



not been admitted to a U.S. college. He never applied to any schools in the U.K., and he applied to only one in Pakistan. In general Sharhan was strongly inclined to go to college, and the social context in his high school resulted in an inclination to do study in the U.S. It is hard to imagine circumstances that would have prevented Sharhan from attending college somewhere.

Sharhan limited his choice set to schools that offered “technical” degrees (engineering or computer science). This choice seemed to be less a matter of self-awareness and more a matter of seeking a degree that fit his high school background, his academic ability, and his perceived social expectations. In addition to one school in Pakistan and one in Singapore, Sharhan applied to six U.S. colleges: Yale, Dartmouth, Texas-Austin, California-Berkeley, Illinois-Champaign-Urbana, and TSU. His choice set was conditioned somewhat by that of his friends and high school colleagues (“I think everyone to a degree back home is like Yale is such a big name, so everyone applies to Yale, Princeton, MIT, blah blah blah”). The choice set was also affected by the policy of Sharhan’s high school counseling office, which limited the number of applications *from the high school* to particular schools so as to not overwhelm any single college with applications from the school. This resulted in a policy whereby the high school counselors would consider students’ G.P.A.s and SAT scores and then only allow students who had good chances of admission to apply to certain schools.

In addition to the four counselors at his high school, Sharhan was encouraged to apply to TSU by a teacher at the high school. He received brochures from colleges, but he admitted that he did not read them. He also received positive information regarding TSU from a “friend of a friend” who had attended TSU. He also read *U.S. News* rankings,

although he was apologetic about using that as a resource: “US News, it’s a ranking system, very flawed in my opinion, but it’s something, right? I basically looked up the top 20 masters programs, the top 20 bachelor’s programs.”

As it turned out, Sharhan’s choice strategy finally amounted to getting admitted to *any* school in the U.S., and, over time as he processed information, his top priority in the U.S. became TSU. The fact that TSU admitted him without requiring completion of his A-level exams was a big plus. Had he not been accepted to a U.S. college, he would have attended a well-regarded university in Lahore. But early on, Sharhan focused on TSU because of factors described below.

A primary factor was the cost of attending college. Sharhan lost interest in Berkeley when he learned of its overall cost and that financial assistance was not available to internationals until the second year. By contrast, TSU was less expensive. Sharhan applied only to very prestigious schools, and for him a key factor was a school’s academic ranking (as supplied by *U.S. News*), which for Sharhan served as a proxy for academic quality. It should be noted that Sharhan did not make specific reference to quality of education, though he realized at the time of the interview that he might have considered attending the University of Illinois had he been aware how strong their computer science program was. As the search process progressed, TSU soon became his leading choice. This was due to the fact that four high school counselors had recommended that he attend TSU, as well as a high school teacher whom he respected. The high school teacher informed him that several recent graduates of the school were enrolled at TSU. Sharhan did not know those students. Their presence at TSU seemed to assure him that it would be a good choice. Sharhan was encouraged that alumni of his

high school were at TSU. He considered these individuals friends, though he did not know them personally: “They’re not exactly my personal friends, but I knew them.” As Sharhan reflected on his college experience, he felt strongly that the presence of friends, or at least other Pakistanis, created a social climate that was supportive and comfortable for him. He commented on other Pakistanis at other colleges in the U.S. who had run into problems adjusting to campus (and American) culture because they did not have strong social support systems.

In reflecting on his choice, Sharhan was glad that he had chosen a school in a community where there were other Pakistanis. “In retrospect, I don’t think I would have had a more fun college experience than this had I [compared] to any of the other places, cause the friends played out like way better than I could have expected. They often joke [this city] is like the American Lahore. I came here and by now I don’t feel that different about living here, considering that I have friends who are from the same place, and they do some of the same things, so it’s been a really good experience, yes.” It is possible that Sharhan’s interest in having a Pakistani community about him drove him to give strong consideration to TSU. One of the most important factors was the fact that TSU accepted him early, ahead of his completing the A-levels. This early acceptance relieved him of considerable pressure to score well on the A-level exams, and it effectively sealed his decision to attend TSU.

Sharhan raised several issues when he reflected on the wisdom of his choice. He said that had been more aware of the academic reputation of the University of Illinois, he might have given it more consideration. This raises the possibility that Sharhan recognized he did not possess sufficient information about the schools as he was making

his decision. He also mentioned that he regretted that his girlfriend, whom he expected to study in the U.S., had chosen to go to the U.K. instead. He felt betrayed by her decision, though he did not give an indication that he might have considered the U.K. more strongly had he known of her choice in advance. But this notion is consistent with the importance of going to a school where there was a strong Pakistani community.

### *Sharafat*

Sharafat began study at SU in August of 2005. He was planning on majoring in business, but he had not yet declared a major. He had graduated from a high school in Dubai, where he had lived with his family. His older brother was in college at the American University of Dubai. Sharafat's parents had encouraged him to go to college, and they were particularly interested in his attending medical school in the U.A.E. He never considered study in Pakistan.

Many of Sharafat's friends with whom he had taken A-levels had chosen to study abroad, though not necessarily in the U.S. In fact Sharafat felt that interest in the U.S. among his friends, and amongst students in general, had declined in the post 9/11 period. Sharafat was focused on attending school in the U.S. or Canada, perhaps because he had visited the U.S. (and the metropolitan area in which SU was located) in 2000. He had relatives in the metropolitan area, and as a result SU was his first choice for study.

During the search process, he communicated with SU's admissions office by e-mail, and once by phone. He also received help from the counseling office at his high school in Dubais. His interest in Canada waned when he did not receive responses from Canadian schools. In addition to SU, Sharafat applied to another large state university (about one hour's drive from the metro area), and he was admitted there. He had also

applied to Boston University and Pace University. He preferred study in the SU metro area, which he believed to be more relaxed than Boston or New York. He described his choice process as one of “hoping the school would choose for him.”

In the end, he had to make a choice between SU and the other State University near the metro area. His parents learned of the other school’s reputation as a “party school,” and they were particularly concerned about negative influences in the dormitories there. Sharafat disagreed with his parents on this point, and he was aware that the other university’s business school had a stronger reputation than SU’s. Sharafat had friend who were studying at TSU and the other state university, though it did not appear that this influenced his decision, as he reported that he had no friends at SU.

Once he decided on attending SU, Sharafat had no troubles with getting a student visa, perhaps because he already held a valid tourist visa. He was concerned with hassles that had occurred with entering the U.S. at the airport in the metro area.

Sharafat was pleased with his decision to attend SU. He was particularly happy the “cultural benefits” he was getting: he was pleased to have the opportunity to learn about the U.S. and to become more familiar with American English.

### *Ali*

At the time of the interview in spring 2006, Ali was in his final year of study at SU. He planned to graduate with a business degree in August. Ali had spent much of his life in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where his father was employed. At the time of the interview, Ali’s mother had returned to Pakistan and his father was still working in Riyadh. Both Ali’s father and mother had bachelor’s degrees from a school in Lahore,

and he had two younger siblings who were preparing to attend college. He also had cousins who had attended college in the U.S. who influenced him to come here.

Ali had arrived in the SU metropolitan area in 2000. He completed his final two years of high school in the same city, where an aunt and uncle were living. Obtaining an American secondary degree was a part of his parents' plan for him to be well prepared to get a bachelor's degree in the U.S.:

Ali considered attending several schools, including the American University of Sharjah in the U.A.E., and, based on the advice of his high school counseling office, he considered two small regional campuses in the state. Eventually he applied to three schools: SU, a large state university about an hour's drive from the home of his aunt and uncle, and the University of Texas at Austin. In all three cases high school friends had recommended the schools. And in the case of SU, his mother knew someone who had graduated from SU, giving it an advantage, at least in his mother's mind. Ali did not consider studying in Pakistan.

Even after sending Ali to the U.S., his parents remained closely involved in his choice process, even though they were not in the U.S. while he was selecting a school. They discouraged him from considering schools in Canada, and they wanted him to find a school in a place where he would have relatives available. In addition to his parents' desires, Ali was also interested in finding a good business school, and in living on what he called a "closed campus" (a school which had clearly defined campus boundaries). Ali said that he wanted to find a very high quality school where he felt he would find "greater opportunity." But when it came down to making a decision, he followed his parents' advice not to attend another state university, which was about an hour's drive from SU.

This was in spite of the fact that SU had a closed campus, and SU was scattered among sprawling apartment and office complexes in the downtown of the metropolitan area. His parents' reasoning was that Ali would be better off studying where he would have the support of his Aunt and Uncle nearby.

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In addition to the recommendations of friends, Ali used web sites and personal communications (e-mail and telephone) with admissions and international office staff at the colleges he was considering. He also used information provided him by his high school counseling office. In the end, his decision came down to following his parents' wishes, and to his own recognition that he had already developed a support system in the city and that studying at the other schools would require him to settle in to a new community. He also spoke of his perception of the high quality of the business school at SU. In addition, SU was the first school to accept him, and once that happened he had a longer time to think about studying at SU than the other schools.

Ali felt that he had made a good choice. He was pleased with his studies, and he was particularly pleased with the business courses he had taken. He was also pleased that he had a job lined up with a real estate investment company after graduation. He said that

the only advice he would give his younger brothers, who were also considering study in the U.S., was that they should think carefully about their majors before selecting a school.

*Razia*

Razia was a female in her final year of study at SU. She majored in accounting, and at the time of the interview she had already lined up an accounting job with a national firm. Razia had transferred to SU after spending two years at a local community college.

Razia's family was well educated, extremely so by general Pakistani standards, and as such she always expected that she and her brother would attend college. Her parents had a hard time accepting her brother's decision not to attend college. In addition to parental expectations, there were expectations from others in her social group in Pakistan. Many of her friends chose to attend college because they were still waiting for marriage opportunities, and so college was a suitable thing for a single woman of Razia's social status to do in Pakistan. Given this expectation, Razia had a very pragmatic approach to her education, though not in the sense of career preparation. Though she already had a job offer with an accounting firm lined up after graduation, she saw her college experience in terms of preparation for life in general, and family life in particular. She chose to leave a college program in Pakistan and come to the U.S. in part because the school did not meet her academic expectations.

Razia did not report that her parents had a lot of influence on her college choice, and perhaps this was related to the notion that college was for young women who expected eventually to get married and forgo a career. As such, the decision on which college to attend may not have had significance in terms of expected professional or



career outcomes. Razia said that she and her parents sometimes disagreed on the importance of education, vis-à-vis marriage, in her life, with her parents putting more emphasis on marriage. It is also possible that the lack of parental influence was because much of her college choice experience occurred after she had left Pakistan (and her parents). She initially came to the U.S. to visit relatives, and the search process that led her to enroll at SU occurred while she was in the U.S., and away from her parents. After several months in the U.S., and prior to enrolling in SU, she chose to enroll at a community college in the metropolitan area that she was visiting.

Much of her rationale for choosing a school was based on her desire not to “waste time.” She felt that her college experience in Pakistan had been a waste of time, and that she was behind others of her age in completing college and joining the work force. She desired to find a school that had a good reputation in her major, and she wanted to avoid spending too much on her education. It seemed that she wanted a good education, and one good enough that it could not be had in Pakistan. It may seem contradictory that she did not want to spend too much money on her education, but that may also relate to the fact that her primary motivation for college was personal, not professional. She wanted to learn and grow in personal ways, and she assumed that her education would make her a better family member (wife and mother) in the future. She was pleased to have a job lined up after graduation, but she was not focused in a strong way on the job or on building a career in her profession.

She initially attended a two-year college in the metro area before transferring to SU. She chose the two-year college because of convenience, and because she believed that there would be resources there for her to give more careful consideration to several

of the 4-year schools in the area. She was also convinced that the degree she would get SU had a strong reputation that would result in good job opportunities, and she was even considering attending graduate school after getting some work experience.

In her decisions to attend the community college and State University she relied on information from relatives. She also was grateful for her community college experience, in which faculty gave her advice about the 4-year colleges that she might attend. She indicated that she used a wide range of information resources, including the web, academic advisors at the community college. Perhaps the most important information source was discussions she had with family members and friends who were already attending State University. All in all, because she was already in the U.S. and in the city where she would eventually enroll, she was able to use a variety of resources, and unlike students who were applying from abroad, she had a larger number of “less significant” information sources.

### *Osman*

Osman had done his high school work in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where his father worked and his immediate family resided. Osman felt that there were no opportunities in Saudi Arabia for non-Saudi citizens, so he believed that Canada, the U.S., and Pakistan were his best options for college. Osman considered only one college, which he chose at the recommendation of an aunt and uncle who lived 75-80 miles from Regional State University (RSU). The uncle, who was the brother of Osman’s mother, had lived in the state for several years, where he and his wife practiced medicine. In addition, the sister of Osman’s aunt (the uncle’s wife) had studied at RSU, and after her return to Pakistan she had advised Osman (by phone, while he was in Saudi Arabia). Osman felt that it would

be difficult to study in some place without family support: “I don’t have any relatives there, so it’s quite difficult to go there.” In this sense the choice to come to RSU was a matter of convenience. He relied on his uncle’s advice and was not particularly active or aggressive in the college search process.

Osman believed that there were no opportunities in Saudi Arabia for non-Saudi citizens, and he believed that Canada, the U.S., and Pakistan were his best options for college. He ruled out Pakistan and Canada, believing that the quality of education there was lower than what he could find in the U.S. As for going to Pakistan, Osman believed that going to Pakistan would have been the simplest thing for him, but he also believed that educational opportunities in Pakistan were inferior to the U.S. or Canada. He felt that education in Pakistan emphasized rote student learning and overall coverage of subjects that did not prepare students for future careers. He believed that U.S. higher education was more demanding of students and that students were required to get “deep knowledge” of their subjects.

Osman’s belief in the superiority of a U.S. college education was born out in his mind, because of job offers he had already received back in Saudi Arabia.

Osman’s primary source of information for his college search was his aunt and uncle, as well his aunt’s sister who was an alumna of RSU. He also used printed materials sent by RSU. He used the materials less for choosing a college and more for choosing a major, which was a source of concern for him. He wanted to have a decision regarding his major before completing the RSU application.<sup>4</sup> But he also

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<sup>4</sup> Most U.S. colleges require international students to declare major on the application form, because government immigration documents require that a major be listed.

was concerned that he would miss good job opportunities at graduation if he did not choose a suitable major.

*Raheel*

Not attending college was not an option for Raheel. Although he could have joined in his father's business, he believed that not attending college "wasn't really an option." Not only did Raheel have a strong predisposition to attend college, but he also had a strong disposition to study abroad. This was encouraged by his parents, and he had relatives, including cousins, who had studied in the U.S. The cousins had told him about their experience, "how they felt, and how it helped them to have a better future, better job, so they were pretty helpful about it. And that also motivated me and gave me some confidence." This confidence was reflected in Raheel's belief that he could succeed as a college student abroad. But it did not foster a proactive approach toward applying to colleges.

Given Raheel's predisposition to study abroad, one might expect that he would have approached the application process more systematically. Rather, Raheel's experience seemed to be dictated by application deadlines and personal circumstances. Raheel gave some thought to studying in England, in part because he had previously traveled there. But he never applied to a school in England because taking the appropriate language test (IELTS) was inconvenient. He had already taken the TOEFL exam and he did not want to travel to sit for the IELTS exam. "I had already given TOEFL, and I had to go to another city to give that, since the testing center in my city was closed, and for England I had to give the IELTS test." He was also concerned with applying to schools in the U.S. and getting admitted so that he could begin classes as

soon as possible. He had applied to a school in Indiana not far from where an uncle lived. But as the application process there became cumbersome (there were delays with the receipt and review of his application materials), he decided to attend RSU, where the admissions staff had tended to his application quickly. RSU did not have as good or as broad a reputation as the school in Indiana, and neither his uncle nor his friends had heard of it. But Raheel was not concerned about RSU's lack of prominence: "I mean I'm satisfied, I'm happy here, so that doesn't make much difference. It doesn't matter much." As Raheel described it, he learned about RSU from a friend who was studying there and he decided to "go for it" – indicating that RSU was the only school at which he completed the application process, and also indicating that he was going to apply in spite of the fact that RSU was unfamiliar to him, his family, and his friends.

Raheel's primary information source about RSU was the friend who referred him to the school. This friend had been a classmate while they were taking some college courses in Pakistan. His friend had already enrolled at RSU, and so they did on-line chats about the school. Raheel gathered a lot of information from the school's web site: "I used the on-line resources, the RSU web site, that's the only thing I used to get here and get all the information."

The deciding factors which led Raheel to attend RSU were the convenience of RSU's application/admissions process, and the overall flexibility and timeliness that RSU offered. Time was a major factor, as Raheel believed he was wasting time while he remained in Pakistan. He explained that in Karachi it was not really possible for him to take a part-time job while he was waiting for college admission, and so to delay his studies would have been financially and personally unproductive.

The most important factor in Raheel's decision to come to the U.S. was his belief in the high quality of American education. By comparison, he believed that universities in Pakistan were of poor quality. He conceptualized American quality in terms of campus resources and the job opportunities that were available in Pakistan to holders of U.S. degrees. He indicated that studying in the U.S. was important, giving him the opportunity to take advantage of the range of resources (faculty, facilities, student services) that were offered.

*Omar*

Omar was a student at RSU. His parents were strongly involved in his intention to attend college. As an adolescent, Omar was encouraged to attend college by his parents, who were to eventually encourage him to study abroad. His parents were both college-educated and they portrayed college life in a positive way: "You know, cause my mom is graduated, my father is graduated, they know the importance of studies, the importance of universities, colleges, and everything, I should say they are the one who always, since we were a child, they started telling us everything about universities and colleges."

Omar's parents saw college as more than a place to build career skills. "Even when we were a child, they started telling us and one day you'll have to go to college, you'll have to go to university, and you'll have a very good time there, you'll see a new world, so many things, so it was kind of a challenge for us when we were a child. Someone is showing us dreams for ever youth." Omar recalled as a child reading material about education in other countries, and he had cousins who had studied in the U.S. He also recalled that when he was in the eighth grade a classmate's cousin came to the

school. The cousin talked about his experiences as a student in the U.S., and at that time Omar began to think that he could someday study in the U.S. as well.

As a high school student, Omar considered joining the Pakistan air force in hopes of becoming a pilot, but his parents discouraged him from a military career, and his father strongly encouraged him to follow in his profession, which was electrical engineering. Omar finished high school and began looking at colleges in Pakistan, which was his first choice for study. He said that Pakistani colleges were not of the best quality, primarily a result of the frequency of strikes by students or faculty. He considered GIK, and he also passed the entrance exam to a technical and engineering college in Lahore, but he was put on the waiting list for admission. His parents became worried that he would not be admitted, and so Omar said that they sent him to an open-admissions university in Turkey. This seems to be the only situation in which the parents had a significant role in the actual college choice process. While in school in Turkey he quickly became disillusioned, because even though classes were taught in English, extra-curricular discussions and even much class activity were conducted in Turkish.

While in Turkey, one of Omar's classmates learned about RSU and applied there, and although he never attended RSU, he told Omar about the school. Omar's parents were supportive of his application to RSU. They and Omar were mostly concerned with finding a good engineering education abroad, be it in England, the U.S., or Australia. Omar said that the Internet was his most useful information source in learning about RSU, but he did not make specific reference to how he used the web or e-mail.

Omar's primary criteria for choosing a college were cost and the availability of engineering programs. "Like I was searching the Internet, that should be cheap for me, I

mean suitable, and, then, I was even thinking for ranking too.” But for Omar, finding a college in the U.S. seemed to be the primary goal: “I mean I should be honest here, at that time I was not worried about rankings, I was just worried about how I get in the states and how I start my studies there.” Perhaps this concern stemmed from Omar’s view that in Pakistan, applicants who had studied abroad were considered more seriously than those with degrees from Pakistan. Or perhaps this was because his experience in Turkey had been so bad. But it may have also related to a sense that once he began study in the U.S. he could then find his way to the best educational experience. He believed that a U.S. education was a good pathway to a good career. “And that’s why I’m sure in the states if I do my studies if I go back home for my job, or if I go to the Middle East or somewhere, I will get a job easy.” His concern about getting to the U.S. may also have been related to his fears of not getting a visa. Even though he entered the U.S. prior to 9/11, it was already becoming more difficult for Pakistanis to receive visas to the U.S. due to terrorism concerns, and he feared that he would not get a visa. Omar seemed to be concerned about the fact that RSU was in an isolated environment. But he also felt that RSU would provide him with more than sufficient career opportunities, either in Pakistan or in some other part of the world.

### *Pervez*

Pervez graduated from high school in Kuwait and began looking for a college. He did not want to remain in Kuwait, and he felt that going to college in Pakistan was not suitable because of its lack of economic development. It was not clear whether he was concerned about his lifestyle in Pakistan, or whether circumstances in Pakistan would not support the educational and professional activities he desired. He also believed that



higher education in the U.S. had the best reputation in the world, and therefore he wanted to study here. He also explained that he was particularly interested in an English speaking country for college, and so in this respect his college goals were as much cultural and linguistic as they were a desire to obtain a particular degree or develop particular professional skills. He quickly ruled out the U.K. as too expensive, and based on a previous to England, he believed that British people were narrow-minded.

Pervez did not begin his search process until after completing his secondary school. Perhaps this was because of the overall rigor of the secondary system, or perhaps he felt that it was very difficult for him to get good information about colleges while he was in Kuwait. But his delay in searching for a college was in conflict with his desire to begin college as soon as soon as possible.

He learned about RSU from a friend, who had in turn learned about RSU from the Internet. Pervez used printed literature from RSU and he also communicated by e-mail with international admissions staff at RSU. His parents also examined information and learned what they could about the school. Pervez described his search as a 50-50 process between him and his parents.

He was well aware that he started very late with the search process. By his own admission, RSU “was the first thing that came into my mind, so here I am now.” In other words, it was the first (and only) school to which he gave serious consideration. He realized that he should have started his college search earlier, but when he was admitted to RSU, he “just came over.”

Pervez graduated from high school in Kuwait and began looking for a college. He did not want to remain in Kuwait, and he felt that going to college in Pakistan was not

suitable because of its lack of economic development. It was not clear whether he was concerned about his lifestyle in Pakistan, or whether circumstances in Pakistan would not support the educational and professional activities he desired. He also believed that higher education in the U.S. had the best reputation in the world, and therefore he wanted to study here. He also explained that he was particularly interested in an English speaking country for college, and so in this respect his college goals were as much cultural and linguistic as they were a desire to obtain a particular degree or develop particular professional skills. He quickly ruled out the U.K. as too expensive, and based on a previous to England, he believed that British people were narrow-minded.

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*Hussain*

Hussain had been at RSU for one year at the time of the interview. He was majoring in computer science, and he wanted me to know that he had become involved in several campus groups. He also explained that his objectives in attending college were more than just getting a degree. He was one of the few participants who saw his college experience in the U.S. as something out of the ordinary. He said:

Let's face it not everybody back home gets to go through a college in the US, so I mean if I go back I can tell my children, or you know tell my friends how everything [is], and it's not a lot different from back home.

Hussain had parents who supported his decision to go abroad, and by Hussain's account they would have supported him in whatever decision he might have made regarding college. They had encouraged him to attend college. His father, who was in the Pakistan military, thought that Hussain would be better off attending college than joining the military, and he advised Hussain on the real possibility that Pakistan soldiers would be involved in combat actions. Hussain's mother was particularly strong in her opinion that college was the right thing for him, saying “you know you have a much sharper mind, so put it to more use.”

Hussain seemed to take his mother's advice to heart, particularly as he progressed through secondary school. He began looking at colleges in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and after he completed his A-levels he prepared for and took the SAT and TOEFL exams. It was during this time that a high school classmate told him about RSU (the classmate had

some relatives at RSU). Hussain and a group of his friends decided to apply to RSU together, as a group. His parents were supportive.

Perhaps Hussain's parents were supportive because they knew that there were relatives in the U.S. who could offer Hussain support that they could not while he was away. Hussain had an aunt and uncle in Chicago, and another aunt in New York. He saw the Chicago relatives during breaks.

Just as Hussain's parents were concerned that he not be alone in a foreign land, he also wanted the support of friends as a part of his college experience.

Hussain seemed to want more than just the support or comfort of friends while he was abroad. He valued the sense of community that he had found at RSU, primarily among his Pakistanis friends there:

This desire for a human connection played out in the search/application process. He was pleased that he received personal responses from RSU staff, and he took that to mean the campus would be friendly and welcoming after he arrived. He also realized that attending a smaller school would more likely result in a more friendly campus environment.

This perception of the friendliness of the school and its staff, and the desire to be in a community of friends was more important to Hussain than issues of academic quality. He defended RSU's computer science curriculum, comparing to that of MIT, saying that all undergraduate programs were essentially the same, and that students from different schools (including MIT and RSU) would be differentiated in job interviews only by their ability to respond effectively to questions about programming procedures.

Hussain also believed that American universities offered vastly superior computer science curricula in comparison to Pakistani universities.

Hussain used several information sources in making his choice, including RSU's web site, e-mail and telephone communications with RSU's international admissions staff, and, most important, information provided by the friend who had initially recommended that Hussain consider RSU.

### *Zeeshan*

At the time of the interview, Zeeshan was completing his third year of undergraduate work at RSU. He had arrived there in 2000. But after a year at RSU he left for a semester or more in Houston, before returning to RSU for his junior year of study. Zeeshan had completed his secondary education in Kuwait, where his father, who held a Ph.D. from Iraq, had been working. His mother was in Lahore, as were two siblings who were attending college there.

Zeeshan's perception of his college choice experience was shaped by two beliefs about postsecondary education in Pakistan. First, he believed that many Pakistanis were eager to leave Pakistan for higher education. In his case he would have preferred to have remained in Pakistan, and he somehow felt that this preference set him apart from most Pakistanis. Second, he believed that there were very few spaces available for college students in Pakistan, which resulted in many Pakistanis going abroad. Although he would have preferred to have studied in Pakistan, he believed that since his family had sufficient funds to send him abroad, he should be willing to do that. He even expressed that it would have been inappropriate (perhaps even immoral) for him to benefit from a low-cost Pakistani education when he, unlike most Pakistanis, could afford to study abroad. In

addition, because he had already lived outside of Pakistan, he believed that study abroad “wasn’t that big of an issue for me.” Zeeshan seemed to see his choice to study abroad as not just a personal sacrifice, but a sacrifice made on behalf of countrymen who did not have the resources or abilities that he had. Whereas most Pakistanis wanted to study outside of Pakistan so as to enhance their own professional or academic reputations, Zeeshan wanted to study abroad as a way of serving the broader Pakistani nation.

Although his parents had not influenced his decision to attend RSU, they believed very strongly that he should attend college. He viewed his choice to go to college as his choice to make, but one that was strongly supported by his parents, especially his father. His parents would have been displeased if he had foregone college to take a job right after high school.

Zeeshan’s choice set included GIK, the engineering school in Islamabad, founded by A.Q. Khan. At the time he applied to GIK he also submitted an application to RSU. He did not apply to schools in Kuwait, as he believed that colleges there were only open to citizens of Kuwait.

While Zeeshan was considering colleges, he and some friends began exploring options for study abroad. He and his friends had been referred to the state in which RSU was located on the basis that the state had many jobs and, presumably, employment opportunities after graduation. Using a college index web site, they began searching schools in the state, and were pleased to find RSU, and were even more pleased that RSU staff responded personally to their inquiries, by phone and by e-mail. In contrast, they did not receive responses to inquiries to other institutions.

Zeeshan said that he also studied the RSU brochure and catalog before making a decision. When he was not accepted to GIK, he decided to apply for a visa and attend RSU. He explained that he was interested in attending RSU, though he was not particularly drawn to study in the U.S. He reported that he was the first Pakistani to attend RSU. He seemed proud of the fact that other Pakistanis had been able to find an academic home at RSU, and that the school was a place that his compatriots found satisfactory.

*Ismael*

Ismael was in his first year at RSU where he was majoring in electrical and computer engineering. He transferred to RSU after a year at a college in Cypress. He had spent most of his life in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where his father was employed and where he had attended a school for Pakistani expatriates.

Ismael's father was an engineer, and his mother held a master's degree. Most of his relatives had higher degrees. "Because all of my family is very educated, very admired, most of my father's brother are engineers, my mom's brother are doctors, everyone is educated." Ismael was attracted to the lifestyles that were available to his educated relatives, and he never considered other life options besides attending college. Growing up in this family context, Ismael had a strong predisposition to attend college.

In spite of this predisposition disposition, he did not begin his college application process until late into his high school years. His primary reason for attending the college in Cypress was the quick acceptance the school offered. Ismael said that the application process to schools in the U.S., where he really wanted to study, took six months. "For one year, because I didn't start my process for USA so I already applied in Cyprus and I got

admission, so again when I got admission in Cyprus then I applied over here and I got a reply so I transferred over here after one year.” So his decision to study in Cypress was a more a matter of convenience and availability. It certainly was not related to a specific desire to study in Cypress or a belief that the opportunities in Cypress were better than in the U.S.

Perhaps it was his family’s experience and predisposition for college attendance that led to his father directing Ismael’s search and application process. Applications to RSU were handled by his father, in part because Ismael was busy with his studies in Cypress: “Actually he played a most important role too, for my admission, and he made all the decisions, because when I was in Cypress all the documentation he did that time.” Ismael’s father had also been heavily involved in Ismael’s choice process, not just the application process. Ismael and his father had first learned about RSU at a College Fair in Jeddah. Ismael pointed out that he and his father had been attending the annual fair for five years, another indication of the strong disposition to attend college.

Ismael (and presumably his father) had no interest in attending schools in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, where he assumed that no colleges would be open to him. This lack of interest was based on the assumption that the best schools were in the U.S. Ismael believed that the perceived value of an American college degree was especially high in Pakistan and the Middle East. He also believed that graduates with American degrees could earn double the salary earned by graduates from other places in the world.

Having settled on study in the U.S., Ismael had several criteria for finding a school. First, he wanted to be in a safe or secure place, which in his mind precluded large American cities. Second, he had relatives in the Midwest, and so finding a school close to



those relatives offered some a sense of security. A third criterion was the speed of the application process. Note that Ismael had begun his college work in Cypress because of the general slowness involved in becoming admitted to an American school.

Apparently, RSU was able to process Ismael's application in a timely manner. A fourth criterion was cost – Ismael was seeking a modestly priced college. “Cost information and both, you know we are international students, that means our fees are almost triple the regular students, and we have to think about the financial,”

As discussed above, Ismael and his father learned about RSU at a College Fair in Jeddah, where they met RSU's Director of International Programs. They also used brochures from RSU.

Ismael was satisfied with his choice to study at RSU. At the same time he was aware of the pressures and demands that came with study in a foreign country, and he believed that RSU's small size and the size of the community made study there very comfortable and safe. He felt RSU was a better choice for him than the big universities in Houston or Dallas where friends were enrolled. Ismael felt so comfortable with his decision that he believed RSU would be the best choice for other Pakistanis who might be interested in study in the U.S.

### *Eisa*

Eisa was in his first year at RSU at the time of the interview. He was one of three brothers. He considered Karachi home, but he and his family had lived abroad in Saudi Arabia for several years, and he had traveled extensively in the near and Middle East. Eisa's father was an ENT surgeon. Eisa took pride in the fact that he was from Karachi,

Pakistan's commercial capital, and that he was from the Mamon caste. Most of his family and friends were members of the Mamon caste, and were businessmen.

My interview with Eisa occurred in November, after he had begun study at RSU the previous August. Eisa already had a college degree before coming to RSU. He had completed a Bachelor's degree at Newport University, a proprietary school that offered online degrees in Pakistan and elsewhere. He had been working in the MIS department in a Pakistani agricultural chemical and paint company. He had liked his job, which he felt offered him a comfortable lifestyle, and he was proud of the salary and benefits he had received.

Several factors led Eisa to consider continuing with his education. Although he liked his job, he was also aware that it was not secure, and that he did not possess any particular skill or knowledge that would differentiate him from other employees. He was also aware of and desirous of the respect that his father, a doctor, enjoyed because of his educational attainment: "As my dad, he studied a lot, and now he's a specialist, he's a surgeon, even he's old, now he's old, but he has some respect like if he goes to any party or something, people respect him and they give him, they treat him very nice." So Eisa decided to continue his education so that he might benefit from both the skills and the prestige that it would offer. He began to think getting a master's in business, either from the U.S. or Pakistan.

Eisa's father was supportive of his desire for further education, and Eisa's parents provided him with financial support for his study in the U.S. While he was in school, he was dependent on his parents' financial support. He believed that they had sufficient

income to support his education abroad. He said that his parents were supportive of his decision to come to the U.S., but they did not influence his decision in any way.

He began to think seriously about going abroad for his Master's when he accompanied his younger brother to the office of a private academic advising agency in Karachi. At that time the advisor suggested that Eisa consider going abroad. Eventually Eisa decided that it would be best for him to do another undergraduate degree in the U.S. before seeking a graduate degree. Eisa first learned about RSU via e-mail communication with a friend who was enrolled there. Eisa decided to attend RSU because he wanted to study where he had some friends. But by the time Eisa had arrived at RSU, his friend had transferred to a school in Oklahoma.

At the time of the interview, Eisa was very focused on his educational goals: "And my aim is first of all to complete my masters, everything else comes after education for me." Still, Eisa wanted to study among friends and no doubt experienced some homesickness:

The desire to be close to friends was the most important criteria in Eisa's decision to attend RSU. Perhaps he was less concerned about other characteristics of the school because for him it was a step in the process to his ultimate goal, which was a Masters degree. He believed that the U.S. was the best place for him to get that degree, because he could truly experience international business on an American campus. He did not believe he would have the same experience in some other country. He said that he was interested in studying in Greece, and he believed that study in the U.K. would have been more efficient due to fewer (or no) general education requirements.

Eisa was pleased with his decision to attend RSU, and he was glad that he had made some friends there. “Yea, I feel good about my decision, because my, like my aim was to be in a better society, and to learn more personal values and all, it’s good over here.

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