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From Riyadh to Portland: The Study Abroad Experiences of Five Saudi Arabian Female Students

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From Riyadh to Portland:
The Study Abroad Experiences of Five Saudi Arabian Female Students

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in TESOL degree at the SIT Graduate Institute,
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Abstract

The number of Saudi Arabian students enrolled in college and university programs in other countries is increasing. This paper reports on a qualitative research project conducted with five female Saudi college students enrolled in a summer program at Portland State University. It examines how notions of culture can explain the source of the challenges that the students faced and how they overcame these challenges. Implications for pre-departure orientation and on-site support are presented and discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This paper reports on a qualitative research project conducted with five female Saudi Arabian college students enrolled in a summer program at Portland State University. The research focused on their adaptation to the educational approaches they encountered in this program, and shows how notions of culture can explain the source of the challenges that the students faced, how they overcame these challenges, and ultimately how cultural orientation can help students succeed in studies abroad.

During the summer of 2010, five female students studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration at Al Yamamah University (AYU) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia participated in business courses offered at Portland State University (PSU) in Portland, Oregon. There were similarities and differences between the instruction and teaching pedagogy at the two institutions. The challenge for the students was to successfully adapt to the new educational context and my task was to become aware of the similarities and differences in the pedagogy as well as the challenges that the students faced. Once aware of the situation, I focused on research to understand how the students overcame the challenges.

I enjoy participating in cultural exchange programs, so when presented with the opportunity to chaperone the study abroad program, I accepted immediately. I decided to use the experience as the basis of this paper as I am interested in intercultural education and figured that I would deepen my understanding of the field by writing this research paper. I did not choose to write this paper solely for personal reasons, but also because research on international education in regards to Saudi Arabia is of increasing importance.

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Because of globalization, the desire to be employable and the King Abdullah Scholarship program, a scholarship program that covers overseas higher education, more and more Saudis are leaving the Kingdom in order to further their studies. The number of Saudi Arabian citizens seeking foreign education makes inquiring about and learning from these students' experiences important.

The audience for this paper is administrators of intercultural programs and educators teaching international students, especially Middle Eastern and Saudi students. Because of the location of the program in Oregon, this paper can be useful for students who are planning to study in the West. My hope is to increase participants', administrators', and educators' awareness of the difficulties of transitioning between educational paradigms. To this end, I also offer suggestions on easing students' transition and aiding administrators and educators in preparing for and accommodating the students. The narratives of the five Saudi students' challenges can be used as critical incidents in intercultural training sessions or curricula in any context.

This paper is organized into six chapters. It begins with this chapter, the introduction, which gives readers a brief overview of the paper. Chapter 2 describes the research project in more detail. It includes background information about the situation, the students, instructors, PSU, myself as the chaperone, and education in Saudi Arabia. It also explains the research question, data gathering techniques and analytical frameworks. Chapter 3 is case descriptions. It details each case of students encountering a similarity or difference in classroom culture. The cases are then analyzed using the two theoretical frameworks in Chapter 4. Findings from the

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analyzing and previous research are also presented in this chapter. Chapter 5 outlines the implications and applications in regards to the research project.

Chapter 2: Description of the Research Project

In this chapter, I give detailed background information on the research project. It begins with an overview of PSU, the Saudi students and their instructors as well as background into my role as chaperone. After offering a brief history of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I discuss the research question and the strategies I used to gather data. I conclude the chapter by explaining the analytical frameworks used to understand the challenges the students faced.

Situation

Al Yamamah University located in Riyadh, is a progressive institution that aspires to be at the forefront of educational innovation in the Kingdom. Classes for males at the private university first began in September of 2004. Two years later in 2006, the women's section opened enrollment. Currently at AYU, 600 female Saudi students are pursuing degrees in Business Administration and Computing & Information Technology. In June 2011, the first group of female students will graduate with Bachelor's degrees in Business Administration from the first all English university in Riyadh.

In order to meet degree requirements, students are required to complete two cooperative education assignments aimed at equipping students with real world employment experiences. The cooperative education assignments are practical, field-based internships at local companies. In an effort to further broaden students' horizons, AYU encourages students to face the challenges of globalization and increase their employability by taking part in an international experience. In this regard, students can participate in one of several organized international summer school, study abroad and/or study-travel programs instead of participating in a second

cooperative assignment. The short-term international exchange programs offered through AYU seek to prepare Saudi students for the global marketplace.

Portland State University

One of the 2010 summer study abroad programs at AYU was held at Portland State University in Oregon. PSU, founded in 1946, is Oregon's largest and only urban university. It has an undergraduate enrollment of 21,674 of which 1,943 are enrolled in The School of Business Administration (<http://www.pdx.edu>). The School of Business Administration purports to be the most diverse business school in Oregon. Although Portland State University is considered a commuter school, its centrally located campus has ten residential halls, which house about 2,000 students. It also has a large international student population including close to 400 Saudi students.

In comparison with the other international programs offered by AYU, the program at PSU is unique. The students complete undergraduate courses from The School of Business Administration whereas the other study abroad programs available to AYU students offer classes that are tailored specifically for international students. At PSU, the Saudi students from Al Yamamah live in a dormitory and attend the same classes as domestic students. This program offers the international students a chance to experience American university life through regular courses, alongside American students.

The summer of 2010 was the first time AYU students joined the PSU campus. Five female students took 8 trimester credit hours over a four-week period from July 19th to August 13th. Each student was enrolled in two of the following courses: BA 311: Marketing Management, BA 316: Working with Customers, BA 325: Competing with Information

Technology, MGMT 471: Staffing and Employee Selection, or MKTG 338: Professional Selling. Both of the students enrolled in MGMT 471 decided to drop the course. However, the other four courses were successfully completed by each of the enrolled students.

The summer course load was very intense. The students were extremely busy taking eight trimester credits in only four weeks. The students attended roughly twenty hours of classroom instruction time weekly. In addition, they had the responsibility to complete homework and projects on time. Remarkably, they accomplished all of this in their second or third language.

Students

In this section, I offer brief background descriptions of each of the five Saudi students. I have used pseudonyms, not their real names.

Abeer graduated from the English section of a prestigious international high school in Riyadh. She studied abroad at PSU during the summer before her final year at AYU. She is majoring in Business Administration with a concentration in Insurance. While at PSU, Abeer was interested in learning more about their MBA program and hopes to join such a program in the near future.

Jawaher graduated from the French section of a well-known international high school in Riyadh. She is trilingual, and speaks English, French and Arabic. Jawaher was also starting her senior year at Al Yamamah majoring in Business Administration with a concentration in Quality Management.

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Nada studied at PSU in between her sophomore and junior year at AYU. She is a student in the School of Business Administration concentrating in Marketing. Nada spent the previous summer in New Zealand. She traveled there with her family but spent part of the time studying in a language school and participating in a home stay.

At the time of the program at PSU, Huda had just completed her freshman year at AYU and was preparing to enter her sophomore year within the School of Business Administration, concentrating in Marketing. Huda traveled to the US on her own to visit family on the East coast prior to meeting the group at PSU.

In the summer of 2010, Amal was also preparing to enter her sophomore year at AYU. She is concentrating in Finance within the School of Business Administration. Unlike the other students, Amal traveled to Portland with her family and lived during the duration of the program with them in an off campus, residential hotel.

Instructors

In this section, I offer brief background descriptions of the three instructors who taught the Saudi participants during the summer of 2010. I have used pseudonyms, not their real names.

Dragan Slovic is an Assistant Professor at PSU on a research exchange from a university in Serbia. He holds a PhD in Marketing and a specialty in Business Psychology. Dragan Slovic's main research interest lies in cross-cultural shopping behavior. During the summer 2010 term, He taught BA 316: Working with Customers.

Cassie Thomas taught two courses during the summer 2010 term; BA 311: Marketing Management and MKTG 338: Professional Selling. She received the student-nominated 2010 Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award that honors School of Business Administration teachers for being the best in their field. Furthermore, Cassie Thomas is currently the President of InterLink Marketing Group and has “over 20 years of experience managing business development, sales, marketing and operations at the area, region and corporate levels from start-ups to established firms” (<http://www.pdx.com>).

Donald Gerber is a professor of quantitative methods at Portland State. He holds a PhD in the subject from a Midwestern university. He has extensive technological experience especially in the designing of websites for large businesses. Professor Gerber taught BA 325: Competing with Information Technology during the summer of 2010.

Chaperone

I accompanied the students to Portland as a chaperone employed by Al Yamamah University. My role as chaperone was loosely defined by the university. My job description was to be a female representative of AYU so that the families of the Saudi female students would find it permissible for their daughters to attend such a program. With such a general job description, I felt free to design my own role and hoped that role would lead to the basis of my Independent Professional Project.

When I accepted the chaperone position, I knew that I would like to use the situation as research for this project. While thinking about the trip beforehand, I wrongly assumed the students would experience culture shock because of cultural differences outside the classroom.

Life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the USA, in my eyes, differed greatly. Prior to departure, I was therefore interested in researching what triggered the students to examine their cultural selves. Also, I initially saw my role as being one of planning and organizing extracurricular activities that would expose the students to life outside the classroom.

However, after arriving in Portland, my focus changed. The students had little time for outside activities and when they did, they seemed to adapt easily to life in America. As the days passed, the students identified more concerns with their experience within the classroom, not outside it. Maybe they voiced these concerns about their classes because they felt more comfortable discussing this subject with me, as I was a teacher that understood a bit of both Saudi and American educational contexts. Or it could have been that adjustment to American culture was not as relevant as I had assumed. As one student put it, "I am used to American life. I grew up with it on TV."

My living arrangements as chaperone meant that I was in close, daily contact with the students. I lived in the same on-campus dorm as four of the students. The fifth student lived off campus in a residential hotel with her family. Living next door to the four students meant that I was able to interact with the students spontaneously and informally. I also was able to participate in many non-academic activities with the students such as shopping and eating out. My role involved listening to the students talk about their experiences. I did not get involved in any areas of instruction related to coursework. I tried to limit my advice and intervention. I simply wanted to understand what they were feeling without directing or affecting the situation. However on one occasion, while listening to Huda's concerns about her upcoming test and

ongoing confusion in class. I did change the course of events by suggesting that she focus less on textbook readings and also that she meet with the instructor. This meeting was a turning point for Huda.

Education in Saudi Arabia: Past and Present

This study abroad experience for these five young women represented a transformation in educational priorities for Saudi Arabia, taking place at the national level.

Due to the discovery and production of oil in the 1950s the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's national capital exponentially grew catapulting Saudi Arabia into a whirlwind of economic, social, and demographic growth. Oil brought advancement in many aspects of Saudi Arabian society, including the education sector. Previously, education in the Kingdom, like many Arab countries, was limited to Qur'anic schools whose pedagogy was based on rote learning and the memorization of the holy book of Islam from cover to cover. In light of the discovery of oil and the need for an educated society, the government enacted the "rapid expansion policy" (Abd-el Wassie, 1970), which emphasized quantitative expansion in education focusing on increasing student enrollment and broadening curriculum. In this regard, the "rapid expansion policy" was a success (Rugh, 2002 Prokop, 2005). However, qualitatively speaking, schools did not improve. Schools still mirrored the educational principles and practices of the Qur'anic schools, where students were still passive receivers of knowledge.

The same holds true today; educational pedagogy within Saudi Arabia and the gulf countries as a whole has changed little from the longstanding practice of Qur'an recitation. Chadraba and O'Keefe (2002) along with Tubaishat, Bhatti and El-Qawasmeh (2006) concur

that pedagogy in the Middle East relies heavily on lectures, rote learning and dictation. Teaching practices have not evolved beyond traditional methods. Burt (2004) and Russell (2004) describe that teaching within the Middle East simply consists of reading from textbooks and illustrating concepts. Furthermore, the Middle Eastern educational system rewards the passive absorption of knowledge through its exam-orientated system (Russell, 2004). A World Bank study elaborates on this idea:

the systems teach students how to learn and retain ‘answers to fairly fixed questions in problem situations with little or no meaningful context’ and thus rewards those who are skilled at being passive knowledge recipients (Rugh, 2002 p. 399).

These rampantly popular passive teaching and learning practices still used in today’s schools have done little to propel Saudi Arabian society forward.

The overarching teaching approach presently used at Al Yamamah University coincides with the results of previous studies of gulf country educational systems. The teaching approach focuses on textbooks, exams, memorization and rewards passive learning. Critical thinking and the application of theory are absent in most AYU classrooms. The pedagogy is still tied to Qur’anic schools. Only at the university level, the memorization of the Qur’an has been replaced with memorization of PowerPoint slides. Huda described the teaching methodology of AYU as, “The teachers just lecture from a PowerPoint and they email the PowerPoint slides every day. Every two weeks, we have a quiz.”

When the five AYU students landed in Portland and settled into their new learning environments, they came across a variety of teaching styles, pedagogical approaches and cultural

practices. Some of the experiences were similar to those of their past while others differed drastically.

Research Question

Due to the girls' initial reactions and discussions, I reexamined and narrowed the research to focus on perceptions and responses to teaching approaches. The question that I ended up with was: How did the Saudi students adapt to the teaching methods in their courses? From this question, came others. What challenges did they encounter? How can notions of culture explain the source of these challenges? What helped the Saudi students understand and overcome these challenges?

Data-gathering Strategies

I gathered data from formal and informal interviews with the Saudi students and their instructors, from observations of classes with students in attendance, from documents on the PSU website and course materials, and from field notes that I wrote throughout the duration of the program. I had planned to gather further data through dialogue journals. However, Saudi Arabia has a strong oral tradition and the students resisted the additional written task. Writing is often Saudis' weakest skill. Nonetheless, the gathered data proved to be substantially rich, containing viewpoints from the students, professors and myself.

Student Interviews

I interviewed the Saudi students, both in scheduled, formal interviews with prepared questions and in informal interviews that occurred spontaneously before or after classes that I observed or in socializing events where we were together. The formal interviews were always

one-on-one meetings, while the informal interviews often involved more than one student. I conducted a total of ten formal interviews with students. I interviewed each student two times, averaging about twenty minutes in length. I took detailed notes during these interviews.

Informal interviews took place on the spur of the moment. Whenever I was with the students and they began talking about school, my ears perked up. Because these took place on the spur of the moment, I did not take notes during the conversations. I wrote most of my notes afterwards.

In general, my goal was to find out how the students were adapting to their classes, what they found familiar, and what they found challenging. The questions that I asked in the formal interviews addressed the following topics: cultural adaptation and classroom pedagogy.

However, I found the informal interviews to be most informative. While socializing as a group, the students spoke about the issues that concerned them the most. From these conversations, I learned more about the students and their situations.

Instructor Interviews

I formally interviewed each instructor one time. These interviews took place in the middle of the course and averaged about thirty minutes each. Generally, these interviews were a chance for me to develop a relationship with the instructors. I introduced myself and explained my role with the students. I was also able to ask questions regarding the instructors' teaching philosophies. I took detailed notes during these interviews. These initial formal interviews were followed by several spontaneous interviews before or after observing their classrooms. Most often they approached me during the classroom observations to share concerns about the students, or in the case of Dragan, to praise Abeer's performance.

Classroom Observations

I observed each class at least three times. During classroom observations, I noted the teaching style used in class as well as the students' behavior and response to the style of classroom instruction. After class, I was able to ask the students what went well in class and what they found challenging. Attending class not only strengthened my understanding of the teaching pedagogy, but also strengthened my relationships with both the students and the instructors. The relationship building was crucial in gathering data to complete this study.

Documents

I examined many different documents as a part of my data gathering. I accompanied the students to the bookstore and copy shop. There, I was able to initially review the textbooks and course packs that they would be using. Attending classes gave me access to many useful documents. Prior to the first classroom observation, I most usually briefly introduced myself to the instructor and asked for a course syllabus. From the course syllabi, I was able to better understand the format and requirements of the course. Attending class also gave me access to handouts and other materials used in class. From all these documents, I gained a better understanding of the classroom dynamics and course requirements.

Field Notes

During the four weeks in Portland, I always had my field notebook in my bag. I took notes in my field notebook both during the formal interviews notebook as well as while researching. Also immediately after informal interviews and interactions, I wrote down what transpired in the notebook. It was helpful to carry the notebook at all times as when a correlation or previous interaction popped into my head, I would pull out my book and write.

Data Analysis Strategies

Data analysis was a circular process involving rereading field notes, interpreting data, and asking instructors and study abroad participants for further clarification. While reading through the field notes, I coded the data by writing down the topics that the conversations, interview answers and observations addressed. The themes of teaching and learning encounters and co-education arose from the coded data. These were written up into vignettes and analyzed using Paige's ten Intensity Factors (Paige, 1993) and Moran's Cultural Knowings framework (Moran, 2001). The two analytical frameworks complemented each other as they seek to understand two different aspects of culture exploration. Paige's framework of ten Intensity Factors is useful to analyze how people respond to cultural difference, while Moran's Cultural Knowings framework is needed to analyze how people acquire cultural knowledge and understanding through navigating cultural situations.

Analytical Frameworks

Michael Paige's ten Intensity Factors indicate areas of potential adjustment challenges. Intensity factors are "situational variables and personal attributes that can influence the psychological intensity of the intercultural experiences" (Paige, 1993 p. 2). Paige's ten intensity factors include cultural differences, ethnocentrism, cultural immersion, cultural isolation, language, prior cultural experience, expectations, visibility and invisibility, status and power and control. These ten attributes of cultural situations and/or the individual living abroad may contribute to the challenge or ease of cultural adjustment. Paige's central point is that the greater the differences between learner culture and host culture for each factor, "situational

variables and personal attributes” (Ibid.), the greater the psychological intensity, and in turn, the greater the challenge in cultural adaptation. The intensity factors of cultural differences, ethnocentrism, cultural immersion, cultural isolation and language proved most useful in explaining the stress that the students in this study experienced.

Pat Moran’s (2001) Cultural Knowings blended with Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) provide a framework for making sense of and learning from a cultural experience. The four Knowings—Knowing About, Knowing How, Knowing Why and Knowing Oneself—paired with the Experiential Learning Cycle’s participation, description, interpretation and response are a means to interpret, analysis and understand the cultural learning process. It is a “means for describing culture in terms of what students need to do in order to learn it-their encounters with another way of life” (Moran, 2001, p. 15).

When learners participate in a cultural experience, they are actively engaged in the Knowing How stage. In this stage, learners experience cultural practices. They are involved in doing. However, although learners are participating in a cultural practice, they may lack true cultural understanding. They need to also explore the Knowing About and Knowing Why stages of cultural learning. Knowing About involves comprehending cultural information while Knowing Why deals with interpretation. Why do people participate in this way? Knowing Why entails understanding the underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes that affect cultural practices. It is a “process of learners’ structured inquiry into observations, information, and experiences with the culture” (Moran, 2001, p. 16). The Knowing Oneself phase is an interaction with the other three Knowings. It “concerns the individual learners-their values, opinions, feelings, questions,

reactions, thoughts, ideas, and their own cultural values as a central part of the cultural experience” (Moran, 2001, p. 17). Ultimately cultural learning leads to greater self-awareness and reflection.

During their time at PSU, the students were taking part in an extensive cultural experience. The stories and anecdotes they shared coupled with my observations and interviews were analyzed using the Cultural Knowings and Intensity Factors. I hoped to gain an understanding of the students’ perceptions of the new educational context, the challenges they faced and how they overcame them.

Chapter 3: Case Descriptions

In this chapter, I describe specific intercultural encounters that the Saudi students had with professors and other students in specific courses, gathered from my observations of classes and interviews with the students and professors. Following these descriptive accounts, I analyze the situations using Paige's Intensity Factors and Moran's Cultural Knowings framework.

Teaching and Learning Encounters

BA 325: Competing with Information Technology

Nada and Abeer, along with roughly 50 other students, took BA 325: Competing with Information Technology, taught by Professor Gerber during the summer session at PSU. The class was held in a three-tiered, u-shaped small lecture hall in the business building from 9 a.m. to 10:20 a.m. from Monday to Thursday. There was an hour-long optional hands-on computer lab immediately preceding the lecture. Course assessment was based on the completion of homework, a mid-term exam, final exam and final course project. The course project was broken down into milestones that were assigned at specific dates during the course. A course book, available at the local photocopy center, detailed the processes and steps to follow in order

to complete the course project of creating a website. Questions to be answered for homework were given weekly. The answers to the homework were subsequently provided and test questions were taken directly from the homework questions.

Nada and Abeer never attended the lab portion of the course, but they went to lecture regularly. Half of the originally enrolled students either dropped the class or stopped attending the majority of the lectures. Abeer noted, “Half of the class is no longer attending.” During my observations there were twenty-eight to thirty students in the lecture hall. While observing the class, I noticed that both Nada and Abeer, unlike the majority of their counterparts, did not take notes. During one class, other students had their homework questions out while Professor Gerber took questions regarding the homework. Abeer had a notebook out, but Nada had brought only herself to class. Every time I observed the class, neither student took notes.

I asked them how, without taking notes, they got the needed course information. They answered that there was no need to take notes as they were ultimately given what information to memorize for the test. Furthermore, homework was based on completion not accuracy. Professor Gerber eventually posted all answers to homework questions on the course webpage.

Teacher Small Talk and the Role of the Textbook

After one class observation, I asked Abeer and Nada what their impressions were. Abeer commented:

He (Professor Gerber) makes things more complicated (with his side talk). He is all about Blue Fish (a web design program), Blue Fish, Blue Fish and complaining about Microsoft. He makes things more complicated with Blue Fish.

Nada said, “It was challenging because it is really boring. I am not interested in technology at all.” She added, “I like that his questions on the test are easy. There is a book, but he does not use it much.” However, before the first test Nada prepared to study material from the book.

Abeer was discussing the upcoming test with her friends and related:

The professor explained that the test would cover material from the homework, but Nada was focusing on the book. She kept saying, ‘What about the *kitab* (book in Arabic)? What about the *kitab*?’

BA 316: Working with Customers

During the 2010 PSU summer session, Assistant Professor Dragan taught BA 316: Working with Customers in a three-tiered, u-shaped lecture hall in the on-campus business building. The class was held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 5:15 to 9:40pm. Abeer was the only Saudi female enrolled in this 20-person course. Assistant Professor Dragan followed a daily format of lecturing from a PowerPoint followed by a quiz. In response to my question, he said, “If I am a professor, it is expected of me to give a lecture.” The fact that the professor himself was a non-native speaker of English and taught business content classes to non-native speakers in Serbia affected the learning and teaching environment. I observed him explaining vocabulary and terminology more extensively than the other PSU instructors. The course relied on a textbook similar to a textbook used at AYU. “See this book it is an introduction. It is the same book that we use at AYU only this is the American book and we use the International edition,” shared Abeer. Course assessment was based on daily quizzes, a mid-term exam, a final exam and a group-work marketing plan.

BA 338: Professional Selling

Huda and Amal enrolled in BA 338: Professional Selling with Professor Cassie Thomas. The class met on Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons from 12 to 4:20pm. The sixteen students sat at long tables in a traditional style classroom on the third floor of the Urban Planning building on PSU's campus. The Chinese proverb, "Tell me and I forget; show me and I may remember; Involve me and I will understand" was the opening PowerPoint slide on the use of demonstrations in selling in the course BA338 Professional Selling. This proverb not only illustrates a method of selling, but seems fitting as a way to explain the class structure and teaching philosophy of the course. In class, information is presented to the students through the use of a PowerPoint lecture. However the instructor does not speak directly from the slides. Instead she relates the concepts and theory to her experiences and relays this practical information to the students. Then through pair or group work, the students have a chance to apply the theory to different selling scenarios. The class is a mixture of lectures, role-plays, case studies and practical activities which help students prepare for their final sales presentation. The course has a textbook in which readings are assigned daily. Course assessment is through participation, a mid-term exam, final exam and various in-class presentations.

While studying for her first quiz in BA338, Huda started to feel overwhelmed with sorting through the wealth of information presented in the book. This provoked her to call me and meet with me to discuss dropping the course. After having prepared for the nine-chapter quiz for hours, she was still only on Chapter 3. She lamented that the teaching style was the opposite of AYU. The teacher doesn't lecture from the book, "Here she like has bullet points on

the PowerPoint and then tells stories.” Huda could not decipher what the important information was; “I don’t take notes in class, because I don’t want to write down stories.” She decided to continue to study and wait to drop the class until after the quiz.

I saw Huda the next day as she prepared to enter the BA338 classroom. The professor said that each student could bring a one-page “cheat sheet” to class. In reference to Huda’s cheat-sheet paper, Amal said, “That is not a paper. It is a computer.” Huda had crammed as much as she could onto that notebook paper and had not even finished the required chapters; “I did not finish it. I did not sleep. I finished up to chapter 6.”

Huda soon realized that she would have to drop her other course (MGMT 471: Staffing and Employee Selection). She did not have the statistical background to complete the course. However, dropping this course meant she would have to complete BA311. Taking advice from me, she made an appointment to meet with the professor of BA 338, Cassie Thomas. It was her first time meeting with a teacher.

After Huda and Amal’s two hour meeting with her, Professor Cassie Thomas commented to me, “I am glad that they approached me. I only wished that they had met with me sooner.” She suggested, “Future exchange students should meet with and explain their situation to their professors on the first day of class.” I later observed that she focused more on the two Saudi students and checked in with them more frequently during class sessions. Because of the meeting, she learned more about the students and their situation.

Huda and Amal also seemed relieved after the meeting. Huda mentioned, “She (Professor Cassie Thomas) is flexible. She said she will grade the things that we still need to

hand in late and give us extra work.” Huda continued, “The final assignment seemed hard, but then she explained it to us. It is easier than we thought.” Huda gained an understanding of the purpose and usefulness of the class activities; “I love the exercises though...the role plays when I do them I start thinking about my project,” Huda later commented. This comment is strikingly different from her initial perceptions of the course, when she voiced concern about the instructor’s lecture style and use of role-plays. Although Amal did not show initial confusion, she added, “I like the worksheets and activities here. At AYU they lecture. We just listen. I am bad at listening.”

Co-ed Classrooms

The first assignment given in BA311 Professional Selling was a thirty-second elevator pitch to sell oneself for a job interview. The pitch was to be presented individually to the class of both males and females and would be videotaped for reflection purposes. Upon watching the video of their speech, the students had to submit a written reflection to the instructor. On the tape, Huda was barely audibly and was visibly nervous. Amal giggled while telling me about the video of Huda, “She talks so soft.” Huda added, “Yes Miss (referring to the author), you could not hear anything.” Abeer was in on the conversation and added, “Oh, I miss Al Yamamah. I miss being in class with all girls.” In the subsequent reflection submitted to her teacher, Cassie Thomas, informed me that Huda explained that it was the first time that she had spoken in front of male students. Huda noted that she could hardly hear herself on the video recording and attributed her quietness to the novelty of presenting in front of men. Cassie Thomas commented, “Shyness with boys...that surprised me.”

Cassie Thomas also taught BA 311: Marketing Management to two of the other female Saudi students, Nada and Amal. At the time of reading the reflection, the two girls were due to present in BA311 in a group with two male classmates. She thought about that class and commented, “If I had known, I would not have put them in a group with men.”

In BA311: Marketing Management, students signed up to give a group presentation concerning different marketing strategies and decisions for the Apple Ipad. A list of dates and topics was passed around the class for each student to sign up where they desired. Nada unknowingly signed up to be in a group with two male students. She said, “I was a bit uncomfortable, but they were respectful so it was ok.” She added, “They are older, maybe 28. Maybe that is why I am so embarrassed.” Amal enrolled into class the class late and she subsequently joined Nada’s group.

On the day of the presentation, Nada attempted to get Amal to sit by their group; however, Amal refused. Both Amal and Nada told me that they were nervous. Nada had extensive public speaking experience. She had presented a debate in Dubai to over 100 people, females, and won, however, it was her first time speaking in front of a male audience. “I am going to be nervous. It’s the men,” declared Nada. Amal agreed. Amal had only ever spoken in front of men in the Professional Selling course. Nada spoke about the disadvantage of single sex education; “I like studying with all girls, but there is just one negative then we are too shy around guys. I am not confident.”

The teaching and learning encounters illustrate the students’ varied experiences at PSU. The range of experiences relay the similarities and differences in educational pedagogy that the

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students came across during their study abroad program. The detailed vignettes offer a glimpse into the students' life at PSU and offer insight into cultural learning, understanding and adaptation.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings

Let us now turn to an analysis of the cultural dimensions of the above encounters. By examining the various reported experiences or vignettes in relation to the Intensity Factors and the Cultural Knowings, the learners ease or challenges in adaptation can be better understood. In the following section, I will re-visit these encounters and apply the two frameworks.

Findings of BA 325: Competing with Information Technology

Paige's Intensity Factors, particularly the factor of cultural differences, can explain the AYU students' apparent ease of adaptation in BA 325. "Cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors represent the most common intensity factors" (Paige, n.d., para 4). Paige (1993) hypothesizes that "the greater the degree of cultural difference between the sojourner's own and the target culture, the greater degree of psychological intensity" (Ibid., p. 5). Both Abeer and Nada appeared to adapt rather easily to the teaching approach used in this course. For them, the cultural distance between the home classroom culture and the host classroom culture was not great. As a result, similarities in course format and the emphasis on memorization reduced the stress of adjustment and facilitated adaptation.

The noted ease of transition into the classroom pedagogy of BA 325 can be explained by examining the intensity factor of cultural difference. The degree of cultural difference was low; therefore, according to Paige's hypothesis, the degree of psychological intensity should also be low. And indeed it was. The format of BA 325: Competing with Information Technology was familiar to the AYU students. According to the Cultural Knowings framework, the students had

a clear understanding of the Knowing About. This eased their transition into the classroom environment. Assessment in BA 325 was based on the completion of homework, a final project broken down into parts and two exams. The exam questions were taken directly from homework assignments. Therefore in order to succeed on a test the students needed to only memorize homework questions. Passive learning was at play. From years of previous schooling in Saudi Arabia, Abeer and Nada had mastered rote learning and memorization. Their home classroom culture and the host classroom culture in BA 325 at PSU were similar and the recipe for success was easily recognizable to the students.

Nada and Abeer's behavior in class emulated that of students in Saudi classrooms. This is an outward display of their ease in adjustment. Nada came to class empty-handed and Abeer touched her BlackBerry more than her paper and pencil. These two behaviors are commonplace in Saudi university classrooms. It is not unusual for students to come to class without a pen or notebook. Also, many students are more attuned to their BlackBerrys than classroom instruction. Nada justified her lack of note taking as unnecessary considering that all the test questions and answers would later be provided. This rationalization holds true for students in Saudi classrooms where, as Huda explains, "the teacher reads from PowerPoint and then they email the PowerPoint."

Nada's ease of adjustment is also reflected in her use of outsourcing, having someone else complete needed coursework. However, this use of outsourcing also reflects her lack of cultural understanding and adaptation. When Nada was confronted with an assignment that she was unable to complete, she outsourced. She called her brother in London who then completed

and emailed her assignment to her. Having someone else do your schoolwork, whether paid or unpaid, is prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Talking about course content, Jawaher commented, “I don’t need to learn that. I can pay someone to do it.” Similarly, I met someone who was hired as a full-time private tutor for a female student taking an online degree in Art History. The private tutor soon realized that she was not actually expected to tutor rather to complete the degree for the student. Thus, Nada did not feel excessively overburdened by the unknown task as she was able to use a familiar strategy. This situation highlights the transfer of a “learning’ or survival tactic from to home to host culture. She applied a widely used home cultural practice to the host culture; however, she did not realize that this practice was not acceptable in the host culture. In reference to the Cultural Knowings framework, Nada took a “knowing how” from her home culture and used it in the host culture. This strategy was ineffective, since she had not acquired necessary cultural knowledge or adapted fully to American university culture. The students were displaying the same behavior and using the same strategies as they did at AYU.

Findings of Teacher Small Talk and the Role of the Textbook in BA 325

Despite BA 325 and courses at AYU being pedagogically similar the students were confronted with a few challenges. Differences in classroom discourse and the reliance on textbooks posed slight challenges that the students needed to overcome. Specifically, Abeer was challenged by Professor Gerber’s side talk and Nada was initially confused over test preparation. Abeer’s dislike of the extraneous chatter and Nada’s confusion are both reactions to cultural differences.

Although the course format appeared similar to that of AYU, the classroom discourse was different. At AYU, professors usually speak directly from slides and textbook material. They have little to no professional or practical experience to relate to the students. Unlike AYU professors, Prof. Gerber did not speak from PowerPoint slides. Instead, in his side talk, he often went off on tangents, such as his dislike of Microsoft and love of Blue Fish. As it turned out, this difference in classroom discourse created minimal stress for Abeer.

Confronted with this difference, Abeer coped effectively. She successfully managed the difference by discarding classroom instruction. Instead she focused solely on the step-by-step instructions provided in the course book to complete assignments and on the provided homework answers for test preparation. This successful adaptation can be explained by analyzing the situation using the two frameworks. Although the degree of cultural difference was great, Abeer did not experience a great amount of psychological intensity. The Cultural Knowings and Intensity Factor frameworks offer insight into how she overcame the difference. First of all, Abeer mastered the Knowing About, “gathering and demonstrating acquisition of cultural information” (Moran, 2001, p. 15). She knew about the new class format and recognized the nature of the instructor’s side talk. This led her to understand that classroom discourse was not essential to succeed. Secondly, Paige’s Intensity Factor of language played a key role in Abeer’s adaptation. Paige (1993) states, “the less language ability the sojourner possesses, the greater will be the psychological intensity of the experience” (p.7). Abeer’s near native level of English clearly lowered the intensity presented by the instructor’s “side talk.” She used this phrase “side talk” to describe his added comments. The phrase shows that she knows that the content of his chatter is not important. It is off the books or on the “side.”

Nada faced a different challenge. Nada's concern with knowing the course book material for the first test exemplifies a cultural difference. Instructors at AYU rely heavily on textbook content when delivering lectures and preparing tests. Professor Gerber did not. She initially experienced stress due to this cultural difference. However, she was eventually able to mediate this intensity factor due to a rather low degree of the other intensity factors: cultural immersion and cultural isolation. Nada was able to overcome the challenge because of input from a Saudi classmate, Abeer, who explained how to prepare for tests at PSU. In terms of the Cultural Knowings, through Abeer's mastery of the "Knowing About," she understood test requirements. Her extensive knowledge or "Knowing About" enabled her to clarify test content for Nada. Abeer explained to Nada that the test questions were not based on the course book. The low degree of the intensity factor of cultural immersion and isolation aided Nada in navigating the challenge. Nada was not isolated within the new culture rather she had a classmate who helped her adapt to the new test format.

Findings of BA 316: Working with Customers

Abeer smoothly made the transition to BA 316: Working with Customers. On the surface, her smooth entrance into learning at PSU seemed remarkable. However, after analyzing her experience it becomes apparent that the intensity factors of cultural difference and language were not great; thus aiding her in making the transition. Observations and interviews showed commonalities between learning in BA 316 and learning at AYU.

BA 316: Working with Customers, was similar to AYU courses as it was based on PowerPoint lectures and quizzes, it used the same textbook as AYU and it was taught by a non-

native speaker of English. Dragan followed a daily format of lecturing from a PowerPoint and administering quizzes; a format comparable to AYU. Furthermore, Abeer noted that she had used the same textbook for a similar course at AYU. The fact that the professor himself was a non-native speaker of English and taught business content classes to non-native speakers in Serbia affected the learning and teaching environment and further affected Abeer's experience of and ease of adaptation to the classroom. I observed Dragan explaining vocabulary and terminology more extensively than other PSU instructors. This added explanation was familiar to Abeer as all the faculty members at AYU are non-native speakers and teach to non-native speakers. Language as presented by Dragan in BA 316 was broken down and made more comprehensible for Abeer. The extensive explanation of business vocabulary, daily teaching practices and the content of the course were familiar to Abeer. The low intensity factor of cultural difference as well as similarities in language instruction eased her transition from AYU to PSU.

Findings of BA 338: Professional Selling

Paige's Intensity Factor of cultural difference can be used to explain Huda's stress in regards to the course pedagogy while Moran's Cultural Knowings framework helps explain her eventual success in meeting the challenge. The teaching approach of BA 338 differed vastly from the norm at AYU and the norm within the Gulf countries. There existed a huge gap between the home culture of passive learning and teaching and the active teaching and learning strategies of the host BA 338 classroom culture. Paige's cultural difference intensity factor was significant in this situation. The notable difference in pedagogy led to considerable stress in

adaptation for Huda. Not until Huda understood the how and why of the classroom culture was she able to rectify the immense stress of the cultural difference.

Huda's initial desire to drop the course was a result of being unable to draw required knowledge from the new teaching approach. She could not decipher for herself the important material from the readings, lectures and classroom activities. She was accustomed to courses in AYU that told her directly what to memorize and learn. In BA 338, Huda was not given summaries of readings nor was she given clear facts to memorize. When posed with a nine-chapter midterm exam, Huda felt the stress of the heightened cultural difference. She perceived there to be overwhelming amounts of information. Instead of wading through unknown territory, Huda wanted to drop the course.

Huda was unable to draw the required information from the course partly because the instructor, Cassie Thomas, was utilizing unfamiliar teaching methodologies. Cassie Thomas used case studies as an active learning tool which encouraged critical thinking and application of theory. Case studies are used in many business schools around the world as a case study provides students with more experience than any other teaching tool (Burns, 1990). Case studies stimulate students' thinking and challenge their capabilities. Huda was confused by case studies as she did not see the purpose behind the activity. Furthermore, case studies posed an even further challenge for Huda, since passive learning systems in the Middle East accustom students to direct answers and questions, and instructors do not routinely assign practice cases (Ahmed, 2010).

Huda's meeting with Cassie Thomas proved to be influential in her subsequent success in the course. Prior to her meeting with Cassie Thomas, Huda was attending and participating in class. However, she was not gaining the needed knowledge from the classroom lectures and activities. In reference to the Cultural Knowings framework, she was involved in knowing how. She knew how to participate in class. She sat in the front of class, listened attentively and took part in the role plays. Huda's outward appearance was like that of the other students. However, inside she was confused. In cultural terms, the problem was that she skipped over the knowing about and knowing why. Huda did not know about the usefulness of the role plays or why Cassie Thomas told stories more than she spoke from PowerPoint slides. Instead of sorting out the "Knowing How" and the "Knowing Why," Huda went straight into the realm of response and knowing oneself. She mentioned, "I don't take notes 'cause I don't want to write down stories." She was responding as she would in an AYU class where she would focus on facts to memorize. According to her cultural logic, there were no facts and therefore there was no need to keep notes. She was viewing the classroom discourse from her own cultural background and was unable to gain meaning from the stories. She was participating in the new cultural learning context, but she was viewing its practices from an un-adapted cultural self.

The stark contrast in Huda's perception of the course before and after her meeting with Cassie Thomas exemplifies the need to know how and to know why within the cultural knowing frameworks. Prior to the meeting with her professor, Huda had an understanding of the "how." She knew the classroom practices but she had no idea of the "why." In the meeting, Cassie Thomas gave Huda an explicit explanation on the usefulness, benefits and expectations of active learning practices. Along the same lines, after meeting with Cassie Thomas, Huda had a better

understanding of what to grasp from the class activities. This is illustrated in her comment, “Now when I do the role plays, I think about the final project.” After learning how and why, Huda eventually met the challenge of discerning relevant knowledge from the culturally different classroom practices.

Prior Research of Middle Eastern Students’ Perceptions of Teaching and Learning

Huda’s difficulty adapting to the difference in pedagogy between the Middle East and the West corroborates previous research of Middle Eastern students’ experiences when confronted with American notions of education. Saudi students in Shaw’s (2009) study reported that

American classroom practices—which include active classrooms, pair work, group work, projects, papers, frequent quizzes and exams, required attendance, constant homework, and self-directed learning—and culture to be elements of their new environment that were different, sometimes challenging, and often marginalizing. (p. 225)

The American educational paradigm, which encourages discovery, creativity and critical thinking skills, is likely to create barriers to Middle Eastern students who are accustomed to passive learning techniques. This was the case for the Saudi students in my study. They were not prepared for American cultural practices. They had not learned how to learn through active learning practices. Left to their own devices, they could not figure out the classroom culture. They needed explicit information about these teaching and learning practices and guidance as to how to learn in American classrooms.

Huda’s confusion in regards to the use of case studies within the classroom correlates to prior research on Arab students experience with active learning tools. In a study of students’ perceptions of various teaching methods, Ahmed and Mahrous (2010) found that Middle Eastern

students' perceptions of the effectiveness of case studies were low. Middle Eastern students' perception of case studies may be thwarted by the difficulty they might face when confronted with active learning tools. Chadraba and O'Keefe (2007) noted problems that students face when dealing with cases,

...they are confused about what is expected of them, lack the practical experience that would help them to analyze cases, and face time constraints and anxiety arising from a learning technique that may not deliver a right answer. (p. 221)

Furthermore, a recent Harvard study of Arab higher education concluded that Middle Eastern students are ill-prepared for putting theory into practice; "widespread practices of rote learning and memorization exercises are incapable of developing capacities in students for problem solving and application of theory to practical concepts" (Rugh, 2002, p.410).

Given the cultural differences in teaching methods, the Saudi students in this study, like those in other studies, found American teaching practices difficult to fathom. However, once they were made aware of the reasons for these methods and study skills that were required, the Saudi students were able to adapt and to succeed in these classrooms. For this to occur, the students first needed to recognize and voice their concern, confusion, or frustration. Huda took the initiative to approach me regarding her difficulties in her courses.

In this instance, as noted, I suggested that Huda meet with her professor to bring up the matter. From listening to her and seeing her minuscule written cheat sheet, I could tell that she was lost in a sea of information. I could not tell Huda what information was important, but I could direct her to those that might. I directed her to meet with her professor and I also, on my own, unsuccessfully tried to find a tutoring or note taking service for her. My intervention stems

from my cultural understanding. In regards to the Cultural Knowings framework, I understood the “about” and “why.”

Co-ed Classrooms

Saudi society is strictly segregated by sex. Men and women do not mix in social places. Restaurants have one seating area for single men and a separate area for families. Shopping malls have guards that prohibit single men from entering the complex. Some malls even have separate floors for women only. Even the celebrations of the unity of man and woman are segregated. There is one party for the men and a different party for the women.

Not only is public life segregated, but so is private life. Many Saudi families do not mix with opposite sex members of their extended family. It is not uncommon for men and women to have no contact with each other outside of their immediate family; brothers and sisters and mom and dad. Education is no different. After kindergarten, boys and girls no longer share a classroom. From first grade to the last year of university, males and females are educated in separate facilities.

For the five female AYU students at PSU, this all changed. Each of the five students had previously traveled internationally and had experienced daily life in a non-segregated society. However, this was their first-time sharing a classroom with men. Initially, they did not mention the presence of the men, because, I assume, in the beginning they were able to keep their distance within the classroom. As the days passed by, they had to integrate more with the men in the class. The girls then started to share with me their experiences and feelings regarding co-education.

The students' reaction to co-education can be better understood by looking at Paige's intensity factors of cultural difference. The intensity factor of cultural difference in regards to co-education is substantial. Despite kindergarten, the students had never shared a classroom with males let alone work together or present in front of members of the opposite sex. The students voiced their concerns, apprehensions and nervousness regarding collaborating with and presenting in front of men. I also noted that Nada, Amal and Huda were visibly less confident when presenting in front of men. Being members of co-ed classrooms was an intense factor for the students and therefore a challenge.

Co-educational practices represent a significant cultural difference between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the U.S. However, this intensity factor did not play as significant a role as might have been expected. This is explained by the fact that the Saudi women already had a number of experiences interacting with men during their international travels. Also they each knew that being able to interact and work with men professionally was a much needed skill to acquire. They saw co-education as a part of American culture that they wanted to adopt and integrate. They were prepared to deal with this difference. This does not mean that this cultural difference was not a factor; it was. The point is that it was not as significant as I had expected.

On the basis of classroom observations and the AYU students' comments, it can be concluded that the presence of men in the classroom clearly affected their performance and raised their affective filter. The usually confident self-assured female students withered when confronted with working with and presenting in front of men. Studies of Saudi Arabian students' experiences in US universities carried out by Alsultan (2008) and Shaw (2009) at Portland State

University and Oregon State University, respectively, drew the same conclusions. Furthermore Tubasihah, Bhatti and El-Qawasmeh (2006) reported,

In the Middle Eastern culture, students often lack opportunity to freely meet, communicate, and collaborate. This results in shyness and lack of confidence to express opinion in front of members of the opposite gender. This is particularly true for female students. (p.679)

The presence in the classroom of members of the opposite sex is a hurdle for Saudi students to overcome in order to achieve success in US universities.

To summarize the findings, the analysis of the teaching and learning encounters using Paige's Intensity Factors and Moran's Cultural Knowings framework offer insight into the reasoning behind the reactions of the students. There is a strong connection between Huda's experience in Professional Selling and the two frameworks. Paige's theory explains why Huda felt stress while Moran's framework explains how she overcame the challenge. This is the strongest connection in regards to the Cultural Knowings framework as Huda completed the experiential learning cycle and the encounter with cultural difference was successfully resolved. She completed the cultural learning process and acquired the cultural knowledge necessary to succeed in the classroom. Furthermore, her experience with cultural difference confirms Paige's hypothesis. The connection between co-education and the intensity factor theory is also strong. The cultural difference of the presence of men in the classroom caused some of the students to be stressed and to behave differently. This stress was minimized because of the students' beliefs on co-education. This also confirms Paige's hypothesis on cultural difference. Psychological intensity was heightened due to the cultural difference of co-education, but it was lessened due to the sojourners positive evaluation of the difference. Although the students gained experience in

mixed classrooms, they are still learning to adapt to this difference. Thus, the connection with Moran's framework is weaker. The other teaching and learning encounters offer weaker connections to the frameworks.

Chapter 5: Implications and Applications

In this chapter, I present and discuss implications yielded from my analysis of the students' experiences at PSU. I arranged the implications beginning with those relevant at the local level and ending with national implications.

One implication of this study is change at the local level. Portland State University and Al Yamamah University can learn from the experiences of the five study-abroad participants. Learning from their experiences enables future partnerships and joint ventures between the universities to be more successful. Localized application of change can be pursued both on a personal and institutional level.

Know thy teacher; know thy student. Both teachers and students have a responsibility to learn about each other. International students should make themselves known to their instructors and instructors should be open to learning about cultural similarities and differences from these students. In this study, Cassie Thomas mentioned that she would have liked the Saudi girls to have met with her sooner so that she would have known that they were on an international exchange. It would have been beneficial to both parties to know each other better. Through Huda's written reflection on her elevator pitch, Cassie Thomas first learned of the strict segregation of Saudi society. She gained a better understanding of her student's behavior. A personal responsibility of both the student and teacher exists to learn about one another. On a class-by-class basis, students and professors should take time to learn about and from each other.

How can Middle Eastern students be ushered into an educational context that values active learning and the application of theory? Ahmed and Mahrous (2010) suggest that the

explicit explanation of the benefits of active learning tools would improve students' perceptions. In Huda's case, this held true. Middle Eastern students may be reluctant to participate in active learning activities such as case studies because they have rarely been exposed to them. Therefore, they may not understand the usefulness. Parker (1986) also noted the importance for Middle Eastern students of face-to-face meetings. Because Middle Eastern culture relies heavily on oral communication, a personal meeting or chat about classroom practices would be more effective than a syllabus outlining classroom philosophy and objectives.

Students and faculty should not solely be held responsible for intercultural understanding. Institutions, especially those with a high number of international students, should educate their faculty to better equip them to work with and serve diverse populations. Alysayed (2007) suggests "training faculty and staff on Arab and Muslim cultures to enable them to better understand and work with their students" (para 8), which would help Saudi students to integrate on US campuses. Portland State University has the highest number of students from Saudi Arabia studying on their campus; however, they do not offer any cross-cultural training specifically about the Middle East for their faculty or staff.

Portland State University and other universities with a diverse student body should research intercultural training programs and adapt them to fit their needs. Implementing such program will create more successful multicultural environments. Workshops and trainings specifically concerning Middle Eastern culture have been held at universities both in Colorado and Indiana. Colorado State University, which has about 150 Saudi students, trained more than 700 faculty and staff on Middle Eastern culture, educational systems, and cross-cultural

communication (Redden, 2007). They also sponsored a Middle East Training Workshop series with the help of a U.S. State Department grant. Heidi Gregori-Gahan, the director of international programs and services at the University of Southern Indiana received a training grant from NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the State Department to create a “Train the Trainers” workshop. The workshop helped foster cross-cultural understanding by bringing together staff from 15 different Indiana institutions to discuss what could be done to help integrate Saudi culture and American higher education (Redden, 2007). There is an immense need at PSU to educate the faculty about the culture of the 470 Saudi students.

Findings from the study show a need for better advising and collaboration between the universities. The PSU Director of International Students, Judy Van Dyck voiced concern about the challenge of placing AYU students in appropriate classes. The unclear transcripts and lack of TOEFL scores impeded the task and ultimately led to two students dropping a course. A major challenge for host campuses is in the admission and placement of international students. The international universities should be supportive and play an active role in the admission process and placement of students. There needs to be open, transparent and honest communication between the two entities.

Practical suggestions for dealing with the challenge of admitting and placing international students can be devised by collaborating with and learning from other universities with similar experiences. In a March roundtable discussion on Saudi students sponsored by the Institute of International Education (IIE), educators identified key challenges including “discerning students real skill set and students’ criteria for eligibility for academic programs” (Alsayed, 2007, para

4). The group of educators echoed Judy's Van Dyck thoughts on the admission process. The discussion provoked the creation of a list of other successful practices for admitting Saudi student with ambiguous credentials, including "requiring that they first enroll in a community college for a semester of admitting students to less demanding majors while offering them the option to switch at a later date if they succeed academically" (Redden, 2007, para 10). Arizona State University, ASU, assigned an advisor to exclusively help the Saudi students. "You have to sit there and tell them exactly what they need to do," said Zohreh Sotoodeh, director of international undergraduate admission at ASU (Redden, 2007, para 11).

Throughout the summer program, I tried to intervene in the students learning as little as possible. I wanted to be solely an observer like a fly on the wall. However, I did directly intervene and change the course of events when I suggested to Huda to meet with her instructor. The meeting was a turning point in her cultural learning. It was her first ever meeting with an instructor. She called immediately after the meeting to thank me for the suggestion. An implication is to employ an advisor to deal directly with study abroad participants. In the summer of 2010, PSU's Office of International Students was in the process of hiring a part-time advisor to focus solely on the Saudi population.

In an effort to become less dependent on foreign brainpower and oil and more self-sufficient, the Saudi Arabian government decided to invest heavily in the education of their society. "The desert Kingdom is blessed with bountiful oil reserves, Prince Turki noted, but every Saudi Arabian knows that oil is a finite resource. "We know that our best and infinite resource is our people," he explained, "so while we enrich ourselves from one, we must invest in

the other” (Hanley, 2007, para 7). Under those auspices, the Ministry of Higher Education established the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, KASP. The goal of the scholarship program is to meet the challenges of globalization by strengthening the educational background and employability of Saudi nationals.

Since the inception of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, the fund has provided higher education to tens of thousands of Saudi students studying for undergraduate and graduate degrees in various countries. In 2007, The King Abdullah Scholarship Program funded 12,000 students studying in the United States, of which almost a third were women (Hanley, 2007). The number has been steadily increasing as the U.S. is once again seen as a friendly, accommodating place to pursue higher education. The Saudi Cultural Division in Washington DC anticipates that the number of Saudis studying in the States could increase to 22,000 in the coming years (Alsayyed, 2007).

Therefore, this study has national implications and is a timely matter because of the large number of Saudis studying abroad through the scholarship program and is useful for Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington, D. C. The findings and implications of this study are useful for the scholarship administrators as they plan pre-departure and onsite support for their scholarship winners. The need for transparency in admission processes and an effective and timely cultural orientation before departure with ongoing support while at university are implications of this study that the Ministry should listen to in order to ensure the success of their scholarship recipients.

Education can learn from business. In MKTG Working with Customers, Dragan shared a story about Wal-Mart's adventures in Germany. When Wal-Mart first opened stores in Germany, they trained their staff in the American style of business. They instructed the staff to engage the customers with idle chitchat. What happened? The customers ran away from the shop assistants! After a few months of this, Wal-Mart finally changed their approach. They adapted it to fit the cultural context. While going over exam questions, Cassie Thomas echoed the same idea. She read one of the answers, "Adapt communication style to the way the customer understands." Education can learn from business' international experiences. While there is a push within higher education to diversify classrooms, there is also a need to adapt in the light of globalization. Previous research conducted by Clarke and Flaherty (2002) also argued that educators must adapt their teaching practices to accommodate international students.

The five Saudi Arabian female students' experiences studying at PSU are a microcosm of a broader phenomenon. Colleges and universities around the world are witnessing an increase in enrollment of Saudi Arabian students. As a result, inquiry into the challenges that these five students faced as they traversed educational paradigms from Riyadh to Portland is widely beneficial. The Cultural Knowings framework and the Intensity Factors were used to understand the source of these challenges and how the students overcame them. It is hoped that learning gained from this study will aid future educational exchanges.

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