TRANSITION INTO A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY FOR

NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS:

FINDING A SENSE OF INSTITUTIONAL BELONGING

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of non-native English speaking immigrant students at a small Canadian university relating to their transition to university, their experiences within the social and academic contexts of the campus, and their sense of belonging on their campus. This study used a phenomenological approach, and was supported by a conceptual framework of minority student persistence and belonging within postsecondary education. The findings of this study suggested that these students' positive social experiences and perception of the campus as being diverse and open to diversity were connected to students' sense of belonging. The results also suggest that increased availability of customized support is needed for non-native English speaking students on this Canadian campus, and that greater awareness among university faculty and administration needs to be paid to students' integration in classroom and campus practices. This thesis concludes with recommendations for practice and future research.

Key words: *immigrant; non-native English speaking; postsecondary; transition; academic and social integration; sense of belonging.*

DEDICATION

To all the students who have shared their stories with me.

Thank you.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study contributes to the body of literature addressing the persistence and retention of non-native English speaking, immigrant students, and the factors that affect the development of a sense of belonging among this demographic in a Canadian postsecondary setting. This study further examines the stages through which these students navigated in the PSE experience, including how these students: navigated the transition into their first year of university; articulated their campus experiences; and finally, perceived their sense of belonging to the institution.

Background Information

The issues of student persistence and retention within postsecondary institutions are central in the discussion of higher education for researchers and practitioners alike (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). This focus has resulted in extensive documentation of the transitional experiences of postsecondary students, including the factors that affect persistence and that facilitate a positive adjustment journey into higher education (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Terenzini et al., 1994).

More specifically, this attention has largely been directed towards the experiences of students within the first year of their studies, as Tinto (1998) explains "attrition is, for most institutions, most frequent during the first year of college" (p. 169). Since the first year of this experience is the most formative in an individual's intention to persist in his or her studies (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993), understanding the

processes by which students navigate their first-year experience and the factors that affect institutional affiliation and belonging are integral to gaining a clearer understanding of student retention and persistence.

Student persistence within postsecondary programs is both practically and theoretically significant to students, institutions, and the greater community. In their review of studies in higher education, entitled 'How college affects students,' Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that the effects of postsecondary experiences are largely positive, offering economic, cognitive, social, and moral development to the parties involved. Tierney (1992) further elaborated on this idea, stating that persistence allows "the student [to be] able to reap the rewards that a college degree affords, the college or university [to be] able to maintain the income that derives from the student's attendance, and [the] society [to be] able to utilize the skills of students in becoming more productive" (p. 604). Additionally, the completion of higher education allows graduates to gain access into the labour market, and facilitates their transition to full participation in society (Kilbride & D'Arcangelo, 2002). For socially normative students on time transition to PSE is supported by societal norms whereas for visible minority English-speaking Canadian youth such transitions may be alienating them from their social groups and values resulting in low retention place. Clearly, the focus on retention of students in postsecondary programs is well-merited.

However, research also highlights that both the experiences within the university campus, and the effects of higher education are *conditional*; that is, "not all students will necessarily benefit to the same extent, or perhaps even in the same direction, from the postsecondary experience" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 2). Research demonstrates that mature, visible-minority, and non-native English speaking students may experience a greater

number and a greater degree of challenges than their non-minority, traditional-aged peers, and that the effects of postsecondary experiences are significantly less positive for the former demographic (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). These conditional effects are further exacerbated, as historically, minority and mature students are widely known to have lower rates of both attendance and persistence at university. While Trow (1973) conceptualized that PSE has moved from an elitist model of participation to a universal model of participation, with participation within PSE at university exceeding 50% of the population (as cited in Kirby, 2009, p.1), for disadvantaged and minority populations, this change has not taken place (p. 2). Therefore, successfully moving 'non-traditional' students into PSE and through to graduation requires new strategies. While the majority of research on student persistence in higher education involves an American demographic, these concerns and conditional experiences and effects are alarmingly similar on the Canadian campus.

In a pan-Canadian study of the transitional experiences of first-year college students (Human Resources, 2008), participants who identified themselves as an immigrant and/or a member of a visible minority group consistently reported lower satisfaction in their postsecondary experiences, including experiences suggestive of lower academic and social integration (Section 5 & 6). Furthermore, they reported significantly lower institutional commitment than their local-born, non-visible minority peers (Section 5.11 & 6.6). The Council of the Federation, a national organization created in 2003 to strengthen inter-provincial and territorial ties, and foster relationships with government on issues of national significance, describes one of their priorities as "improv[ing] access [to postsecondary education] for all Canadians, in particular for the many Canadians who have been traditionally disadvantaged and underrepresented in postsecondary education and

employment" (Introduction); it is integral to continue to focus on persistence and retention of minority students in higher education institutions, and the transitional experience that affect these processes. In Canada, this troubling data, coupled with the unique composition of this population described below, elevates this issue to an even higher level of significance.

The Demographics of Canadian Universities

The composition of Canadian society is changing dramatically, and this change is being reflected on the university campus (Belanger & Malenfant, 2005; CUSC, 2011; Human Resources, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2003b, 2005). Defined by the Employment Equity Act (1995) as "persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Department of Justice, Interpretation), visible minority groups accounted for only 5% of Canada's population in 1981; however, in two decades, this figure nearly tripled to represent over 13% of Canada's population by 2001 (Bélanger & Malenfant, 2005, p. 18). Furthermore, by Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017, this demographic is projected to grow to roughly 20% of Canada's population (p. 18).

Additionally, in their review of the most recent *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada*, Bélanger and Malenfant (2005) found that "sustained immigration" contributed most significantly to these changes in Canadian demographics, as "visible minorities make up a high percentage of newcomers" (p. 19). More specifically, in 2001, Statistics Canada found that "the large majority (68%) of the visible minority population living in Canada are immigrants … [and] many (24%) visible minority immigrants are very recent arrivals to Canada" (p. 3). These demographic shifts are also observable on the Canadian campus.

According to the Pan-Canadian Study of First Year College Students (2007), 16% of respondents were immigrants (p. 22), 20% of respondents self-identified as a member of a visible minority group (p. 21), and 13% did not speak English or French as a first language (p. 21) (Human Resources). The Canadian University Survey Consortium (2011) found that 7% of respondents were immigrants, almost one quarter self-identified as a member of a visible-minority cultural or ethnic group, and 17% of students reported that neither English nor French was their first language (p. 7). Please see the definitions of terms beginning on page 12 for a description of terminology. These demographic changes reflect shifts in national and provincial immigration policies, programs, and priorities.

Although Canada has several classes of immigration, the classes that account for the largest number of newcomers are those that work to support the economy by recruiting highly educated and skilled workers (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010, p. 14). Historically, immigration has been under federal jurisdiction in Canada; however, in order to prioritize the economic growth on a national *and* provincial level, a new immigration class entitled the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) was enacted in 1998. Now operational in 10 provinces and territories in Canada, the PNP "allows the provinces flexibility in selecting immigrants according to each province's needs and interests" (Quell, 2002, p. 46). As a result of the priorities of this program, Manitoba has experienced a "brain gain", as the newcomers are largely work-force aged, highly skilled, and well-educated, often possessing extensive professional experience in their home country (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2010, p. 22). More specifically, in his analysis of data from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics administered by Statistics Canada, Boyd (2002) found that foreign-born, non-native English speaking visible minority adults in Canada achieved higher levels of

educational attainment than their native-born counterparts. Therefore, both nationally and provincially, Canada recruits and attracts highly capable newcomers with extensive professional education and experience, who will be most beneficial to the economic viability of the province.

Despite these assets, these newcomers often struggle to integrate into the Canadian community (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2003b), and, more specifically, into the Canadian labour-market (Statistics Canada, 2003b, 2005; Badets, Chard, & Levett, 2003). The results of the Ethnic Diversity Survey, administered in 2002 by Statistics Canada, indicate that upon arrival and settlement within Canada, immigrants "experience a downgrading of their occupational status due to things such as: underutilization of their skills, lack of Canadian work experience, transferability of foreign credentials, lack of knowledge of at least one official language, lack of available jobs, or through personal choice" (Badets et al., 2003, p.46). Therefore, despite their capabilities and qualifications, these individuals are often not readily able to find relevant employment. Of the concerns listed above that contribute to this challenge, credential recognition is reported as the most problematic (Carter, 2009).

According to a recent evaluation of the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, of the 84% of respondents who reported that they had experienced difficulties in finding relevant employment, the majority identified credential recognition as their largest barrier (Carter, 2009, p. 29). On a national perspective, in the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada administered in 2005 by Statistics Canada, only four in ten newcomers with internationally obtained qualifications had their credentials recognized (p. 35). Statistics Canada (2003) acknowledges that while "credential accreditation should enhance [newcomer's]

employability and hence their economic success and subsequently facilitate the integration process … credential recognition is a major hurdle that many newcomers experience" (p. 50).

Credential recognition is a problem not only for the immigrants, but also for the host country. Facilitating credential recognition translates into a "greater pool of resources available" (Statistics Canada, 2003b, p. 50), while a delay in this process amounts to a "brain drain", depleting the home country of a skilled worker, and underutilizing that worker in their new home. However, the process of credential recognition has become increasingly complicated as the number and diversity of source countries for immigration increases. Previously, immigrants came predominantly from European countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany, as well as the USA, where the education systems are similar to that of Canada, and the first language was often English (p. 50). Now, however, the majority of immigrants are from Asia (Statistics Canada, 2005), where language, culture, education, and skills (Statistics Canada, 2003b, p. 50) are quite different. As a result, the newcomers for whom credential recognition is more problematic are more likely from a non-native English speaking visible minority group, because of the dissimilarities in the education systems.

Credential recognition concerns necessitate either a) obtaining employment at a level non-commensurate with one's credentials or b) changing occupational fields or entering a Canadian postsecondary program, should an individual wish to enter the Canadian workforce in his or her previous profession or general field of expertise. As a result of these credential recognition concerns, access to higher education represents a "primary means of entering Canadian society and eventually its economy" for those affected (Kilbride & D'Arcangelo, 2002, p.11). However, accessing admission to institutions of higher education does not

necessarily imply inclusion or successful integration into the university community, nor does it necessarily result in a sense of belonging to that institution or greater community.

Furthermore, for many newcomers, the transition into a postsecondary institution may coincide with their first experiences in Canada; attending a postsecondary institution may therefore provide many students with the first opportunity to integrate into their new home. As Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggest, if students can successfully negotiate the transition into their first-year of postsecondary studies, then they will be much more likely to persist within that institution, and therefore more readily able to participate actively in society upon graduation. Therefore, postsecondary institutions have a unique and powerful position from which to either foster a new Canadian's integration into their community through a positive university experience, or to further exacerbate a very challenging transition through a negative and unsupported first-year experience. Since the institution has the ability to play such a pivotal role in this transitional period, it is crucial to investigate the experiences of these students to determine what supports are needed to facilitate their success. Gaining a clearer understanding of the transitional experiences of non-native English speaking immigrant students is essential in the development of more educationally equitable practices that improve both access to and outcomes from higher education for all Canadians.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate how non-native English speaking immigrant students navigate the transition into university at one small, diverse (Axworthy, 2009) campus located in the province of Manitoba. It further examined the factors that affect these students' abilities to develop a sense of belonging within the institution.

Research questions. The following overarching question guided this research: what factors affect the transition and adjustment of non-native English speaking immigrant students at a small, diverse, postsecondary institution, and furthermore, what factors contribute to the development of a sense of belonging for those same students? To further define the scope of this study, the following research questions were asked:

1. In the initial transition to the Canadian postsecondary experience, what do non-native English speaking immigrant students perceive and describe as affecting this experience?

2. How do non-native English speaking immigrant students describe their experiences within the university?

3. What are non-native English speaking immigrant students' perceptions of their sense of belonging on the university campus, and what do they perceive to have contributed to or prevented its development?

Specifically, the objectives of this research were to (1) record and analyze the transitional experiences of 12 non-native English speaking immigrant students in a small Canadian postsecondary institution, (2) collect and analyze students' perceptions of their sense of belonging through their subjective descriptions, (3) document students' participation in both university initiated and community-based academic and social activities, and investigate students' perceptions of the effects of these experiences on their sense of institutional belonging, (4) collect and synthesize scholarly research on factors that

contribute to a sense of belonging within and institution, and the implications of institutional affiliation, and (5) report findings to academic, professional, and administrative audiences.

Limitations

This study was limited to the experiences of 12 students at a small university in the Province of Manitoba so as to gain a deep and full understanding of these students' perceptions of their own transitional experiences and sense of belonging. However, because the participant pool has not been randomly selected, is very small, and the demographics of the selected institution are very unique, this limited the generalizability of any conclusions drawn in this research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, as Nora and Cabrera (1996) state, "studying students at a single institution as opposed to multiple institutions controls for several threats to internal validity" (pp. 138-9) including exposure to dissimilar conditions, such as academic staff, faculty, course requirements, programming, and the campus climate. Therefore, delimiting this study to one institution therefore controls for these threats to internal reliability.

Furthermore, in addition to the small sample size, subjects were not selected as representative in number of smaller student populations on campus, so generalizations of this sample to the university population will not be possible. James and Taylor (2008) also identified this as a potential limitation of their qualitative research study investigating the experiences of first-generation students. However, the themes that emerged from this research may also resonate with a larger group, but the frequency with which these themes may emerge in the larger group will not be predictable.

My own background experiences, both as an EAL teacher working with newcomers in a university setting, and as a program coordinator, often supporting the transition of non-native English speaking, immigrant, and mature students into a postsecondary context, were both a strength and a limitation of this research. My experiences are an asset in this research in that I have a strong awareness of the challenges that this demographic may face in a postsecondary setting; however, they may be construed as a weakness because of the potential bias that this may bring to the research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, however, that an awareness of this potential source of bias relating to the researcher's identity can help to minimize this problem, and that documenting any thoughts in the form of field notes while researching may also reduce the impact of this potential concern, both of which were employed in this research. Furthermore, the impact of this bias was reduced by my overt attention placed on students' perceptions, rather than employing an outsider's perspective and placing pre-determined values on different experiences.

Definitions of Terms

In order to clarify the use of the terms 'visible minority', 'immigrant', 'Canadian', 'non-native English speaking', 'traditional', and 'nontraditional', I will provide operational definitions of the terms as they will be used in this study.

Visible minority**.** For the purpose of this study, usage of the term 'visible-minority' will be consistent with that of the Employment Equity Act. The Employment Equity Act (1995) defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Department of Justice, Interpretation).

Canadian. A complex and often subjectively-interpreted term, nationality or citizenship is defined in many ways. In his text orienting readers to citizenship education, Schugurensky *(*2006) describes the four dimensions that characterize citizenship. Most commonly, citizenship is associated with *status*, which is often seen as the possession of a passport, or one's designation of nationality. Secondly, citizenship refers to an individual's *identity*, or sense of belonging or integration within a community. Citizenship also concerns the embodiment of *civic virtues*, or the principles, beliefs, and behaviour deemed representative of a "good citizen." Finally, citizenship as *agency* involves citizens participating actively in their society to effect social and political change. According to Tran, Kustec, and Chui (2005), Canadian citizenship as 'status' can be gained "by birth or by naturalization" (p. 8). Citizenship by birth requires an individual to be born on Canadian land, or to Canadian citizens, whereas naturalization occurs when an individual not born in Canada gains permanent residency and later passes a citizenship exam. For the purpose of this study, when I refer to a 'Canadian', I employed the term to designate one's natal status, or designation of nationality at birth. I therefore employed this term as participants of this study did, rather than including both Canadian's by birth, permanent residents who have passed their citizenship exams, and those who have yet to write (or to pass) these exams.

Immigrant. In this study, as in relevant literature, I will use the term 'immigrant' to an individual who was born in another country, with accompanying citizenship in that country, and later gained permanent residency in Canada as a landed immigrant or refugee (Statistics Canada, 2003a).

Non-Native English Speaker. In this study, I used the term non-native English speaker to refer to an individual who was foreign-born, and did not speak either English or

French as a first language. From here, I used the abbreviation NNES to refer to this designation. I have not used the terms EAL (English as an additional language) or ESL (English as a second language); although EAL is used within Manitoba with the agenda of acknowledge individuals' multilingual capabilities, this term often positions individuals with a deficit identity. While 'naturalized English language speaker' may more effectively address the current language capabilities of these individuals, with respect to English, I have used 'non-native English speaker' to remain both consistent with existing research and politically neutral.

Traditional**.** In literature relating to higher education, this term arises frequently, and it identifies the student population that has been historically the most common on Canadian and American campuses. This includes Caucasian students who have entered university relatively quickly after high school (generally under 22 years of age), who speak either English or French as a first language, and who were born in Canada. While this term is used in existing research, I have employed the term 'dominant culture' within this thesis as an alternative to subvert this potentially harmful language.

Nontraditional. In literature relating to higher education, this term is used to represent students that have been historically less represented in university. This typically includes visible-minority students, non-native English (or French) speakers, and 'mature' students (typically older than 23 years of age). While I don't want to perpetuate the connotations associated with being a traditional or nontraditional student, because these terms are used frequently in literature, I have included them to represent existing research findings. However, when possible, I have employed the terms 'non-dominant culture' and mature as an alternative within this thesis.

Organization of the Study

  The first chapter of this study included a background to the problem, the statement of the problem, purpose of this study, research questions, limitations and delimitations of the current study, definitions of terms, and the organization of this study. A review of the literature organized around the purpose of this study is found in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, design, research materials, data-gathering and analyses procedures that were used in conducting this study. Chapter 4 presents findings, discussions, and interpretations of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to present an overview of current research related to the transition to university, students' experiences within the postsecondary setting, and the development of a sense of belonging among NNES immigrant students. The literature review of this study is organized around five sections so as to represent the key concerns that provide the foundation for this study. The first section examines the contribution of three terms in literature relating to persistence and retention in postsecondary education: involvement, engagement, and integration. The second section involves a review of a significant model of student departure. Third, the applicability of this model to an increasingly diverse demographic is examined. The fourth section explores the construct, sense of belonging, and suggests a rationale for its use in examining the transition and persistence of NNES immigrant students within higher education. The last section highlights several models of sense of belonging, and examines the factors that affect the perception of belonging, particularly for NNES immigrant students.

The sources employed in this research were identified using the ERIC, Psychology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, and Health Sciences: A SAGE Full-Text Collection databases, as well as from references in existing, relevant studies. Generally, the studies accessed have been published in peer-reviewed journals and books.

Involvement, Engagement, and Integration

In current research on student adjustment and transitions to postsecondary education, two results are consistently noted: (1) Involvement and engagement are essential to students' integration into the institution (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993), and

(2) social and academic integration are linked to both student persistence and graduation (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 525). Because of the overlap and frequent use of these terms in relevant literature, the following is a brief definition and history of each to ensure clarity in the proceeding research.

Involvement. The first salient term relating to literature on student transitions and adjustment is involvement. Astin (1984) defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). He positions full involvement and withdrawal at opposite ends of the involvement continuum, describing withdrawal as the "ultimate form of noninvolvement" (p. 303). This continuum is the basis of his *Theory of Student Involvement*, which draws from an earlier longitudinal study conducted of college dropouts (1975). Although Astin (1984) doesn't dismiss the importance of psychological constructs such as motivation on involvement, he highlights the behavioural aspects of this idea, as "it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement" (p. 298).

The development of this theory partially resulted from frustration with existing pedagogical theories that tended to view college material and resources as input factors, and standardized achievement measures as output factors, but neglected to account for the effects of "some mediating mechanism that would explain how these educational programs and policies are translated into student achievement and development" (Astin, 1984, p. 299). Astin (1984) further states that involvement offers a preliminary "link" between variables employed in previous pedagogical theories, such as the input of subject matter and campus resources and the "learning outcomes desired by the student and the professor" (p. 300). It

therefore emphasizes "active participation of the student in the learning process" and is convenient from an administrative perspective in that it views students' time as the most valuable institutional resource; "the extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains." (p. 301).

Research conducted by Astin (1975) previously also suggested a relationship between students' perceptions of involvement and the "fit" between colleges and students (p. 303). This research found that students were more likely to transition successfully into and persist at an institution where they were better able to identify with the environment. While involvement is solely comprised of the actions of the student, this idea of 'fit' connects with the next two terms, engagement and integration, in that it highlights the interplay between the student and the institution.

Engagement. The second significant term that I will highlight is engagement. Student engagement involves two key components; "what the student does [involvement] and what the institution does" (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 413). Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007) further elaborate on these two features of engagement:

> The first [feature] is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities… The second feature is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation (p. 44).

Therefore, engagement requires both the institution to create active learning opportunities and provide relevant services, and the student electing to participate in these opportunities.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has been used to collect data on the background characteristics, levels of engagement, and persistence of more than 1.5 million American undergraduate students. It is conceptualized around the following five components: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment (Harper & Quaye, 2009, pp. 5-6). Like involvement, engagement also results in increased persistence; Harper and Quaye (2009) summarize the work of numerous researchers, stating "those [students] who are actively engaged in educationally-purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than their disengaged peers to persist through graduation" (p. 4). Therefore these two terms offer insight into the factors that influence retention and persistence.

Integration. The third salient term that I will highlight relating to student persistence and retention is integration. Integration is used to explain "the extent to which students come to share the attitudes and beliefs of their peers and faculty and the extent to which students adhere to … the institutional culture" (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 414). Integration is often divided into two categories; academic integration, which results from students' academic performance and interactions with the University faculty and staff members, and social integration, which, among other elements, is connected to involvement in extracurricular activities, and peer group interactions (Tinto, 1993).

Theoretical and empirical evidence connects "persistence and degree attainment in higher education to students' abilities to connect with a peer group and develop positive relationships with faculty" or respectively, social and academic integration (Johnson et al., 2007, 525). Because of its strong connection to persistence, the concept of integration has

become increasingly significant, with many instruments being created to measure it (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980), and models developed that employ this concept (Tinto, 1993). Although many models of student persistence use the construct of integration, the most notable educational theorist who has modeled social and academic integration in the postsecondary persistence process is Vincent Tinto (1975; 1987; 1993).

A Theory of Student Departure

Progress has been made in developing models that are explanatory and predictive of students' persistence within and adjustment to university, in order for postsecondary institutions to be better able to promote student success and increase student retention and graduation rates (Spady, 1970; Astin, 1984, Pascarella, 1985; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Among the most significant of these models is Vincent Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) Model of Student Departure.

In 1975, Tinto developed a model that sought to explain the process by which students withdraw from college. Described as an "interactive model of student departure" (Tinto, 1993, p. 112), Tinto's theory was strongly influenced by educational theorist, Spady (1970), and adapts the work of French sociologist, Emilie Durkheim and Dutch anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep. As the most commonly-cited theory of student departure, Tinto's work has been described as seminal, and assigned "near-paradigmatic status" in relevant literature on student persistence in postsecondary education (Berger and Braxton, 1998, p. 104)

The focus of Van Gennep's 1960 research that most influenced Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) theory is the idea of *rites of passage* in tribal societies. Rites of passage involve the

"mechanisms that traditional societies employ in providing for the orderly transmission of its social relationships over time" (Tinto, 1993, p. 92); Van Gennep examines these *rites* or crises that individuals face throughout life, particularly relating to "movement … from membership in one group to another" (p. 92). He determined that this process of *passage* or transition involves three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. According to Van Gennep, s*eparation* entails physical and emotional distancing from one's past associations and memberships. This may also involve a rejection of the values held by these previous associations. In the *transition* stage, the individual begins to interact with members of the new group. Finally, *integration* involves taking on "new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and … establishing … membership in that group as a participant member" (p. 93). As Tinto states that Van Gennep intended his work be applied "to a variety of situations" (p. 93), he borrows the conceptual framework of the three stages of transition from Rites of Passage, and employs them within his model of student departure to describe "the early stages of withdrawal from institutions of higher education" (p. 95). In his model, then, the 'rite of passage' is the transition to postsecondary education. Previous associations from which the student needs to distance himself or herself in order to successfully transition include his or her family, and high school friends or colleagues. Full separation, according to Van Gennep, includes both a physical separation, and a distancing and rejection of values held by previous community.

Tinto was also heavily influenced by W. G. Spady (1970), who was the first to apply Durkheim's 1951 studies of suicide within communities to help illuminate causes of student departure from higher education. In his studies of suicide, Durkheim identifies four forms: altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical, the latter of which Spady (1970) and Tinto

(1975) apply to their models of student departure from postsecondary education. This form of suicide "arises when individuals are unable to become integrated and establish membership within communities of society" (Tinto, 1993, p. 101). As the two are "intimately interrelated", Durkheim argued that *both* insufficient social integration, involving daily interactions and personal connections, and insufficient intellectual integration, involving commonly held beliefs and values, can result in egotistical suicide (Tinto, 1993, pp. 101-2). Tinto (1993) suggests that Durkheim's theory on egotistical suicide offers an "analogue" to students' departure from postsecondary institutions, because it "highlights the ways in which the social and intellectual communities that make up a college come to influence the willingness of students to stay at that college" (p. 104). Therefore, he suggests that both social and academic (intellectual) integration are essential to promoting retention.

Taken with the work of Van Gennep, these ideas merge to illuminate a process by which students can arrive at a decision to persist at or withdraw from an institution, and how an institution affects students' choices to do so. As previous theories of student departure put the onus squarely on the shoulders of the students, this seminal model of college persistence and withdrawal veers away from its predecessors by placing equal, if not greater responsibility for integration and therefore retention, with the institution. See Tinto (1993, p. 114) for a complete depiction of this model.

Tinto (1993) describes that students enter the college experience with a multitude of "pre-entry attributes" relating to their family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. These attributes inform students' intentions, goals, and institutional commitments as they enter college, the effects of which are moderated by students' external commitments. Tinto suggests that the experiences that students have within the institution relating to the

academic system, specifically their academic performance and interactions with staff and faculty, as well as to the social system, which involves their participation in extracurricular activities and their interactions with peers, affect, respectively, their academic (intellectual) integration and social integration.

In this model, integration is defined as "the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). Tinto (1993) furthers his explanatory model by positing that the academic and social experiences that shape integration in turn affect students' goals and institutional commitments, indicating that "positive experiences… reinforce persistence through their impact to heighten intentions and commitments both to the goal of college completion and to the institution … [while] negative or malintegrative experiences serve to weaken intentions and commitments, especially commitments to the institution, and thereby enhance the likelihood of leaving" (p. 115). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) summarize, "rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution presumably lead to greater student integration in these systems and thus persistence" (p. 54). Thus, integration is a significant precursor to retention and persistence.

Criticism of Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. Tinto's investigation of student persistence led him to develop "a model of educational communities that highlights the critical importance of student engagement and involvement in the learning communities of the college." (1993, p. 132). While this is a significant development in the field of student departure research, Tinto's model has received extensive criticism. This criticism primarily revolves around two main concerns. The first concern is the inappropriate application of Van

Gennep's theory of separation to the student persistence process (Tierney, 1992). The second concern is with the concept of integration itself, and the privilege this concept offers to majority students by valuing 'normative' values and attitudes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Particularly because this research focused on the transitional experiences of minority students in postsecondary education, it is important to illuminate potential concerns relating to these concepts in application to this demographic. I further describe these concerns below, and highlight the educational theorists who hold these views.

Tinto (1993) asserts that in order to integrate into the community of the postsecondary institution, students must "break away" and "disassociate themselves … from membership in the communities of the past", including the family and external community groups (p. 95). He adapts this notion from Van Gennep's separation stage in the rite of passage, which describes separation as the first of three stages in the transition of membership to a new community. Tinto further explains that this may require a rejection of the values and norms of past communities, and that failure to do so may result in these external ties pulling an individual away from incorporation into the college life, and therefore increase the risk of student departure (p. 96). This idea has received criticism both theoretically, for the incorrect employment of an anthropological construct in an education setting, as well as practically, in its inapplicability to minority and, as literature describes, 'nontraditional' student populations.

Van Gennep and other social integrationalists posit that individuals must undergo a "rite of passage" to achieve full participatory membership within a new community of a given society. However, Tierney (1992) describes that while Van Gennep uses the term 'rites of passage' to describe rituals within a given society, Tinto borrows this term to describe the

passage of an individual from one culture to another (pp. 607-8). While Tinto (1993) asserts

that Van Gennep "believed that the concept of rites of passage could be applied to a variety

of situations" (p. 93), Tierney states that Van Gennep "never anticipated that it would be

used to explain one culture's ritual to initiate a member of another culture" (p. 608). Rather

than describing the process of assimilation from one culture to another, a rite of passage was

initially used to describe a nonnegotiable, *intra*cultural experience. For a dominant culture

student whose parents and peers attended university, this transition may be an intracultural

experience. However, for a NNES immigrant student, who is the first in his or her

community to attend university in Canada, this is a culturally disjunctive experience

(Terenzini et al., 1994), which is not a result of the process of the 'rite of passage', but the

result of the fact that the "institution is culturally distinct from the [student's] own culture"

(Tierney, 1992, p. 608). Therefore, the employment of the cultural constructs of ritual and

rites of passage extracted from their cultural foundations within this theory and model is

problematic.

Despite this criticism, researchers have empirically tested Tinto's use of the

separation theory in the student departure model, and have yielded significant, yet conflicting

results. In a study of Hispanic students at a predominantly white campus, Attinasi (1989)

found that support from family and friends in students' external communities was very

significant in both the transition to and persistence in university. Similar results were found

by Elkins, Braxton, and James (2000), Chhuon and Hudley (2008), Hurtado and Carter

(1997), and Johnson et al. (2007), suggesting that maintaining family and community

connections are an important part of the transition to college for visible minority,

'nontraditional' students.

For researchers utilizing Tinto's model to study the transitional processes of any minority students, the above criticisms and this study indicate that one should proceed with caution in doing so. Research suggests that indiscriminate employment of the separation theory may be potentially harmful to minority students who need to maintain their cultural traditions and support from family and friends outside of the university (Attinasi, 1989; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Elkins, et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). Given that "substantial research has validated the need for minority college students to retain and nurture connections to their cultural heritage, and to draw support from members of their home communities", Guffrida (2006) suggests that a "cultural advancement of Tinto's (1993) theory begins by recognizing cultural and familial connections more prominently" (p. 452). Therefore, in order to enhance the applicability of Tinto's (1993) model to the persistence process for minority students, it must account for the potentially positive effects of extra-university connections, rather than conceptualizing these connections as always being negative to the student.

The second criticism relating to Tinto's model of student departure involves the use of the construct of integration. Acculturation is an underlying component in many integration models that is inherently problematic for any 'non-dominant culture' student. Tierney (1992) explains this is particularly problematic for ethnic minority students, as it implies that students need to minimize their cultural differences with the culturally dominant group to fit in. This is partially because the concept of integration adopts a cultural view of the university, suggesting if integration is essential to retention, that the only way to be successful within the university context is to assimilate and assume the views and practices of the majority (Elkins et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000;

Tierney, 1992). This both privileges majority students and disadvantages minority students. Hurtado and Carter (1997) summarize that it is particularly important to reexamine the focus on integration in models of student persistence because "integration can mean something completely different to student groups who have been historically marginalized in higher education" (pp. 326-7).

Tierney (1992) furthers this concern, stating that Tinto's model requires minority student either to "acculturate to institutions of higher education that have grown out of systems of oppression by abandoning their home culture, or maintain past affiliations and risk academic and social disintegration" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 526). This leaves minority students with two equally undesirable outcomes: persistence with rejection of past values, or withdrawal and retention of cultural roots. Therefore, according to this model, if a student does not perceive a "fit" between his/her values and the values of the institution, and if he/she does not choose to reject these past values in order to assimilate into the new community, then persistence is an unlikely outcome. The failure of this model to account for cultural variables results in a problematic situation when used to describe the experiences of minority students (Guffrida, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon et al., 2000). This construct does not "acknowledge that integration is complicated by racially tense environments for diverse groups of students whose responses to adversity are complex" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 340).

The other problematic aspect of this conceptualization of integration is that, unlike engagement, the responsibility for success and persistence is largely the responsibility of the student. As Tinto (1993) states, students who are "unable to establish… the personal bonds that are the basis for membership in the communities of the institution" are much less likely

to persist than those students who are able to develop social and academic connections (p.

56).

While this model has contributed to the understanding of student persistence through

its emphasis on the impact of the institutional environment, and the focus on student

engagement, its inability to explain the "particular problems and experiences of racial-ethnic

minorities" have resulted in criticisms of this model as a primary framework for research and

practice in this field (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 340).

An Alternative: Sense of Belonging

Numerous scholars have found the idea that integration is central to students' success

to be problematic, particularly in its application to minority students (Hurtado & Carter,

1997; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992). In many cases, experiences that suggest academic

and social integration in minority students are not necessarily predictors of retention, and

students' persistence is not always accompanied by experiences that suggest academic and

social integration to have occurred (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2002). These

findings lead to a need for an "empirically distinct measure of a psychological sense of

integration"; many researchers therefore employ the construct of 'sense of belonging' as a

more applicable alternative (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 327). Hoffman et al. (2002) describe

this requirement in models of student departure:

> Although researchers frequently point to the import of 'sense of belonging' in
> departure decisions, attrition models built by researchers have failed to adequately
> conceptualize and include this important theorized construct… It seems evident that
> this field can benefit from a more refined notion of integration, one that represents an
> empirically distinct "sense of belonging". A refined definition may elucidate why
> student involvement and interaction in the college systems alone are not sufficient to
> ensure integration, why integration into one system alone is not enough to ensure
> persistence, while shedding light on factors that contribute to retention. (p. 228)

The need for a revised construct is clear.

Although 'inadequately conceptualized' and insufficiently represented in literature relating to student departure, the concept of involving a subjective construct of students' perceptions of their integration is not new. In response to the criticism he received relating to the use of the construct of integration, Tinto (1993) suggested that the concept of 'membership' "is more useful than 'integration' because it implies a greater diversity [of approaches to] participation" (p. 106). This measure includes students' perceptions of their integration into the university community, and is an important factor in persisting through postsecondary.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) support Tinto's move to include an affective and subjective element in his model of student persistence. However, they suggest that his revised model fails to clearly define membership, presumably a broad concept, particularly how it differs from students' participation: a narrower, behavioral construct. Despite its limitations, Hurtado and Carter (1997) indicate that "it would be helpful for researchers to develop the concept of membership further by identifying activities that bring about a greater sense of affiliation with campus life" (p. 327).

Spady's (1970) model includes a variation of Hurtado and Carter's suggested "affiliation" with the campus; the psychological dimension that he includes measures students' perceptions of their *subjective* sense of integration, and includes this component as significant in predicting students persistence in university. In his employment of this measure, he found that men and women indicated that different academic and social experiences contributed to a general feeling of integration in campus life. These findings

provide further indication that a "subjective sense of integration may be useful for assessing the range of social interactions on campus" as well as their unique value to particular demographic groups, such as racial or ethnic minority student populations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 326). This fits with Hurtado and Carter's (1997) previous assertion that the determination of activities particular to different groups of students that result in an increased institutional affiliation would be helpful to more fully defining and modeling the process of membership.

Nora (2004) also describes the concept of person-environment 'fit', or of 'fitting in' as a factor in predicting students' adjustment to and persistence in postsecondary education. More specifically, he identifies the psychosocial factor, 'habitus', as being associated with an individual's fit to their environment, defining it as "the fit between a student's values and belief system and his or her academic environment" (p. 182). Similarly, 'sense of community' is the term used by Berger (1997); he describes this as students' perceptions of "membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection" (p. 442). Overall, these factors were found to suggest that students who felt a personal and social fit with their postsecondary environment were more likely to persist in that institution (Nora, 2004, p. 199). Furthermore, Nora concluded that "students' psychosocial perspectives", specifically the feeling of personal acceptance, "are very influential in predicting students' intentions to reenroll", and in fact are nearly twice as powerful as other factors found to predict persistence (p. 201). Nora found that "habitus", or the "fit between a student's values and belief system and his or her academic environment" (p. 182), was a significant predictor of student satisfaction and student persistence, in that

students who felt a sense of fit within their campus, expressed early attachment and plans to persist (p. 198).

The constructs of 'membership' (Tinto, 1993), 'affiliation' (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), 'subjective sense of integration' (Spady, 1970), 'fitting in' and 'habitus' (Nora, 2004), and 'sense of community' (Berger, 1997) are powerful constructs that all include this element of students' subjective understandings of their experiences, and are suggested to be strong factors in predicting persistence and retention in postsecondary. As Johnson et al. (2007) suggest, these works taken together "suggest that students have a fundamental need to feel that they are an important part of a larger community that is valuable, supportive, and affirming" (p. 527). The factors that lead to the fulfillment of this 'fundamental need' are the driving focal point of this thesis.

Although it shares many characteristics with the terms listed above , the term that has gained the most attention and empirical support relating to students' perceptions of their experiences is 'sense of belonging' (Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Pojuan, 2005; Maestas et al., 2007; Velazquez, 1999). Hoffman et al. (2002) define 'sense of belonging' as the student's "subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the university community" (p. 228). In this way, sense of belonging "captures the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 327).

While previous constructs, such as integration, assign different social and academic experiences set values, sense of belonging allows the student to articulate which experiences contribute to greater institutional affiliation. Hurtado and Carter (1997) contend that

"understanding students' sense of belonging may be essential to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these students" (pp. 324-5). By measuring students' 'sense of belonging', they focused on the student's *perspective* of whether he or she feels affiliated with and included in the university community, and which activities contributed to this feeling. Therefore, this construct provides a better perspective of the individual's perceptions of the experiences and interactions that serve to enhance one's identification with the community of their institution, rather than illuminating the perspective of an insider (the researcher) on whether or not the student 'fits in'.

Finally, while early models of retention began with examining student behavior, sense of belonging begins with examining students' perceptions. Hoffman et al. (2002) further note that while these models begin with an examination of students' perceptions, they end with the students' persistence choices; that is, "the greater a student's 'sense of belonging' to the university, the greater his or her commitment to that institution (satisfaction with the university) and the more likely it is that he or she will remain in college" (p. 228).

The impact of a sense of belonging has been investigated in many contexts, including sociology, healthcare, and psychology. In his hierarchy of human needs, Maslow (1968) ranked the need for belonging third, after physiological needs and safety needs, asserting that the need for belonging must be fulfilled before the need for self-actualization can be realized, a process partly achieved through higher education. Through their extensive literature on belonging and motivation, Baumeister and Leary (1995) conclude that "human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong…[and] the desire for interpersonal attachment may well be one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature" (p. 533). Given the connections with the

construct of sense of belonging to education, and its universality as a human motivator, examining students' sense of belonging, and the factors that students perceive to affect their state of belonging or non-belonging is a worthwhile avenue to investigate.

The subsequent review compiles documented data on the models and research conducted involving sense of belonging, and the factors that have been concluded to affect the sense of belonging of minority students, according to extant literature, particularly focusing on research relating to NNES, immigrant, mature, and visible-minority students. The organizational scheme, or conceptual framework of the following review is similar to that adopted by Feldman and Newcomb (1969) in their seminal (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) text, "The impact of college on students", which organizes relevant research by factors influencing students in postsecondary. While Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) more recent text, "How college affects students: A third decade of research" organizes the research in terms of *outcomes* of higher education, I have chosen to adopt the former framework, as this research examines the influential factors on *one* outcome (achievement of a sense of belonging). As with any framework, however, this will be difficult, as the effects of these influential factors are difficult to disaggregate, and, as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) point out, the effects of any one factor may result from the influence or interaction of two or more factors (p. 6).

Models of student persistence and sense of belonging.

In order to more accurately represent the experiences of an increasingly diverse student body on Canadian campuses, many revisions have been made to existing student retention models to offer more insight into the retention patterns of minority students, while other researchers have formulated new models to describe and predict retention and student persistence

(Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007). In particular, the models and studies addressed below will draw from and develop the notion of sense of belonging.

Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, and Early (1996). In a study of community college students, Hagerty et al. (1996) used a sense of belonging instrument to measure the connections between sense of belonging and social and psychological functioning in community college students. Hagerty et al. concluded that sense of belonging is an 'important element for mental health and social well-being", and identified the antecedents and consequences of sense of belonging among participants. They found that a sense of belonging had three antecedents: energy for involvement, potential and interest for involvement, and potential for shared or similar characteristics. They also identified that sense of belonging involves two defining characteristics: valued involvement in the environment or community, and the perception of 'fit' with one's community. Finally, they found three consequences: involvement, the perception of purpose of that involvement, and the strengthening of a foundation for emotional and behavioural responses (p. 236). To view the figure in full, please see Hagerty et al (1996) (p. 236).

This model offers important insight into the precursors of sense of belonging: namely, that an individual must both value and desire meaningful involvement with his or her peers, and have the energy to devote to involvement in the new community for sense of belonging to develop. Furthermore, Hagerty et al. (1996) identify that the potential for shared characteristics, or 'fit' with one's environment, "allows the individual to feel a part of a group, system or environment" (p. 237). Although they do not elaborate on the implications inherent when a member of a minority tries to find a sense of belonging within a group where

their traits are not shared, the significance and potential concern is clear. Interestingly in this model, Hagerty et al. (1996) found that sense of belonging is a vehicle to involvement, whereas other models find the opposite relationship to be true.

Hurtado and Carter (1997). In order to clarify the foundation of Tinto's (1993) model of student departure for visible minority students, Hurtado and Carter (1997) developed a temporal model of sense of belonging, linking the background characteristics and experiences of students in their first and second years of college to their sense of belonging and persistence in the third year of college. They verified this model through a composite, longitudinal measure that included Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) Sense of Belonging Scale and the National Survey of Hispanic Students, on 287 high-achieving Latino students.

Through this study, Hurtado and Carter (1997) expanded upon the idea of the psychological elements of membership and belonging, stating membership "does not simply reflect behavior (participation or nonparticipation)" (p. 338). By approaching their study from this perspective, they highlighted that "specific activities may foster a broader sense of group cohesion and enhance an individual's sense of affiliation and identification" with their postsecondary institution (p. 338). For this reason, unlike Tinto's model, Hurtado and Carter (1997) do not include participation in academic or social activities in their model, because they did not want to impose their assumptions of which activities would foster belonging for their research participants. They also question the applicability of Van Gennep's separation stage for minority students, stating that for their target demographic of Latino students, strong family relationships were among the most significant factors contributing to a positive transition to postsecondary (Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler, 1996).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that students' background characteristics, such as gender and academic ability both affected the selection of an institution to study, and the ease of their transition into university. The ease of a students' transition into the university campus involved three components: family support, cognitive mapping, and managing resources. Unlike Tinto's (1993) model that stated ongoing family relationships could jeopardize a student's persistence by 'pulling away' their attention from the campus environment, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that "maintaining family relationships are essential aspects of the transition to college" which suggests that "students are finding ways to become interdependent with their families during college, not completely dependent" (p. 339). Cognitive mapping, or getting to know the institution also positively affected the ease of students' transition, and was also found to directly affect students' sense of belonging (p. 339). They suggest that "an initial orientation to a college's social, academic, and physical geographies is essential to students' feeling that they belong in their college" (p. 339). Finally, the ability to manage resources such as time and finances also helped ease the transition of students into college.

During the second year, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that students' perceptions of a hostile climate within the university negatively impacted their sense of belonging in their third year, suggesting that adjustment is difficult when students feel alienated. Finally, they describe sense of belonging as students' perceptions of feeling a part of the campus community, a member of that community, and of feeling a sense of belonging to the campus. To view the figure in full, please see Hurtado and Carter (1997) (p. 336). This model has been employed by many researchers since, and is an important construct in the development of a model of sense of belonging that is applicable to minority students.

Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2002). In their investigation of first year college students, Hoffman et al. (2002) develop a measure to test "students' subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the campus" and to help "understand why students persist in, or withdraw from, college" (p. 227; p. 230). Development of such an instrument, they argue, is important, due to the connections between sense of belonging and persistence within an institution; Hoffman et al. (2002) summarize that "the greater a student's "sense of belonging" to the university, the greater his or her commitment to that institution,… and the more likely it is that he or she will remain in college" (p. 228). They focus their research on students attending freshman seminar courses, dividing participants between those participating in a learning community and those not participating in a learning community. Through the use of focus group interviews and instrument testing, they found that two main factors are important to students' institutional commitment, intention to persist, and sense of belonging: "quality" student/peer relationships and student/faculty relationships. Their final Sense of Belonging Instrument identified five factors as affecting students' sense of belonging: perceived peer support, perceived faculty support/comfort, perceived classroom comfort, perceived isolation, and empathetic faculty understanding. These factors are important in establishing a clearer understanding of the antecedents of a sense of belonging, and the implications of sense of belonging on students within postsecondary programs, and show clear connections to both the academic and social systems of the university.

Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr (2007). In a recent study of students at a Hispanic Serving Institution, Maestas et al. (2007) investigated the factors that affect students' sense of belonging. Their objective was to examine how diversity in educational institutions affects sense of belonging for all students. Although this study builds on the work of Tinto (1993),

focusing on students' academic and social integration at the institution, it also includes a subjective element, involving students' perceptions of the quality of their experiences (Maestas et al., 2007, p. 339). They also integrate students' experiences with and perceptions of diversity in the university.

Their model depicts students' background characteristics, including their family's education, their access to funding, and their ethnicity, as affecting their experiences with academic integration, social integration, and their perceptions and experiences relating to diversity within the campus environment. They concluded that both social and academic integration were important factors in establishing sense of belonging, and highlighted several experiences that students perceived most influenced their affiliation or attachment to the institution. Furthermore, with respect to experiences with and perceptions of diversity, Maestas et al. (2007) found that "within a highly diverse university environment, being able to cope with diversity, socializing with diverse peers, and being supportive of affirmative action contributes to a sense of belonging" (p. 251). Therefore, they concluded that both academic and social integration were crucial to establishing a sense of belonging, and that experiences with diversity were also "strong predictors of sense of belonging" (p. 252). This confirms previous research by Tinto (1993) and Hurtado and Carter (1997) on this topic.

Taken together, this empirical research and these models clearly demonstrate that there is a significant connection between sense of belonging in a postsecondary institution, and student persistence. Given that these models have been used extensively, and developed originally for non-dominant culture students, the factors that they suggest impact the development of students' sense of belonging within postsecondary programs will be used as

a framework for subsequent review. Gaining a clearer understanding of the factors that affect sense of belonging for NNES immigrant students on the Canadian campus is crucial.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that informed this research study draws most notably from the models of student persistence and belonging developed by Tinto (1993), Hurtado and Carter (1997), and Maestas et al. (2007). It is described below, and illustrates the process and factors affecting students' transition to and negotiation of a sense of belonging within the university campus. Although this framework does not provide a comprehensive overview of existing data and research on student transitions and the development of a sense of belonging, it depicts the elements being examined in this research project. Each element of this framework is described briefly below, and in more depth as it related to relevant literature in the following section of chapter 2.

The first element of this model is background characteristics. In order to understand the transitional process, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) state that one must understand "where the students have come from (their historical meanings) and the present context" (p. 316). However, conclusions regarding the specific characteristics that affect students' transition to postsecondary programming are varied. In his model of student persistence, Tinto (1993) stressed that academic preparedness played an important predictive role in the success and persistence of students in postsecondary programs. Likewise, Nora and Cabrera (1996) include pre-college ability, specifically relating to the academic system, in their Student Attrition Model, finding it exerts both direct and indirect effects on academic and social integration and development, and persistence. However, Maestas et al. (2007) found that the only background characteristic that impacted students' sense of belonging was their ability to

pay for college experiences. Hurtado et al. (1996) conclude that "students' in-college experiences affect their adjustment far more than student background characteristics" (p. 153).

In the current research study, the participants were all NNES students who were immigrants. While these were the only universal characteristics shared amongst participants, there are other characteristics that are important to note: namely their educational experiences. This includes whether participants had previous educational experience in Canada within the K-12 system, therefore having socialization experiences into Canadian systems of schooling. Another important educational experience to note is whether they had experienced transition to PSE in their home country, and therefore own language and culture; although this wouldn't provide direct indication that students would be successful within the Canadian system, these are certainly important background characteristics to address. While these characteristics set an important context for this study, the model has been developed drawing from research on visible-minority and NNES student persistence. Because of this connection, this suggests that these background characteristics affect, directly or indirectly, all elements of this model.

In addition to students' differences in previous educational experience, either with high school education in Canada, or with PSE in their home country, students also differed in terms of their progression in their current degree. Research suggests the first year of postsecondary education is critical in the transition and adjustment of a student (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). In their research on the experiences of minority students in transition, Nora and Cabrera (1996) completed their cross sectional study at the end of students' freshman year of

college. Hurtado et al. (1996) also suggest nearing the second year of postsecondary is a useful time to collect data from students because it is at this time that students will "make a commitment to an academic major and enter a new phase of their college career" (p. 136). On the other hand, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) conducted their study with participants at varying degrees of completion in their degrees, and Andrade (2009) recruited participants in their final semester of their studies. While the first year has been found to be very formative in students' experiences, the Canadian University Survey Consortium (2011) found that participants were "no more likely to … feel that they are part of the university whether they are in the first year of their studies, or the fourth year" (p. 70). Therefore, I collected data for this study with participants at varying degrees of completion in their studies.

As a result of these conflicting and varied conclusions on the background characteristics that affect students' postsecondary adjustment experiences, and the delimitations of the research population in terms of both size and demographics, this conceptual model does not posit the direct path through which these characteristics act to affect sense of belonging.

In terms of the postsecondary transitional experience, the ease of transition is the first step in this longitudinal, transitional process. The ease with which a student transitions into the postsecondary context directly affects sense of belonging (Tinto, 1993), and indirectly affects the establishment of a sense of belonging through its influence on students' perceptions of the campus environment, including diversity, perceptions of diversity, and the campus climate towards diversity (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The next element of the model examines the students' perceptions of the context of the university. Students' perceptions of the campus environment for diversity, including the hostility of the climate and experiences with prejudice, affect several elements in the adjustment process. According to Maestas et al. (2007), students' "experiences with and perceptions of diversity" directly affect the development of their sense of belonging. However, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that these perceptions indirectly affect students' perceptions of sense of belonging in their second year of postsecondary by affecting their experiences with academic and social integration in their first year of studies. This model combines both findings, positing both direct and indirect effects on sense of belonging through academic and social integrational experiences.

Subsequently, this conceptual model explores students' experiences that contribute to social and academic integration within the context of the postsecondary environment. Academic integration is measured through characteristics and behaviours such as academic performance, (Tinto, 1993), perceptions of interaction with instructors (Maestas et al., 2007; Tinto, 1993) and engagement with peers on academic material (Astin, 1984; Maestas et al., 2007). Social integration, on the other hand, is viewed as the "informal" education of students (Tinto. 1993), and is measured through characteristics and behaviour such as involvement in extracurricular activities, (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Tinto, 1993), living on campus (Berger, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007), and general peer-group interactions (Tinto, 1993). Ongoing research has suggested both academic and social integration as important predictors of both persistence and sense of belonging (Astin, 1984; Hoffman et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993).

As Nora and Cabrera (1996) state, the effects of experiences that result in changes in students' perceptions of their academic and social integration are not independent of one another; "positive experiences in one domain are seen as conducive of positive experiences in the other domain" (p. 123). Borglum and Kubala (2000) also found that "students who felt academically integrated also felt socially integrated" (p.574), further supporting the connection between experiences in the academic and social systems, although their findings suggest a one-sided relationship. This model includes these finding, positing direct effects on academic and social integration experiences on sense of belonging, and on one another.

Finally, these factors and experiences within the postsecondary environment are affected by external supports available to the student outside of the university environment, including family and community supports (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). The cumulative direct and indirect effects of these factors, as well as potentially other unidentified factors, have a net effect on the student's sense of belonging, or membership within and attachment to the institution.

The following section of this literature review summarizes pertinent research on the factors that affect the development of a sense of belonging within a postsecondary institution, particularly for NNES, immigrant, and visible-minority students. I will use the theoretical framework as a guide in describing and organizing these factors.

Ease of Transition. In this conceptual framework modeling the transitional process of adjustment into a postsecondary institution, the first factor affecting sense of belonging is the ease of transition. This section will examine the significance of this factor within this model of sense of belonging, and will address literature relevant to this topic.

This transition involves a student's initial experiences on the postsecondary campus, including, but not limited to, navigating the physical, social, and academic contexts, and managing one's resources, such as time and finances, through the initial stages of the transition (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This factor presents an important place to begin, because "it is the early experiences of college transition that are essential in determining how and whether students find their place in the campus community" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, pp. 329-330).

Attinasi (1989) conducted early research on the effects of students' early transitional experiences at the beginning of their freshman year on their later sense of belonging at the beginning of their second year of studies. He described students' perceptions of their transitional experiences with the organizing concept "getting in". This concept refers to the processes through which students become acquainted with the physical, social, and cognitive geographies of the campus. Attinasi (1989) found participants described their experiences in terms of the vastness of the physical dimensions of the campus (physical geography), the overwhelming size of the student body (social geography) and the extensive array of fields of study, courses, and content (academic geography) (pp. 262-263). Hurtado et al. (1996) found that "students who successfully negotiated the physical, social, and cognitive geographies on campus had significantly higher social adjustment and attachment to the institution" (p. 152), suggesting this aspect of the transitional experience is crucial to successful adjustment. Students' reactions to these contexts were categorized under different "strategies to fix themselves" in the campus geographies to avoid becoming "lost" (Attinasi, 1989, p. 263). This process is facilitated by scaling down, or cognitive mapping, 'getting to know', peer support, and mentoring (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Cognitive mapping is the process of "locating [oneself] within more manageable

campus geographies" (Hurtado et al., 1996, p. 152). This allows students to scale down the

perceived vastness of the new environment, and is accomplished by forming a smaller social

niche or getting to know a subset of the campus facilities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 329).

In other words, cognitive mapping involves reframing one's perception of the larger context

into a smaller, more manageable context. This also occurs through comparing what is

familiar to that which is unfamiliar; for students with previous educational experience in the

K-12 system in Canada, or with PSE in their home country, this process of cognitive

mapping could be very valuable in this transition. This aspect of the transitional process has

been found crucial to and predictive of the development of a sense of belonging (Attinasi,

1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996).

The ease of transition can be facilitated by "getting to know" these geographies

(Attinasi, 1989). Rather than adjusting one's perceptions of the surrounding geographies, this

involves students actively engaging with their new context in order to become more familiar

with it. This process can be achieved through mentoring, or establishing relationships with

experienced students who "function as guides or interpreters of the geographies" (p. 263).

The early formation of peer groups, or "peer knowledge sharing" can also support the

process of "getting to know" the geographies (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This

process can also be facilitated by institutional intervention.

Research has shown both direct and indirect links between institutional intervention

on the transitional process and the development of sense of belonging. Pascarella, Edison,

Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini (1986) found that intensive orientations to the institution

supported the early stages of social integration, while Hurtado and Carter (1997) concluded a

direct connection, stating "an initial orientation to a college's social, academic, and physical geographies is essential to students' feeling that they belong in their college" (p. 339). These findings suggest the significance of institutional support on the transitional process of minority students.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) include the skill of managing resources in their transitional student model under the category, 'ease of transition'. Among these resources were included schedule and personal finances. They concluded that successful resource management facilitated the ease of transition, and indirectly enhanced students' sense of belonging. In their earlier investigations of Latino students in an American university, Hurtado et al. (1996) found that "successful management of student resources in the first year has a strong impact on academic and personal-emotional adjustment in the second year of college" (p.152). Therefore, management of resources is another important component of the ease of transition.

The ease with which this transition occurs differs depending on students' background. For students who come from a family where attending a postsecondary institution is expected, Terenzini et al. (1994) describe that this transition "was simply extending a set of family and sociocultural values and tradition" (p.62). Furthermore, these students perceived that admittance to the institution "was evidence that academically they "belong" at their institution" (p. 62). Therefore, this element has a direct effect, if not on final sense of belonging, perhaps on academic integration. However, for "non-traditional", first-generation university students, Terenzini et al. found that attending university represented a "disjunction" in their life (p. 63). Attending university required a cultural transition, and a breaking away from family tradition. In this way, the students' backgrounds affected their

transitional experiences, and the ease with which they later developed a sense of integration and belonging.

Although this research will not investigate the implications of students' specific backgrounds on the transitional process, it will examine how students' perceptions of themselves as members of a visible-minority, and non-native born Canadians impact their adjustment experiences. Regardless of background, Hurtado and Carter (1997) reaffirm the significance of this transitional process for minority students, and "how students manage the difficulties of transition to becoming part of the overall campus community." (339) The perceptions of minority students' throughout their experiences of transition are crucial to later integration and belonging (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996).

External Supports. This section examines literature relating to the significance of external supports within the development of a sense of belonging. In his interactive model of student departure, Tinto (1993) suggests that "in order to become fully incorporated into the life of the college, [students] have to physically as well as socially dissociate themselves from the communities of the past" (p. 96). This component of his theory, adopted from Van Gennep's separation stage in the rites of passage, has received extensive criticism in its applicability to 'non-traditional' students, such as mature students, NNES students, immigrants, and visible minorities. Tierney (1992) and Guffrida (1996) suggest that this component of Tinto's theory can further disadvantage visible minority students, as these external relationships provide support to students, give continued connections to their cultural background, and offer increased motivation to persist in their studies. Tinto (1993) also notes that his research primarily involves 'traditional' populations, and therefore the

applicability of his conclusions to other populations is limited. In fact, research has confirmed that the support of family and individuals external to the college environment can in fact be integral in minority students' successful transition to higher education, and the later formation of a sense of belonging within the postsecondary environment (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Terenzini et al., 1994)

In their review of literature on social support, Hagerty et al. (1996) found that social support "does appear in some way to influence psychological and social adjustment" (p. 237), and that a higher sense of belonging was correlated to higher "perceived support and to positive social support actions" (p. 242). For students in their first year of postsecondary education who have not yet formed strong social support networks within the university environment, these supports come predominantly from external sources, such as family, friends, and community support groups such as religious organizations and community groups.

Similarly, in their investigation of the experiences of Latino students attending predominantly white universities, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found external supports and "prior communities" were integral in "facilitating students' transition and adjustment to college" (p. 329). Students' reports of the impact of participation in community organizations and religious organizations suggest that "links with external affiliations that can enhance a students' sense of belonging" (p. 339); furthermore, Hurtado and Carter reported that students' experiences of feeling at 'home' on the university campus were correlated to "maintaining interactions both within and outside the college community" (p. 338). Therefore, they concluded that "a strong 'separation' assumption was not upheld as a

necessary condition for transition and incorporation (integration) into college", elaborating that interdependence rather than full independence may increasingly be a goal of students (p. 339).

In their investigation of the transition experiences of a diverse population of first-year students at 4 diverse college campuses, Terenzini et al. (1994) concluded that "there can be little doubt about the important role new students' families played in providing encouragement to attend college and to persist and succeed while there" (p. 65). However, for first-generation students, they suggest that this relationship may also be a "liability" in students' positive adjustment process. The college experience may be viewed as a "disjunction" and a break from family traditions for students who are the first to attend postsecondary in their family; therefore, parental support may be interpreted as 'clinginess" if they do not understand the demands of the transition (p. 63). This finding suggests that Tinto's theory may hold valid for such a population. In contrast, in James and Taylor's (2008) investigation of first-generation, visible minority university students on a Canadian campus, they found that despite the disjunction implied from this transition to university, "participants felt that the nurturance and support they received from their communities contributed to their achievements" (p. 582). Furthermore, they concluded that these participants' motivation was often drawn from the "credit, respect, and status that their families gained for their achievements from their respective ethno-racial community": sentiments they would not have earned had they not been among the first to attend university within their family and community (p. 582). Therefore, even when entrance to university represents a 'disjunction' in a student's life, connections to one's family and community outside the campus can still provide invaluable support to a student in transition.

In their investigation of the factors that affect the successful transition of Cambodian American students, a unique visible minority group on campus, into postsecondary education, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) concluded that "maintaining contact with the prior community [is] important for Cambodian American students' successful adjustment" (p. 15). More specifically, the support of home and communities outside of the campus was critical in the adjustment of students to campus life.

In terms of family support, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) found that all visible-minority, NNES immigrant participants in their study "turned to their family and friends from home for empathy and support, which helped them to adjust to their new surroundings" (p. 26). These connections "buffered them against perceived isolation in college" (p. 28). Furthermore, Chhuon and Hudley found that participation in an ethnic organization on campus, also provided students with a valuable vehicle to achieving belonging. Although the ethnic club was on campus, the researchers stated that this was student-initiated, promoting connection to students' ethnic and cultural background, and therefore falling into the category of external supports and affiliations. They found that involvement in this club "validated participants' cultural heritage, allowed them to gain a more positive view of their ethnicity, and made them feel more integrated into the university life" (p. 25).

Outside of the context of the university, Houle and Schellenberg (2010) found that external supports and connections to prior communities were integral in the overall life satisfaction of new immigrants to Canada. They found that newcomers who: perceived their neighbours as friendly, frequently attended religious services, and maintained contact with friends were more likely to have a higher satisfaction with life in general in Canada. This suggests an even further implication of the significance of external ties and perception of

support; although well-being is a different construct than sense of belonging, both involve a similar psycho-social dimension, and are indicative of the pervasiveness of the implications of sense of community and support.

For mature students who have their own families, however, these connections and responsibilities external to the institution may lead to students conceptualizing themselves as simply "day students" (Christie, Munro, & Wager, 2005). As O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) suggest, "such identities disadvantage adults in [Higher Education] by limiting their participation in the wider aspects of university life, and by excluding them from networks through which important information circulates" (p. 314). While external supports are helpful in facilitating a successful transition, too many external responsibilities detract from this process.

Although Tinto (1993) initially supposes that severing ties to family and external supports is a key element in the successful transition of both minority and non-minority students in postsecondary, a significant body of research supports the conclusion that external supports and connections to one's family and cultural community contribute positively to students' academic and intellectual development and performance (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Terenzini et al., 1994), and to their overall adjustment and belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Campus Environment towards Diversity. Within this section, I address the contributions of the environment of the campus towards diversity to sense of belonging, and examine relevant literature on this topic. Students' perceptions and experiences of the climate of the campus towards diversity can have significant impacts on their adjustment process,

their integration into the campus community, and their subsequent sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005; Lee & Ill, 2000; Maestas et al., 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Although conceptualized in different ways, this element can be found increasingly in models displaying the transitional process of minority students (Maestas et al., 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). As a result of the increasingly significant role this factor has been found to play in the transitional processes of minority students, such as NNE speakers, visible-minorities, and immigrants in the postsecondary campus, it has been included in this model of the student experiences relating to a sense of belonging.

The diversity of a postsecondary campus, and the climate of that campus towards diversity, can affect the experiences of all students. Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that the perception of prejudice and discrimination within the university campus affected the ability of both Caucasians and minority students to integrate socially. However, this impact is exacerbated for visible minority students. Nora and Cabrera also found that minority students were "more likely to perceive a discriminatory campus climate, sense more prejudice on the part of faculty and staff, and were more prone to report negative in-class experiences than were whites" (p.130). Because most university campuses are predominantly white, "students of color often feel marginalized and isolated" (Maestas et al., 2007, p. 241). Perceptions of racial/ethnic tension may result in minority students feeling like they do not "fit in" (Hurtado et al., 1996, p. 152). Because this perception of "fitting in" and "belonging" is at the core of this study, examining experiences and perceptions of students in relation to the campus diversity, and the impact of these perceptions, is an important element of this process. Furthermore, Nora and Cabrera (1996) caution the following:

Like other stressors, experiences of racism and alienation are seen as being associated with psychological distress and poor academic performance. Unlike other stressors, however, experiences of racism are considered unique in that they: (1) heighten feelings of not belonging at the institution and (2) compound or augment negative effects associated with other stressors (p. 124).

Therefore, the risks associated with not attending to the effects of this element in the transitional experience are extensive and detrimental.

In their quantitative study of undergraduate students, Lee and Ill (2000) sought to understand how cultural orientation, acculturation strategies, and multicultural experiences affect the sense of belonging of Caucasian and Asian-American students on an American campus. Acculturation strategies explain how an individual can maintain one's cultural orientation and identity while they relate to individuals of other cultural orientation – more specifically, the majority cultural orientation. They divided their cultural orientations according to Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies model, and labeled the four strategies as marginalized, traditionalist/segregation, assimilationist, and bicultural/integration. Berry (1997) divided these acculturations strategies based on two variables; (1) the individual's maintenance of their ethnic and cultural identity, and (2) the individual's desire to establish relationships among other cultural groups. According to this model, Lee and Ill (2000) found that Asian American students with assimilationist and bi-cultural/integration strategies were "best able to adapt to and develop a sense of belonging on campus" (p. 113). This finding is supported by Velasquez (1999), who also concluded that stronger cultural orientations and ethnic identity contributed to a higher sense of belonging in visible minority students.

In contrast, Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that students who spoke Spanish at home were more likely to experience or perceive that the campus climate towards diversity was hostile, concluding that students who "retain strong cultural ties are less likely to see

their university as a welcoming campus environment" (p. 244). However, other than this fact,

they concluded that experiences within the institution, rather than students' background

characteristics, were more predictive of students' perceptions of hostility of the campus

climate towards diversity (p. 244), hence the focus in this study on students' experiences *in*

university rather than their background and experience *before* university.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) included students' perception of racial climate of the

institution in their model of sense of belonging. In their research on the transitional

experiences of Latino students on a predominantly Caucasian college campus, Hurtado and

Carter (1997) found that students' "perceptions of a hostile climate in the second year of

college had a negative effect on Latino students' sense of belonging in the third year" (p.

339). Therefore, this element was an important predictor of students' conceptualization of

their belonging within the institution. Furthermore, they found that the effect of adverse or

hostile campus climates was only mediated by "membership in racial-ethnic student

organizations", possibly because of the support and validation towards one's minority status

that these communities offer (pp. 335-6). Therefore, in Hurtado and Carter's longitudinal

model, this element was a key predictor of belonging among their research participants.

Conclusions relating to the effect of these perceptions of hostility and discrimination

are extensive. Smedley et al. (1993) and Hurtado et al. (1996) found that minority status

stressors and perceptions of prejudice and hostility towards diversity significantly detracted

from the transitional experiences of minority students. More specifically, Hurtado et al.

(1996) found that "the perception of racial/ethnic tension was directly associated with lower

levels of personal-emotional adjustment, attachment to the institution, and (to a lesser extent)

adjustment in the academic and social arenas" (p. 151). Latino students who felt the campus

climate towards diversity was hostile also disclosed that they had challenges integrating academically and socially, and that it was more difficult to establish a sense of belonging/attachment to the institution. Nora and Cabrera (1996) drew similar results from their research, finding that experiences with discrimination affected students' academic performance, academic integration, social integration, as well as their "affiliation" or sense of attachment/belonging to the university, and their persistence decisions.

Furthermore, although the majority of research conducted on the transitional experiences of visible minority students has focused on the experiences of Latino students in particular, Nora and Cabrera (1994) found that mechanisms and processes underlying these perceptions are relatively consistent across a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Ogbu (1992), on the other hand, found that students' perceptions towards diversity varied in relation to their cultural and language "frames of reference" (p. 289). He posits that these frames of reference either oppositional or non-oppositional in nature, and explains that "non-oppositional cultural/language frames of reference are due to primary cultural/language differences … [which] existed before a group became a minority" (p. 298). These include cultural and language practices that were employed within one's home country; different practices encountered within this frame of reference are viewed as "differences", rather than as opposition to one's current practices, and therefore not interpreted as hostile or discriminatory. Alternatively, secondary cultural and language differences are "differences that arose after a group has become a minority", such as after immigration has occurred (p. 289); this subordination and oppression of previous practices results in an 'oppositional' frame of references. Ogbu (1992) suggests that this results in a desire and defiance to maintain one's previous practices in order to preserve one's identity. In the case of this

research project then, it is important to understand participants' cultural and linguistic frames of reference in order to more clearly understand their perceptions regarding the campus environment towards diversity.

While experiences with hostility and discrimination have been found to detract from the academic integration, social integration, and sense of belonging of minority students, a positive campus towards diversity can facilitate the development of these three student experiences. When conditions within the campus facilitate positive intergroup relations, "positive learning and democratic skills can result" (Hurtado & Ponjan, 2005, p. 237). Maestas et al. (2007) found greater impacts from interracial socialization in their study, suggesting this experience contributed directly towards a sense of belonging; the ability to connect with individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds facilitated the experience of connection to the university (p. 251). More specifically, they describe that "within a highly diverse university environment, being able to cope with diversity, socializing with diverse peers, and being supportive of affirmative action contributes to a sense of belonging" (p. 251).

These studies suggest that the experiences of students with campus diversity and having experienced discrimination on the university campus contribute greatly to their academic integration, social integration, and sense of belonging. While positive intergroup relations among different ethnic and racial groups can facilitate these elements of the transitional process, negative experiences of hostility and discrimination can detract significantly from these elements. This factor has been modeled to reflect such connections.

Social Integration. Next, this section examines literature relating to the factor of social integration, and addresses its contributions to this model of sense of belonging. Higher education research generally divides the postsecondary institution into two systems: the academic system and the social system (Hoffman et al., 2002; Terenzini et al., 1994; Tinto, 1993). Although success within the institution has traditionally been equated with success in the academic system (typically measured by a student's grade point average), contemporary research increasingly prioritizes the significance of students' experiences within the social system of the institution, as well as their perceptions of the value of those experiences.

Despite its only recent increased prominence in higher education research, an understanding of the value of these social experiences and the consequences of social integration to the postsecondary experience is not new. Dewey (1958) was a strong proponent of the significance of social experiences in education; he argued that the quality of education "is realized in the degree to which individuals form a group" (p. 65). Five decades later, James and Taylor (2008) found that their research participants, first-generation university students, also understood that "their success in university…depended on their ability to navigate peer networks" (p. 579). Including students' experiences within the social system is clearly significant in attempting to gain a full understanding of the adjustment processes, development of sense of belonging, and persistence decisions within the postsecondary institution.

While the academic system of the institution involves formal learning experiences, and generally encompasses relationships formed between students and professors or staff, the social system of the institution involves informal learning experiences that occur outside of the classroom, and relationships built largely among peer groups (Tinto, 1993). More

specifically, involvement in extracurricular activities and positive experiences with peer groups out of class contributes positively towards social integration, while negative experiences are seen as malintegrative (Berger, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Terenzini et al., 1994). In their research of the transitional experiences of first-year university students, Hoffman et al. (2002) also included out-of-class student/faculty interactions within the social system, stating that increased frequency and quality of these interactions contributed positively towards social integration. Specifically, "perceived faculty support", and "empathetic faculty understanding" contributed to social integration (p. 248). In the current research study, an understanding of students' social integration will be accomplished through investigating two subcategories of out-of-class interactions: student-peer interactions, both within class and extracurricular, and student-faculty interactions (Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

The value of extracurricular activities has been generally found to support students' social integration. Maestas et al. (2007) use participation in extracurricular activities and other university-initiated activities to measure students' social integration; in general, they found that such involvement positively impacted students' social integration. In turn, they found that social integration played a "critical role in predicting sense of belonging" (p. 251). Although Hurtado and Carter (1997) also found that students who participated in extracurricular activities generally reported increased social integration and a higher sense of belonging, this was not true for all activities. In their study, Latino students who belonged to religious associations, social community organizations, religious clubs, and sports teams had a higher sense of belonging than nonmembers (p. 335). However, they found that students who joined ethnic student associations and sororities or fraternities reported a lower sense of

belonging (p. 335). On the other hand, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) found that their Cambodian American research participants reported a feeling a greater sense of social integration and belonging as a result of participating in their ethnic student association on campus. Hagerty et al. (1996) found that men reported significantly less value of involvement in religious services and community activities in contributing towards their sense of belonging than women, which is consistent with the theory that women more strongly value social relationships and are more likely to "belong to a web of social ties that substantiate their feelings of self and of being valued and important" (p. 242). The significance of membership in these groups may therefore differ according to students' background characteristics. Taken together with the previous findings, the perceived value of participation in such activities may differ for groups depending on their value of social relationships.

Informal peer-group interactions are also seen as significant contributors towards students' social integration. Hoffman et al. (2002) measure students' "perceived peer support", and use findings as an indicator of social integration in their investigation of sense of belonging among first-year college students (p. 247). Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) and Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) used a Likert-style measure for social integration relating to peer-group relations; this included students' perceptions of the closeness of their relationships to other students and the positivity of these relationships on intellectual growth as indicators of the impact of these factors on social integration. While some research indicates that all peer group interactions are beneficial, Hurtado et al. (1996) found that the "nature of affiliations" among students resulted in varying impacts on students' social adjustment. More specifically, interactions across diverse peer groups more strongly

facilitated social integration. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) also found that students who "reported positive interactions with diverse peers" reported a higher sense of belonging (p. 245). Furthermore, Attinasi (1989) found that the nature of peer groups affected students' social integration. More specifically, he drew conclusions on the significance of peer-mentoring, or the support of a more experienced student in helping to navigate the transition to the campus environment. This form of peer support was found to more readily develop students' perceptions of social integration (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado et al., 1996).

Interactions between students and faculty are conceptualized as belonging to both the academic system and the social system in different models. However, in general, student-faculty interactions that take place outside the classroom contribute to social integration. Hoffman et al. (2002) include two elements relating to student/faculty interactions in their measure of social integration, including perceived faculty support/comfort and empathetic faculty understanding (p. 248). Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) and Braxton et al. (2000) also included indicators of the quality of out-of-class faculty relations in their measure of social integration, which explored students' perceptions of the opportunities to interact with faculty out of class and the quality of these interactions, and the degree of impact these interactions had on positively affecting a student's "personal growth, values, attitudes, ... career goals and aspirations" (Braxton et al., 2000, pp. 574-5). In general, this aspect of social integration has been found to be the most influential on students' social integration, and, more significantly, their sense of belonging within a university campus. Astin (1984) states, "frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement, or indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic" (p. 304). Regardless

of the decision to include this element within the academic or the social system, the impact of these interactions is significant.

In general, social integration exerts a strong, positive effect on all students' sense of belonging within an institution, and on their decisions to persist within the intuition decisions (Braxton et al., 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Unfortunately, Terenzini et al. (1994) found that 'nontraditional; students often "deferred involvement in the non-academic activities and life of the campus until they felt they had their academic lives under control" (p. 64). In contrast, they found that 'traditional' students prioritized making friends, "feeling connected", or feeling "a part of" the school. Therefore, despite the benefits of social integration, for minority students, social integration may not be prioritized in the postsecondary experience, which may result in a decreased sense of belonging.

Academic Integration. This final section addresses the factor of academic integration, and explains its involvement and contributions in this model of sense of belonging. The significance of academic integration in the development of sense of belonging and in students' persistence decisions in evidenced in its pervasive inclusion in models of student adjustment in higher education (Astin, 1984; Hoffman et al., 2002; Maestas et al., 2007; Tinto, 1993). Academic integration relates to students' experiences within the academic, rather than social, system of the institution. The academic system, as Tinto (1993) describes, "concerns itself almost entirely with the formal education of students" (p. 106). Experiences related to this system occur generally within centers of formal learning, such as the classroom and the laboratory, and involve interactions primarily among students, and between students and faculty within these contexts (Tinto, 1993). Braxton et al. (2000) suggest that "academic integration reflects a student's experience with

the academic systems and academic communities of a college or university" (p. 571). Although it is generally conceptualized to encompass positive experiences within the above contexts, academic integration is defined by variable characteristics in different student transition models.

Academic performance is a traditional measure of academic integration within this system on campus. Tinto (1993) includes academic performance as an element of academic integration in his model of student departure. Maestas et al. (2007) suggest that "academic integration is measured most often by academic performance … and an assessment of intellectual growth" (p. 239); however, they did not find this factor predictive of academic integration or a sense of belonging in their data analysis (p. 250). Hurtado and Carter (1997) also did not find a link between GPA and sense of belonging among their Latino research participants, which indicates that "GPA does not necessarily enhance or diminish Latino students' sense of affiliation" (p. 334); they conclude that a greater sense of belonging may develop from alternate activities (p. 334). For the purposes of this research, I did not investigate students' GPA.

Research also suggests that academic involvement and engagement is related to students' perceptions of academic integration. Astin (1984) is a strong proponent of the value of involvement in promoting academic growth and integration. He defines involvement by the time and energy that students devote to their academic experiences. Derived from Freud's notion of cathexis, or external investment of one's time and energies, involvement occurs on a continuum, and has both qualitative and quantitative features. Of his findings relating to undergraduate student experiences, Astin (1984) summarizes that "being academically involved is strongly related to satisfaction with all aspects of college life except friendships

with other students." (p. 304). Therefore, while academic involvement can contribute to academic integration, Astin concludes that it does not facilitate social integration.

A similar construct to academic involvement is active learning. Active learning involves learning experiences within the classroom that actively involve the student; these experiences often merge the social and academic systems of the university (Braxton et al., 2000). Bonwell and Einson (1991) elaborate on active learning, describing it as any activity that "involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (p. 2). More specifically, examples of such activities include class discussions, higher order thinking, and group work (Braxton et al., 2000, p. 576). These forms of classroom experiences are "antecedents of academic integration" (in Braxton et al., 2000, p. 571; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Hurtado and Carter (1997) concluded that these experiences that "suggest a merging of students' social and academic interactions" may significantly contribute to the development of their sense of belonging (p. 334).

Research suggests that academic integration is affected by not only what students do in their class, but also by the classes and programs into which students enroll. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that students who participated in academic support programs reported a higher sense of belonging than their non-participant counterparts (p. 245). Maestas et al. (2007) also found that participation in academic support programs directly affected students' academic integration (p. 250). Additionally, Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that "students who took courses that emphasized diversity tended to report higher sense of belonging" (p. 245). Therefore, the specific content of course work may also enhance students' belonging.

Finally, academic integration is generally conceptualized to include positive experiences with institutional faculty and staff (Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) includes 'positive interactions between the student and university staff' in his definition of academic integration, while Hoffman et al. (2000) include "empathetic faculty understanding" and "perceived faculty support and comfort" as elements in their measure of academic integration. In their analysis of how students' academic experiences affected their sense of belonging, Maestas et al. (2007) concluded that "faculty interest in the students' development" was one of only two factors that affected this result (p. 250). Hurtado and Carter (1997) also found that students who frequently interacted with faculty also reported a higher sense of belonging (p. 334). Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that minority students were more likely to have positive interactions with faculty if they perceived lower levels of discrimination on campus, suggesting the connection between perceptions of prejudice and experiences of academic integration (p.131). In general, students' perceptions of a supportive faculty, and the frequency and quality of their interactions with academic staff and faculty are very significant to both academic integration and a sense of belonging.

Overall, Maestas et al. (2007) concluded that academic integration played a "critical role in predicting sense of belonging" in their research participants (p. 251). Tinto (1993; 1998) also found that academic integration predicted persistence for students, and that students' experiences of academic and social integration are 'reciprocal', in that an increased perception of social integration will result in an increased perception of academic integration, and vice versa (p. 168). However, he elaborates that generally, "academic integration seems to be the more important form of involvement" (pp. 168-9).

Summary

Significant research has examined the retention, persistence, and sense of belonging of postsecondary students. Three terms have been ubiquitous in related literature: namely, involvement, engagement, and integration. Astin (1984) defines involvement as time and quality of time on task, while engagement accounts for both the student's actions to become involved, and the reciprocal actions of the institution to create opportunity for involvement. Finally, integration involves the extent to which a student shares beliefs, values, and behavior with the institutional culture.

Integration forms the basis of Tinto's (1975) Model of Student Departure, which has been seminal in the area of research on persistence and retention in postsecondary programs. However, this model has received criticism due to its inapplicability and insensitivity to minority students, stating that students must separate from their past, and assimilate into the majority culture of the institution to be likely to persist in their studies. As a result of ongoing criticism and problems with applicability to a more diverse demographic, the construct of 'sense of belonging' has been increasingly used as a measure of student success and persistence. Sense of belonging accounts for students' subjective perceptions of their inclusion in the institution, and has been conceptualized and tested for visible minority students in both Hurtado and Carter's (1997) model of sense of belonging and in Maestas et al.'s (2007) model of sense of belonging. A conceptual framework that integrates existing models has been developed for this study. In this model, students' sense of belonging has been conceptualized to be affected by their external supports, the ease of their transition, their perceptions of the campus environment towards diversity, and finally their integration into both the social and academic systems of the institution. Although not exhaustive in its

integration of existing data, this model serves as the framework for the following research

study.

CHAPTER III:
METHODOLOGY

This research project was designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of non-native English speaking immigrant student within a Canadian university campus. It involved an examination of their transition to the postsecondary context, their social and academic experiences within this setting, and their perceptions of their sense of belonging. Because there were relatively few studies devoted to understanding the experiences of this demographic, a phenomenological study aimed at uncovering the lived experiences of these individuals within the Canadian postsecondary setting was the most suited to examining this question. The following chapter describes the methodology and design of this thesis.

Type of Study

Many research studies conducted in the field of persistence, belonging, and adjustment have employed quantitative research methods (Andrade, 2009; Berger, 1997; Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Chow, 2007; Fox, 1986; Hoffman et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007; Maestas et al., 2007; Nora, 2004; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Schussler & Fierros, 2008; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). However, these methods "effectively strip away the context" of the student's perceptions, and "exclude from our consideration the student's own perceptions of the process" of their adjustment and persistence choices (Attinasi, 1989, p. 250). Morrow (2007) further explains that it is "the most useful approach to understand the meaning people make of their experiences" (p. 211). Since this rich data and subjective meanings are precisely the focus of this research, quantitative research methods were not appropriate for this research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

As stated on page nine of Chapter 1, three questions framed this research:

1.   In the initial transition to the Canadian postsecondary experience, what do non-native English speaking immigrant students perceive and describe as affecting this experience?

2.   How do non-native English speaking immigrant students describe their experiences within the university?

3.   What are non-native English speaking immigrant students' perceptions of their sense of belonging on the university campus, and what do they perceive to have contributed to or prevented its development?

The first research question mirrors that which Kanno and Varhese (2010) examined in their study of non-native English speaking immigrant students within a 4-year college: "[what are] the key challenges that these students experienced in their transition to college" (p. 311)? Similarly, Brown and Holloway (2008) investigated the "insider perspective on the adjustment process" of international postgraduate students, through an ethnographic approach (p. 235). Finally, this research question was also discussed in Terenzini et al.'s (1994) study of "people, experiences, and themes in the processes through which students become (or fail to become) members of the academic and social communities of their campus" in which, among other questions, they investigated the following: "what experiences play a major positive or negative role in the success or failure of that transition [to university/college]?" (p. 58).

The second research question, although more general, encompasses that which was investigated by Chhuon and Hudley (2008): "What experiences did Cambodian American college students believe affected their social and academic adjustment at the university?" (p. 17). Further, their goal was to "understand our participants' perspectives by highlighting their voices and attending to their explanations for achievement" (p. 17). More specifically, Kim (2009) questioned the "academic adaptation experiences of [ethnic] minority immigrant students", and presented their experiences "in their own words in order to gain a meaningful understanding of their college academic adaptation experiences" (p. 12). The second research question in my study reflects, in part, this objective and process.

The final research question in this study, relating to sense of belonging, more generally expressed the research questions of Lee and Ill (2000), Schussler and Fierros (2008), and Johnson et al. (2007). The guiding research addressed by Lee and Ill (2000) examined how multicultural experiences and cultural orientation affect the sense of belonging on campus for Asian American students (p. 111). Schussler and Fierros (2008) examined "student perceptions of their academic environment, relationships with other members of the college community, and sense of belonging at the institution" (p. 27). Johnson et al. (2007) investigated the factors that impacted a sense of belonging in a multicultural population using quantitative methods. However, most significantly, this final research question reflects the conceptual framework employed in this study, which draws on the research of Maestas et al. (2007) and Hurtado and Carter (1997), who investigated the factors affecting the development of a sense of belonging in minority students.

As Attinasi (1989) describes, in order to gain a clear understanding of students' experiences, "what are needed are naturalistic, descriptive studies, guided by research perspectives that emphasize the insider's point of view" (p. 250). Therefore, in order to gain deeper understandings of the participants' subjective perspectives of their experiences and sense of belonging within the institution, this study employed qualitative methods of research, rather than quantitative, as this is more effective for collecting in-depth information on inner perspectives, such as the development of a sense of belonging (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Furthermore, the theoretical underpinnings of this study are situated in a phenomenological approach.

Methodology: Phenomenology

The following section outlines a brief history of phenomenology, and explanation of the purpose and process of conducting phenomenological research, and the utility of this approach in the context of the current research study.

History of phenomenology. Phenomenology originated in the work of a German mathematician and philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). He argued that "to arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way, the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). This understanding of an experience that appears within our consciousness is described as a phenomenon, or "absolute reality", and understanding the essence of phenomenon is the aim of phenomenology Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). This focus of phenomenology is captured in Husserl's declaration, "To the things themselves!" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4; Moustakas,

1994, p. 26). Therefore, personal experiences and understandings are privileged above all other ways of knowing within this methodology.

Among others, French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was essential in expanding on and carrying forward this methodology. However, as Stones (1988) describes, by 1970, phenomenology "had not yet establish[ed] itself as a viable alternative to the traditional scientific approach in psychology research" (p. 141, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 5). However, with increasing development and acceptance of postpositivist approaches to research, phenomenology "has been adopted by different disciplines as an appropriate way of exploring research questions" and constructing knowledge (Campbell, Traditions of phenomenology).

There are two approaches to phenomenology evident in literature: hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Van Maden (1990) describes that hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on lived experiences and "interpreting the 'texts' of life", and requires researchers to describe and interpret the "meaning of the lived experiences" (p. 4 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Moustakas (1994) developed the approach of transcendental phenomenology, which "is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Within the context of this approach, Moustakas (1994) defines 'transcendental' as a state "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (p. 34). To achieve this state, Moustakas (1994) employs Husserl's construct of the 'epoche' or the "self-suspending of the phenomenologist" (Husserl, 1931, p. 189). As Husserl describes, in conducting phenomenological research,

"the whole world is placed within the nature-setting and presented in experience as real, taken completely "free from all theory", just as it is in reality experienced, and made clearly manifest in and through the linkings of our experiences, has now no validity for us, it must be set in brackets." (Husserl, 1931, p. 111). In transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) elaborates that "in the Epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense" p. 33). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology examines contextualized lived experiences, while transcendental phenomenology examines decontextualized experiences.

This research combines both hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology, in that I focus on the lived experiences of participants, and the meaning they make of these experiences, but I also interpret the meaning of these lived experiences; I examine these experiences through the lens of my own experience, and the literature I examined relating to this field. The reader will find my own experiences described later in this chapter, under the heading 'Social location and role of the researcher'.

Phenomenology in qualitative research. As Weldman and Kruger (1999) explain, "phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspective of the people involved" (p. 189 as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p.5); individuals selected for participation in a phenomenological study must have experience with the phenomena being examined. The phenomenological approach allows the researcher to investigate how an individual understands an experience by asking the individual "to describe their everyday lived experiences" (Creswell, 2003, p. 54) in relation to the particular phenomena being examined (Campbell, 2011; Groenewald, 2004). This requires the

researcher to "emphasize… the subjective aspects of people's behavior… in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives" (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 25-26). Because the goal of this research was to understand the transition to university and the development of a sense of belonging from the participants' perspective, the phenomenological approach supported this process.

A process approach for phenomenology. In order to engage in research through a phenomenological methodology, a particular procedure is required (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

This process begins with the identification of the phenomena or shared experience being investigated, and the decision that the phenomenological approach is the most effective way to address this problem (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004). As Creswell (2007) states, "the type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individual's common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (p. 60). Moustakas (1994) elaborates that the problem must have "both social meaning and personal significance" (p. 104). In this case, the phenomenon being studied is the postsecondary education experience of immigrant students, which meets the criteria of both Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) (see chapter 1).

The next step in conducting phenomenological research, as previously discussed, is to "bracket and interpret research bias and expectations" (Campbell, course notes). (See Chapter 3: 'Social location and role of the researcher'). In this case, I have examined my own experiences relating to the transition to university, my experiences within both the academic

and social systems of the university, and have considered my own sense of belonging within this context.

Following this step, research participants with experience relating to the phenomenon being examined must be selected. While Polkinghorne (1989) suggests 5-25 participants are necessary for conducting phenomenological interviews (as cited in Creswell 2007, p. 61), Boyd suggests 2-10 participants as "sufficient to research saturation" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 11). This research study employed the support of 12 research participants.

In-depth interviews are the most common method of data collection, which begin with "a social conversation… aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere" and move into "a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p.114). As Creswell (2007) suggests, these questions should include the following:

- "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?
- What contexts or situations have typically influenced your experiences of the phenomenon?" (p. 61)

Although a complete list of the interview questions guiding the interview process can be found in Appendix D, three questions reflective of Creswell's suggestions include the following:

- Describe your academic and social experiences within the university.
- What has contributed most positively to your experiences since you began studying at this university?

- What has detracted from your experiences since you began studying at this University?

In general, the goal of this interview is to gain an understanding of the participant's subjective understanding of the experience or phenomenon.

After data has been gathered, Moustakas (1994) suggests that phenomenal analysis begins with "horizonalizing" the data, which involves understanding how the participants perceived the phenomenon by identifying "meaning units" which are then clustered into "themes" (p. 118; Creswell, 2007, p. 61). These meaning units and themes "are used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience [and the] structural descriptions" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 118-9). The textual descriptions of the experience involve a description of *what* was experienced, while the structural descriptions relate to the influences on this experience (Campbell, 2011, p. 6; Creswell, 2007, p. 61). In this research project, the experience being examined was the post-secondary experience for a non-native English speaking, immigrant demographic, including: the transition to university, experiences within both the academic and social systems of the university, and the experience of a sense of belonging.

Finally, this analysis ends with a "unified account of both textual and structural descriptions of participants' experiences" (Campbell, 2011, p. 7), which involves compiling a "composite description that presents the "essence" of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). This is completed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, although the emphasis has been placed on the "unified account" of participants' experiences.

The phenomenological approach in related literature. The phenomenological approach has been used by numerous researchers investigating issues in the field of postsecondary persistence, adjustment and belonging. Andrade (2006) collected data using a phenomenological inquiry process to investigate, respectively, the effect of a seminar course on the adjustment processes of first-year international students. Wasburn (2008) supported his investigation of the effects of peer mentorship on the adjustment to campus life with the phenomenological approach. More specifically, the methods Andrade (2006) and Wasburn (2008) used for this process of phenomenological inquiry were, respectively, open-ended surveys and an instrumental case study approach.

The theoretical framework of this study drew from the work of several college impact models of student change to provide a comprehensive and descriptive analyses of the means through which students achieve a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007). Furthermore, I expand upon these frameworks by using a multicultural population, and qualitative research methods. Please see the relevant section of Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework for a detailed description of this framework.

Social location and the role of the researcher. In the spirit of epoche (Moustakas, 1994), let me disclose my own social location and related experiences. I am a Caucasian, 29 year old woman, brought up in middle-class family that has always supported me, both emotionally and financially, in my decisions and experiences. I was raised in an English-speaking household, and I consider myself monolingual and monocultural.

Within my educational experiences, I expected of myself and achieved academic success; while I applied myself with dedication to my studies, I understand that this

motivation and achievement came relatively easily to me. This experience extended into my postsecondary studies, and I always felt a desire to take on more. However, I did not experience the same success (or motivation) in my social experiences within these educational settings. I have frequently experienced the feeling of being an outsider throughout my schooling, and generally did not participate in extra-curricular activities within the contexts of either high school or university.

However, I did not truly know what it truly felt like to be an 'Outsider' until I moved to a South Korean community for two years, without knowledge of their language or cultural practices. Even then, although I felt alone, different, and without community, I received privileges because of my ethnicity, and therefore do not begin to equate my experience to those of the immigrant participants with whom I worked on this project. Within this experience as well, I realized how important a supportive social community was to me, mainly through its absence during this period.

Upon returning to Canada, I believe that I brought a new appreciation and empathy into my work as an English as an additional language (EAL) teacher to adult newcomers. I was more attuned to listening to their challenges, and elated at hearing their successes. These experiences prompted my choice to pursue this topic for my thesis. As Moustakas (1994) indicates, an effective phenomenological study "grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic [and] the researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the search" (p. 104); I feel I brought this interest to this study, and that I feel my experiences as an ESL teacher throughout the course of conducting this research have continued to strengthen and focus my commitment to this topic.

However, these experiences have also encouraged an assumption that the university system often marginalizes these students, and reduces them to their NNES status; this deficit model positions them as a problem to be dealt with, rather than an asset, bringing diversity and alternative perspectives to the classrooms. In conducting this research, it was important for me to focus on participants' understandings of events, rather than imposing my own beliefs and assumptions on their stories, because phenomenology requires the researcher to "bracket" her own preconceptions and experiences.

Research Method & Process

In conducting this research, I employed the phenomenological research process described above. I will explain this process in more detail as it pertains to this study below. Supported by the phenomenological approach, I used individual, in-depth interviews to collect data.

As Kvale (1996) describes, the qualitative interview is "literally an inter view, an exchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" in which the researcher tries to "understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences" (pp. 1-2 as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 13). Similarly, Kouritzin (1999) describes the qualitative interview as "face-touching", derived from the Japanese words for interview. In more general terms, the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can "develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). Given that this method is particularly useful for collecting personal information on individual

perceptions, experiences, and challenges (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) it fit well with the research goals of this study.

This method has been employed by numerous researchers investigating the transitional experiences of minority students (Attinasi, 1989; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Clark, 2005; James & Taylor, 2008; Kim, 2009; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1994). Chhuon and Hudley (2008) employed 'semi-structured individual interviews' to gain an understanding of how students belonging to a unique visible-minority group perceived factors affecting their transitional experiences and college persistence choices. Similarly, Terenzini et al.'s (1994) interview protocol for determining the transitional experiences of a diverse population of students at four diverse postsecondary institutions involved "purposefully open-ended and broadly structured" questions to investigate students' background, expectations, experiences, and goals (p. 60). Attinasi (1989) also employed an open-ended interview method for his investigation of the transitional experiences and perceptions of 18 persisting and non-persisting Mexican American students at a postsecondary institution. In addition to this method being more suitable to the research questions posed in this study, the rich, in-depth data collected through qualitative methods will be useful to supplement existing quantitative data in extant literature on this topic. The design and method of these studies is significant to note because the purpose of the objectives is very similar to the overall purpose of *this* thesis; in conjunction with the protocol for phenomenological research, this validates the use of a similar research design in this study. Therefore, the interview protocol I used in this research followed this same semi-structured, broad, and open-ended strategy.

Ethics approval. Because this research was conducted in connection to two postsecondary institutions, I applied for ethics approval from the Education and Nursing Research and Ethics Board at The University of Manitoba, and the Senate Committee on Ethics in Human Research and Scholarship at The University of Winnipeg. I required ethics approval from the first institution because of my affiliation as a student, and the second, because of its use as a research site.

In addition to ensuring I received full ethics approval from both research boards before I began data collection, I also observed ethical research processes by following the guidelines set by Bogdan and Biklen (2007, pp. 49-50).

First, I avoided research sites and processes in which individuals may have felt coerced to participate in my research. In order to identify suitable research participants, I disseminated information on my study to three program/department coordinators within the university who work directly with students who met the characteristics of my research participants: The Global Welcome Centre, the English for Specific Purposes Program, and Introduction to Academic Writing in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications. I mailed information about my research study to key individuals involved in these programs: respectively, the program coordinator of the Global Welcome Centre, the program coordinator of the English for Specific Purposes Program, and an instructor in the department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications. I provided these individuals with posters to recruit participants, as well as my ethics approval from both ethics bodies. These posters made potential participants aware of: the purpose of my research project, my need for research participants, the characteristics required for potential informants, the time

commitment required should they choose to participate (i.e. 90 minutes – 2 hours), and the

benefits, including a $30 honorarium. I also posted posters on information boards within the

university, which provided potential participants with the same information as listed above

(Appendix B). This insured that potential participants were aware upfront of the

responsibilities involved in this study, and therefore would proceed only if they were willing

and able to do so.

Secondly, in order to preserve the privacy and anonymity of my potential participants,

my contact information was made available to all potential informants, and any individuals

who were interested in participating were instructed to contact me in order to do so. In this

way, the colleagues of potential informants were not aware that an individual had chosen to

participate because he or she did not identify him or herself in a public arena. Furthermore, in

the storage, analysis, and presentation of my research, I ensured that I used pseudonyms for

all participants, and that I removed any information that could disclose participants' identity

from the data.

During interviews and data collection, I "treat[ed] informants with respect and

[sought] their cooperation in the research" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50). I ensured that

participants were fully aware of my research interests and provided them with this

information in both oral and written form. I also informed participants of their ability to

withdraw from the study at any time by simply asking to do so. Furthermore, I let them know

that if they chose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from that individual will be

destroyed, although no participant chose to do so. All interview transcripts were stored

digitally by pseudonym on a computer to which only I have access. The informed consent

sheets containing the names of participants were stored separately from any other hard copies of interview data in a locked drawer in my office, which is in my residence where only I have access to it. This avoids the possibility of connecting participants' names to any information that he or she has disclosed. Hard copies of the transcripts will be destroyed after 7 years via shredding, and deletion of electronic copies.

Finally, in reporting the data collected, at all times I truthfully recounted the information obtained, and used member checks to ensure that I presented the informants' experiences and perceptions accurately. Member checks help to ensure validity, which is an essential element of qualitative inquiry (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Consultation and pilot. After receiving ethics approval from both The University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, I completed a pre-pilot consultation to receive feedback on the research instrument itself from both an experienced researcher and an experienced practitioner in this field. These experts are on faculty at the postsecondary institution in which I conducted my research; because they work closely with students at this institution, they were able to provide valuable feedback on the proposed research questions. These two individuals offered valuable suggestions on the comprehensibility of my questions and the length of the interview, and also gave suggestions on my proposed method for recruiting participants. This included avoiding *presenting* to students within the three proposed programs on my research project, suggesting it would be difficult to be certain that coercion didn't factor into students' willingness to participate given that the presentation would be occurring in conjunction with a program from which they were receiving services. Given these changes suggested, I then reapplied to the ethics board with these revisions.

After receiving approval from the ethics board within both institutions, I then performed a pilot test of this research project to better understand the applicability of the research instrument in the field. I requested the assistance of 2 students with whom I had a pre-existing friendship, and who shared the characteristics to those required for this study to participate in the interview process. While I explained the interview and ethics process, they didn't sign consent forms, because I didn't transcribe their interviews, or report on their responses. During these sessions, I observed the following elements of the interview process: length of time required to complete the interview, redundancy in interview questions or responses received, gaps in interview questions, confusion or lack of clarity in the questions posed, and utility of interview questions in soliciting information that relates to the three overarching research questions of this project. I found that the length of time was appropriate (roughly 60 minutes), but I realized that several questions needed to be adjusted for increased clarity. As we progressed through the interview, I also invited these two pilot participants to give me any feedback they had on the questions, to which they responded with the following suggestions and comments:

- Make the questions clearer; sometimes it felt like I had already answered that question before.

- It was sometimes hard to think of responses to these questions 'on the spot'; could you give the questions beforehand?

- I like the style of interview; it only felt like a conversation. I was worried it would be like a job interview.

Once I completed the pre-pilot consultation, the pilot test, and made the necessary modifications of the research instrument, I began the data collection process itself.

Research participants, location, & time. Participants for this study were students attending one small university located in the Province of Manitoba, which will from here on in be called Canadian Prairie University (CPU). This university has a small, but diverse student body, and is primarily an undergraduate university. As described above, in order to locate potential participants for this study, I applied for ethics approval, and disseminated both information on my study and a request for research participants to three key programs on the university campus that provide services and support for the demographic required for participants in this study: an mentioned above, The Global Welcome Centre, the English for Specific Purposes Program, and Introduction to Academic Writing in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications. In addition to general information about my study and call for participants, this letter included verification of my ethics approval to pursue this research. This letter is included in Appendix A. In this letter, I requested that they post the call for participants included in the letter in a location visible to their students. I also posted this document around the university campus. Please find the poster calling for participants included in Appendix B.

Either through the general posting of information around the campus, or through the information disseminated by the three individuals listed above, students responded to my call for participants through the email address indicated within the posters. In total, 19 students responded to my advertisement, six of whom were international students studying on a temporary student visa, and therefore ineligible to participate. Twelve of the thirteen

respondents met with me for an interview based on (1) their willingness, and (2) the required

characteristics for participation. These characteristics included that the participants be a) a

non-native English speaker, b) an immigrant or refugee to Canada, and c) a full-time student.

This was therefore a sample of convenience, and demographically non-representative of the

larger campus demographics.

These interviews occurred on campus from late September to early November, 2012.

Twelve (12) participants were interviewed by me, Kaleigh Quinn. At the outset of the

interview, each was informed about the following: (1) the purpose of the research, (2) their

anonymity throughout the research, and (3) their ability to withdraw from the study at any

time by simply asking to do so. Before we began the interview, I reviewed this information,

and each participant signed the informant participation form (Appendix C).

Interview process. Because I was not acquainted with the research participants at the

time of the interview, I began the interview process with small talk in order to establish

rapport. Moustakas (1994) stresses the importance of establishing a "relaxed and trusting

atmosphere" when conducting a phenomenological interview by beginning with a "social

conversation" (p. 114). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest this can be accomplished by

discussing "a topic that you have in common" with research participants (p. 103); in my case,

one suitable topic was our mutual status as students, and the challenges inherent in this

status. We also discussed our mutual interest in this topic, and why participants chose to

participate in this research study. After engaging briefly in small talk to put the participant at

ease, I shared my research purpose and assured my participant of their confidentiality. This

assurance of confidentiality and the ways in which their anonymity is preserved can help to build trust.

Another way we developed comfort and trust was by sharing feelings. Although Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicate that the feelings, preconceptions, and experiences of the researcher are often a source of bias that need to be recorded and shared to ensure the reliability of the data, Johnson (1975) also suggests that "feelings are an important vehicle for establishing rapport and gauging subjects' perspectives" (as cited in Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 101). The feelings of the researcher can therefore be used positively to establish a connection with the participant. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) discuss this idea further:

> The researcher's feelings can be an important indicator of subjects' feelings, and therefore, a source for reflecting. They can also help formulate questions to get at subjects' experiences. In this sense, the observer's emotional reactions are a source for research hunches. If carefully sorted out, selectively presented, and appropriately expressed, they can also be a wonderful avenue for building rapport. Becoming part of a group, after all, means that you can share insiders' reactions. (p.102)

For example, during one interview, a participant shared that she was worried she was going to "do this wrong" and "not be helpful". This provided us with an important opportunity to discuss the interview, what she expected, and what would happen. I also told her that I could understand her concern, since it can be difficult trying something new, especially when we don't know what to expect; I also shared that I often feel this way too. However, I assured the participant that nothing she said could be wrong, because I only wanted to hear about her experiences. After we talked about this, she was more at ease, and we had a very open interview, during which she cried, recounting some of her challenges, and laughed, describing some of her early memories immigrating to Canada, realizing how much she had

changed. Therefore, addressing these emotional reactions was very helpful in establishing rapport.

Before moving into the interview questions, we reviewed the Free and Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), and the policies and procedures outlined within. Once we completed reviewing these forms and addressing any questions, I began a 'guided conversation' on the topic of their experiences as a postsecondary student in Canada. Open-ended interviewing techniques were used in this study so that I was able to pursue topics of interest as they arose during the interview. However, within the context of this strategy, I provided broad questions (see Appendix D as a guide) for the participant to discuss, and then "probe[d] more deeply, picking up on topics and issues the respondent initiate[d]" thus allowing "the subject to play a stronger role in defining the content of the interview" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). As students' experiences and perceptions differed substantially from one another, providing very open-ended questions allowed the participant to pursue topics as they related to his or her life, rather than fit their experiences into predetermined categories, or in the order predetermined by the interviewer. However, for research participants who need more support and structure to the interview process, the research instrument, or interview questions, included in Appendix D, served as a guide in the interview process. These questions follow the initial pattern presented in Kim's (2009) study of the academic experiences of ethnic minority immigrant students within a PS institution. I followed Kim's question template because of the overlap in our research objectives, the clear presentation of her interview questions, and her credibility in this field, given her status as a recipient of an award from the National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. I adapted this instrument slightly to fit my research questions, and

augmented it with a section addressing students' sense of belonging. Therefore, this research instrument helped to collect data that addressed the overarching research questions examining students' transitional experiences as they relate to the development of a sense of belonging within the university. Although the research interview was flexible, given the experiences and perspectives that participants shared, reference to the interview questions ensured that all three research questions were addressed, and as such, they aided in uncovering the patterns present in participants' experiences and perceptions.

Data Collection and Analysis

In completing the organization and analysis of this data, I followed the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994), which represent a modification of the phenomenological analysis procedure outlined by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975).

This process began with trancribing the cross-sectional interview recordings for each "co-researcher" (Moustakas, 1994) or participant. In transcribing the interviews, I wrote exactly what I heard during the interview, including any grammatical errors but not including pronunciation errors or filler words, such as 'um' and 'ah'. I indicated a [pause] in the transcript when there was a long pause in the participant's speech.

After completing this process, I considered my "own experience of the phenomenon" and wrote a description of this experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122), including both a textual and structural description of both *what* I experienced, and *how* I experienced this phenomenon of the postsecondary experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). An abbreviated composite description of this experience has been included earlier in this chapter under the heading "Social location of the researcher".

At that point, I turned to the interview transcripts of the research participants. As I read and reread the transcriptions and immersed myself in the perceptions of the participants of this research, I observed the patterns that emerged. From this data, any "words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects' way of thinking, and events [that] repeat and stand out" were used as the basis of my coding system for this raw data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173). I identified codes by highlighting these significant statements and writing 'meaning statements/units' (in the margins (Creswell, 2007, p. 156), to horizontalize the data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). I then wrote textural and structural summaries of each participant, which are included in Appendix E.

At that point, I re-read the meaning statements/units and textural and structural descriptions, and "relate[d] and cluster[ed] the … meaning units into themes" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Then I transferred each preliminary 'theme' (which typically were later organized and relabeled as 'sub-themes') to a sticky note that I added to a large poster in my office.

Through this process, I identified 76 themes (or codes) initially. For example, these themes related to ways of thinking about immigration and university, students' feelings about coming to Canada, relationships with friends, family, and individuals within university system, and their reflections on different university experiences. Sometimes the labels given to themes were a general expression of participants' thoughts, such as 'relationships with others from the same ethnic background'. Others were labelled with the words students used "getting behind" and "the university system".

Once this process was complete, I wrote brief textural and structural descriptions of the experiences of each participant in the form of a reflective research memo, which related to their transition to university, their social and academic experiences within university, and their sense of belonging within the university.

At this point, I returned to the themes that had emerged as I reviewed and organized the data and cross-referenced this list with the descriptions of each participant's experiences to ensure all themes, or codes, had been identified. I then sorted through the themes or codes to develop categories, and to organize the data analysis process. Examples of the themes are: descriptions of the immigration process; initial perceptions of Canada/Winnipeg; perspectives regarding finding work and working; and relationships with others at university. These codes reflected a focus on students' perceptions of their experiences and the world around them. Categories related to the research questions were pursued further, while other categories that related to students immigration decisions and journey, and work experiences, for example, were set aside. This helped to reduce the number of coding categories and codes employed in data analysis to those immediately relevant to this study.

Data reduction was further accomplished by examining the remaining themes to decide (1) what could be merged, (2) what could be disregarded due to lack of relevancy to the current study, and (3) how could the data be organized most effectively. I saw some as linked based on participants' descriptions, and therefore grouped and them together. For example, "pre-requisite courses" and "pre-requisite knowledge" were merged or reduced to one broader category, "meeting pre-requisites", due to their similarity in understood meaning as conveyed by students, and organized together with "transfer credit" under the category of "the university system".

Although this data organization step is not described in Moustakas (1994) phenomenological research procedure, this approach has been employed by past researchers who have used similar qualitative research methods on similarly broad topics relating to student adjustment and persistence (Attinasi, 1989; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1994;). This step was helpful in further classifying the data that emerged within this research.

Finally, I developed a "composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience of the group as a whole" within this study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). This composite description of both what participants perceived and described in their transition to postsecondary, their academic and social experiences within postsecondary, and their sense of belonging on the university campus, as well as descriptions of how they perceived these experiences, are included in Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.

This process took place from November 2012 to March 2013.

The Role of the Researcher

Regardless of my intentions as a researcher, it is important to note that "as trusting as the relationship may be [between researcher and participant], it does not eliminate the problematic of representation" that affects all researchers (Delgado-Gaitain, 1994). Crook (2009) further elaborates that "the language we choose to describe something helps shape what we see" (p. 20). It also helps shapes what our reader sees. Although I attempted to 'bracket' my own experiences and assumptions, this is challenging to accomplish perfectly, especially as a new researcher (Creswell, 2007).

These problems relating to representation can be exacerbated when working with or within another culture. While this research was performed with individuals attending a small Canadian university, research participants were relatively new to Canada. Participants did not share a first language, culture, and customs with the researcher, who is native to Canada. Therefore, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) caution, participants with diverse backgrounds may not share the typical definition of research or researcher (p. 93). Furthermore, differing views on authority, privacy, respectful behavior, and communication may add a layer of complication to the research process (p. 94). In order to do my best to ensure that participants felt respected and safe, I ensured that I clarified all elements of the research process with participants clearly, and that I maintained transparency with my research objectives throughout the study. I explained to them what my role of the researcher was, and we discussed any questions they had about this process, and how this process might differ in their home country, should they have any experience with this.

I also maintained a keen awareness of this potential concern, and I documented any challenges with the rapport I developed with particular participants in detailed field notes and observations, to ensure relevant data was included in my analysis. However, despite my attention to this concern, this does not "eliminate the problematic of representation" resulting from this cross-cultural research. Therefore, participants' stories are mediated by their perception of me as a research, teacher, and a member of the cultural majority group.

Summary

In summary, in order to examine the perceptions of non-native English speaking immigrant students as they navigate their transition to university, their experiences in the

social and academic systems of the university campus, and developed a sense of belonging, I employed a phenomenological research methodology. I collected qualitative data using in-depth, open ended interviews with 12 research participants from one small, Canadian university at varying points of completion of their university studies. Interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed using a phenomenological approach to explore meanings and themes that emerged from the raw data. Finally, results were compiled to share the composite meanings and essences of these experiences to report to a larger academic and professional audience.

CHAPTER IV:
RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings of chapter. The themes that emerged as these participants shared their stories related to the three research questions addressed in this study, as stated on page nine of Chapter 1:

1. In the initial transition to the Canadian postsecondary experience, what do non-native English speaking immigrant students perceive and describe as affecting this experience?

2. How do non-native English speaking immigrant students describe their experiences within the university?

3. What are non-native English speaking immigrant students' perceptions of their sense of belonging on the university campus, and what do they perceive to have contributed to or prevented its development?

In order to respond to the research questions, the results of this study are presented and discussed in three sections.

In the first section, I address students' perceptions of their transition to university. This section is divided into the following components, which examine students' initial perceptions of their experiences and challenges on the university campus: their decision to attend university; the notion of getting 'behind'; and challenges with the university system. The elusive university "system" was further identified by students as involving processes

such as planning courses, meeting pre-requisites, and transferring credits. I also investigated the remaining barriers that participants identified as challenges in their transition to university.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine the ways in which students describe their experiences during their first two years of university. These descriptions are grouped into two main sections: the experiences students had *within* the university classroom, or their *academic* experiences, and the experiences students had *outside* of the classroom, or their *social* experiences. These experiences within the academic and social realms of the university also impacted their transition to the postsecondary environment; as such, implications of their academic and social experiences on their transition are also examined.

The third section of this chapter addresses the third research question, which relates to participants' perceptions of their sense of belonging on the university campus, as well as the factors that they perceive to have contributed to or prevented its development. Relevant discussions and connections to literature are included within each section.

Finally, I conclude with advice and suggestions that participants offered to future students in their positions, in order to achieve a more successful transition experience and positive experiences within the academic and social realms of the postsecondary experience. I also highlight students' recommendations for changes universities could adopt in order to support and respond to the needs of their immigrant student-body more effectively.

Participant Demographics

Twelve students currently studying at a small, diverse Canadian university, referred to as Canadian Prairie University (CPU) within this study, volunteered to participate in this research study. These students were non-native English speaking immigrants, who were willing to share their perceptions about their experiences within the university. Each informant participated in one 55 – 75 minute interview on the university campus, followed by a member check of the data. Both the interviews and member checks occurred during the fall of 2012. Pseudonyms are used and identifying information has been removed. A summary of the demographic information of the twelve participants is provided below to provide a conceptual frame. See Table 1.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Name (gender)	Country of Origin	Year in University	Length of time in Canada	High school in Canada?	Postsecondary experience in home country?
Alberto (M)	Peru	2nd	3 years	N	Y
Amara (F)	Ethiopia	3rd	5 years	Y	N
Ashan (M)	Sri Lanka	1st	1 year	N	Y
Dejan (M)	Yugoslavia	1st	<1 year	N	Y
Gabrielle (F)	Colombia	1st	2 years	Y	N
Jay (M)	Philippines	1st	3 years	N	Y
Maria (F)	Philippines	3rd	7 years	N	Y
Maya (F)	Venezuela	1st	2 years	Y	N
Mohisha (F)	India	2nd	2 years	N	Y
Natalia (F)	Dominican Republic	1st	8 years	Y	N
Rivka (F)	Russia, Israel	3rd	5 years	Y	N
Robel (M)	Ethiopia	1st	2 years	N	Y

Within this group of twelve research participants, 5 participants were male and 7 participants were female. Participants were from a diverse number of countries, and had been living in Canada between 9 months and 8 years at the time of the interview. On average, participants had been in the country for approximately four years. Five participants had studied within a Canadian high school for at least one year, while seven participants had

previous postsecondary experience in their home country. There was no overlap in the participants who had completed high school studies in Canada and those who had postsecondary experience in their home country; therefore, each participant had educational experience within one of these contexts. At the time of the interview, 7 participants were in their first year of university within Canada, two participants were in their second year of university, and three were in their third year.

A detailed profile of each participant has been included within Appendix F.

Part 1: The Transition to University

This section of the findings provides a primary overview of the students' perceptions of their experiences during their transition to university. Each theme and subtheme is divided into two sections: the findings that emerged from this study, and a discussion of related literature.

For a few participants, reflecting a year or two back to their initial feelings upon beginning university was difficult, but others clearly recalled these feelings. Participants described that making the idea of university into reality was a "dream come true", and the start of a "really, really amazing journey". Others found it "overwhelming" and "hard to adapt to". Amara's account of her initial feelings is particularly powerful:

It was overwhelming. I definitely wanted it to be a good experience. I wanted to make friends and fit in. I was super excited at the beginning. I remember thinking, I couldn't believe I'm joining university, this is a big deal. And it was really exciting, but then it was really overwhelming afterwards, and I thought, I don't know if I can do this, I don't know if I wanna do this. This is kinda not what I expected from

university. So obviously my first year was very indecisive. I didn't know if I wanted

to go to university or if I wanted to continue, or if I just wanted to stop. But I never

wanted to stop. To begin with it was a dream come true really; I never thought I

would go to university.

This section uncovers the varied perceptions each participant shared about their transition to

university and to understand how each student managed the challenges they encountered. A

summary of the themes and subthemes that emerged within this section are highlighted in

Table 2.

Table 2.

The Transition to University: Themes & Subthemes

Theme: The decision to attend university
Theme: Getting behind
Theme: Ease of transition: Understanding university processes 　　　　　Subtheme: Understanding the university system 　　　　　Subtheme: Planning programs 　　　　　Subtheme: Transferring credits 　　　　　Subtheme: Accessing support
Theme: Barriers to transition 　　　　　Subtheme: Financing university 　　　　　Subtheme: Time limitations 　　　　　Subtheme: Confidence (lack of) 　　　　　Subtheme: Insufficient support

The Decision to Attend University. The decision to attend university affected their

current situation and their future, as well as their families. This decision can mark a

beginning of a turning point in one's life, and certainly for these participants, it was not to be viewed lightly.

Findings. Some participants shared that part of their motivation to immigrate was to access a Canadian education; as a result, their decision to attend university in Canada was made before arriving in Canada. Maya's decision to immigrate with her mother was due partly to the "better opportunit[ies]" available in Canada, and her understanding that she "can get an education [in Canada] easier". The decision to attend university was firmly rooted before her immigration application was accepted. Gabrielle felt similarly, sharing that her initial thought upon discussing the immigration opportunity with her father was, "it's a good opportunity for my education. It's going to be a better education, and I'll have better opportunities for jobs." Ashan echoed this intention, stating that he also came to Canada "because of the education. For the education I came [here]; I heard … that the educational system is really good, and that you can get a student loan, and it's cheaper, maybe." These students were very motivated to begin their studies quickly, perhaps because it could legitimize all the challenges they had encountered in their immigration journey.

Participants also conceptualized their decision to attend university in connection to their access to and preparation for meaningful work. For example, Dejan's decision to attend university was motivated by a desire to "secure the best future" for his family. However, this decision carried additional significance for him, having had no Canadian work or educational experience, as he believed that a Canadian degree would open "a whole new perspective" for his job opportunities. His understanding that "Canadian employers are more open to someone with a Canadian education" placed a much stronger value and priority on obtaining "a Canadian education", and on the decision to attend university in Canada.

Robel shared a similar reasoning behind his decision to enter university in Canada. Although he had received a degree from a university in Ethiopia, he found that he was not able to "find a job that could use [his] previous experience and skills" upon arrival in Canada, as he had expected. Without any other options, and a need to sustain himself, he took a position in a factory. Upon realizing his situation, returning to university became an integral part of his future: "You know what, basically, I was just, I… I knew that I had to go back to school, basically; that was the plan that I had. I had to find a way to get access." Gaining access to university became a focus for Robel, in order to secure meaningful employment.

Given Robel's background in teaching, this was an important step in upgrading his credentials to meet Canadian accreditation requirements. Similarly, Dejan, Ashan, and Jay had also studied in the same field in their home countries as they had enrolled into within CPU; for each of these individuals, their current studies were an opportunity for them to upgrade their credentials, either because their credentials hadn't been recognized as sufficient within Canada (Robel and Ashan), or because they wanted to secure a higher level of work within Canada than they had in their home country (Dejan and Jay).

For Maria, although she "craved for" learning, characterizing herself as "the person to pursue a degree at university", the decision to attend university wasn't made until four years after she immigrated to Canada. After working for several years in entry level positions, Maria decided that she "wanted to get a degree, just to make something meaningful with [her] life." She perceived university as a way to "find happiness"; "[university will] make possible… all of what I've been thinking, and what I've been trying to achieve in life. Like, coming to university is going to give me that pass somehow. Give me that way to achieve

those goals." Her conceptualizations of this decision suggests that she placed a high valued on a university education, seeing it as essentially the only way to actualize her goals.

Instilling a sense of pride in family members, and fulfilling familial expectations was another aspect of some students' decisions to enter university. For Natalia, she was the first member of her family to attend university, both in her home country and in Canada, and she felt "a little pressure" as a result; "my family used to be poor, so they just went to high school. They didn't go to university or anything." Her mother has high expectations for her to "do better than her[self]" educationally and professionally, and tearfully, Natalia shared that her decision to attend university was made both "to make [her] mom proud [and] … to make [herself] proud". Alternatively, although Maria also wanted to make her parents proud, she wanted to complete a university degree as a way to "prove something to [her] family". She saw re-entering university in Canada as a way to demonstrate her capabilities and her success to her parents, although she followed that thought with this hope: "eventually my mom would be really proud of me".

Discussion. Similar to the experiences shared by several participants, in the review of the Provincial Nominee Program within Manitoba, Carter (2009) found that 83% of principal applicants indicated that they were encountering problems getting their credentials recognized (p. 37), and roughly half of these applicants "were working to upgrade their credentials" (p. 38). Therefore, the important role credential recognition played in these four participants' decisions to return to university in Canada reflects the challenge that credential recognition often plays in immigrants' transition into the Canadian labour market (Carter, 2009).

In relation to Natalia's experiences, Terenzini et al. (1994) suggest that although her decision to attend university constituted a *disjunction* in her family's educational 'tradition' (p. 63), her family was very supportive, and advised her that "without education, you are nothing." As Hurtado and Carter (1997) found, this support external to the university community was essential in her transition to university.

Getting Behind. The topic of getting behind emerged as another important theme relating to the transition to university.

Findings. Several participants held firm expectations for themselves about their educational and professional goals; the migration journey and settlement process was viewed by some as an 'interruption' to this process that set them back from either the pace set by their peers in their home country, or the goals they had previously established for themselves. This feeling of 'being behind' in terms of the progress of where they were in their university studies, or where they *would have been* had they stayed in their home country and continued on their expected trajectory, played a prominent role for some in their current life. This idea of 'getting behind' or 'being behind' was a prominent theme in many participants' stories that in many ways informed their decision to enter university, and the experience they had in transition.

Maya had completed all requirements to attend university in her home country, and, like her peers, she "really wanted to start university *then*". However, the decision her family made to immigrate to Canada required her to re-enter grade eleven in a Canadian high school in order to meet entrance requirements of Canadian universities: "I had to go through one more year and then graduate, and all my friends from Venezuela, a lot of them they're

already in like second year university". For Maya, this was a frustrating reality to face. When she graduated 18 months later, she was "so ready to come to university", both to fulfill her own expectations, and to match the pace set by her peers who were already completing the second year of their postsecondary studies.

Although access to a Canadian education was a strong factor in his decision to immigrate to Canada, Ashan found that his English language proficiency was not sufficient to enter university when he initially arrived. He spent the better part of his first year in Canada working to meet the language proficiency requirements to enter university only 14 months after arriving, but he still felt that he is "a year behind": "I think that it would have been great if I started studying because … I could have finished 1 year now, if I started then." This feeling of being behind schedule recurred throughout his interview.

Although the feeling of being behind contributed to Maya's and Ashan's decision to enter university, Jay's extreme perception of delayed progress was almost an inhibiting factor in completing his postsecondary studies in Canada. Before his parents informed him of their plans to immigrate to Canada, Jay was completing a nursing degree in the Philippines, and working towards the goal of applying to medical school. However, upon arriving in Canada, he found that his undergraduate degree was not accepted by Canadian medical programs, and that he would need to repeat his bachelor's degree to meet admission requirements; he wasn't sure if he would be able to "start again". Despite this huge setback, Jay acknowledged the following about becoming a doctor: "[it] is my dream, and I need to follow it". However, where he would have been had he remained in the Philippines continued to be a significant reference point, and his inability to maintain the schedule he had originally determined for himself was troubling; "if we hadn't have moved here, I'd be in my fourth year of med

school by now... That's my biggest regret." The factors and feelings behind students' decisions to enter university are important to note as they were often connected to students' motivation to persist in their studies, and their feelings of belonging.

Understanding the 'University System'. Participants' reflections on their initial transition experiences centered on their initial feelings and reactions to the new environment, including feeling lost, overwhelmed, and unsure of how to proceed; they often ascribed their challenges to not understanding the "university system". In addition to understanding the "system" in general, recurrent challenges relating to specific processes were expressed, including planning one's courses, understanding and completing pre-requisites, and transferring credit from previous educational experiences.

Findings. For five participants, understanding the university systems presented a greater challenge than the content and assignments of their classes, and participants often spent a far greater portion of their interview addressing these challenges. Alberto found the application process to be very fast, and while he was very happy to receive his letter of acceptance in the mail, he was confused and uncertain about subsequent steps; he was left with the question, "what to do next?" Ashan's experience also echoed his confusion. Like Alberto, he struggled to understand the 'system' and 'processes' within the university; "the biggest problem I've had when I go to university [is] figuring out what to do, and how to do it."

Four participants discussed their perceptions of the inaccessibility and lack of transparency of university processes, as well as the expectations held by the 'university' regarding the prior knowledge that all first year students are assumed to have:

Maya: The first couple of months were so hard, because it's hard to adapt. Like the culture and the language and the way the system works. It's way too much information at once... In university, I think it's more expected that you already know how to go around and get yourself around, well not just around campus, but that you know what the norms are and that you know what to do.

Gabrielle: The school system is so different here, so I really didn't understand what was going on.

Jay: I think people have challenges because they don't know how the system works.

Mohisha: It's really hard to get a handle on the system alone. Like, the Canadian system is way different. Like it's so different compared to countries like India and other Asian countries.

Several students noted this process is even more difficult without any Canadian high school experience to support the transition, believing this experience can help to provide students with background knowledge on Canadian educational processes. Maya, who had initially experienced frustration upon realizing she would have to finish her high school studies in Canada before entering university, expressed gratitude that she had this opportunity. Reflecting on her experiences, and on the knowledge that she gained in high school about these processes, she shared that "it would be kind of overwhelming if university is the first thing you do here. It would be pretty scary." Gabrielle, who also completed her high school studies in Canada agreed: "it would have been really hard if I didn't finish high school here and I just started university here". Attending high school first was "really helpful" because it

gave her the opportunity to "get [to] know how things work and how people are" within an educational context.

Discussion. Literature describes the transition to university as an "exceedingly complex process" (Terenzini et al., 1994, p. 61) that includes students' initial experiences with the physical, social, and academic contexts on the campus (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For students who attended high school in Canada prior to beginning university, this experience offered a pre-socialization opportunity; it was a "simulation" experience for students (Attinasi, 1989, p. 258), where they could learn the behaviours, systems, and processes in place within Canadian educational facilities.

Although Jay didn't attend university in Canada, he speculated that students who did would "know how the grading system works, and what the requirements are. It would be really nice to know those." On the other hand, he shared, "if you're a newcomer and you're going to go straight to university … it's a difficult thing to do to get integrated into the system right away." Similarly, Brown and Holloway (2008) also reported that many international participants in their study felt "lost", "uncertain", and unsure of how to proceed in their first few weeks of university, which they associate with increased acculturative stress. Moreover, Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, and O'Brien (2007) cited this "lack of familiarity and knowledge" with the processes involved in higher education as a transitional barrier faced by the Hispanic students in their study (p. 178). Additionally, the findings of the Pan-Canadian Study of First-Year College Students (Human Resources, 2008) also suggests that "recent immigrant students may be less aware of the services available to them at their college" (section 5.12, paragraph 3). Participants therefore perceived more explicit support for learning the university "systems" as necessary for newcomer students,

which is consistent with research that suggests institutional intervention can support the transitional process (Clark, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Terenzini et al., 1994).

Planning Programs. Although many students referred to the challenges presented by the "university system", a definition of what they meant by this "system" was not easily provided. Upon further discussion, participants described the university processes as involving navigation of initial time sensitive tasks, such as selecting and planning courses, confirming and obtaining pre-requisites, and transferring credit. Each of these areas presented different challenges in terms of how to logistically navigate the task, but they were also linked to independent issues as well, that often related to students' perceptions of their legitimacy on the university campus. Interestingly, contradictory themes emerged from participants' responses in each of these areas.

Findings. Challenges with planning one's program of studies, and with selecting courses also emerged as a significant element of 'the university system'. According to students' perceptions, this was a result of the vast options available to choose from, the lack of clarity in the processes required to select, declare, and adhere to a program, and the differences in the Canadian system and that of participants' home countries.

Alberto shared the following about his initial questions about university: "I was kind of lost, taking courses randomly… I thought, well what to do next. So I just chose classes, and started going to class. Just keep going until I got to point when what am I going to do in next year? How will I plan it?" This was further complicated because of his experience with postsecondary education in his home country, where each student's course-load is fully dictated and pre-planned based on his or her major. Therefore, his experience at CPU was not

consistent with his expectations based on his prior understanding of university processes in Peru.

Maya also experienced some challenges with planning her courses; she shared, "I'm not sure about what to do next" in terms of her course planning. Robel realized that some courses he was taking were not appropriate for his current course of study, and as a result, thought that withdrawing might be the best option. However, this task presented its own set of problems: "I'm thinking I have to understand how I should do it [drop a course]. If I can drop a course then uh, well I don't know because I can't take any course now. It's too late…I know it's really hard but I have to work on those things." This uncertainty rang through several students' narratives, and was often complicated by difficulties with pre-requisites and credit transfer, resulting in unclear direction on what courses students should (or could) take.

Discussion. In his research, Attinasi (1989) found that students described feeling lost in the complexity of the "academic geography" of the campus. The vastness in terms of the number of options available complicated students' experiences; students identified a need for more support in navigating this process.

Meeting pre-requisites. The theme of 'meeting pre-requisites' also emerged as a feature of the transition experiences for most participants.

Findings. Many students struggled with understanding how to navigate the university in terms of determining which pre-requisite courses were waived, and which they still required. For example, Dejan was sent to several departments to try to sort out his pre-requisite situation for mathematics, and was referred from professor, to department chair, to department head. Although it was a difficult process to navigate, once he met with the correct

person, he was able to "talk it over, and explain [his] situation, and show her [his] grades"; ultimately he received a favourable response to his request. However, once he considered his situation more, he realized it might have been better if he had taken the pre-requisite course instead. Dejan had a clear sense of his situation, and could predict where his challenges might lie: "14 years away from the school is a lot... I knew what kind of challenges I'm going to be facing and one of them is going to be math… So I just wanted to catch up and start reviewing all the math I had done in high school." This step was a personal choice made to ensure he had the pre-requisite *knowledge* to begin his program successfully, even though he had officially met the pre-requisites for his program. He reflected that he would "have a better grade in discreet mathematics, for example, if I took calculus, just to be on the safe side… I would not hesitate taking a calculus course just for my own satisfaction." He reiterated this desire to solidify the foundational knowledge required for success in his program.

This anecdote reveals a pattern that emerged in participants' narratives regarding pre-requisites. In addition to challenges with the *process* of meeting pre-requisites, participants shared two different conceptualizations of the idea of pre-requisites that had interesting implications on their transition experience. The first conceptualization of pre-requisites was as *official* pre-requisites, or the minimum requirements deemed necessary for entrance into a particular course or program. The second was pre-requisite *knowledge*, or the knowledge perceived to be necessary in order to gain success in a particular course or program. In Dejan's case, although he was evaluated to meet the *official* pre-requisites of the program, he felt he should improve his pre-requisite *knowledge* before beginning his program in order to ensure his success.

One form of official prerequisite that all NNES students (who are not born in Canada) are required to meet is to demonstrate that their English language proficiency meets minimum standards through submission of official scores on approved language exams, or completion of pre-approved English language courses. These requirements, however, are waived should a student have completed high school in Canada with courses of standard designation. If the language proficiency requirement is not met, then students must seek out a way to improve their language proficiency, and then prove the requirement has been met.

When Ashan initially immigrated to Canada, his language proficiency was not high enough to attend university. He elected to take a university-approved language course to meet this pre-requisite for admission. He took these classes "because they told me once I take these two classes the language barrier for the university is waived." However, he also found that the classes "are very good for newcomers." Although post-secondary studies in Sri Lanka are conducted in English, he observed that "Canadians have a different writing style, so this class had very important things to learn. So now I have to do many assignments, and this helped me with the writing, and how to construct essays, and that." Therefore, this course helped to satisfy not only the *mandatory* language requirement to enter university, it also supported Ashan in developing the pre-requisite *knowledge* he perceived to be necessary for success in university.

Maria also enrolled into a language course on campus to develop her academic writing skills before applying to university, even though she had already met the language proficiency requirements needed for admission into university. However, she regarded this choice as a way to develop pre-requisite *knowledge* that she deemed necessary for university success, rather than a way to meet admission requirements. After several years away from

university, she decided that it would be a good idea to "practice [her] writing skills, and to learn the Canadian style" for academic compositions. She also found that this course motivated her to return to university, providing a stepping-stone from "outsider" to "university student".

In addition to language-based pre-requisites, the theme of meeting pre-requisites also emerged in relation to other subject areas. In order to move ahead in his computer science program, Ashan was required to complete a pre-calculus course; however, this requirement was waived if he achieved a sufficient grade in a preliminary course. Although he received the grade necessary to waive this requirement, he explained that he had registered to take the course in the upcoming session anyway; "I prefer doing it". Ashan was determined to ensure he had all the pre-requisite knowledge deemed necessary to succeed in this program, even if it meant or duplicating requirements specified.

While Ashan and Dejan both decided to address the pre-requisite knowledge they deemed necessary for success in their courses, Gabrielle followed only the *specified* pre-requisite courses provided by the university. For her science program, Gabrielle had enrolled into a first-year chemistry class. Although Gabrielle had completed grade 12 chemistry, she had not taken grade 11 chemistry; despite having been met the minimum requirements for acceptance into this course, she felt that she "had a gap there". Gabrielle reflected at length about her missing pre-requisite knowledge, and the impact this was having on her transition to university:

When I got to university I was like, oh no I feel like I'm going to fail. So I was like, 'maybe I should drop that [chemistry course] and take grade 11', and have a solid

ground and then come back to university and do my chemistry and start from zero

and then it will be good.

Although she decided to stay in the class, her perception that she was 'missing' information held her back from studying for the course: "[I'm] afraid that I would need what I didn't learn in grade 11. So I thought I'm not going to be able to study what we learned now, because I will need to know what we learned in grade 11." Her perceived lack of pre-requisite knowledge prevented her from addressing the current content of her class, suggesting that feeling academically prepared is a strong factor in successfully transitioning into the university context for this participant.

Jay's experience with pre-requisites was very different. Jay enrolled into a Bachelor of Science program at CPU in order to meet the admission requirements of Canadian medical school. However, he had already completed a Bachelor of Nursing in the Philippines, and had also been working as a nurse in Canada for 18 months prior to his university acceptance. Therefore, when he found out that his education and experience didn't meet the pre-requisites required to enter university, and he would have to take a high school math course, he was very frustrated; "I told [the department chair] I've already been working as a nurse, and I handle people's lives. I know it's not related to math but I'm not doing math again. I'm not wasting my time. I'll do first year math again, but not high school." He perceived this decision as a denial of the value of his previous experience, and he interpreted that chairs decision to mean "you're not good enough for university; you have to take *high school* math". With persistence and a keen understanding of the workings of university processes, Jay was eventually able to have the pre-requisites waived. However, this experience caused him such stress and frustration that it was recounted as if it were still an open wound.

Discussion. While some research suggests that taking EAL courses on-campus relegates students to a "deficit identity" and forces them to "re-become ESL" (Marshall, 2010), these students found these courses very helpful in their transition to university. This was particularly true because these courses were offered on the CPU campus; they gave students a chance to become familiar with the campus, which was helpful in their eventual enrolment in for-credit courses. It was a way for these students to engage in "direct simulation" of the university experience (Attinasi, 1989, p. 259).

Transferring credits. Participants' thoughts on the challenges with the university "system" were often related to their experiences with the process of credit transfer, which for some was an ongoing struggle.

Findings. Difficulties with understanding how to transfer credits, what credits would be transferred, what to do with these transferred credits, how to obtain the necessary documentation from students' previous educational experiences, and who to contact for support all emerged as aspects of this struggle. Although Jay had four years of university experience in his home country to support his understanding of the "university systems", he still struggled with navigating these processes. In order to receive transfer credit from his previous studies, his academic advisor told him to "talk to the department chairs or department heads." After sending many emails and having several meetings, he was told that his previous credits could not be transferred because there were "inconsistencies with whoever evaluated [his] transcript". As a result, he has to contact his high school in the Philippines to courier his transcripts again to be re-evaluated. Finally, he was told he would receive transfer credit, but currently, "they're still processing [his] transcript and [his] papers", which creates difficulties in terms of what level of courses he is able to take.

Maya's experience was similar to Jay. She was able to receive transfer credit from an Advanced Placement course she had taken in high school, and she was happy to hear that "they were going to let me use it and go into second year psychology classes". However, there was a problem with her transcript, and as a result, she shared: "I'm still trying to figure out what to do…I have to go all over, and I had to go to the psychology office, and they sent me to the department head, and I spent the day going back and forward." The process of navigating this credit transfer process was very complicated and unclear for Maya.

While Robel didn't experience as many difficulties in getting his credits transferred, he was unclear on what to *do* with them: "they [his department administrators] said they will exempt me this many credit hours. But my department … they can't translate all those… Those things we all did in a rushed manner." Although he has record of these credits on his transcript, he is unclear on how to proceed, and what courses he does or doesn't need to take as a result of this transfer. His lack of clarity on the systems and processes was very problematic in his return to university.

In addition to the confusion caused by the process of credit transfer, similar to the division of perspectives on pre-requisites, a dichotomy emerged in participants' value of credit transfer. Some participants fought to be granted transfer credits from their previous educational experiences so as not to get more 'behind'; they sought validation for their previous achievements. Conversely, other students questioned the credits that had been transferred, and sought the opportunity to revisit more foundational concepts before moving forward.

Before immigrating to Canada, Mohisha had completed one year of studies in India in a Bachelor of Science program, specializing in engineering. Upon enrolling into CPU, she met with the admissions department to request the following: "[is] there any way I can get a few credits – maybe not all of them. I mean, definitely there is a difference between the engineering curriculum and the science." She submitted "the details of the subject [she] had taken, and the transcripts and everything", and roughly one week later, she received an email confirming the transfer of 20 credits from her previous educational experience. She had a reasonable expectation of what to request, and a clear understanding of the process required. As a result, she happily shared that "even though this is my second year of university here, I'm taking third year [of] university". In her case, Mohisha was very happy to receive transfer credit to reduce the length of her undergraduate program.

Jay, however, was not satisfied with credits that were transferred from his previous degree; he didn't feel that the 30 transfer-credit hours sufficiently recognized his prior learning experiences. He noted that he material he was covering was "redundant" and that he "did this already", and although he was doing very well in all of his courses, he was frustrated with how behind he was from his previous schedule. This feeling intensified when Jay learned that half of one of his classes was comprised of high-school students in an extra-credit course; "I felt like, why are they questioning my degree from the Philippines if I have high school lab mates?" However, he was able to come to terms with this reality by thinking, "okay, this is my goal." Without changing his thoughts, Jay feared he "would go back to the Philippines" out of frustration.

Alberto had completed two years of university in a related program in his home country. Upon applying to CPU, he found that roughly one term of credits transferred into

this program; "thankfully, my credits from my last university... were just transferred, some of them". He later reiterated his gratitude that his previous experience was recognized, acknowledging that "some people actually start from zero." While not all students do receive credit recognition for their previous learning, he doesn't recognize that some students may choose or prefer to start from 'zero' in this new postsecondary context.

Robel, on the other hand, had a very different experience with transfer credit. As discussed, as a result of his completion of a degree, admissions transferred 30 credit hours into his current program, which waived his first year of his studies. Because this was an integrated program, this meant that Robel joined an existing cohort of students who had already spent a year establishing their connections; "I just joined with the students in second year. I think that's one of the problems I am having." The transfer of credits therefore impacted his social experiences in this new context, as he shared that in this area he felt he is "doing really poor[ly]." This credit transfer also affected his academic experiences in this program. For example, one of the courses that admissions waived was a first-year Canadian history course. However, having taken all of his previous education in Ethiopia, Canadian history was not a topic on which he was familiar:

> The history course that I am taking, it was just began in 1812. So it would be much better if I had taken some kind of course which will help me and give me some kind of information about what happened before. So that when you take that course, I will not be completely new.

The reality of his situation was more worrisome because he was enrolled into a teacher-education program with history as a teachable-subject. He shared that despite receiving

transfer-credit for this course, "I'm planning to do [the first-year] course, because I know, the situation I am in teaching won't be very easy because I don't know it… I have to have proper kinds of well-established knowledge about this kinds of stuff." It appeared that his concern over his lack of foundational knowledge in the field was weighing on him heavily.

Dejan also had a unique story to share about transfer credit. Because he had already received a college diploma in a related discipline, and spent six years working in IT, the admissions department had initially granted him transfer credit. However, Dejan said he "was not interested in that":

> I was yearning for knowledge, so I will not skip a course. And the courses I have
>
> chosen are not easy and they deal with programming. And they are courses that are
>
> going to be helpful, not only in my professional career but also in my daily life.

He was concerned that if a course was waived or transferred, he would have to spend time relearning the concepts, and would have to "study twice as much in order to catch up." Instead, he felt more comfortable building a solid foundation in his program to grow as a professional in the field.

Discussion. Students' desire to establish a strong foundation and repeat previous courses emerged as a new finding in this research. Existing research suggests that internationally educated students who were denied transfer credit or struggled with this process was supported by existing research. Terenzini et al. (1994) found that invalidating experiences such as these can be very problematic in the initial transition process.

Accessing support. Unsure of how to cope with these transitional challenges alone, students sought support to be able to navigate these systems effectively during their initial weeks and months studying at the university.

Findings. Many students accessed assistance from university supports such as the admissions department and from academic advising; many were very vocal in making their needs known, and asking questions. For example, of her early experiences at university, Mohisha shared, "I got all the help I need. I definitely had to go out and look for it, and ask other people." These requests for help included both university staff, and outside supports. Dejan coped with these challenges similarly: "If I don't know something I go and ask. I set up a couple of appointments after that with academic advisors. I made sure that I attended all the, how do you say, introductions to university." Academic advisors were a critical source of support and information for many participants.

Other students, however, knew about the services available, but did not access them:

Alberto: I know where they are, and how to access the resources. If I ever need it, I know what to do.

Jay: I think the university is doing things, but I'm not taking advantage of them. I mean, I keep getting emails, [but] I'm not really interested.

Robel: I know the ways are there, but I never just take time and find a way and go there … and use the service. I didn't do that so far.

Maria: Well, I know that some of those things [support services] exist at the university, but I've never really reached out to them.

Interestingly, Robel and Maria knew about resources that were available to support them, but hadn't taken advantage of these yet, despite disclosing their challenges and need for support.

Finally, others didn't know *what* university supports were accessible to them. For these students, understanding the services and how to access them was associated with understanding the university "system" itself. As Ashan stated, his biggest challenge was understanding what to do and how to do it; accessing support fell into this category for him.

In addition to accessing university supports, students often turned to friends and classmates within the university for assistance in navigating these processes Ashan shared that what was most helpful for him in navigating the university system was to "find someone who is [in the] same path in university", and "register at the same time, and do it and the same time". The support offered by someone else who was at the same stage in his learning as Ashan decreased the isolation he experienced. Ashan also received support from another immigrant who already had some expertise as a student at CPU; "when I registered I asked her many things… she showed me some areas – here are the places you can study and that". In this case, an 'insider' who was already knowledgeable about the university systems offered essential support to Ashan. Gabrielle also accessed support from a friend, who had immigrated a few years before her; she was already familiar with the system, and was able to explain to Gabrielle "how school works here". In her case, an informed 'insider' who also understands her experience as an immigrant was essential in her transition process. Finally, although Mohisha didn't receive support from a friend when she began university, she speculates that "it would really help if they know there's an immigrant here who is studying, that they have someone to at least kind of take the person to the class, and tell the person how the system works, and.. how else can I say this.. to like, tell them small things."

Discussion. Existing research also identified the important role that academic advisors played in the transition to university for newcomer students. Chhuon and Hudley (2008) drew this conclusion from their research of Cambodian-American students, and Hurtado et al., (1996) found that academic advisors were important in facilitating both students' academic adjustment as well as their "attachment to the institution", or belonging (p. 153).

Although research suggested that campus staff played an important role in supporting this transitional experience, there is also existing evidence that newcomer students are reticent to seek out these supports. Brown and Holloway (2008) also found some participants were reluctant to seek help (p. 246); they advocate for more inclusion of support services available during orientation week to normalize, and ensure the accessibility of these supports.

In addition to the formal supports available within the university, literature indicates that the support of peers can play an important role in navigating this transitional experience. Attinasi (1989) and Kim (2009) found, accessing assistance from peers was an important support in the transition process for these students. Attinasi (1989) describes this as "peer knowledge sharing", and sees it as a valuable way for newcomers to "get-to-know" the various campus geographies (pp. 263-4), and Kim (2009) found peer networks among immigrant students to play a "critical role" in the adjustment to the college environment. Kanno and Varghese (2010) also found that it was through "coethnic friends" that participants navigated the university system, and learned which courses to take, how to register, how to access support, and how to apply for financial aid (p. 323). However, Hurtado et al., (1996) caution, based on their findings, that students who relied solely on peer mentors for support in their transitional journey may be "ultimately disadvantaged" (p. 153).

Barriers to effective transitions. This section addresses the barriers that participants identified as a challenge in their transition to university, and therefore focuses on participants' perceptions of elements that detracted from the transition to university.

Throughout participant interviews, the issue of barriers arose frequently, and took many different forms for each student. Some barriers, such as perceptions of discrimination, linguistic (un)readiness, and challenges with the university 'system' are addressed in other sections of this chapter, as they relate more closely to another theme. The following topics, however, emerged somewhat independently of other factors, and include the following barriers: financing university, time limitations, confidence, and a perceived lack of support (on and off campus). While this list does not exhaustively represent the barriers that participants faced when transitioning into the university campus, they highlight the most salient themes that emerged in their narratives. These barriers typically detracted from students' transitional experiences, which Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest can affect minority students' perception of their comfort and belonging on the campus. However, as with other topics, participants' reflections on these topics yielded a spectrum of responses, and often dichotomous perceptions of these topics were shared.

*Financing **u**niversity.* Participants' challenges with paying for one's education arose frequently during the interviews.

Findings. For some participants, this challenge was a nagging issue that affected their university experience, but was manageable. For other participants this was a more significant concern; several participants noted that challenges with financing almost prevented them from applying to university.

Maya initially saw finances as a barrier to education. In her home country, there are both private and public universities, so financing postsecondary education hadn't previously been a concern. However, upon arriving in Canada, although she was "so ready to come to university", she wasn't sure if she would be able to apply; she told her school counsellor, "I don't know if can afford it." Because she had the support of an informed counsellor, she realized that there were many options available to help her with this; "I can get a student loan, or I can get a scholarship, or a bunch of different thing." This information empowered her, and helped her to realize that financing her university education *was* possible.

Having come to Canada by himself, Robel didn't have any external financial support to assist him with his living costs, or with funding his education. He realized that it would not be very easy to stop working, and return to school: "I had nothing, I just came, and I was working to support myself." However, he was very motivated to attend university, and to be able to work again in his field of expertise. After attending an orientation session for an access program at the university, he realized this would be the opportunity he needed, as he recalled that he initially understood that "it's a program that will definitely support me or sponsor me to get into my education." Because of this understanding, he applied to the program. However, upon being accepted, he realized that he had misunderstood the situation; while there were more bursaries available to students in the program, those accepted were still required to pay for their studies. This was a challenging reality to face, and as Robel recalled, "in my mind, I know the situation I was in, and I knew it wouldn't be that easy." Although the decision was a struggle, he decided to persist and join the program.

Amara also felt that financing university presented her with a significant challenge. Involvement on the campus and in the community was a significant component of Amara's

university experience, and preoccupations with financing her education detracted from her involvement: "I really like volunteering and doing this and that and you're happy and excited, but it's not giving you any money. I live on my own, so I have to pay rent." The additional difficulty that compounded her financial situation was that in addition to supporting herself, she shared, "I have to help my family in Ethiopia. You know there's just like so many responsibilities that so many mainstream Canadians wouldn't have to worry about. Like my friends wouldn't have to work because they have to send their mom money…So that is definitely challenging." This situation placed a heavy financial burden on her that influenced the time and energy she had to devote to her university experience. Amara's inability to rely on support from her family makes her more reliant on the financial support opportunities made available by the university.

While Ashan shared that the most difficult aspect of his university experience so far was the limited time he had, rather than his expenses, his time was so limited because he worked almost full-time hours to support himself during his studies. Although he didn't want to work so many hours, he was "afraid [his] financial situation [was] going down." As a result, the time he had available to allocate to his studies was very limited; there is little free time outside of these commitments to explore other campus activities, such as clubs, sports, or university events which research suggests are very influential in establishing a sense of comfort and belonging on the campus.

The only participant with dependants, Dejan acknowledged that his family is making a big sacrifice for him to be able to attend university. While he shared that his wife is "behind [him] 100%", the time and money that had to be devoted to his schooling presented a real

challenge for his family. Despite these challenges, he remained motivated and positive that attending university is "the best was to secure the best future".

While the challenge of financing one's education recurred throughout participants' narratives, so too did relief and gratitude at the financial supports that were accessible. Amara, Ashan, Rivka, and Maya all directly discussed the support they were receiving, either from the university or from the government, to help finance the costs of their education. Rivka expressed her gratitude for this support:

> If I didn't have student aid, my family wouldn't be able to afford university, so I think that really helped me…I enjoy how supportive the government is with me studying. They provide me with scholarship. I recently got like a bursary from [Provincial] Student Aid – they forgave me part of my loan, which is very helpful. And they always ask me, and send me emails about awards and financial aid to apply. So like, they have like lots of financial support too.

When Amara received an email regarding her receipt of a bursary, she shared "I just thought 'thank you thank you thank you, this is so awesome.'… I kind of wanted to just go and hug whoever gave me the money because I needed it so much." That her university could offer a fund to support her through this most challenging component of her university experience made Amara feel grateful and supported. However, she also recognized that many other students were in a very similar situation, and the fact that *she* received this bursary meant that there would be fewer funds available for others:

> There are so many people who are on the [low income] scale as that and really need it. But they won't [receive a bursary] because there's someone who's a little lower,

and has higher needs and it would go to like me and not to them, that person who has almost the same needs. So yeah, having more bursaries and funds would definitely make the transition a lot easier.

In Ashan's case, while he noted that he was able to access a loan, he "didn't know how" to apply for a bursary or scholarship. On the other hand, Alberto says he is familiar with the process of how to access financial support, but he chose not to; "I never liked to have a debt behind me." As a result, he only took two or three classes each term to ensure he could cover the costs, which limited the rate at which he could progress through university. Somewhat surprisingly, while most participants shared that they have found financing university to be a significant hurdle in their university experience, neither Rivka nor Alberto perceived this to be particularly problematic.

Discussion. The ability to finance one's studies has been found to be an "important aspect" of students' transition to university (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007); in particular, Kanno & Varghese, (2010) found that limited financial resources were seen as a barrier to accessing education for minority students.

In terms of general data regarding university financing in Canada, the CUSC (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2011) determined that roughly 60% of all university students in Canada relied on financial support from their parents, family, or spouse (p. 36); in fact, 13% of all debt reported by students was stated to be owed to their parents. On the other hand, the Pan Canadian Study of First-Year College Students (Human Resources, 2007) found that 19% of recent immigrants recognized their parents as a primary source of financial support, compared to 40% of Canadian-born students, and 74% of

international students (Table 24). Therefore, newcomer students are required to either finance their studies independently, or to rely on the post-secondary institution for support.

Similarly, the Pan Canadian Study of First Year College Students (Human Resources, 2008) found that visible minority students reported that they were more likely to work during the school year than their non-visible minority counterparts (78% compared to 71%), and they were also more likely to work more than 20 hours/week (section 6.8, paragraph 6). This suggests participants in this study are not alone in challenges with balancing work and studies.

Therefore, this data supports previous findings that challenges with financing university negatively the ease of transition, and also had indirect impacts on students' academic and social experiences, as well as institutional belonging (Alexander et al., 2007; Hurtado et al., 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kanno & Vargese, 2010; Maestas et al., 2007). However, the availability of bursaries and other forms of financial assistance can offer significant support to students in this process; As Maestas et al. (2007) found, "having the ability to pay for college would increase one's sense of belonging at university" (p. 249).

Time limitations. Participants also expressed concerns about time limitations within their post-secondary studies.

Findings. Related to participants' financial concerns were concerns surrounding the insufficient time that had to meet all needs within their lives, including their work, studies, social connections, and other responsibilities. Throughout participants' narratives in this study, time was associated with different ideas, and valued in different ways; participants described their thoughts on losing time, filling time, wasting time, taking advantage of time,

freeing time, and spending time. In general, though, insufficient time arose as a common barrier that participants perceived to negatively affect their postsecondary experience. Because participants of this research study had a variety of backgrounds and responsibilities, their perceptions regarding their challenges with limited time varied greatly; however, insufficient time was consistently seen as an obstacle to integration.

Time and money were inextricably connected. Most participants worked in a part-time capacity, and several held more than one position. While these positions were essential in financing their university, they also limited the time available to become active in student organizations, campus events, and social engagements. Of the role of work and time in his adjustment, Ashan described; "before university I didn't have much to do, so work is helping me. But now with the university I need more time to study." While work was supportive initially, the limited time that Ashan had to devote to his studying was becoming problematic. Interestingly though, while being busy detracted from the opportunities for academic and social experiences within the campus, it also served as a coping mechanism for living in a new country. Ashan substantiated this with the following thought:

> I think my job has helped the most [in the transition to university]. It keeps me busy so I don't have time to think about other things. It keeps me busy, and so I don't have time to think about what's happening in my country. I like to keep myself busy so I don't think about much.

Although his busy schedule limited his opportunities to participate fully in his university, staying busy and limiting 'free' time was a coping strategy to deal with the transition to life in Canada. Robel also acknowledged that he needed to "make [himself] busy" to "find a way

for [himself]" in his adjustment. Mohisha felt similarly, and shared that when she first began her studies she missed her friends and family. However she described that "then [her] days got really busy": "I literally start my day at 7, and I don't get home until 11. So I don't really have time for anyone now." Being busy helped to manage the feelings these three participants had when they immigrated and began university.

Participants also associated time and schedules with freedom. For example, both Rivka and Gabrielle identified that they experienced difficulties in managing their new schedules as they entered university directly from high school. Gabrielle initially appreciated the openness of her university schedule, because at high school, "you have to be there all the time, and you're not free to study what you want." However, this 'freedom' quickly became more overwhelming, as she felt lost and overwhelmed setting her own pace and managing her study time. Similarly, Rivka also shared that when she began university, she realized she had "never had that much freedom". She found it "hard to concentrate", and overwhelming because "no one really looks at you, or notices you." Whereas in high school, she found her time to be structured by her teachers and her parents, "here you have freedom to not study if you don't want, or not to come to classes. But after a while you still have to be prepared for the exams. Nobody watches you, but you still have to make yourself do it." This was a challenging adjustment for her to make. There was a fine line for both of these participants between free and unsupported.

For Dejan, the theme of limited 'time' was prominent throughout his narrative. Although he didn't specify this as his primary challenge, it arose often, and he perceived it to affect his both his academic and social opportunities, as well as his life external to the university. The topic of time arose in some of the following ways in Dejan's interview:

- I don't have time to actually go explore [the university], and spend more time with my colleagues. I found I leave home at 6:30pm, and classes finish at 5:15pm. I am out. I don't have time to actually find out about the services, or spend more time with the [student] association. I want to spend more time, but I just don't have it.

- As far as university, I didn't have a chance to make friends… But nothing like getting to know people and hanging out with them. But it's mostly due to time constraints. Well and my personality.

- It's mostly because of the time. That's the reason I cannot spend more time with those guys. That would be great if I could spend more time with those guys. There are some really nice guys in there [the student organization].

- The biggest challenge I'm facing is the pace that the professors are going through the book. … They have to go through 2 or 3 chapters in about 2 weeks, and you only have time to work on one.

- [The most negative aspect of his university experience so far is] Me not being able to spend time with my children a lot. That is really… I mean, even when I was working I didn't have that much time to spend with them, but uh, this whole travelling thing is really long. So the commute. These things are the biggest challenge… And a lot of time to study. I really didn't think it would be so much time to study.

Limited time affected Dejan's: awareness of campus services; social network; ability to join an extracurricular organization; his academic progress; and his relationship with his children.

Conversely, other participants were able to manage time very effectively, and actively sought out ways to 'do more' with their time; the activities they chose often led to a keener sense of social involvement and belonging. Jay shared that he was accustomed to filling his

free time in high school and university back in the Philippines with extracurricular activities. At university in Canada he felt like he had "so much free time" in comparison to student life in the Philippines, and he was seeking out more extracurricular and volunteer commitments so that "it would not be a wasted time". Maya found that, unlike many warnings she received that once "you start university, you don't have any time", she felt she has "time for everything". While she prioritized involvement in extra-curricular activities, she drew her line at one group. She was able to manage this 'student resource' effectively. Amara was also involved in a large number of groups, and she explained, "there are also other organizations that are very active and I want to be involved, but there's not enough time"; being so busy, it is hard to manage social engagements but she fit this in as well, by meeting with friends to "get busy together", working side by side on their school work.

Although limited time presented a barrier for participants, it was also conceptualized as a support in the transition to life in a new country and studies in a new postsecondary institution. Robel reiterated many times that the most important advice he would give to a new student is to "take time… to learn how to do things… [and] to understand people, or work, or a situation. Whatever you are facing." He felt his situation was improving with time, and that with time and patience, he was "very much hopeful that things will work out." Gabrielle also shared that time has been supportive in her transition to life in Canada, and to her university studies; "what helped me most was time. Just time and being here." Therefore, time played a dual role in some students' lives.

Discussion. Hurtado and Carter (1997) describe both personal finances and schedules as "resources" that students must manage, and conclude that successful management of these resources directly affects students "ease of transition", and indirectly affects students' sense

of belonging. Additionally, Brown and Holloway (2008) found that there was an association

between "the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress" (p. 241).

Therefore, while challenges with successfully managing one's time and schedule in the

present can lead to difficulty with the transition process, the *passage* of time can support

students' adjustment to this new experience.

Therefore, the findings of this study support previous studies, which have concluded

that the successful management of one's time and schedule positively impacts one's

transition (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), academic adjustment, (Hurtado et al., 1996; Kim, 2009)

and emotional adjustment (Hurtado et al., 1996).

Perception of (a lack of) confidence. Another barrier that students perceived in their

transition to university with their confidence level.

Findings. Of her performance in her classes, Gabrielle shared that she felt she is "not

as good as other students." She elaborated, "I feel that students here are a step ahead of me…

I've always felt that students here like are better so I don't really say much." This

comparison of herself to native-born Canadian students decreases her confidence. However,

in her class that is aimed particularly at non-native English speakers, she sees that her "other

classmates in my English class, they really have more trouble than I do"; this, combined with

the "step-by-step" process of the class "gives [her] confidence". Her perceptions of her

abilities were framed in comparison to her peers, which resulted in fluctuations in her

confidence levels.

Maya also felt an initial impulse to compare her performance to native English

speakers. During tests, when she needed more time than others, and she saw "people start

leaving the room, and then you feel like you'll run out of time. That can get stressful." Her internal thoughts were, "Oh, I'm really slow; I need to do this faster." While her first reaction was to make this comparison to the abilities and pace of native English speakers, she later realized that "there's people who take longer time to figure it out," and that she's not the only one who needs more time. Overall, she shared that she now "feel[s] pretty confident" in her academic performance.

Natalia also experienced challenges relating to her lack of confidence. The advice she shared for other students on how to create a more positive university experiences was to bolster one's confidence, and to "not be scared, everything will be fine…To not be scared and to just be yourself." She explained that this helped her persevere through her first few months of university. Mohisha also felt that confidence was a significant component of a successful adjustment. Her advice for other students clearly reflected this value:

> The most important thing is the person has to, um, be confident. She has to have confidence in himself or herself… For people who are starting as first year students, they should definitely have to have faith in themselves, and they have to just be persistent with whatever they are doing. They shouldn't worry about what others think about them, or that others aren't talking to them.

From their perspectives, they see confidence can be a significant barrier to a positive university transition and experience.

Discussion. Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade's (2005) findings supported this data. In their research with minority student populations, they concluded that students' confidence,

or "self-efficacy", particularly relating to academic abilities, was associated with students'
perceived stress levels, and was predictive of academic success, which underscores the
importance of self-esteem and confidence in postsecondary success.

Lack of support. A lack of support emerged as the final barrier that participants
experienced in the transition to university.

Findings. Participants in this study found support in different areas of their lives;
family, friends (particularly from "back home"), and high school or university staff were
primary sources of support as perceived by these students. Mohisha interestingly commented
in her interview that "the good thing about Canada is there's always a service available.
There's always help out there. Whatever you need, there's always someone there." While
some participants agreed, typically participants indicated that the supports they had access to
both internal and external to the campus were not sufficient.

Several participants were very aware of the supports available on the campus for
students, such as counselling, academic advising, and the immigrant support centre. Mohisha,
Jay, Alberto, and Dejan had all accessed support from university staff members – particularly
academic advisors. The shared the following thoughts about their experiences and the
support accessed:

Alberto: I went to the advisor to see the whole process, and in the end it was very
helpful.

Mohisha: At the academic advising centre, all the people there are really helpful, so
people should definitely go to the, because they literally tell you everything, and what

to expect and everything. … I think they could provide advice that would be really

helpful. Especially for the first year students, because they actually know what's

going on so their advice was really helpful.

Jay: I must say, though, that the academic advisors are really helpful as well.

These internal campus supports helped to facilitate the transition to university for these

participants. Unfortunately, this was not the experience of all students. Amara perceived an

initial lack of support, or lack of awareness of support, internal to the university campus in

her transition to university; "I felt kinda like not a lot of sources [of support] were available

to me. So that was one thing I really struggled with." Ashan also felt a lack of support at

university in the transitional process; his challenges with "figuring out what to do and how to

do it" included accessing the system of support available at the university. Therefore,

regardless of how effective the supports available are, if students are unclear about how to

access them, their utility is lost.

Other participants commented that they were aware of support services on the

university, but hadn't yet accessed them. For example, Maria reflected she was aware of

many services at the university that could offer her additional support, but she shared "I've

never reached out to them. I thought I could do it myself." However, she would encourage

future students "to access those services, and not really follow the steps I did."

External to the campus, participants turned to friends and family for support.

However, these supports were often perceived as insufficient by participants. Although

Mohisha had extended family in the city to which she immigrated, she shared that they

hadn't connected often in their lives before her immigration. In her transition to life in

Canada with her brother, she noted that "they helped us, but they couldn't really provide us with the support we needed at that time." She elaborated that it was "really hard, to come from a place where we had many friends and family to support you all the time, and then to have no one, basically. So that was hard." While her friends and parents in India have been a "huge support" to her in her transition to life in Canada, she believed that "but at that time [of transition], what one would require would be a person, like a local person, to actually guide you in the right directions." Unfortunately, she was not able access this 'insider' support that she thought would be so valuable in this transition.

While Maria identified her friends as her primary support network, she felt a lack of support from her family: "my family isn't really supportive. They're not the ones who would tell their children to strive heard, and that it will be worth it." This lack of support was challenging for Maria, and she identified that rather than giving advice to a new student, she would offer them encouragement and support instead: "I would *encourage* them. I think that's really a major thing." The offering of encouragement and support seems to be a significant aspect of what she felt was missing in her transition.

Because Robel immigrated to Canada alone, he shared, "I'm learning things by myself…I was working to support myself." While he had some support from the organization that sponsored his immigration, "it's not in the way that you know, you have the support, whatever you need, whatever you want." The fact that it's "mostly just [him]" has been challenging, and he acknowledged that "it needs somehow some change." Similar to Maria's situation, the lack of support was a difficult reality to face.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, did feel that she had sufficient family support in her transition to university. She immigrated with her father, and she noted the following about his presence in her transition to university; "it was kind of a relief to have someone to talk to in Spanish, and I mean he's going through the same thing that I'm going through… Our relationship grew really close so that was really good". Although she still struggled with her transition to university, his support was invaluable.

Natalia also felt sufficient *affective* support from her family in her transition to university; although she immigrated to Canada with only her mother, she felt the support of her extended family still at home. However, because she was the first individual in her family to study in a postsecondary institution, she felt "pressure" to do well and to make her family proud. Her attendance at university was therefore a "disjunction" from her family's tradition (Terenzini et al. 1994), but in some ways, this seemed to increase the significance of her choice, since she was the trailblazer of her family. Although Natalia struggled with the reality that she could not rely on her family for support in her academics or with negotiating the system of the university, which was the area in which she was struggling the most, she was motivated to succeed and persist through her program.

Discussion. Substantial research indicates that support from friends and family is essential in the transition to university (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996); as Chhuon and Hudley (2008) found, these connections "buffered [students] against perceived isolation" in university (218). Additionally, Johnson et al. (2007) indicate that "students' smooth academic and social transitions to college are also moulded by the supportiveness of key

players in the college environment that facilitate the transition, such as faculty [and] advisors" (p. 537).

In their research of first generation university students, James and Taylor (2008) also found that despite the 'disjunction' that their enrolment at university represented, these students felt sufficient "support and nurturance" from their family and community, as well as respect and pride at their achievement of being the first in their family to take this step (p. 582). Torres and Solberg (2001) also concluded that family support was associated with persistence intentions and academic self-efficacy. They elaborate that "family support likely produces a self-identity capable of perceiving life transitions as challenges rather than threats" by encouraging problem-solving and "providing a safe place to rely on when one's challenges far exceeded one's abilities" (p. 61). Therefore, findings from this study relating to support within and external to the university are consistent with existing research on ethnically diverse students.

Although these four areas: (1) financing university, (2) time limitations, (3) perceptions of confidence, and (4) lack of support, emerged as thematic barriers to students' transitions, participants did not unilaterally struggle with these issues. Some participants voiced notable confidence and success in their studies, while others felt they certainly had sufficient support that contributed positively to their experiences within university. However, these barriers arose as the most common challenges faced by participants.

Part 2: Experiences at University

In this section, I describe the themes that emerged in participant interviews that addressed the following research question: In what ways do immigrant students describe their

experiences within a Canadian campus? Two broad categories emerged in response to this question were participants' perceptions and descriptions of their experiences *within* the university classroom, or their *academic* experiences, and their experiences *outside* of the classroom, or their *social* experiences. These related to the guiding interview questions that related to this section. As findings suggest (Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996), students' perceptions of their experiences in the academic and social systems of the university are hard to dissociate, and further, are not independent of one another.

The following themes emerged within students' descriptions of their academic experiences: seeing content and learning as motivating; the pace of course work; challenges with language in the classroom; asking questions; perceptions of and interactions with their professor; (formal and informal) interactions with peers during class, which included dealing with discrimination; and accessing support. While some of these factors had consistent positive or negative impacts for all students, generally, different participants perceived these experiences in different ways.

Likewise, within the category of social experiences, several sub-themes were apparent. These were: social experiences with other newcomers; social experiences with other members of the same ethnic or linguistic background; social experiences with Canadian students, which involved understanding the culture; participation within extracurricular activities; and finally, barriers preventing social integration. Table 3 summarizes these themes and subthemes relating to participants' descriptions of their university experiences.

Table 3.

University Experiences: Themes & Subthemes

Theme: Academic Experiences (experiences *inside of* class)		Theme: Social Experiences (experiences *outside of* class)	
Subtheme	Sub-subtheme	Subtheme	Sub-subtheme
Course work	Perceptions of content and learning The pace of coursework Challenges with language Asking questions	Social experiences with other newcomers Social experiences with other members of the same ethnic or linguistic background	
The professor	Perceptions of Interactions with		
		Social experiences with Canadian students	Understanding the culture Forming connections
Interactions with peers	Informal interactions Formal interactions Experiences with discrimination	Participation within extracurricular activities	
Accessing support	Learning and study strategies Taking to the professor Other support	Barriers preventing social integration	

These experiences within the academic and social realms of the university also impacted participants' transition and adjustment to the postsecondary environment; as such, implications of their academic and social experiences on their transition are also examined.

Academic Experiences. A key component that participants addressed about their experiences in university was their experiences *in* the classroom. These experiences related

to interactions with and perceptions of the content addressed, the professors, and other students, and both positive and negative impacts on their transition to university.

Experiences with the coursework emerged as the first subtheme within the area of participants' academic experiences. Within this area, four subthemes emerged, based on participants' narratives: perceptions of content and learning, the pace of coursework, challenges with language, and asking questions.

Perceptions of content and learning. Students' perceptions of the content and learning is the first theme relating to students' academic experiences and perceptions of the coursework.

Findings. Although the content was often regarded with mixed perceptions, viewing the content as motivating and personally relevant emerged as a theme during interviews. Six of the twelve participants indicated that they saw the content addressed in their classes as personally relevant and interesting, or viewed it as clearly moving them closer to their professional goals. As such, their in-class experiences with content often motivated students to persist through other challenges.

Rivka shared that she found the content addressed in class to be the most positive aspect of her university experiences, and she conveyed the following after two full years in her program: "I'm happy to know that I still like what I'm studying and I enjoy my studies". Amara also felt strongly about the positive influence that her interesting learning experiences had on her transition to university. However, in her experience, the class content and the professor weren't the only sources of this information, but also the "students who share the

knowledge". She really valued the opportunity both to learn from and share with her peers during her classes.

Natalia also viewed the course content as a positive factor in her transition to university. She found that when "the teacher talks about things that I'm interested in", or "the content of the class, or a chapter that interests me", she felt more motivated and positive about her university experiences: "you think, oo I like that, I want to learn about that…I think okay, I want to keep learning about this." Although this wasn't a consistent thought about her university coursework, these sporadic positive reactions facilitated a more positive transition for Natalia. Maria agreed, voicing that she really appreciated knowing that "every time I got to class, I will learn something." This learning applied not only to "the context of the course", but also to her personal life: "[Sometimes] they will be presenting or detailing instances where, you know, our career will be affected, and just giving us moral support, and showing how the information is helpful later." This clear connection of classroom learning to her life brings purpose and clarity to her university experience.

Finally, Dejan also appreciated how much he felt he was learning in his classes. Having taken time off work and away from his family to devote to his studies, it was all the more important that this experience be valuable personally and professionally:

> I'm thirsty for learning. That's what I've been getting quite a bit. I'm studying and learning new things. That's great. Because this is the reason why I'm not working. I want to learn. This is the reason I'm here; I want to learn.

Although he had high standards, and brought six years of professional experience to his program, he shared that "I've been growing a lot professionally." He felt his courses were

imparting to him the knowledge he felt his supervisors in his previous workplace had, and that his program would allow him to "learn their [his supervisors'] knowledge. This is what I'm getting now. I'll be one of the people I used to call for help." In each instance, the value of the content and learning helped to offset some of the challenges.

The pace of course work. Despite seeing the content of classroom experiences as contributing positively towards students' transition, challenges with pace in which the class content was addressed emerged as a common theme amongst students.

Findings. Five participants in particular expressed their challenges relating to pace, and for three students in particular, they identified pace as the biggest challenge:

Dejan: The biggest challenge I'm facing is the pace that the professors are going through the book… So the biggest challenge is me staying behind and not being able to catch up.

Maya: The classes were going like at such a fast pace. And it's like, okay we just started and we have a midterm in a few weeks. So it's like, wow, yeah it's a faster pace and everything goes by so quick... Yeah I think it was the biggest challenge. I think it was too much information in such a small time. Like, they keep giving you more and more.

Robel: You know, when someone is lecturing you understand and take notes, but I think it will take a little bit of time to do things at the pace you're expected to do. So that's the problem I have now. I can't keep reading 4 or 5 hours each day… That's the biggest challenge is still taking much time to read. I think I could say that's the biggest challenge.

Maya shared that in her experience, challenges with the pace of course work were compounded by her struggles with the language within the class. The use of many new scientific words in addition to the fast pace caused confusion: "it's so hard to get, to get the ideas". Amara agreed that for students who don't speak English as a first language, "there are so many things that are passing you. Like when the professor is talking, there are so many words he is saying that are just sort of passing you by." Strategies that she shared could be used to cope with the unfamiliar language, such as using a dictionary, are not possible given the 'real-time' interaction, and the quick pace: "you know, obviously you don't use a dictionary, and can't just think "oh, let's find you…" in response to an unknown word. Gabrielle echoed these thoughts, and shared: "I feel like I don't get much because the teachers go really fast. I dunno, and they think you will know, but I don't know… I can't follow. The teacher says all the instructions, but I don't understand." While the other students are able to respond, and "are so fast, they just go", Gabrielle is left to ask "so.. what are we doing now?" The pace, in her case, was more problematic because she saw it as insolating and dividing her from her classmates; it was a vehicle for exclusion.

Although Dejan indicated the pace was his "biggest challenge", he didn't feel it excludes him, like Gabrielle; he realized that the other students in his class were experiencing the same frustrations, and that he was "not the only one facing this problem". His understanding that his peers (who were much younger and without external responsibilities) were "struggling with the same things", resulted in feelings of pride for Dejan.

While Maya and Gabrielle both experienced pace as a negative and inhibiting factor in some classes, resulting in feeling "lost", overwhelmed, and "crying in frustration", both shared classroom experiences where the pace *was* appropriate for them, and the feelings this

experience invoked. In Gabrielle's English class, which was specifically for non-native English speakers, she shared that her professor progresses through content "step by step, little by little", resulting in her feeling relieved, happy, and that she "can do it":

> It's all little by little, and I'm not expected to respond as a Canadian student. Not yet… I find that also my other classmates in my English class, they really have more trouble than I do, but I think the fact that I'm going step by step and little by little in the beginning gives me confidence.

Although this class was not 'inclusive' in that it was targeted towards a particular population, the overall experience was strongly inclusive, resulting in Gabrielle feeling like she belonged, and that she was "where [she] need[ed] to be."

For Maya, the pace of her psychology class emerged as a strongly positive element of her academic experiences. Her professor "goes slow[ly] in a way that everyone is getting the content", and rather than using PowerPoint, "she writes on the board, and when she is talking, she makes sure everyone is getting everything down." In Maya's perspective, this teaching approach, which attends to the learning pace of all the students in the class, facilitated a positive perception of both the class as well as her capabilities: "I'm good at psychology and I enjoy it."

Discussion. Kanno and Varghese (2010) also found that some participants were more comfortable in 'ESL classes', where "there was no pressure to compare themselves with native speakers"; however, other participants of their study resented their placement in ESL classes, although they noted that the extra costs and lack of credit for these courses may have been a primary cause of these feelings (p. 322).

Challenges with language. Participants' experiences of their challenges relating to language in the classroom also arose in their descriptions of their academic experiences.

Findings. For all students, their first exposure to language in practice in Canada was not in university; therefore, in most cases, they were able to understand their challenges, improve their fluency and accuracy with the language, and gain more confidence before university. However, several participants addressed the challenges they continued to have with language proficiency at the time of the interview.

Maya, Gabrielle, Rivka, and Amara immigrated to Canada during high school, while Natalia immigrated to Canada in middle school. Each felt that their steepest learning curve, linguistically, began when they entered grade school in Canada. Their primary reflections about this experience centered on their lack of confidence and low English proficiency, particularly for the academic context.

Maya: High school was so hard because my English wasn't really good. Like, I could understanding some, most things, but I couldn't speak it very well. So I was really lost.

Rivka: It was so hard, because I didn't understand. They would ask many, many times what I mean, and I just would get frustrated sometimes, because it's hard. And whenever they tell me something, I don't understand. So yeah, this was challenging.

Amara: I could communicate, but I had a very thick accent. I still do but obviously then it was horrible. It was okay for communicating with people, but for academic purposes it was too low basically.

Gabrielle: I was very shy and I was very afraid of my accent. I felt like I didn't want to talk a lot because I talk and people say, what what what? So I just say, never mind. So I didn't really talk a lot in the beginning so it was hard to make friends at the beginning.

Natalia: I don't even remember how I learned it [English]. The teacher used to talk, and I was just like I don't know. And then, my friends, they used to talk to me. When they talked to me, I wouldn't understand, but I could see their face when they looked at me so I knew it was okay… I used to understand it, little by little. I couldn't talk because I was scared to. I don't even remember how I learned it.

Their language proficiency had implications on both their academic success and on their social experiences. Although each student shared that their language skills improved drastically throughout their high school experience, most continued to see their language as a deficiency; for Amara and Rivka, their accents became a symbol of their "otherness", which stayed with them into university.

As mentioned previously, in order to gain admission to university, students need to demonstrate their language proficiency, either through graduation from a Canadian high school, or by successfully completing accepted language proficiency exams or courses. Therefore, by university standards, each participant within this study was deemed to have sufficient language proficiency to meet the demands of university. This, however, was not the theme that emerged from interviews. Participants shared that their confidence or abilities in English impacted their ability to understand course content and lectures, complete tests, write papers, and ask for help from a classmate or professor.

While Dejan had some awareness that his written proficiency in English was low, upon entering university he realized that "even though my spoken English may be good, I found out that my academic writing is terrible, and that's where I need quite a bit of help on." Dejan demonstrated strong coping strategies, and both enrolled in a writing course, and sought out the help of his professor to improve his writing. He was very motivated to develop his writing skills further to be able to meet the demands that university would present, which helped to facilitate a more positive transition to university, because he knew he would be more linguistically prepared for future classes; this was a manageable obstacle that he found a way to cope with.

For Maya, her perception of her language skills was "always a concern in the back of [her] head". She realized that it had implications on the pace at which she could complete her assignments and texts; "Oh, I'm really slow; I need to do this faster". In order not to let this concern preoccupy her, she shared that she copes by reminding herself "to be aware that it's going to take you longer, it's going to take you a few more hours to do the process of thinking in English…you just kind of have to make time for that." However, she admitted that "it is really tough sometimes to have classes in a second language, like, it's really energy consuming."

The reality that Ashan met upon immigrating to Canada in terms of his linguistic readiness for university was also a surprise. Because the school system operates predominantly in English in Sri Lanka, Ashan thought he would be more prepared to meet the linguistic demands of his courses. However, he experienced many challenges with the language, and found that he was struggling with the language more than the content of his classes: "we have to study the subject plus the language. Because some words are new. So

we need to study that word also... In Sri Lanka, when people are speaking English, [the] vocabulary is limited." Conversely, professors in his program of study used "a different range of vocabulary" with which Ashan was not familiar. When asked, he shared that it was not the terminology related to his field of study that was problematic. Instead, it was the general language used in the classroom: "they have, for example, some words that we can say like, there are synonyms, but they say like the advanced one." Although Ashan was working to integrate study strategies to support his with both the content and language acquisition, such as recording his lectures, sometimes he found the challenge to be too overwhelming: "the one thing that make[s] me want to go back [to Sri Lanka] like my mother is the language is too hard." This suggests that an increased awareness of the needs of non-native English speaking students by university faculty, and a foundational understanding of pedagogical strategies that could be more supportive to these learners, could go a long way in supporting students.

Robel also indicated that oral interactions take longer for him due to language proficiency, and the challenge comes when he is not provided with that time:

> For me, people are saying something and you try to understand. I mean, you understand the face value of what he is saying, but all the other things, I think it takes a little bit of time to get into that kind of communication or whatever... There are some few things which you understand, but it's a matter of time... Sometimes people would be busy and doing something. You want to talk to them but you still hold back. You want to talk to the professor sometimes, but you aren't sure … if they will have time.

His lack of confidence with his English proficiency both provided a barrier to forming an initial understanding, as well as prevented him from negotiating the meaning by asking help because of concerns that others won't have enough time to offer assistance.

Discussion. These findings are echoed in Kanno and Varghese's (2010) research of the challenges experienced by immigrant and refugee ESL students in college programs; they identified "linguistic challenges in their academic work" as a significant challenge experienced by their participants. Similarly, in the Pan-Canadian Study of First-Year College Students (Human Resources, 2008), approximately half of all respondents indicated they would be "highly likely" to access support to improve in the language of instruction, compared to 13% of Canadian-born students (Table 23). Overall, the issue that students are tasked with both learning the content as well as learning the language is very challenging.

Similarly, Kanno and Varghese (2010) also noted that their participants "considered … linguistic challenges to be manageable", and saw them as an obstacle they could "overcome" by working harder and accessing support (p. 316). Further, Andrade (2011) noted in her findings that, "overall, English proficiency weaknesses do not appear to negatively affect … learning" (p. 30), and that her participants were able to succeed academically despite their lower linguistic proficiency. This is similar to several participants' perceptions of the manageability of this challenge.

Similar to Maya's experiences, Kanno and Varghese (2010) also noted it took participants extra time to "perform academic tasks in one's L2", which resulted in an extra layer of challenges for non-native English speaking students (p. 317).

 Finally, the experiences of Ashan and Robel ran counter to the findings of Kanno and Varghese (2010) and Andrade (2011); however they are consistent with Bers' (1994) study, which notes the "academic and extracurricular life" of non-native English speaking students is complicated by their limited language proficiency.

Asking questions. This topic emerged as another theme within participants' classroom experiences.

Findings. Asking questions related to students' confidence in their linguistic skills and their sociocultural skills; often, students weren't sure when or how to appropriately ask questions. Like Robel, participants voiced concerns with taking their professor's time, but many suggested they were worried about how they would be perceived by asking questions in class. Rivka chose not to ask questions during class, because she's "not that comfortable" with this task; she would prefer to ask her professor after class to avoid the fear that "everyone else knows that answer and [she's] the only one [who doesn't]." While Maya shared she sometimes asks questions in class, she reflected: "sometimes I think twice, because I don't want to sound stupid or something."

Maria also avoided asking questions in class, so she didn't have to ask herself: "are people listening or judging me?" She also stated that sometimes she's "not sure if it's okay to say [a question]" in class, so she'd rather leave them until after class, and either ask the professor individually, or send an email. She followed this by assuring that she's "very interested in class", and that she attends regularly, but that asking questions in class is not a common practice culturally in the Philippines, where she feels "we're just there to be students and sit there and not say anything." The definition of a "good student" differs

greatly between these contexts, and she worried that being quiet in these situations as common classroom practice would dictate in the Philippines, might reflect disengagement in the Canadian classroom. Combined with the increasing immigrant and international demographics in Canadian universities, this suggests a need for inclusion of a cultural component into the typical university orientation procedure.

In general, most students indicated they would typically exhaust all other channels to find out the answer to a question before addressing the professor in class, including: searching the internet, asking another student, sending the professor an email, asking the professor during office hours, or asking after class. However, both Alberto and Dejan reported that they will immediately ask when they have a question, to ensure they understand:

> Dejan: If I have a question, I will go to them right away… You can't do everything by yourself. You've gotta ask questions.

> Alberto: [I am] not afraid to ask something. Just take 5 minutes to ask the teacher. That will help you a lot. It will not hold you back for the whole week if you know the answer to that.

This method certainly helped to support these students in their academic experiences, as reaching out for support when it's needed, rather than assuming that you are only one struggling, is an effective coping mechanism.

Discussion. Kanno and Varghese (2010) also noted that participants in their study were reticent to ask questions during class because of a "sense of intimidation" and their "self-consciousness about English" (p. 322).

The *p*rofessor – *p*erceptions of and *i*nteractions with. Experiences with 'the professor' in general also presented as a key theme in the area of 'classroom experiences'.

Findings. Participants shared key insights and reflections regarding their perceptions of and interactions with their professors that had important implications on their comfort in the classroom. Participants used the following terms to describe their perceptions of their professors: helpful, busy, nice, approachable, friendly, and professional. More specifically, they shared the following:

> Rivka: I enjoy my professors. Most of them are very helpful, and they really want you to succeed. So I'm really happy with that.

> Amara: The professors are extremely helpful… They were just really nice professors. They like to spend time with you and really make sure you understand.

> Mohisha: The professors are really nice … and so approachable. I'm literally a fan of every one of them... They're so helpful.

> Maria: I've had professors that are very engaged. And most of them have been really helpful and friendly, I think that has made me believe that even if other people don't understand, the professor will.

For Maria, she shared that her experiences with her professors were the *most* positive aspect of her university experience, which was important, since they "will be the one to mark and give me a grade."

For the students who had previous postsecondary experience outside of Canada, they offered some insights into the cultural differences between professors in Canada and in their

home country. These differences took some time to become accustomed to when they began their studies. Maria found that in the Philippines, "professors would do more talking", while in her current program, classes are more "interactive"; as previously mentioned, this has been a difficult practice to readily adopt for Maria. Jay noted that professors are stricter, and less tolerant towards misbehaviour in class. Dejan also found that classes in his home country were more focused on the professor, and that in his home country, they "have a higher opinion of themselves". Conversely, he found that professors at his current institution are "more down to earth and accessible. They are always willing to help." This support and encouragement put Dejan at ease in his studies.

Although many participants voiced their discomfort at speaking up during class and asking questions, they also shared that their interactions with professors after class or during office hours, two opportunities where most *did* feel comfortable to ask questions, were very positive and helpful. Both Dejan and Gabrielle went to talk to their professors when they felt like they were doing poorly, and were considering dropping their class. Dejan shared that his professor told him that he should not drop the course, and he gave him strategies to help him to be more successful; he also told Dejan to stay positive, and that "you don't measure your success by how smart you are when you come in to university, but by how smart you are when you leave." This was a validating experience for Dejan, which Terenzini et al. (1994) describe as essential in feeling "accepted in their new community" (p. 66).

The teaching strategies that professors used were also a common topic addressed by participants during interviews. For most participants, the professors' pace through classroom content was their biggest concern with teaching style. Often, the label of 'fast-paced' was

connected to the use of PowerPoint presentations. While students had devised coping

strategies for this, such as printing out and previewing the PowerPoint notes before class, this

wasn't sufficient support to fully comprehend, and find the teaching approach valuable.

On the other hand, two participants shared their experiences in classes that they

described as "interactive" and "participatory". Maya found one of her professors to be very

engaging: "she wants us to talk. She asks us, oh what do you guys think about this topic, and

she encourages us to participate." As a result, Maya shared that she really was enjoying this

course, and that she really feels like she is "getting the content." Amara describes that the

majority of her classes operate in this style.

> It's very interactive and participatory, which I like. I like to talk a lot ... It's really
>
> helpful because they can give you marks based on what kind of experiences you have
>
> and you offer to class, and things like that. They are always listening to you, and they
>
> really want to hear your part in class and in development and in other issues, and so I
>
> appreciate that. I don't just go to class, listen to what they have to tell me, and that's
>
> the end of the story, because that can be really boring. Like I understand it's my
>
> professor, but I feel like I have my own knowledge, so hear me out here! But there I
>
> mean, you *matter* in class.

Because of the teaching approach used by her professors, she not only had the opportunity to

interact with her peers, she also felt valued in her classes.

Discussion. This is a significant area for examination, because research suggests that

positive interactions with professors and institution staff facilitates academic integration and

belonging (Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Nora &

Cabrera, 1996; Tinto, 1993). Chhuon and Hudley (2008) also found faculty contact to be a factor that moderated the transition to college for their participants; personal attention from professors positively affected participants' transition to college. They found the "quality of faculty contact [to be] significant for participants' academic motivation and performance" and an important "source of academic integration". Maestas et al. (2007) and Hoffman et al. (2002) also found that perceived faculty support and attention resulted in greater academic integration and a greater sense of institutional belonging and attachment.

Interactions with *p*eers during *c*lasses. The opportunity to work with peers during classes offers an important "merging" of students' social and academic experience, which Hurtado and Carter (1997) found to contribute significantly to their sense of belonging on campus (p. 334). However, this potential effect requires (1) the opportunity for in-class interaction to be possible, and (2) that students' feelings from these interactions are positive and validating.

Findings. For many participants, group work and lab work were a component of their courses, and working with peers within their classes was therefore a requirement of course work. For other participants, classes were conducted in lecture style only, with students sitting in "military form", as Amara described; interaction with peers with neither required nor encouraged. However, the opportunity for incidental interactions amongst peers during classes is ever present, with either polite small talk before class and after class, or short requests during class.

Regardless of their class contexts, students had a very wide range of experiences and perspectives on their interactions with peers during classes, ranging from discomfort to

enjoyment, and felt a range of responses, from enhanced inclusion to discrimination. During formal in-class interactions with peers was the only opportunity that participants voiced that they did experience discriminatory behaviour on the university campus.

In general, most participants indicated that they didn't participate in informal interactions with peers during their classes. This was particularly the case in larger classes. Amara stated that the "military form" of the large classes was not conducive to making friends. Natalia agreed, noting that in her psychology class, she found that "there's so many people, and they're all in their own space," which doesn't facilitate interactions amongst peers; she elaborated, "I don't know anybody there, so who am I going to sit with?" This reflection hit a particularly emotional note, and as she began to cry, she shared that "just thinking about all of it… sometimes gets me so [sic.] overwhelmed."

Robel felt similarly about his interactions with his peers during class, summarizing that he is "doing really poor[ly]". Although he would like to build relationships and talk with his classmates, his observation that people are "busy and "have things to do" held him back; "I can't force myself to have that kind of communication with [my] classmates." On the other hand, Alberto did force himself to have that kind of communication, encouraging himself to talk to at least one classmate each class, and ask a simple question, such as "can you lend me a pen?" Eventually, he shared, this became a little more natural for him, and now before class, he "sit[s] with people there, and you talk a little." However, he noted that the labs are the "best place to get to know people." He suggested that this is because of the size and the fact that everyone is working towards the same goal; "everyone has the same problem, and everyone wants to get to the same reaction, so they all help each other... we all laugh at each other, because then you make mistakes and have to start again." Gabrielle and Natalia also

shared that their smaller classes facilitated these informal interactions, and that they felt more "comfortable" with fewer people, and "familiar faces".

Participants offered very different perspectives on formal in-class interactions amongst peers. While Rivka enjoyed hearing the contributions of the other students in her classes, she preferred working individually on tasks rather than being assigned to groups; she found other students can shirk responsibility, and "don't do what they have to do, or they get too in charge". Conversely, Amara really appreciated the opportunity to work on group tasks in her classes, and found she benefitted "not only from professors but also students who share their knowledge". Group tasks provided the ideal opportunity for these exchanges to occur. She particularly enjoyed these group exchanges because of the positive experience she had had with students in the past; she found that other students in her classes were very supportive: "they're so understanding considering that you might not know that much knowledge on issues that took place a while back and I wasn't here. Like if it's things I don't really understand, because English is my second language, most are really understanding and have travelled internationally to volunteer so they understand and it's really helpful." Because her program appeals to students who have travelled, and had more exposure to other cultures, Amara perceives that it has resulted in a more open and accepting atmosphere, which is very conducive to group work.

Unlike Rivka and Amara, Robel hadn't had the opportunity for formal in-class interactions with his peers. Compared to the informal opportunities for interaction with his peers, where he "want[s] to talk to them [other students] but you still hold back, regarding the topic of group work, he shared "this would be much better for me …; I can interact with the topic we are raising". His desire for this interaction substantiates existing literature.

Discussion. Similar to participants' experiences, research suggests that collaborative learning provides an opportunity to develop relationships amongst peers, and validates students' sense of place within the university (Terenzini et al., 1994). Lave and Wenger (1991) further describe that engagement in dialogue with peers on academic topics is an essential component of legitimate peripheral participation for students, and helps to move students towards full participation in the learning community. Therefore, a lack of opportunity for in-class discourse on academic topics with peers can contribute to a sustained peripheral identity.

Should these collaborative learning opportunities involve diverse peer groups, more benefits may be experienced; research that suggests that interactions with diverse groups will increase one's openness to diversity (Grayson, 2008; Pascarella, 1996).

Experiences of Discrimination. Relating to students' encounters with their peer group within the classroom were their experiences with discrimination.

Findings. While Amara found her classmates to be supportive and understanding during group work, Maria and Mohisha observed a pattern of discrimination from their peers towards immigrants and other non-native English speakers during group work activities. When assigned to a group, Mohisha found that "Canadian students" will "try to take the lead, even if they don't know anything." She perceived that this occurs because "it is assumed that you [the immigrant/non-native English speaker] don't know anything." Similarly, Maria shared that in mixed groups with native- and non-native English speakers, non-native English speakers were "not really able to voice our opinions very well. Yeah, like it was, I don't think they value our opinions." When she did contribute in these groups, she felt her responses

were disregarded, and that a student might respond positively, but she felt that "they're not really that receptive to that [her contributions]." She reiterated later in the interview, regarding a recent instance of this occurring, that she felt she was "being ignored", and that the other students in the group "probably just think that they have better ideas than I do." She also noted that another student in her group, born in China, "didn't say anything at all", speculating that he felt similarly.

Further to the previous experience, Mohisha shared that when other students learn about her grades, her research position, or her chemistry TA position, "then they realize, oh this person actually knows something, so that's when they try to be friends with you… they'll initiate [a friendship] if they think they can get something out of you." These experiences of discrimination detract any value that could have been obtained from a group task experience. Mohisha summarizes that in her experience, "if they think that you're just a student from a different country who wasn't born in Canada and can't speak English, then they totally ignore you." In the face of this treatment, it's difficult to remain positive about interacting with peers. Unlike Alberto's validating experience in his lab, these participants' experiences with discrimination in class in are particularly invalidating, as they "failed to confirm or validate the student as one capable of learning and deserving of a place in a college classroom" (Terenzini et al., 1994, p. 67).

Discussion. Research indicates that the perception of prejudice and discrimination "negatively affects the adjustment of the minority student to the two realms of the college [social & academic], while damaging the cognitive and affective outcomes associated with college" (Nora & Cabrera, 1996, p. 140). Smedley et al. (1993) describe these experiences of perceived discrimination as minority status stressors. These constitute a "separate and

additional pathway for maladjustment" for immigrants in university, and detract from positive university experiences (p. 435). On the other hand, Johnson et al. (2007) found that positive perceptions of the campus climate towards diversity was positively associated with sense of belonging for most ethnic groups, further demonstrating the significance of this element. Pascarella et al. (1996) suggest that changes to institutional policies that enhance all students' openness to diversity through "programs and policies that both sensitize faculty, administrators, and students to what constitutes racial discrimination" would help to prevent further discrimination at university, reiterating that "consciousness-raising" is an essential step in this process (p. 189).

Accessing *s*upport. Participants coped with some of the challenges presented in their classes by: adopting effective learning strategies and study habits; talking to their professors (as discussed previously); and accessing support from outside the classroom.

Findings. Because students were coping with learning the new content of their classes in an additional language, many had devised creative study habits to support them with both learning the new content, and having a greater opportunity to address the new language as well. Interestingly, although CPU offered numerous lunch hour workshops on topics such as study skills and academic writing, none of the participants in this study had attended such a class. Instead, they developed primarily independent study strategies. Learning strategies that participants employed included the following:

- viewing lectures multiple times through the online video-lecture tool available (1);
- downloading and printing PowerPoint notes from the Learning Management System to guide the listening process (4);
- accessing resources about the content in one's first language (1);

- making an audio-recording of lectures to listen to repeatedly at home (1);
- highlighting, taking notes, copying resources, and looking up unfamiliar words (4).

These learning strategies helped to provide students with multiple opportunities to learn and retain the content, and to listen to, look up, and define unknown words. The use of these tools demonstrated the motivation and self- awareness students brought to their classes regarding what tools worked best for them, and what strategies would support them in the challenges with which they were presented.

Despite the strong study habits that many had adopted, when employed alone, these often did not provide enough support. When Gabrielle and Dejan began their classes, they felt very overwhelmed. Both spoke to their professor to get their input on whether they should pursue their studies in the class, or drop it.

Gabrielle: When I got to university I was like, oh no I feel like I'm going to fail. So I was like, maybe I should drop that… So I talked to my teacher, and he said no you have to work a little bit harder and you'll be good. So I stayed.

Although Gabrielle remained in her class after talking to her professor, she still felt like she was "not as good as other students", and although she shared, "I know I should prepare more and study more before and after," she found she was struggling with the motivation. On the other hand, this conversation was a powerful turning point for Dejan, and he took advantage of other supports after discussing his situation with his professor.

Finally, for five of the participants, reaching out to the free tutoring support available on the campus was a key component of how they coped with the challenges presented during class. Students accessed tutoring to help them with both the content of their classes, as well

as with their academic writing. After speaking with his professor, Dejan "booked a session with the tutors, and things are going much better since that point." This helped to support him in learning the content within his classes. Rivka hadn't accessed tutoring to help her with the content of her classes, as she generally felt comfortable with this area. However, she shared that she used the *writing* tutoring centre regularly; "they always check my papers before I submit it, and that helped me a lot." Although she wished they could teach her about her writing challenges, rather than only correct her work, she felt that "because I have had to write so many papers that I improved my writing skills." Therefore, the tutoring services have helped her to become more autonomous in her writing, and now she often submits her papers without their support. Although initially in her studies, Amara struggled with "not knowing where to look for help like if I needed a paper to be edited", she also regularly accessed tutoring support for her writing. However, like Rivka she also wished she could be taught how to write better, rather than simply having one paper edited at a time.

On the other hand, both Jay and Mohisha felt very confident in their subject areas, particularly due to the previous academic experience they have had in these fields in their home countries. Rather than accessing tutoring support themselves, they have both offered tutoring support in their areas on the campus: Jay, informally to classmates, and Mohisha, at an immigrant support centre on campus. Although neither had had extensive opportunity to do this, both were excited at the prospect.

Discussion. Relating to the development of study skills, and participants' interest in workshops on learning strategies, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) also found that participants in their research preferred "active engagement in the learning process" over decontextualized

study skill classes, and that the former were most effective for their learning because they involved 'learning by doing' (p. 320).

Social Experiences on the Campus. Experiences out of class, or social experiences on the campus, emerged as a second key component of the experiences participants shared about their experiences at CPU. Lave and Wenger (1991) note that this area requires significant examination because of their findings that active engagement in the sociocultural practices of an institution are the only way to move from peripheral involvement to full participation and membership within a community. Several themes emerged in the area of social experiences outside of the classroom that participants shared affected both their transition into university, and their establishment (or lack of establishment) of a sense of comfort and belonging within the campus. These themes include: interacting with other immigrant or international students; forming connections with other students with a shared linguistic or cultural background; interacting with Canadian students; and participating in extracurricular activities on campus. Pascarella et al. (1996) found that a "student's peer group is a particularly potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" so gaining an understanding of participants peer-groups is an important way to gain insight into their university experience.

Participants also offered numerous barriers that they perceived challenged their social experiences, and although these represent a wide and varied array of concerns, are grouped as a final theme: barriers to social experiences.

Social experiences with other newcomers. The first theme that emerged with respect to participants' social experiences was their interest in forming social connections with other newcomers.

Findings. CPU is a very diverse campus, with a large presence of immigrant students attending the university. As Amara described, the campus "definitely has many unique opportunities for aboriginal people and visible minorities and things like that so it's definitely a good university," and presumably, these opportunities help to cultivate a stronger immigrant presence. For Amara, this presence of diversity on campus helped to encourage a sense of belonging, and seeing "representation" of visible diversity through the "spices" and "colours" on campus helped her to feel more comfortable. While the diversity community of this institution is valuable in affirming the presence of individual visible minority and immigrant students on campus, participants also stressed that the campus diversity was important because it was within this 'mosaic' that they were able to establish their (initial) community.

When asked to describe their social experiences outside the classroom, many participants responded that they felt more comfortable and understood by other immigrant students. Because of their shared experiences and challenges, many participants perceived there was a greater opportunity for empathy and connection amongst other immigrant and international students, than with native-born Canadian students:

Amara: It's really nice to meet people who have at least had the same experiences, most of them at least understand that maybe if I'm struggling with my marks, they understand why. I feel more comfortable sharing it with them [other immigrants or

international students] than like a Canadian who wouldn't really understand. They might understand but I wouldn't feel like they full understand. They wouldn't judge me, you know like I didn't do so well this time… But I feel like for Ethiopians and other newcomers, we experience the same kind of challenges. So it's kind of nice to see someone else who is going through the same challenges.

Maria: Like my friends right now, we are mostly immigrants. I probably have a couple who are born here, but not really more than that… I don't know why I'm driven to that kind of relationship [one with other immigrants rather than native-born Canadians]. I think that we would think the same. In the class, when there is class projects, I find that I would initially make contact with international students or immigrants. That's how I would make friends. Yeah, like I would say, oh, can I be in your group?

Rivka: I liked that I could meet so many international students, and make so many friends with immigrants [at this university]. People I could relate to easier... And I find that here I connect with immigrants better because I know what they are going through – when they are just starting coming to university. So, it's easier for me to become friends with them.

Natalia: They [other Spanish speakers] almost have the same experience, and they know what it feels like to come from another country.

This shared understanding about academic challenges, similar thoughts and experiences, and ease in relating to one another provide the basis of participants' explanations regarding their preference in forming connections with other immigrant students.

In addition to the social opportunities and connections offered through the presence of a diverse student body, Rivka also saw the diversity as a learning opportunity: "[I have met] lots of friends from around the world that I would never get a chance to speak to otherwise… I get the chance to talk to Canadians and Aboriginal people and international people." Amara elaborated that "getting to know people that actually have very interesting values and beliefs and are very diverse [has] widen[ed] my knowledge about like a lot of issues. That has definitely been a very positive influence I think." Therefore, the benefits of this diversity extend past her social experiences. The learning opportunities presented through these diverse connections was another important reason why participants sought out connections with other immigrant and international students, although this seemed to be a lesser priority than previous reasons stated.

For Maya, her friendships with other immigrants and international students fostered an initial sense of community that allowed her to branch out further, extending her network. While at first she shared that her friends "were mostly either immigrants, or sons or daughters or immigrants, and international students", she noted: "now I have a lot of Canadian friends, but I also have friends from, like Germany, and South America, and other countries". She shared that while initially, she felt "more related" and "more underst[ood]" by other international students and immigrants, she felt that "[now] it doesn't really matter" who she socializes with.

On the other hand, Mohisha did not feel that her associations with other immigrants were helpful in her integration to life in a new city or to her transition to university. While she enjoyed the company of these new friends, she realized they were in the same position as she was, learning about a new city, trying to find work or begin their studies, and supporting

their family, so "they couldn't really help". Mohisha shared that "what one would require would be a person, like a local person, to actually guide you in the right directions" in the transition process, rather than the support offered by an individual at the same place. However, as Kanno and Varghese (2010) also found, she struggled to access these social networks.

Discussion. Like participants within this study, Guffrida (2006) also indicated that initial connections to multicultural communities are important in the social integration processes of many immigrant students. In fact, literature confirms that interactions with diverse peer groups offers academic benefits, as well as increased attachment to the institution (Andrade, 2011; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), and increased openness to diversity and challenge (Pascarella et al., 1996). However, Johnson et al. (2007) only found this to be the case with Hispanic/Latino participants in their study.

Kanno and Varghese (2010) also note that associations with other immigrants can be an important way to develop social capital, which is helpful in developing relationships with hosts, as Maya's situation illustrates. They further note that in their study, many participants formed these associations not because of their choice, but because "they perceived English-speaking social networks as inaccessible" (p. 323), which is not an element of the experience Maya shared.

Social experiences with similar language/background. More specifically than simply forming connections with other immigrants and international students, several participants discussed their preference towards interacting with individuals who either shared their first language, or shared their cultural background.

Findings. Building relationships with students of a shared linguistic or cultural background was the most important dimension of social experiences for Gabrielle, Natalia, Ashan, and Maria.

Natalia shared that she preferred interacting with other Latino people "because you can communicate more. You don't have to say, oh, how do you say this, how do you say this. It's easier." Gabrielle shared that she too is "looking for Spanish speakers around me, because I still don't feel very comfortable in English. I mean, I always have trouble, and I get stuck and I have to think and say things twice and I don't like it. But also I get nervous. But in Spanish it doesn't matter because it's easy." The ability to speak freely facilitates more open communication, and the establishment of new connections. For Amara, she reflected that while she doesn't connect with other students from her home country very often, "[she] kn[e]w they are there, and that's kind of a nice feeling." Ashan agreed that for him, connecting with other students from Sri Lanka is very important because "people from our country know our culture and language... So we can exchange more information, feel like home kind of." Interacting with other individuals from his home country helped to establish the sense of comfort and belonging that was lacking when settling in a new environment. Maria added that she felt she "best associate[s] with other Pilipino people", but this is a challenges, since she "do[es]n't see a lot of people of my own culture" at the university. However, she adds that she enjoys the company of "people who are really friendly and who embrace diversity" in general as well.

While these participants indicated that they often *chose* to interact with other students with the same cultural and linguistic background, Mohisha felt that the reason why students

associate more with members of their own ethnic or linguistic group is because of discrimination, rather than preference:

> You might have seen, or other people might have seen that the people from other countries usually hang out with other people from other countries. The reason for that is because other people, they don't want to accept them in their groups. So that's the reason that the east Asian people would hang out with east Asian people, because the Canadian people won't accept them in their groups, unless they were born here, and went to high school here, and they know about everything.

Similarly, while Maria doesn't express this explicitly, she noted: "I haven't had a lot of association with people who are Canadian. I didn't really have much of that… it's like they just don't care, it feels like. So I think it's preventing me from, what do you call that, like integrating." Therefore, while on one hand she stated she preferred interacting with students who share her cultural background, she also stated she felt excluded from the cultural majority group.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, believed that students from minority groups sought out these connections to members of their ethnic community out of personal preference: "Filipino people get along better with Filipino people. Just like Latin people get along better with Latin people. So it's not that people are excluding us. It's just that we feel better in our own groups. But I don't think there's prejudice." Her perceptions are more aligned with the experiences of other participants, such as Maya, Ashan, and Natalia.

Regarding this topic, Alberto felt strongly that students should make an effort to interact widely with many different people, and advised new students not to simply "stay

with people who speak your same language. Go speak with someone else." He believed this will help foster comfort and belonging in their new home. Gabrielle, however, felt that interacting with other Latino people has helped her to be able to connect with a larger community. She advised that new students should begin to form a social network by "look[ing] for people from where they belong so they would feel comfortable. And then little by little they would start building connections here with people who aren't from their culture." However, she mirrored Alberto's point, and reflected:

> [I've been] thinking about meeting more [people from my home country], but I'm living in Canada. I have to live with Canadians... I have to learn how to fit in with Canadians… So having an atmosphere [of my home country] would be nice. Or more Latin, at least. It would be more comfortable. But it's not like Canada is all about us [Latin Americas].

While initially connecting with others from her cultural background may help to initially nurture her comfort, she believed that this is not the way to build lasting belonging within her new home.

Therefore, participants shared that ease of communication, connections, a sense of "home", and the development of social capital form the basis of their choices to interact with members of their ethnic group.

Discussion. Research studies have found that diverse students generally perceive a higher sense of belonging when they have stronger ties to their ethnic community, and have the opportunity to "emphasize and celebrate their ethnic identities (Johnson et al, 2007, p.

536). While in these studies, these connections have been achieved through participation in ethnic/religious clubs (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007) or ties to their ethnic community external to the campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), perhaps in the absence of such opportunities, students seek *informal* connections with individuals of the same background, as these participants have done. However, Brown and Holloway (2008) found that for participants who "mixed exclusively in co-national groups, anxiety and inhibition [regarding language proficiency] remained preoccupying for months" (p. 242), suggesting that these interactions, exclusively, are problematic.

The perception that relationships with 'hosts' or the ethnic majority group was off-limits is a minority status stressor (Smedley et al., 1993), which detracts from the adjustment experiences of minority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). However, students' experiences that relationships with members of the same ethnic or linguistic background supported their ability to build relationships with 'hosts' resonates with Kanno and Varghese's (2010) findings, that social capital can be accrued through building primary networks with "co-nationals". While research suggests that forming these connections exclusively (Brown & Holloway, 2008), or as a result of perceived exclusion from the cultural majority group (Nora & Cabrera, 1996) is problematic, these initial connections to cultural communities are important in the social integration processes of many immigrant students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Social experiences with Canadian students. Participants' descriptions of their relationships with Canadian students were related to their understanding and perception of Canadian culture. As they shared their experiences, three themes emerged within this topic: the means by which participants gained an understanding of Canadian culture; the cultural

differences they observed between Canada and their home country, both in general and within the university setting, and finally; the relationships they formed with native-born Canadian students.

Findings. For some participants, their understanding of Canadian culture began developing prior to their arrival in Canada. Expectations and perceptions were formed through exposure to North American movies, working with North Americans in their home country, and talking to North Americans and Canadians before immigrating to gain an "insider's perspective" on life and culture in Canada. For Dejan, this helped because "[he] was kinda expecting a lot of things. [He] adjusted really fast, and really well." This suggests that informed expectations can support the adjustment experience.

For other participants, this understanding was not developed until arriving in Canada, and was formed through observation and conversation. Maya shared that as she noticed differences between her culture and Canada from "watching what other people did," she discussed them with a friend. She thought that it was "way easier, to like, talk to someone [because] you start getting used to how things work and how things are here."

Gabrielle shared that she felt Canadian people are "colder" than in Colombia, where people greet one another more warmly, and relationships are closer. In comparison, she felt that space is highly valued in Canada: "here it's like you have your space and I have my space and you must respect that." However, she found Canadians "compensate that lack of physical closeness with words- nice words. Like asking 'how are you'?' and 'how are you feeling?' They really show they worry about you." Maya also observed differences between

her home country, Venezuela, and Canada in terms of appropriate greetings and understandings of physical space.

Participants shared many reflections regarding their thoughts and perceptions of 'Canadian culture'; for several participants, the cultural differences above presented some significant challenges to forming connections with Canadian students. Although Robel has experienced challenges with communication differences, he shared he is working to "align with that [Canadian] way of doing things" and to "know more about the culture, even when you are communicating." However, he found this is difficult compared to others who have "grown up knowing all those things… they communicate easily." When he tries to understand what people are saying, he felt he only "underst[oo]d the face value of what he is saying" and missed "all the other things". As a result, of the Canadian students in his classes, he shared, "you want to talk to them but you still hold back." The effect of culture on communication styles is still too significant a barrier to overcome. Gabrielle shared a similar challenge that she faced when a Canadian friend told her a joke that related to topics that she "didn't grow up with", and that was "very Canadian":

> I was like yeah, I don't get that joke. So I want to make friends, but then they make jokes, and I am like, uh, what are you talking about, I don't get it... So that's also like, okay, I don't know what they're talking about. I can't laugh. I can't fit in.

This type of experiences was alienating, and as noted above, has led her to be more inclined to form friendships with other newcomers or international students.

For Mohisha, although she has experienced discrimination while working in groups with Canadian students, she has several friends who are Canadians, and they get along and

connect well. She also found that forming connections with Canadian students is advantageous, because they could "tell them [a new immigrant] how the system works, because it's really hard to get a handle on the system alone." She reiterated this need for 'insider' support, saying that a "local person, to actually guide you in the right directions" is very helpful upon initial arrival in both a new city, or in the new postsecondary environment.

In contrast, Maria felt a barrier to forming friendships with Canadian students. Whereas other immigrant students can able to identify with her challenges, she felt that "Canadians worry about simple things", and as a result, may not be able to understand her. She also shared that she has found many differences in values and beliefs between herself and Canadian students, particularly relating to styles of communication, although she didn't provide more specific details. Differences in values have also been a barrier for Mohisha in forming closer friendships with Canadian students. She noted that, "all they [Canadian students] want is for you to go out with them and get drunk and whatever... So yeah, that's kind of a barrier because if you don't do that, then they won't accept you in their social groups." Similar to her perception that Canadian students would not value her contributions as a group member without verifying her intelligence, she felt that this is another step or test that has to be passed in order to gain acceptance.

Finally, Gabrielle didn't feel confident enough to have more contact with Canadian students: "I feel that students here are a step ahead of me. So that keeps me from feeling comfortable." The comparison of herself to native-born Canadian students made her feel uncomfortable, and prevented any connection from developing.

Therefore, for many participants of this study, there were significant barriers preventing the formation of relationships with Canadian students. These included challenges with overcoming cultural differences, difficulties communicating at a deeper level, a perceived lack of shared values and interests, and differences in abilities.

Discussion. Similarly, Kanno and Varghese (2010) also concluded that immigrant and refugee students "hesitated to participate in what they perceived as 'mainstream' social networks on campus", which they further describe as social networks with native English speaking, and native born students, or "hosts" (p. 322). This may be problematic because interacting with hosts has been found to support adjustment to the university or college setting (Andrade, 2011; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Therefore, these feelings could perpetuate a cycle of exclusion.

Participation in extracurricular activities. Like other themes in this section, participation in extracurricular activities varied greatly between participants.

Findings. While some individuals were highly active on the campus, others were uninvolved and often unaware of extracurricular activities within the university. Regardless of their level of involvement, most participants spoke highly of the benefits offered by these activities to their feelings of social inclusion and comfort on the university campus.

Amara, Rivka, Maya, and Jay all shared an interest in involvement in campus activities. Maya knew from when she entered university that involvement in extracurricular activities would be a priority for her: "I wanted to do something in my university other than going to class and that's it." She felt that these clubs offer an opportunity to have fun while studying, and reasoned, "if I'm paying so much for university, I might as well get fun out of

it." She valued what it offered to her university experience. For Jay, getting involved on campus was a natural decision; he was highly involved in his university in the Philippines, and, like Maya, he felt he "really want[ed] to do something else other than academics and work." Extracurricular opportunities brought variety to his university experience. Rivka first became involved with extracurricular activities in high school, which she found very valuable to developing her comfort in her new home. When she moved into the city to attend university, she took these same steps, becoming involved with several student groups relating to her school program, as well as volunteering for different campus events. She shared that this gave her the opportunity to become more familiar with many students on the campus, and to gain exposure to new ideas and perspectives that she might not have gained in class. Finally, for Amara, involvement in extracurricular activities had almost an equal value to her classes:

> I really like being involved. School is kinda like, I mean I wouldn't say it's not the main priority, but I mean for me, a lot of learning comes from the practical things [such as] being involved in the community and volunteering and those things, instead of going to class and sitting and listening only.

Was it not for time being such a limiting factor, Amara shared she would be involved in far more campus groups. Participants involved in extracurricular activities shared numerous benefits offered by this type of university activity to their: comfort on the campus; social experiences and networks; and learning experiences.

Participating in extracurricular activities requires students to spend more time on the campus itself. This aspect was helpful for Amara in gaining an increased sense of comfort

within the university, and in learning more about the resources available to help students: as a result of extracurricular activities, she "was on campus a lot, so you kind of get to learn about it slowly that there are services that are helpful." This fed a positive cycle towards developing comfort and familiarity with the university.

Involvement in campus activities also facilitates the formation of a larger network, by building familiarity with more students on campus. Rivka believed that this larger network fostered greater comfort, which developed her sense of belonging on the campus:

> The more student groups I join, the more people I find, and the more people I start recognizing coming to school, … that's how I feel more comfortable. When I recognize people and they recognize here, I feel like then I'm not alone here. And then I can connect with someone and start to talk to someone.

Jay also states that his involvement in student groups is "primarily to meet more people. That's my goal with going a student group. Networking, to meet other people." Large peer networks were supportive of these students' integration.

Maya and Rivka both described that involvement in these groups offered benefits to their academics as well. For Rivka, forming a wider social network, which is accomplished through her involvement in student groups, meant that the chance of her knowing another student in a new class was very high; this was helpful if she "need[ed] to borrow notes" or if she "need[ed] to ask someone for help." Maya's club was particularly for students in her field of study; this gave her an opportunity to network, learn more about her field, and gather with like-minded students; "you get to know people, and you get all excited about psychology, and you get to talk about it." The benefits transferred to both her social and academic

experiences. Further, Amara reflected that rather than simply supporting her in-class learning, these opportunities were learning experiences in and of themselves; "lot of learning comes from the practical things" she did in these extracurricular activities. Finally, Amara summarized that involvement in student groups "will definitely change your perspective about how it feels on campus as a new student." For these four participants who were heavily involved in student activities, the resulting benefits were clear.

Other participants in this project had not yet become involved in extracurricular activities on campus. For some, this was because of barriers, such as a lack of time or a disinterest in the opportunities available; for others, their lack of involvement resulted from a lack of information. In fact, 'student groups' was often thought to mean 'study groups', and several participants weren't familiar with the idea of students meeting in an organized way with purposes that weren't class-related.

When asked about her involvement in different social opportunities and student groups on campus, Gabrielle shared of one group, "I don't know what it is, or what it does. I've heard about it though," and of another, "I've heard about it, but I've never checked it out." A lack of information regarding these opportunities was a theme for other students as well. While Ashan was interested in joining a club, he admitted, "I don't know where to get information for that." Maria and Ashan also indicated they had both tried looking for a student group for their cultural group, but that there wasn't one available. Maria had heard of student groups for other ethnicities, and thought it would be a good opportunity "to see your representation."

Although they didn't have experience with student group involvement, many of these participants still acknowledged the value these activities could offer. Maria wasn't involved in a student group, but she said that she would certainly advise new students otherwise: "access those services [student groups], and [do] not really follow the footsteps that I did. I would encourage them." Gabrielle agreed, reflecting that participating in a club might be able to help students, because "little by little they would start building connections here."

Discussion. As Tieu et al. (2009) concluded, involvement extracurricular activities was associated with successful adjustment, provided students felt positively about these activities, and felt they were a source of connection, as these participants shared. In general, the value of extracurricular involvement is a recurrent finding in literature of sense of belonging for minority students (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

More specifically, research suggests that campus structures (such as ethnic-specific student groups) that help students affirm and connect with their cultural background are critical resources in the process of social integration for immigrant and minority students (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). This resonates with participants' experiences within this study.

Barriers to social integration. As a final category, many participants shared different barriers in their university experiences that affected their perception of their social inclusion. Although some have been previously addressed in earlier sections, they are highlighted here. These barriers included:

- Low perception of language proficiency, particularly relating to an accent (1);

- Dissimilarities in age/interests between the student and his/her classmates (3);

- Limited amount of free time to form connections with other students (3);

- Cultural differences (2);

- Large classes, with no opportunities to meet other students (2); and

- Not knowing how to 'start' a friendship, or a conversation informally (2)

Part 3: Belonging and Comfort within the University. The third section of this chapter addresses the third research question, which relates to participants' perceptions of their sense of belonging on the university campus, as well as the elements of their university experience that they perceived to have contributed to or prevented its development. To reiterate, as Hurtado and Carter (1997) define, sense of belonging aims to understand "the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community" (p. 327).As research suggests, sense of belonging is highly linked to persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hoffman et al. 2002; Maestas et al., 2007), so understanding students' perspectives of their institutional affiliation and comfort can help researchers and practitioners to gain a clearer perspective of the factors that contribute to or detract from this feeling for minority students, and thereby aim to create more inclusive practices to support these students. Throughout participant narratives, sense of belonging was conceptualized in different ways. Participants also shared their understanding of its value to their educational experiences, and the factors that had affected its development.

The idea of 'belonging', 'fitting in' and being comfortable emerged throughout many participants' interviews. The idea of 'fitting in' presented earlier in participants' narratives. According to Hoffman et al. (2002), 'fit' refers to "the perceptions that one's values or

characteristics are congruent with others" (p. 229). Alberto thought about how to "be a part of everyone else" when he began university, and how to "get in a group". Amara joined university when she was 18 to "fit into the mainstream" and when she first began, she "wanted to make friends and fit in". When Robel began university, he shared that it was a process of "trying to see where you fit". Mohisha struggled with the process of gaining acceptance from her peers, and found that "you have to prove yourself, and then they're going to accept you", which she found to be very problematic.

Identification in progress. Some students did not feel as though they had developed a sense of belonging in their new university environment.

Findings. Ever a scientist, Jay reflected that he was having challenges developing his "ecosystem, or community" on the university campus. However, he felt that its development may be "in progress". Although Gabrielle felt that "feeling like you fit in, that would be great, and feeling more comfortable, that would be great," she expressed that she did not yet feel this sense of belonging. Robel also shared that while he is "very much hopeful that things will work out and I will be, you know, like I would feel like I belong here," at this point he felt he "[didn't] have those kinds of feelings now." When a newcomer first comes to Canada, he noted that they "have [their] own culture, [their] own way of understanding," but in order to achieve this sense of belonging, he advised, "you have to try and learn some so you can just fit in here. I would say it's all about taking time and learning."

While Gabrielle and Robel value belonging, and the role it plays in their university experience, Natalia shared that she doesn't feel a sense of belonging on the university campus, but that she doesn't feel this is an important aspect of her university experience. She

elaborated, "if I belong, that's good, and if I don't that's okay. That's who I am, and that's okay."

Discussion. Similarly, the Pan Canadian Study of First-Year College Students (Human Resources, 2008) also found that recent immigrant students indicated lower institutional commitment in all four items used to measure this element; furthermore, although students' institutional commitment increased between the beginning- and end-of-term surveys, recent immigrants reportedly consistently less positive results on almost all measures of institutional commitment at both periods of data-gathering, suggesting sense of belonging continues to be a more elusive state for recent immigrant students.

Identifiers. Other participants *did* identify that they felt a sense of belonging to the campus. Students perceived that their networks, the presence of diversity, connecting with students of a shared background, and feeling like a legitimate university students contributed to their sense of belonging on the university campus.

Peer *n*etworks. For some participants, their peer network contributed most significantly to their sense of belonging.

Findings. Ashan also shared that "the people in the class" contribute most to his comfort and sense of belonging at the university; "I think the students are there, and they are kind." This was interesting, since he had very limited opportunities to interact with other students in his classes, due to his restrictive schedule. Mohisha also felt that the people she had met on the university campus had played a vital role in her comfort and belonging. Although she initially questioned, "where am I? Why did I come here in the first place?" she eventually realized that "as you know people, and then you mix up with them, and you make

friends with them and you get good results, then everything falls into place, and it's really good"; her sense of belonging emerged through these experiences. Interestingly, her experiences with discrimination in the class had not affected this feeling. For Amara, seeing "familiar faces" whenever she came to university helped to contribute to this feeling. Although she really enjoyed her studies and found the content very meaningful, she elaborated: "how enthusiastic I am about going to school, it definitely has a lot to do with how I am with my friends". Rivka, who was involved in many student organizations, conveyed that she "enjoy[ed] coming here" and "fe[lt] positive, too, about coming to university" because she was "so involved in different things": "I know so many different people from different departments". Amara's preference of seeing "familiar faces" is echoed in her response. Both Amara and Rivka were heavily involved in the university, and connect their feelings of sense of belonging to their social experiences, which either directly or indirectly relate to their extracurricular involvement.

Discussion. This is consistent with Hoffman et al.'s (2002) findings that sense of belonging is associated with students' "valued involvement in the collegiate environment" (pp. 249-51).

Presence of Diversity. For some students, the diversity present within CPU helped to evoke a sense of comfort and belonging within the university.

Findings. Amara recounted an experience at a western Canadian university earlier in the year that helped to highlight this importance for her:

As part of my volunteering, we were part of the university for a week, and you would barely see visible minorities, and this was like so weird, especially because I got used

to [CPU]. It was just kind of strange. I mean people weren't staring at me strangely or anything, but like you can feel it. I just thought I kinda want to see some spices here, I kinda want some mix, some colours, you know? It was just really kind of plain, and bland, so I really appreciate the diversity of CPU.

A lack of representation of visible minority students contributed to her feeling out of place, while the diversity at CPU helped to establish a more accepting atmosphere for Amara. Maya also appreciated the diversity observable within the university campus. Unlike her experience at high school, where there was much more homogeneity, "here[at CPU] you get to see people wearing whatever they want, and doing whatever they want… So like everybody's so different, but they're also so open. I don't feel like there's any feeling of discrimination on campus, so I feel like you really get that feeling of belonging on campus." She explicitly connected both the diversity and the openness, or absence of discrimination to her sense of belonging. Rivka contributed a similar thought relating to diversity, although her conception of diversity is manifested linguistically: "I think that yeah because I saw how much diverse [it] is. So I feel more belonged here, now. Before I was the only one with accent, but here many people have accents. I feel comfortable." While she felt somewhat ostracized as an outsider when she initially moved to a small Canadian town, the diverse backgrounds on campus established a clear sense of comfort for Rivka.

Discussion. These experiences support existing research, which indicates that the university "climate" towards diversity impacts minority students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Lee & Ill, 2000; Maestas et al., 2007 Hurtado and Carter (1997) also found the significance of diversity, and a positive campus climate towards diversity to be important in fostering a sense of belonging for students.

Additionally, in their research study, Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that students who took courses that "emphasized diversity" typically reported a higher sense of belonging (p. 245); this substantiates Amara and Rivka's experiences in some ways, since they were both studying in an international development program.

Connections to students with shared background.   For other participants, connecting with students with a shared background, either linguistic or cultural, was helpful in establishing a sense of belonging.

Findings. Both Maria and Ashan identified that being a part of a student group that was for Filipino or Sri Lankan students, respectively, would be helpful in helping to find a sense of belonging. Gabrielle also valued being around other individuals from her home country, and shared that "having an atmosphere [of my home country] would be nice. Or more Latin, at least. It would be more comfortable." However, she realized this doesn't support her in finding a greater sense of belonging within Canada: "I've been thinking about meeting more [people from my home country]. But I'm living in Canada. I have to live with Canadians... I have to learn how to fit in with Canadians…It's not like Canada is all about Latin Americas." However, Gabrielle also realized that the process of networking with individuals from both Colombia and Latin America was helping her to gradually form a sense of connection here. She advised that future immigrant students should "look for people from where they belong so they would feel comfortable. And then little by little they would start building connections here with people who aren't from their culture. Like, that's kinda happening to me."

Discussion. This is supported by the research of Johnson et al. (2007), who also found that "the contexts through which Asian Pacific American students may derive a sense of affiliation with their institutions may be those that emphasize and celebrate their ethnic identities", such an "ethnic club (p. 536).The eventual connections with a more diverse peer group have also been linked to a sense of affiliation and belonging on the campus (Maestas et al., 2007).

Identification as a student. Finally, for other participants, the fact that they strongly connected with the end goals that they felt university would achieve for them helped to establish a sense of place and belonging.

Findings. Maria shared that she felt like a "university student":

I feel similar to them [other students] …I want to be here, and I think that coming here would make all this possible. All of what I've been thinking, and what I've been trying to achieve in life. Like, coming to university is going to give me that pass somehow. Give me that way to achieve those goals. Plus I think that I really value education.

She identifies with the role of university student, and sense shared values in education, which helps to establish some comfort within the university context. When asked what contributed most to his comfort and sense of belonging, Ashan shared similar thoughts: "the thing is I actually want to go to the university, so actually I getting this one is actually kind of good." For him, just being in university, and working closer to his goal was sufficient to establishing a sense of belonging, perhaps because belonging involves feeling like you are in the place where you need to be.

Discussion. O'Donnell & Tobbell (2007) also found that some participants of their study connected their sense of belonging to their new identity as a university student (p. 325). Maria and Ashan's experiences are consistent with Kember and Leung's (2004) findings on sense of belonging and persistence. While existing research suggests that sense of belonging encourages persistence, their findings indicated that the fact a student was persisting through and managing the challenges associated with the postsecondary experience brought about a feeling of belonging; therefore, students may be able to establish a sense of belonging through their persistence.

Advice for Future Students. At the end of the interview, participants were asked what advice they would offer a student in a similar situation to themselves, who was starting university in the upcoming term. Students' responses were highly illuminating of their values of what contributes most to a successful adjustment in university, but were also very individual; they explored all of the areas previously mentioned in these findings, including references to university services, study strategies, student organizations, forming connections, and persistence.

Building their social connections. The first common thread in the advice participants offered was regarding building their social connections. Rivka advised new applicants to "expand their friend circle… Interact[ing] with more people here will help make them feel more comfortable in school. Cause if you are alone, you don't feel very comfortable… I think that just expanding their friends circle, and not being too frustrated about courses." Connection and perspective are both important elements of her advice. Amara also suggested that new students get involved to help support their transition: "maybe all they're doing is coming to school and going to class, and not making a lot of friends in the class… But I

mean getting involved with other services is definitely a good place to start… This will definitely change your perspective about how it feels on campus as a new student." Maya also recommended that new students join a student group, and shared she has encouraged several friends to do this already. Maria also advised new students to join student organizations and access services on campus, but unlike Rivka, Amara, and Maya, she has not accessed this support herself; she shared specifically that she would "encourage them to … not really follow the steps I did."

Share experiences and encouragement. Five participants commented that they would offer new students support and encouragement, and share their own experiences; this particularly included letting students know that things do get better. For future students, Maria suggested the most important suggestions she could offer were through sharing her own experiences:

> I would tell them my experiences, so that way they would understand, and they would have a better idea about things they could expect... it would better prepare them. And they could probably, or would initially establish some kind of, like, how they would deal with it, and make a plan. And I think it's good to share my experiences too…Also I would just encourage them, like encourage and support.

Amara also indicated that she would offer encouragement to new students, and share her experiences to help them to understand they are not the only one experiencing challenges: "If they said, yeah I want to quit, then I would tell them, yeah I was in the same situation, I totally understand, but you'll get used to it." Other students' thoughts advice included the following:

Natalia: To not be scared, everything will be fine. Like at first, I was really scared because I didn't know anyone there and I didn't know what it was going to be like. But then it was fine. So yeah, to not be scared and to just be yourself. And you're here for you, and to focus on what you want. And if you don't have any friends, don't worry, you will find some.

Mohisha: The only thing that I can stay is stick in there. Don't crash under any kind of pressure. It could be the peer pressure that no one wants to talk to you, but that's fine. That thing does away. Or it could be that you're falling behind in your studies, that goes away too. So the only thing is just stick in there – everything's going to be fine… Everything else falls into place over time. Like it takes like a year or two, that's it. Then they won't even feel like they're from another country.

Jay: Focus on their goal. Set their goal in their mind. Do they want to be this, or do they want to be that... And don't be discouraged of what other people say.

This theme of encouragement ran through participants' suggestions, indicating the significance of affective support in the transitional processes for these students.

Strategies and concrete advice. Participants also offered strategies and concrete advice to support students in their studies:

Maya: I would tell them not to skip classes... You can't catch up so easily if you don't have the information. So it's kind of important to me at least.

Dejan: Don't take more than 12 credits per term. I wanted to take 15 credits originally, and I was like, I'm not doing this. Even 12 credits seems to be a little bit overwhelming right now.

Mohisha: just know about the culture. Know everything about the culture, focus on your studies, and then just stick in there. Everything else falls into place over time.

Dejan: Try to spend the most time with the advisors as possible. Attend orientation…And then if you have questions, they should ask always.

Institutional support. Several (3) participants also offered suggestions for what the university could do to help support immigrant students in their university experience. Amara's biggest challenges related to financing, and likely as a result, her suggestions for changes the university could make to help other newcomers in situations similar to herself was to provide more bursaries for students, and to fund more staff at the Immigrant Centre on campus to support newcomer students. She also suggested that unlimited free printing services would also be helpful: "I like my stuff on hard copy. I feel bad for the papers and stuff, but like whenever my professor says you need to read a 15 page article, and when you have to do that once or twice or three times a day it's financially draining." This would support her learning, particularly in regards to how she manages with studying new content in a second language.

Mohisha's predominant concern that arose during the interview was discriminatory treatment by peers in her classes. She identified that the university could address this by publishing an article or series in the university newspaper to help raise students' awareness to this issue, and to prevent it in the future; the articles could contain "the experiences people

have. It's for the people, these experiences people face them in their first year, when people go to the first year of university." This fits with the thread of sharing stories and experiences, suggesting that could be an important support in the transition process for these immigrant students. She also suggested that this topic could be addressed in orientation sessions, although she did not elaborate on this idea.

Jay also advised that changes could be made to the orientation sessions to help better address the needs of immigrant students. He suggested that information about the culture of the Canadian classroom, teaching styles of university professors, and general information on appropriate or common styles of interactions between the professors and students could be addressed in these sessions to enhance their utility to immigrant students. Addressing these collective needs upfront would certainly ease the transition for these students.

This suggestion resonates within the results of the Pan Canadian Study of First-Year College Students (Human Resources, 2008); recommendations that emerged from this study include increasing support services to address the "social and cultural integration challenges and … the mix of barriers immigrants face" (section 5.12, paragraph 6), through initiatives such as "immigrant-specific orientation objectives", a "Diversity/Immigrant Integration Office" and a "peer/immigrant mentorship program" (Figure 7). Therefore, this need is clear in both this study and relevant literature.

CHAPTER V:
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & IMPLICATIONS

Summary

While the topic of student persistence and success within postsecondary institutions has been addressed extensively in existing literature, minimal attention has been paid to the immigrant community within a Canadian context. Given the significant benefits that postsecondary experience and completion offers to students, institutions, and the greater community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and the opportunity it offers to immigrants with respect to building sociocultural capital and gaining Canadian educational experience, often perceived as essential to labour-market integration, examining the 'postsecondary experience' for immigrants is essential. This study addresses this gap by exploring the perceptions and postsecondary experiences of non-native English speaking immigrant students at one small, diverse Canadian campus. More specifically, the initial transition into university, academic and social experiences within the university, and the development of a sense of belonging are examined within this thesis.

Although extensive literature supported this investigation, the theoretical framework of this study was situated in the context of several college impact models of student change (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007). This provided a descriptive foundation of the means through which students develop a sense of belonging, and persist within the postsecondary context.

A phenomenological approach was employed in this study, which provided a foundation to view participants' experiences through their own subjective perceptions & experiences. I interviewed twelve research participants, who, in addition to being students

within one small, diverse university in central Canada, self-identified as non-native English speaking immigrants. These in-depth semi-structured interviews provided a window into participants' lived experiences within the postsecondary context, as well as their perceptions of their sense of belonging within the campus community.

Following the phenomenological data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994), I identified four major themes in participants' responses. These included: the transition to university; experiences within the classroom at university (academic experiences), experiences outside the classroom at university (social experiences), and belonging within the university campus.

Conclusions drawn from this research, contributions of this research, considerations and limitations, and finally implications and recommendations are described below.

Conclusions

In this conclusion, I will synthesize students' perceptions of what contributed most significantly to their university experiences, as well as to their sense of belonging. As Pascarella and Terenzini (1994) concluded, the impact of the postsecondary experience is the "cumulative result" of these connected experiences being sustained over a prolonged period of time (p. 610). Below, I address this web of experiences and perceptions, and offer recommendations based on these conclusions in the following sections.

As literature suggests, the initial transition to university played an important role in shaping participants' perceptions about their university experience. Given that 7 of 12 participants interviewed were completing their first year of university studies, this transition was a fresh component of their experiences; the challenges faced during this transition

resonated throughout their reflections of their academic and social experiences within the university context.

A primary challenge perceived by five participants in the initial transition to university was difficulty with navigating the university system, and a lack of transparency regarding both how to manage the tasks required during this phase and how to access the supports available. This included the process of planning one's courses, registering for classes, transferring credits, demonstrating completion of pre-requisites, and requesting permission from professors and department chairs. These same participants described that without explicit teaching of these skills and information, it was exceedingly difficult to negotiate their way through this initial transition; they described feeling "lost", "overwhelmed", and unsure of how to proceed.

Students who had completed high school in Canada (5 participants) reflected that this previous experience was advantageous, as they has some familiarity with 'how things are done' in the Canadian education system; this opportunity provided them with a "simulation" of the university experience (Attinasi, 1989). It also identified key 'informed' supports that they could access in the initial stages, such as a teacher or counselor. On the other hand, participants who had completed postsecondary education in their home country described support this offered them in regards to general study strategies and content knowledge, but found themselves at a disadvantage compared to Canadian high school graduates with respect to the required 'soft skills'; they were without explicit information regarding university expectations, processes, and the culture of the Canadian classroom. In general, all participants shared they felt a lack of information on how to access support with all these processes, and often a reluctance to seek out this information, or act on it, once they had it.

Combined with the individualized needs identified by participants, this suggests a need for both pre-arranged group support, such as an orientation specific to this demographic as some students recommended, and individualized support, such as meetings with academic advisors, available for students to assist with these initial challenges.

Challenges with financing university and with time limitations emerged as a challenge for all participants, in the first, second, and third year of their studies. These two concerns were strongly connected, as all but one student worked at least one job, and four held two jobs to be able to finance their studies; this limited their time for studying, participating in campus events and student groups, and general socializing with their peers. According to existing research, this can be a particularly problematic barrier because of both the direct and indirect effects that difficulties with financing one's postsecondary studies can have on sense of belonging. Maestas et al. (2007) found that "the ability to pay for college would increase one's sense of belonging at university" (p. 249), while other research has shown the positive impact that successful management of student resources such as finances and one's schedule can have on a student's ease of transition (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), academic adjustment (Hurtado et al., 1996; Kim, 2009), and emotional adjustment (Hurtado et al., 1996). Additionally, even though participants perceived that participating in campus events, students groups, and developing friendships on the campus contributed positively towards their sense of belonging on the university campus, with limited time available, many reflected that the completion of academic work took priority over their social involvement. Those who were able to receive financial support through a loan or a bursary relayed gratitude that this was available; furthermore, 5 participants identified that without the financial support, attending postsecondary would not have been possible at that time.

In relation to participants' academic experiences within the university, 6 participants described the content they were learning within their classes as particularly motivating, and a very positive element of their university experience; for some, their interest and progress in the course content legitimized the sacrifices made to attend university. However, each participant shared that challenges with either the pace, teaching style, and challenges with language detracted from this experience. These were often seen as tools of exclusion, marginalizing their voice, presence, and capabilities within the class. On the other hand, when two participants described a class in which they were currently enrolled, where the pace was manageable, the language was comprehensible, and the teaching approach emphasized collaborative learning and encouraged class involvement, they described feeling empowered and that they were finally in the "right place". In particular, the merging of the academic experiences with social opportunities presented through collaborative learning opportunities and class discussions contributed strongly towards students perceptions of comfort within the university; these teaching methods helped students to "feel like they mattered". This resonates within literature as well. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that engaging in academic dialogue is an essential element in shifting group involvement from peripheral participation to full membership, while Terenzini et al. (1994) found that collaborative learning contributed to students' success. Therefore, professors' choices regarding teaching style, class involvement, and pace can have extensive impact on students' feelings of legitimacy and belonging within the classroom.

Given that this university is particularly diverse in its demographic (Axworthy, 2009), group work typically provided students with a multicultural opportunity for collaboration. As Grayson (2008) and Pascarella (1996) found, positive interactions with diverse peer-groups

within class facilitates students' openness to diversity, while Johnson et al. (2007) suggest such positive experiences with and perceptions of diversity contribute to a sense of belonging. However, two participants perceived discrimination during occasions of group work, and felt their participation was limited and that their skills and contributions were assumed to be inferior before they were demonstrated. These perceptions of discrimination challenged participants' esteem, and although they did not describe it as impacting their sense of legitimacy and belonging within the institution, the amount of focus it drew within participants' interviews suggests these experiences were strongly influential. Smedley et al. (1993) describe such experiences with discrimination as minority status stressors, and Hurtado and Carter (1997) position such experiences as detracting from a sense of institutional affiliation or belonging. Therefore, this suggests that professors engaging in such activities within their classes must encourage and value equal participation among all students.

For the two participants who were enrolled in programs that addressed issues relating to culture and diversity, they shared that their multilingualism and cultural background was perceived as an asset, and that in-class involvement with diverse peer groups was mutually beneficial both to native-born students, international students, and immigrant students. In this case, these experiences both validated their interest in working with diverse groups, as well as their sense of belonging, as they later described. In addition to these interactions, the mere presence of diversity in the "colours and spices" on the campus helped to precipitate a sense of belonging for three participants; there was value in the multitude of beliefs and background, and diversity was perceived as a learning experience.

The campus diversity also offered the potential for forming social connections with other immigrant or international students, or students of a shared linguistic or cultural background. The majority of the participants in this study (9 out of 12) shared that they felt most comfortable forming these relationships, at least initially, because they felt understood due to their shared experiences, able to speak more freely, and that they more often shared values and beliefs. Additionally, these participants revealed that these relationships were strongly connected to their sense of belonging in the campus. More specifically, three students commented that interacting with other individuals of the same background (ethnic or linguistic) had contributed to developing their confidence and sense of comfort within Canada that had then allowed them to network with others, and expand their connections. Similarly, Kanno and Varghese (2010) found that students initially built social capital through forming relationships with the same ethnic and cultural group.

Perhaps related to the fact that informants had only been in Canada for an average of two years, few reported that they were close with 'Canadian' (native-born) students within the university. Four participants in particular shared that these relationships were harder to forge, explaining that this was because of difference in values, in cultural and communication practices, a lack of confidence with the language, and experiences with discrimination. While two participants felt that forming relationships with Canadian students would be helpful in developing one's sense of belonging, five participants felt a sense of comfort and belonging within the university context without such connections. No participant reported that friendships with Canadian students or community members had helped to develop their sense of belonging.

Finally, in terms of extracurricular involvement, whether or not informants had participated in extracurricular activities on the university campus, they unilaterally perceived that such activities would add value to the university experience, and contribute to one's sense of belonging. Participants who were involved in these activities (4 out of 12) did so in order to 'get more' out of the university experience, to increase their social network, and to provide another avenue for learning and personal growth. While these four participants who participated in extracurricular activities did not cite these as a primary factor in developing a sense of belonging within the campus, their increased social networks and familiarity with more students played a role in this comfort and belonging. Additionally, research suggests that participation in extracurricular activities contributes to the development of a sense of belonging within postsecondary studies (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tieu & Pancer, 2009).

When asked about their student group involvement, half of the participants understood this to mean study groups, and responded according; when the meaning of this term was clarified, they disclosed that they had not heard of any student groups on campus, but that they would be interested in participating in one, if their time allowed. The lack of involvement of 8 participants in these opportunities resulted from either a lack of information or insufficient time to participate. This relates to participants' challenges with the 'university system', and understanding how and where to access information about campus processes and services. While over thirty student groups are available at CPU, including groups formed by and for immigrant and international students, if information is not readily available to students, the potential benefits are lost.

These findings highlight the significance of the interplay between students and the campus environment, suggesting developing a sense of belonging isn't only the responsibility of the student; the university plays an important role in creating the conditions to cultivate this comfort. This includes the support and information available during students' initial transition, the accessibility of support staff, the classroom environment and teaching practices, the availability of meaningful extracurricular activities, and the campus environment towards diversity.

Contributions of this Study

This research helps supplement current research, and develop a gap in existing literature in several ways. Extensive literature in this field addresses the topic of postsecondary experiences, persistence, success, and sense of belonging from a qualitative perspective. The use of qualitative research techniques and a phenomenological methodology complements existing research by collecting rich descriptions of students' subjective perspectives of their own experiences; furthermore, research findings have been presented using participants' own words, thus preserving these subjective meanings for the reader.

Additionally, research on the experiences of minority students and non-native English speaking students primarily draws from an American (USA) context. This study provides a unique perspective in that it addresses the experiences of a multicultural participant demographic within the context of a multicultural, Canadian postsecondary campus.

Considerations and Limitations

When reviewing this study, several limitations should be acknowledged.

This study included twelve research participants, studying at one institution. The composition of these participants was not representative of the demographics of the institution as a whole, which limits the generalizability of the research findings to other contexts. However, as McMillan (2008) states, "generalizability is often weak in qualitative studies because the purpose of the research is to increase an understanding of the phenomenon, not to represent a larger population" (p. 298). However, transferability (translatability) of these themes is certainly still possible, but the frequency with which these themes would present themselves in other populations is unknown.

Furthermore, the way in which the participant sample was selected is another limitation of this research. Participants volunteered to participate in this study, and therefore may have volunteered with specific agendas in mind, such as sharing particularly positive or negative experiences within the postsecondary context. Additionally, snowball sampling techniques were inadvertently used, as two students passed information about my research project to the friends (one each), who then participated in this study; this may exacerbate the aforementioned challenge. Again, this suggests that their experiences are not representative of other students' experiences in this same context.

Additionally, participants were provided with a $30 gift card to the campus bookstore, in appreciation of the time they spent on the interview and member check process. Given that several students indicated financial need, this financial incentive to participate may also be seen as a limitation of this study. However, this financial incentive compensated participants roughly at minimum wage; additionally, one participant refused this 'thank you' following the interview, stating that she appreciated the opportunity to share her experience. However, this financial incentive may be seen as a limitation within this study.

This research study also exclusively relied on one method of data collection, which McMillan (2008) suggests can be seen as a limitation. However, member checks were used to enhance the credibility of this research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data can also be seen as a limitation in research. However, given that the methodology employed in this study was phenomenology, which focuses on understanding the lived experiences of research participants from their own perceptions and perspectives, this reliance on self-reported data is not a limitation of this research project (Moustakas, 1994).

Finally, the time that this research was conducted is also a consideration in this research project. Because of researcher and project schedule, interviews were conducted during October and November, which for some research participants, was during their firth semester of university studies. Because the first year is viewed as the most critical in the transition to university, and departure rates are highest during the first semester (Tinto 1993), this may be a very valuable period in which to examine participants' experiences. However, because these participants' experiences were limited to only 2-3 months of postsecondary studies, there were fewer experiences for them to share and reflect on within the context of the interview.

Recommendations and Implications

The findings of this research have numerous implications for supporting non-native English speaking immigrant students in the transition to postsecondary, within their university experience, and throughout the process of navigating a sense of belonging on the university campus. These implications relate to both practice and research.

Recommendations for practice. Several implications on administrative and teaching practices within the university emerged from the perceptions and stories shared by the twelve research participants. It is clear that there is a demonstrated need for increased support for newcomer students, particularly in the initial transition period. Two students suggested that an orientation to the university particularly designed to address the needs of immigrant students would be helpful in facilitating their transition. This would provide the institution with an efficient and effective way to address the specific needs of these students, and to share information to better prepare students for: the culture of the Canadian classroom, teaching styles of university professors, and appropriate interaction between the professors and students, as well as among students. This would also provide explicit support and information to help address the systemic barriers perceived by students, such as negotiating credential recognition and credit transfer, academic planning, and registration procedures.The need for a specialized orientation also emerges in relevant research (Attinasi, 1989; Elkins et al., 2000; Human Resources, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Therefore, one recommendation for practice within the postsecondary context is providing early support, such as in the form of a specialized orientation, to support students in navigating the "system" of the university.

Additionally, a newcomer orientation could provide students with a venue and opportunity to share their stories and suggestions with *one another*. As Maria suggests, more meaning and mutual support may be generated from second, third, and fourth year students sharing their lived experiences and perspectives within the university context with their first-year peers: "that way [first year students] would understand, and they would have a better idea about things they could expect... it would better prepare them. And they could probably,

or would initially establish some kind of, like, how they would deal with it, and make a plan. And I think it's good to share my experiences too." This suggests a very empowering possibility for participants.

This study also highlights the multi-faceted nature of the perceived needs of this student demographic, which both encompass and extend past the need for language support. Institutions have a responsibility to respond to the needs of immigrant students more holistically, and find a way to support them in developing linguistic knowledge, or capital, as well as social and cultural capital. This recommendation echoes that of Kanno and Varghese (2010) in their study of immigrant and refugee students within post-secondary institutions (PSIs) in the USA. As they suggest, one aspect of facilitating the development of linguistic, social and cultural capital involves shifting the general understanding of their language and culture as "other" to seeing their multilingualism and multi-cultural knowledge as (a form of) linguistic, social, and cultural capital.

While this research suggests a more holistic approach to supporting immigrant students is needed within PSIs, these findings also suggest a deficiency within university policy, programs, and faculty awareness to support the language needs of non-native English speaking students. While participants within this study were required to demonstrate that their language proficiency met university standards in order to receive university acceptance, most participants perceived their language proficiency to be insufficient to meet the demands and pace of their content-area classes. While there are for-credit academic writing courses within this institution specifically targeted to address the needs of NNES, two participants indicated they were reticent to take and pay for such a class, because they felt it would bring their GPA down. Two participants, however, had to take such a class, due to lower language

proficiency at the time of university acceptance. A punitive language support process such as this can be problematic, since it repositions students' identity as 'ESL students' (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Marshall, 2010). Instead, participants addressed a need for non-credit formal language development classes to improve their academic writing skills. In fact, such a program does exist at this particular institution; the program is called English for Specific Purposes, and there are three courses in particular that address academic writing and general academic language skills entitled Foundations for Academic English, English for Academic Writing, and English for Academic Learning. While most participants were unaware of this program, three participants had made use of this support and found it very useful in not only improving their writing skills, but also in developing an awareness to the campus. Therefore, developing and raising awareness to formalized language support classes aligned with the PSI, yet outside the for-credit framework, could offer the targeted support needed to address students' language proficiency development for an academic context, without the pressure of the grade appearing on a transcript.

These research findings also highlight a potential gap in awareness and training among faculty regarding how to effectively support non-native English speaking immigrant students in a content-area university course, a recommendation also suggested by Elkins et al. (2000). Teaching strategies that participants highlighted as being particularly difficult included the pace of content delivery, the approach of content delivery (i.e. PowerPoint and lecture based, vs. interactive and discussion-based), and language used during lectures. While postsecondary programs must maintain academic rigor, faculty training to address pedagogical strategies that support non-native English speakers could encourage persistence

and success amongst students; as Kanno and Varghese (2010) state, this includes spreading the understanding among university faculty that "every teacher is a language teacher" (324.)

Preventing and addressing discrimination on the university campus, both inside and outside of classroom, emerged as another recommendation for practice within the university classroom. Research suggests that experiences of discrimination within postsecondary education can be very detrimental to students' success, persistence, and sense of belonging within the campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007); this can be addressed through classes and/or workshops to raise racial and cultural awareness, and to address the topic of discrimination among all students.

Finally, research findings also suggested that NNES immigrant students may experience challenges with forming connections with other students on the campus, and that a general lack of awareness of campus services to support these social experiences, such as social events on campus and student groups, may contribute to this challenge. In accordance with participant suggestions and existing research, peer mentorship programs among immigrant students (Hurtado et al., 1996; Kim, 2009), ethnic-specific student groups to help establish initial communities (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Johnson et al., 2007), and semi-structured opportunities for connection among diverse peer groups (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Tieu, 2009) would to help contribute to a sense of belonging among immigrant students, and foster inclusion within the greater Canadian community.

This study's findings underscore the need to understand this population's diverse perspectives of their university relationships and experiences in order to create an inclusive

campus environment that fosters the development of a sense of belonging for all students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Maestas et al. 2007).

Recommendations for research. While extensive research has been directed towards the transitional experiences of students into higher education, this research addresses a gap in existing literature in that it specifically examines the lived experiences of non-native English speaking immigrant students during this process. Given the growth in this demographic within the Canadian community and the composition of the newcomer population entering Canada, further examination of the experiences of immigrant students within PSIs is needed. More specifically, future research can examine these experiences more deeply across defined immigrant populations such as: generation 1.5 immigrants (who immigrated as children, and attended part of their K-12 schooling in Canada), internationally educated immigrants with PSE in their home country, immigrants with dependants, or recent immigrants, who immigrated to Canada within a particular time frame.

Additionally, a longitudinal study of the PSE experiences of immigrant students would also supplement both this study and existing literature with a temporal understanding of students' perceptions of their challenges and of the value of their experiences during their university education. For example, during a member check, which occurred approximately five weeks following the original interview, a participant reflected the following regarding the process of reading through the interview transcript from earlier in the semester: "It was an interesting experience to meet with myself earlier [in] the semester while reading it, to realize how I've changed and overcome this problems." Gaining a clearer understanding of these changes would be facilitated through the use of a longitudinal study.

This study raised some issues about students' perceptions of the need among faculty for increased awareness of the needs of non-native English speakers in their classes, and strategies that could be employed to support these students. Further research could examine faculty perspectives on working with non-native English speakers, and examine their perceptions of the needs of these students. This could illuminate the disparity between students' needs and faculty understandings of these needs more clearly, so that this gap could more effectively be bridged.

Finally, with growing diversity within the Canadian demographic, and on the Canadian campus, further research is needed within a Canadian context in particular to determine how institutions can better support immigrant students, and foster their inclusion both within PSIs, as well as in the greater Canadian community.

My own practice. Finally, the process of conducting this research gave me the opportunity to reflect on both my own experiences, the literature I reviewed, and the lived experiences participants shared in this process, in order to consider what I will take to my own practice as a student, a researcher, a teacher, and an administrator.

The process of conducting phenomenological research was valuable in terms of the deeper listening practice it offered and the focus on bracketing my own experiences; this provided a valuable lesson in how our own experiences and perceptions can colour the way we might interpret the story and experience of another individual. As Creswell (2007) states, although it is difficult to completely bracket our experiences, an increased awareness to the way my experiences might affect the way I interpret the world around me, and an effort

applied to bracketing these expectations and presuppositions may give me the opportunity to hear and understand the world around me in a clearer way.

Additionally, this experience led me to gain a better understanding of teaching practices and general classroom practices that these non-native English speakers had found. While I try to gain an understanding of students' needs and expectations within each class, I haven't conducted such a thorough investigation into students' needs and perceptions as in this research opportunity. Furthermore, three participants eagerly spoke about wanting to share their stories with one another, and hear other students' experiences within the postsecondary context. Creating the opportunity for this dialogue among students would be valuable in classroom practices for all students, and is a learning and collaboration exercise that I hope to integrate into my own teaching practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Letter to The Global Welcome Center Coordinator, The English for Specific Purposes Coordinator, and Introduction to Academic Writing Instructor

To Miranda Santolini, Global Welcome Center Coordinator:
To Terena Caryk, English for Specific Purposes Coordinator:
To Joanne Struch, Introduction to Academic Writing Instructor:

My name is Kaleigh Quinn, and I am currently enrolled at the University of Manitoba in the Master of Education program. As a course requirement, and as a pilot project for my thesis, I am conducting research on the following topic: 'The transition into a Canadian University for non-native English speaking immigrant students.'

For this study, I hope to interview 10-12 newcomers (immigrants or refugees) who speak English as a second or additional language, and who are currently attending university. In order to recruit these participants, I would like to ask your permission to post the attached poster in a visible location for your students to see.

I can assure you that I will follow all necessary precautions to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the information that students share with me about their experiences. I am also attaching a copy of the questions that I will be asking participants so that you have a clearer understanding of my objectives in this process.

If you would be amenable to posting this document in a public space for your students to see, I would greatly appreciate it. Please contact me at kaleighquinn@gmail.com, or call me at (204) 294-1502 to let me know your thoughts or concerns. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kaleigh Quinn

Appendix B.

I, Kaleigh Quinn, a Masters of Education student at the University of Manitoba, am engaging in research that will examine newcomers' experiences during their first-year within a Canadian postsecondary institution. Specifically, I am interested in students' experiences and perceptions relating to the transition and adjustment to the first year of their studies, and the factors that affect this process.

I am looking for volunteers who are:

1. A first year student (having postsecondary experience in home country is acceptable)
2. Non-native English speakers
3. An immigrant or refugee

I am completing this as a requirement for my graduate thesis.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Volunteers who are interested in participating must be willing to speak about their experiences as a newcomer within the educational institution, and able to meet twice. The first interview would take between 1 ½ - 2 hours. The second meeting would be 15-60 minutes during which we would review the transcript of the interview to make sure the data is accurate. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time by simply telling me that they wish to do so.

If you may be willing to participate, please contact me by email at kaleighquinn@gmail.com or by telephone at (204) 294-1502. At that point, we will set up a mutually convenient place and time to meet. Thank you so much.

Kaleigh Quinn	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com	Kaleigh Quinn kaleighquinn@gmail.com

Appendix C.

Research Project Title: Factors Moderating the Transition to University for Visible-Minority Students: Finding a Sense of Belonging on the Canadian Campus

Researcher: Kaleigh Quinn, Dr. Orest Cap (supervising professor)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this study is to document immigrant university students' experiences and perceptions of their transition and sense of belonging within a Canadian postsecondary campus, and to examine that factors that affect these experiences. This study is being conducted by Kaleigh Quinn, a Masters of Education student at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. This is a thesis project, and the supervising professor is Dr. Orest Cap. If you have questions, please contact Dr. Cap at ocap@cc.umanitoba.ca or Kaleigh Quinn at kaleighquinn@gmail.com.

You were selected to participate in this study due to: your willingness to participate, your status as a non-native English speaking immigrant or refugee university student.

You are asked to consent to one 90-120 minute interview. The time and location of the interview will be determined by mutual convenience. I will audio-record the interview, and then transcribe it verbatim immediately following the interview. The interview will

explore your experiences adjusting to university life in Canada. I will ask you about your sense of belonging on this campus, and what factors you think have affected this experience. A copy of the interview will be returned to you so that you can check the accuracy of my representation of what you said, which should take approximately 30 minutes more of your time. The audiotapes will then be destroyed. There are no risks involved in this study. Benefits include the opportunity to receive feedback about the study results, including a greater understanding of one's experiences within the postsecondary environment.

I am conducting this research project for my Master's thesis. I will be presenting the completed research paper and sharing the results with immigrant and refugee support services within The University of Winnipeg and The University of Manitoba. I may be using some direct quotations transcribed from our interview. I will make all efforts to remove any specific, identifying information to ensure that your identity will be kept confidential.

Please understand that you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation in this study at any time without prejudice or consequence. Should you withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be destroyed. Please be assured that your confidentiality will be maintained at all times. At no time will your name or any closely identifying information be included in any documents generated from this study. You may choose a pseudonym for yourself if you like. All interview information received from you will be stored digitally by pseudonym on a computer to which only the research involved in this study will have access. The informed consent sheet containing your name will not be kept with the interview data, and will be stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's office, which is in her residence where only she has access to it, avoiding the possibility of connecting your name to any information you have given. In assisting me in the analysis of

the interviews, my thesis advisor will have access to the transcripts (without identifiers) but not to the audiotapes. Transcripts will be destroyed after 7 years via shredding. You have the opportunity to request a copy of the summary of the study's result.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board and the Senate Committee on Ethics in Human Research and Scholarship. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact Kaleigh Quinn at (204) 294-1502, or by email at kaleighquinn@gmail.com. You may also contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. If you are interested in participating in this study, please read the following statement and sign and date it.

I _____ agree to participate in this study. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time by simply telling the researcher. I have read and understood the above description of the study. I understand that my privacy will be safeguarded as explained above. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns, I may contact the researcher and/or the Human Ethics Secretariat Board at the numbers given above.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

A copy of this consent for has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

_____   _____

Research and/or Delegate's Signature   Date

I would like to receive a summary report of the findings: _____ _____
                                                                   Yes   No

Please mail a summary report of the findings to:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D.

The interview questions may not be asked in the same order depending on the flow of each participant's responses, and where their response leads. Some participants may respond openly and freely with detailed replies, while others may need prompts; these will be given at my discretion.

1. Tell me about your background.
   (This is designed to be very open, but I will prompt the participant with the following topics if they don't arise organically: ethnic, educational, and employment).

2. Tell me about your experiences in Canada/Winnipeg since you have arrived here.

3. Tell me about the people in your life that you interact with regularly.

The following questions address my first overarching research question: In what ways do foreign-born, visible minority students describe their first year experiences within a Canadian campus?

1. What experiences and decisions led you to enrolling in first year of university here?

2. Since you began university 6 months ago, describe your experiences in the academic and social systems of the university.

3. Since you began university 6 months ago, describe your supports, including family, friends, and university staff.

The following questions address my second overarching research question: What are the factors that affect the transition and adjustment of the students, both positively and negatively?

1. What has contributed most positively to your experiences since you began studying at this university?

2. What has detracted from your experiences since you began studying at this university? What elements of this experience have been negative?

The following questions address my third overarching research question: What are students'

perceptions of their sense of belonging on the university campus, and what are the factors

that contribute to the development of a sense of belonging within these students on the

university campus?

1. Describe you sense of belonging on this campus; do you currently feel as though you belong here? Did you feel as though you belonged when you began university? How has this changed? What factors have affected this feeling? If it hasn't changed, what factors do you think you could change this feeling? Do you think this is important, or contributes to your success in the institution?

2. What advice would you give a new student at this institution in a similar situation to you on how to adjust quickly to the first year of university? What advice would you give to an immigrant studying here for their first year? What would you tell a new student about on how to establish a sense of belonging during their first year of studies?

3. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Appendix E.

Alberto

Textural Description. Alberto described his initial transition to life in Canada as very positive. He had positive expectations about Canada before arriving, informed by North American acquaintances and movies, and these expectations were confirmed upon arrival. He began language classes and volunteering, and later, he began working part-time. He described feeling stress initially in learning the language, and shame at making simple mistakes in public, however, he shared that he worked hard to learn from his mistakes. He now describes that he sees a second language as an asset.

Having left Peru part-way through his postsecondary studies, he was eager to begin again in Canada. Having already taken EAL classes on one of the university campuses in his city, he applied to this institution for his studies and was accepted. He initially described feeling alone on campus, and eager to find ways to fit in. He experienced more success with building social connections in smaller classes, such as science labs, as well as at the gym. He described that he was interested in his classes, and that he has experienced "ups and downs" in his grades, but that he views his mistakes as valuable learning opportunities. He has accessed support from tutors and regularly asks his professors questions. Although he didn't describe that he feels a strong sense of belonging on the campus, he shared that he feels comfortable.

Structural Description: Alberto shared that he is always open to trying new things, and is comfortable taking risks and making mistakes; these characteristics affected his transition to Canada and language learning experiences positively. He shared that his job and

volunteer experience helped him the most with building his network and gaining confidence with the language. Within university, his previous university experiences in Peru resulted in him expecting similarities in the university systems; however, many aspects of the system, such as planning one's program of studies, was quite different, so his previous postsecondary experiences complicated this process. In his academic experiences, he felt that going to class and asking questions affected him post positively. Of the barriers he encountered, he expressed his belief that "many people experience these challenges, not just me"; this belief served him well in his transition to university.

Amara

Textural Descriptions. After immigrating with her brother from Ethiopia, Amara began high school in Canada. Upon finishing grade 12, although she reflected that she wasn't ready to begin university, she applied because she wanted to fit in with her peers. Initially, she experienced challenges with her language proficiency, which she described as insufficient for an academic context, and with the system of the university; unlike the supportive high school environment, she felt lost. In her first term, she had little involvement in university events, other than attending her classes, and hadn't met many people. She experienced challenges with financing university, and worked at least two part-time jobs to both pay for her studies and rent, and support her family at home. Gradually she shared that she experienced an increased interest in becoming involved, and began joining student groups, participating in campus events, and volunteering. These positive social experiences encouraged her sense of belonging on the campus. Additionally, Amara appreciated the presence of such diversity on the university campus, and perceived the campus environment to be supportive and affirming.

Structural Descriptions. Amara shared that her high school experiences affected her postsecondary experiences, both positively and negatively. High school helped to develop her language proficiency, and her understanding of Canadian culture, which supported her in entering university. Furthermore, her high school counsellor supported her in the process of applying and register for university. However, upon entering university, she felt lost and unsupported without the safety net of resources that were available to her in high school. Eventually, however, she became familiar with supports available on the campus and accessed the services as needed. She valued her academic experienced because the content was personally relevant, and her professors were supportive, engaging, and encouraged collaboration and interaction in their classes. Amara developed friendships, primarily with other newcomers, with whom she felt more accepted and understood. Her involvement on campus, her positive experiences in class, and the relationships she developed affected her sense of belonging on the university campus.

Ashan

Textural Description. When Ashan first immigrated to Canada, he described that he felt excited and eager for this new experience. However, he experienced challenges with the language in daily encounters and in finding work; he wasn't able to secure work in his previous field of training because of his lower language proficiency and his lack of Canadian work experience. Having immigrated primarily to study in university, he was eager to begin his studies, but needed to work first and take language classes in order to meet the language proficiency requirements to attend university. This left him feeling behind, and with a desire to return to his home country. When he was able to begin university, he experienced a lot of challenge in his initial transition because his acceptance was confirmed quite late. He was

unsure of the supports that were typically available to students, and because he had limited time, was not able to secure help before his classes began. Although he met the language proficiency requirements, Ashan described that he experienced challenges in his classes because of both the language and the new content. He formed a social network through his connections to the Sri Lankan community as his university, and this helped to form a sense of belonging.

Structural Descriptions. Before immigrating to Canada, Ashan had been exposed to North American culture through Hollywood movies; he shared this helped to prepare him for what to expect in Canada, and eased his transition to Canada. Although his mother initially immigrated with him, she returned to Sri Lanka after several months because of her challenges with the language and in finding work. This affected Ashan's comfort in this new country. Given that he was also experiencing challenges with the language, he too wanted to leave; instead, he took language classes which supported the development of his language proficiency. In university, his small classes and individualized support from the professor helped him to adjust to his classes. Although he struggled with learning the new language and culture, he used creative study strategies such as recording his lectures, and then listened repeatedly to these recordings after his classes to take notes. Ashan shared that the biggest factor both contributing positively and negatively to his transition to university was his lack of time. Because of his need to finance his own education, Ashan was working full-time; however, he was also studying full-time to allay his feelings of being behind. Both reduced his free time substantially, which left him with minimal time available to participate in social activities. Although this was challenging, Ashan also shared that this minimal free time was

helpful because it reduced his opportunity to think about his family and friends at home. He felt that this avoidance supported his adjustment.

Dejan

Textural Description. Having immigrated initially to the United States, Dejan shared that this supported his family's relatively quick adjustment to Canada. However, his wife, children, and himself experienced some challenges settling into life in a rural community. Realizing that it was problematic to find work, Dejan decided to return to university in Canada. He researched the university and program extensively, and spent the summer preparing for his classes by studying math. This helped to ensure he was more prepared for his classes. Beginning university, Dejan experienced difficulty with the volume and pace of the school work, particularly in his second language. He found his English skills were not sufficient for an academic context. However, he worked diligently and accessed support whenever needed from his professor and tutors. He described his classes as useful and rewarding, benefiting both his personal and professional life. He shared that he had no time to devote to social activities because of his familial responsibilities; his was devoted to his academics. Although he found it very challenging to have such limited time to spend with his children, he was motivated to become qualified to the level of his supervisor in his previous workplace, and to secure a similar position in Canada. Dejan didn't share that he experienced a sense of belonging, but he shared that he felt comfortable.

Structural Description. Dejan shared that his previous immigration experiences, and changes in his home country prepared him for the unexpected, and to transition smoothly into life in Canada. He was anxious about reentering university after such a long period, and as a

result, worked very hard to prepare himself to understand both the university system and his academic course content. He described his mistakes as learning opportunities, and understood that he needed to adjust his academic expectations for himself given his responsibilities outside of class. The positive feedback he received from his professors was motivating, and he shared that he felt pride at his successes, especially given his challenges, which was motivating. Although Dejan was interested in becoming more socially involved at the university, his limited time due to family obligations and a long commute impeded this opportunity.

Gabrielle

　　Textural description. When Gabrielle initially immigrated to Canada, it was the middle of winter. Although she had been anticipating the move, she described that she initially experienced the transition as if she were watching a movie; it was surreal, and she wanted to return home. Gabrielle attended the final year of high school in Canada, where she made several friends. She found success and enjoyment in this experience, and established friendships with other immigrants and Spanish speakers, with whom she felt most comfortable. In her first week of university, this positivity continued; she enjoyed the freedom that came with this change. However, after a week of classes, she became overwhelmed. Although she found her professors supportive, she struggled in her classes, and experienced more stress and lower achievement than she anticipated and expected of herself. She described her lack of confidence in comparison to her peers in the class. However, she established friendships with other Latino students which help to establish her comfort and build her community. She did not feel a sense of belonging within the institution, but her comfort was growing.

Structural description. In her initial transition to life in Canada, and to university, Gabrielle shared that support from her father, and her father's Canadian wife was essential. Additionally, she shared that her high school experienced really facilitated her transition to university, and provided her with extensive information about the educational system and the culture of the Canadian classroom. Her challenges with the language affected both her academic and her social experiences; she described that this decreased her confidence, and made her feel shy, making it difficult to make new friends. In university, her challenges with the pace of her classes, the challenge of the language and content, and her lack of interest in the subject material she was studying resulted in her difficulties in classes, and feeling overwhelmed and lost. To support herself through this, Gabrielle shared that she has accessed support from tutors and from her professors, and has reduced her expectations for herself. While she is not satisfied with her academic achievement, she shared that she is satisfied with her progress.

Jay

Textural Descriptions. Prominent in Jay's narrative were his feelings of resentment that he was "forced" to immigrate to Canada by his parents. Although he experienced success with getting his nursing credentials recognized, he didn't want to work permanently in Canada as a nurse; instead, he wanted to pursue his goal of becoming a doctor within Canada. He experienced less success with having his nursing degree recognized by the university, and therefore re-enrolled into a Bachelor of Science program. This exacerbated his feeling of being behind, particularly given that he found himself in first year courses with high school students. While he felt indignant at these setbacks, he made a small group of friends, and described his experiences helping them with their studies with some degree of

pride. He also became involved in a number of extracurricular activities, and found value in the networking and volunteering experiences these offered.

Structural Descriptions: The strongest element that impacted Jay's experiences was his previous postsecondary education. This had provided him with strong study skills and an understanding of university processes, which helped him in his current courses. It also created some dissonance between what he had expected in university in Canada and what he actually encountered, particularly relating to how other students behaved and interacted during classes. Jay was also extremely determined to reach his goal of pursuing medical school and becoming a doctor, and this motivation to reach his goal seemed to create a strong tolerance towards the many challenges and setback encountered along the way.

Maria

Textural Description. Maria described that attending university was an "amazing experience" and that she was grateful for this opportunity. Maria described that she enjoyed her courses, and that they were relevant and motivating. She described positive experiences and connections with her professors, who she found motivating and supportive. Although she described a number of positive academic experiences at university, she experienced numerous challenges particularly relating to the social context of the campus. Maria described that she made connections with other immigrants and international students on the university campus. She shared she preferred these connections because of the shared experiences and understandings she had with these groups of students. However, in general she had challenges forming close relationships with other students. In her classes, when group work was included, she described that she experienced and observed discrimination

against non-native English speakers, particularly from native-born Canadian students. She experienced feeling like her opinions weren't valued, and that she was ignored. Despite these challenges, she described that she felt like a "university student", and therefore felt connected to the university.

Structural Description: Maria chose to enter university to "make something meaningful" of her life. University completion was seen as her "pass" in life, which motivated her to work hard, and move past the challenges she encountered. Maria described that her previous postsecondary experience in the Philippines was very different than in Canada, particularly with respect to the culture of the classroom. Because Maria was shy and accustomed to classroom practice in the Philippines, she was concerned that she would be perceived as disinterested or unprepared. She felt accessing more support and joining a student group would really affect ones university experiences, but she hadn't taken that step yet herself.

Maya

Textural Description. Immediately after immigrating to Canada, Maya began high school. Although initially she was discouraged by having to take an extra year of high school studies, she shared that this was a valuable opportunity for her to learn the culture, language, system, and content. She also developed friendships, primarily with international students, although as her studies continued she formed friendships with native-born Canadians as well. She experienced support from her teachers and counsellors within her high school, and saw her language and content-proficiency increase. With the support of her counsellor, she applied to university. She attended a tour and an information session to learn more about the

institution, although she preferred learning on her own. She enrolled in three courses, which she thought would be manageable given that she was also working off campus and later, on campus. She experienced success in her academic and her social connections, and overall, described the university as a very friendly, open, and accepting environment.

Structural Description. Maya described that her initial transition to life in Canada was supported by her mother, her Canadian step-father, and her extended family in Venezuela, as well her generally positive attitude towards new experiences. Her high school experience supported the development of necessary skills and understandings to be successful in university, and although begrudging this requirement initially, shared that this was very valuable in her later university success. Her university classes were challenging, and required a lot of time and energy to be successful; Maya employed many study strategies and resources, including online notes, video lectures, her textbook, rewriting notes, and asking questions. Because she experienced challenges studying and completing assignments in her second language, she allotted herself extra time to complete all academic tasks. In her social experiences, Maya shared that she had several friends upon entering university, and that she formed new connections with students through her student group and general campus activities.

Mohisha

Textural description. Mohisha's decision to immigrate officially to Canada was made very quickly on a family trip. She immigrated with her brother, and began researching universities intently when she arrived, visiting the institutions daily and spending time online. Although she had challenges within the university system initially, stating the support of a

current university student would have been helpful, she experienced success very quickly in her academics. She found her professors were very supporting and secured positions as a TA, and later, as a research assistant. The research opportunity was extremely positive for her, and her relationship with her research supervisor was an important source of academic and emotional support. However, within her classes, Mohisha stated that she experienced discrimination regularly during her classes, and that she found other students ignored her in group work until they realized that she was excelling in her classes. Despite these negative experiences of discrimination, Mohisha described her university experiences very positively, and shared the support she received both from individuals within the university system and friends and family back home help to develop her comfort within the university. She shared she felt a sense of belonging because of her positive experiences on the university campus.

Structural Description. Mohisha's decision to immigrate was affected by her impression of the Canadian universities she visited, the research opportunities available to undergraduates, and the calibre of teaching. She experienced success in her academics and reflected that her postsecondary experiences in India help to foster a sense of motivation and dedication to her studies, and helped to develop strong study habits. Although she found it difficult in the initial stages of her immigration to Canada, she shared that she coped by keeping busy with her academics and focussing on her research goals. Although her academic experiences were very positive, she experienced challenges with social encounters, particularly with Canadian-born students, due to experiences with discrimination, a lack of shared values, and her busy schedule. Overall, she attributes her positive experiences in university to her confidence, faith in herself, and dedication to her goals.

Natalia

  Textural Descriptions. Natalia described experiencing a lot of change, beginning at a young age. She immigrated to Canada as an 11 year old, and moved houses and schools several times; she resisted these changes, but ultimately had little choice due to her mother's work. While Natalia initially described she experienced a lot of challenges with learning English in grade school, she now supports her mother with learning English, and helps her sister to practice and retain her Spanish; in some ways, she serves as the cultural bridge within her nuclear family. Although she was the first in her family to attend university, and felt pride in this accomplishment, her feelings of being overwhelmed, lost, and afraid seemed to dominate her emotions. Friendships with other Latinos helped to create a sense of home despite these strong feelings. Natalia described that she didn't feel a sense of belonging within her PSI, and wasn't sure it was important for her to feel this due to her independent nature.

  Structural descriptions. Throughout her immigration to life in Canada and her transition into university, Natalia described the support of her family as playing an important role in this process; this included her immediate family, and her extended family living both in Canada and at home. The pride her family felt in her success at being the first member to attend university seemed to motivate and refocus her, despite the challenges she encountered. Her perceptions that the university was impersonal and unsupportive resulted in and from challenges she was experiencing with the system and content of her classes. Although she spoke with determination and hope for her future, the vastness of the university had resulted in a bleak understanding of her situation at the time of the interview.

Rivka

Textural Description. Rivka had two experiences with immigration; she immigrated to Israel as a young child, and to Canada in high school. During both occasions, she recalled the challenges with learning a new language and feeling like an outsider. When she moved to Canada, this was exacerbated, because she was older, and living in a small town. She studied 2 years of high school in t town, and as time progressed, she became increasingly involved in extracurricular activities. She described that her language proficiency increased and she made friends; however, her feeling of being an outsider remained. She moved to the closest city for university to take an International Development Program. Within this context, she met many international students and immigrants, and her experience of being an 'outsider' receded. However, with all the freedom of university, she experienced difficulty concentrating. Although she enjoyed her classes, she experienced challenges with her language skills for an academic context: particularly writing and presenting. Her social experiences were positive, and she experienced enjoyment from participating in numerous extracurricular activities. One student group provided Rivka the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal cultural and issues in Canada; she also observed discrimination towards Aboriginal students and people on campus. She also feared discrimination for herself from other students, being from Israel, and chose not to share this, particularly with Muslim students, to avoid potential conflict. Finally, she described that she experienced a sense of belonging and comfort on the campus.

Structural Description: Rivka shared that the support of one Canadian friend in high school strongly affected her comfort in her new home, and her language skills and confidence. Her involvement in extracurricular activities also played an important role in this comfort, although she shared that her accent was a constant reminder to herself and others

that she was 'an outsider'. Support from an advisor encouraged her to register for university, and her interest in her program grew due to its great reputation, the quality of the professors, their teaching style, the relevant topics covered, and the students in her classes. Her academic experience was also enhanced by the supportive environment of the small college within the university with which her faculty was associated. This played an important role in developing her network, getting to know professors, and accessing support. The presence of diversity on the campus increased her comfort, and she shared that her involvement, extensive network, and the presence of diversity helped to develop her sense of belonging within the campus community.

Robel

Textural Description: Robel described numerous challenges relating to his process of both applying to university, and his experiences within the university. The application process was longer than expected, and he experienced problems with miscommunication and confusion during the applications stages. Finally, after being accepted, he was granted transfer credit and put into the second year of a five-year program, with a cohort of students. He experienced challenges communicating and being 'heard' in this context, both with his peers and instructors. He described his academic experiences as difficult, and experienced challenges with the pace of his classes, his lack of knowledge from the first year of classes, difficulties focusing after being out of school for numerous years, and challenges with language, particularly writing, in an academic context. Robel explained that he didn't feel a sense of belonging to the institution, and blamed himself for this; he was hopeful with time that would develop.

Structural Description: Robel described that he had had challenges with Canadian communication practices in his workplace, and this concern extended into the university context. Uncertainty with communication practices led to hesitancy to speak to professors and other students in the class, and to make his needs known. Due to direct, teacher-led teaching approaches, Robel didn't have a chance to interact with peers in his class, which he found made it difficult to start relationships with his classmates. Having entered this cohort of students in their second year, he felt disadvantages both academically, needing to catch up on first year content, and socially, missing out on the connections that were formed amongst students in their first year. Robel didn't have a lot of information about supports that were available at the university, or opportunities for social experiences such as campus events and student groups; this lack of information resulted in further feelings of isolation. He also described that he felt like people were too busy to ask them for help. These feelings and experiences prevented the forming of a sense of comfort and belonging within the university campus.

Appendix F.

    Alberto. Born in a rural town in Peru, Alberto grew up in a close, supportive family, the eldest of three children. After graduating from high school, he moved to the capital to begin university, studying biochemistry and pharmacy. In addition to his studies, Alberto worked as a lifeguard at a local beach, where he met many North Americans, and formed connections with and understandings about his northern neighbours.

    Shortly after he began his university studies, Alberto, his two younger sisters, and his parents made a family decision to apply to Canada for immigration. Two years later, they received their acceptance, and they immigrated to Canada in January 2009: "we were really excited that we [were] going to another country".

    Upon arrival in their new home, Alberto immediately began language classes in an adult language training program, and also began a thorough investigation of the culture of his new home, including "how people live, what they normally do… how they celebrate, what kind of meals you eat normally"; he became an observer and gradual participant in his new home. He began volunteering to gain Canadian experience and references, and secured a job shortly thereafter. With the support of his family, 18 months after immigrating to Canada he began his postsecondary studies. He continues to feel very positively about this transition and his new home: "I feel like I'm still in the honeymoon after three years." At the time of our interview, he was beginning the second year of his Bachelor of Science.

    Amara. Born in Ethiopia, Amara and her family were forced to flee to a neighbouring country due to political unrest and concerns with safety in their hometown in her late childhood. After spending several years living there as a refugee with intermittent

access to education, Amara, her brother, and her cousin were sponsored by their uncle to immigrate to Canada.

When she arrived in her new home, she and her brother began high school, where she found she struggled with the language. Although she describes that she "wasn't ready for university", partially due to English proficiency that, "for academic purposes, was too low", she was 18 and "wanted to fit in with the mainstream". Registering for university in 2010 was "a dream come true" for Amara as she "never thought [she] would go to university". Amara selected her university based on the "unique opportunities for visible minorities" that it offered, and the availability of a developmental studies program. This program interested her personally because she was "officially from a developing country", and because she felt at home with students who "really want to be a positive influence in their society". At the time of our interview, Amara was beginning her third year of university; she still struggles with balancing the academic and linguistic demands of university with her work schedule, but is continually inspired and motivated to continue her studies.

Ashan. Ashan and his mother immigrated to Canada from Sri Lanka in the spring of 2011. Although he had already completed a diploma in computer hardware engineering and gained work experience in this field in his home country, he and his mother decided to immigrate due to the quality and the cost of postsecondary education in Canada. Unfortunately, Ashan's mother experienced challenges finding relevant employment, so she returned to Sri Lanka in the summer of 2011.

Immediately upon arrival, Ashan began looking for work. Due to problems with language proficiency and a lack of Canadian work experience, he was not able to secure a

position relating to his education and experience; instead, he found a job in a fast food restaurant. In order to meet the English Language Proficiency requirements for a local university, Ashan took several EAL courses to improve his writing skills, and enrolled into university immediately upon receiving confirmation of his eligibility. At the time of our interview, he was in his first year of a computer science program.

Dejan. Dejan was born in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, and grew up in a climate of political unrest. He began his studies in computer science at a local college, but stopped after a war broke out because he needed to support his family. He found a position working in IT for an international development organization, where he was exposed to "the North American mentality". However, for employment and security reasons, Dejan and his wife accepted positions with an American organization, and spent 6 years working in the USA on a work permit. They applied for citizenship shortly after their arrival, but 5 years later, after the birth of their two children, they had not received acceptance; as a result, they decided to apply for immigration to Canada, and three years later, they received their acceptance.

In 2011, Dejan and his family relocated to a rural community in central Canada. Despite their relief to settle somewhere permanently with their family, the transition to living in a conservative, "protectionist" community was difficult, which he described as a community that looked out for locals, or 'insiders' and wasn't particularly warm or welcoming to 'outsiders', or newcomers. Challenges with securing employment, and an understanding of the value of a "Canadian education" led Dejan to apply to postsecondary studies, and commit to a 90 minute drive each way for his classes. Despite the challenges presented by this situation, the support of his wife and his "thirst … for learning" motivate

him to continue pushing forward; as such, at the time of our interview, he was completing his first term of a degree in computer science.

Gabrielle. Born in Colombia, Gabrielle immigrated to Canada with her father and two younger brothers when she was 16 years old. Her father secured a faculty position with a local university, and through the sponsorship of his Canadian wife, was able to immigrate with his family. Although she was excited for the "better opportunities" for education, work, and to improve her English proficiency, upon arrival, Gabrielle was overwhelmed with the realization that she was "stuck" in an unfamiliar place where she didn't want to be. Coming at an earlier age, she felt, might have alleviated some of these challenges, as it provides "the background with native born people here" and facilitates social interaction. However, she worried that her younger brothers will "lose their roots" as a result of immigrating to Canada as young children: "they're going to grow with the Canadian background, but then they're going to lose their Spanish background."

Gabrielle entered eleventh grade when she first arrived, which she describes allowed her to "get to know the city, and how things work, and how people are." After graduating from high school, she decided to begin her postsecondary education at the university where her father worked on faculty. Although she is interested in the content she is learning, social interactions challenge Gabrielle's comfort level in English, and she often seeks other Spanish speakers for support. At the time of our interview, Gabrielle was studying in her first year of an undeclared degree.

Jay. Motivated by the promise of a better future for their two sons, Jay's parents applied for immigration to Canada from the Philippines in 2007. They received their

approval in 2008, and were finally prepared to immigrate in 2009, after Jay had completed his four-year degree in nursing. Although this decision was being made largely for his future, Jay didn't want to join his family; he came only because his parents "forced" him by revoking their offer to fund his way through medical school should he not join them.

Jay hoped to complete the entrance examination and application process for medical school in Canada, but found his degree was not accepted because "it's not Canadian". Realizing he wouldn't be able to enter medical school as he had anticipated was a huge source of regret for him, and the feeling of being 'behind' as a result has not left his thoughts. However, Jay adjusted his plan, and after receiving his credential recognition from the local nurses union, Jay began practising as a nurse. The work was challenging and rewarding, causing him to reconsider his plan to pursue his dream of entering medical school. However, three years after his initial arrival in Canada, he applied to university, and is now working towards completion of his bachelor of science; "now I'm a step closer to my goal of getting into medical school." At the time of our interview, he was working on his first year in a Bachelor of Science program of studies.

Maria. Maria was born in the Philippines, as the second of three daughters. As she finished high school, her father immigrated to Canada as a skilled worker to reunite with his family who had immigrated to Canada 25 years earlier. Maria entered a university in the Philippines in the Faculty of Engineering, and after completing two years of studies, she and her mother and sisters immigrated to Canada to join her father.

Ongoing family conflict presented a challenge to Maria, and although she started university shortly after her arrival in Canada at 19, she stopped 8 months later. She took on

different positions, working various jobs as she struggled with the cultural and emotional adjustment to her new home. However, after four years of working full-time, she described, "I decided I wanted to get a degree, just to make something meaningful with my life." At the time of our interview, Maria was beginning her third year of university at CPU in the Faculty of Business.

Maya. In December, 2010, Maya and her mother immigrated to Canada. Sponsored by her mother's husband, the two women left behind their extended family in Venezuela to start a new life in central Canada. Although Maya was excited about the new educational and employment opportunities that would be available to her, she felt torn by all that she would be leaving in her home town; she shared that "coming here was the best option, but the best option isn't always what you want."

Although she had heard stories of her new home town from her step father, she "really wasn't that informed about the city" when she arrived. The cold winter was a harsh contrast to the balmy weather she had left in her home, and the suburban prairie neighbourhood she moved into was nothing like the "New York-esque" image she had in expected. However, she embraced the change as she entered into grade 11.

Beginning high school was a challenge, and she struggled with learning the language and the culture of her new home: "I was really lost, and the school system is so different here, so I really didn't understand what was going on." However, she found the students at her new school to be very supportive, and they were accustomed to the presence of many international students; gradually she developed a network of friends. By the time she was

finished grade 12, she was very ready to begin university. She enrolled in the fall of 2012, when she began a degree in psychology.

Mohisha. Mohisha was born in India, where she grew up with her parents and her younger brother. After graduating with very strong grades from high school, she began her postsecondary studies at a local university. Due to her aptitude in math, she was advised to enroll into the Faculty of Engineering, which she did. Although her younger brother also planned to pursue postsecondary studies, he wanted to attend a Canadian university, rather than one in India. While he was completing high school, their parents applied to immigrate to Canada to be able to provide him with this opportunity, and they received their permanent residency shortly thereafter. In October 2011, Mohisha, her brother, and their parents arrived in Canada.

Initially, Mohisha had no intention to stay in Canada. The intention was to 'drop off' her brother, and for her parents and herself to return to India, since there were no comparable career opportunities for either parent in Canada. However, based on the calibre of postsecondary education apparent in the universities she visited, and the research opportunities available to undergraduate students, Mohisha decided to remain with her brother in Canada. She enrolled in a small university, and began her studies three months later.

After entering the Faculty of Science, she excelled in her classes, securing herself both a teaching assistant position and a research opportunity. Although she hasn't experienced positive social experiences while on campus, Mohisha shared, "when you come to a different country, all your focus should be towards your studies and towards the greater

goals of your life." At the time of our interview, she was completing her second year of a Bachelor of Science at CPU.

Natalia. At 11 years old, Natalia immigrated to Canada with her mother and baby sister from The Dominican Republic, hoping to begin a "better future". Shortly after their arrival, Natalia began grade 5; having no prior experience learning English, Natalia struggled with this new learning environment. Natalia and her family had to move several times after immigrating to Canada, forcing her to change schools on three occasions.

In 2012, with the support of her family both in Canada, and back home, she began university. As the first person in her family to enter university, both in Canada and at home, she shared that she felt both "pressure and pride" to be able to do so. Her mother in particular, encouraged her to pursue this challenge: "she always wants me to do better than her. And I want a job that makes me like.. Um.. I want to make my mom proud. I want to make me proud." At the time of our interview, Natalia was completing her first year in the Faculty of Arts at CPU.

Rivka. Born in Russia, Rivka and her family immigrated to Israel when she was six. However, realizing they were seeking different opportunities for work and education than what were available to them, they decided to apply to Canada for immigration, and were accepted in 2008. In the summer of that year, Rivka, her parents, and her cat immigrated to a small prairie town, where she started grade 10.

In school, Rivka felt like an "outsider", struggling with learning the language and fitting in with her classmates. However, within a year of her immigration, she had become much more involved in her school by volunteering, joining a sports team, and getting

involved in the leadership of extracurricular group. During grade 12, Rivka decided to apply for university; due to her interest in community service and global issues, her school counsellor suggested she apply to a program focusing on international development at CPU, which Rivka agreed was a great fit. She began her studies in 2010, and at the time of our interview, was in her third year of studies in this program.

Robel. Robel was born and raised in Ethiopia. After graduating from high school, he completed an English Literature degree in 2007; he then secured a position as a teacher in a local private school. In 2008, he moved to Kenya for an employment opportunity, and it was from there that he made a connection with a church-affiliated organization. In 2010, he was sponsored by this organization for immigration to Canada, leaving behind his family in Ethiopia.

Upon arrival in central Canada, Robel experienced some problems finding employment related to his experience and education. He explained, "I tried to apply different places where I could at least find a job that could use my previous experience and skills which I was thinking would be much better … but I had no chance." Instead, he found a manual labour job in a factory. He continued in this position for 2 years before quitting, to enter university.

In 2012, Robel began an integrated education program at CPU, which is designed to provide access to higher education for mature visible minority, newcomer, and aboriginal students with related experience in the field. At the time of our interview, he was in his first year in this integrated program.