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**GREENER GRASS? INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS'  
EXPERIENCES AT UNIVERSITIES IN THE WESTERN  
CAPE**

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Psychological Research

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2002

**DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 5/9/2002

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## ABSTRACT

Literature has indicated that international students may experience difficulties when entering their country of sojourn. Previous studies have not addressed the experience of these students in South Africa. Given the unique social and historical context of the country, students may encounter issues dissimilar to other countries. The objective of this study was to explore the experiences of international students in South Africa, in terms of the social, academic and general experience. Additionally, students' motivations and expectations were explored. For this purpose, a survey was conducted via e-mail to students at three Western Cape universities. The final sample comprised 142 postgraduate international students from three universities. The participants were from a variety of faculties, and originated from a variety of countries, most of them coming from the African continent. (A questionnaire, comprising closed- and open-ended questions, was constructed from findings in international research. The collected data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis included chi-squares, Fischer's exact tests and logistic regression. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The main finding of this study was that students, although in most respects faring well, experienced problems in social interaction with South Africans. ) Specifically, students reported having experienced discrimination. Their worst experiences were crime and social problems, and the experiences they enjoyed the most were mainly sightseeing and social activities, as well as faring well socially. Most students had arrived in the country in search of education, and with realistic expectations. The academic lives of most students were satisfactory. However, most students did not wish to remain in South African after the completion of their studies. Thus, there was no brain gain in favour of South Africa.

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# CHAPTER 1:

## INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of international students arrive in South Africa to attend universities. In 2000, as many as 33 838 international students enrolled at tertiary institutions around the country (Department of Education, 2001). This was a large increase from 13 606 in 1996 (Department of Education, as cited in Ramphela, 1998) and can be assumed to rise further over the years as the political and social climate in South Africa stabilises.

The motive for studying in South Africa may be different for each and every student. Amongst other reasons, students may arrive purely for education, to experience a different culture, or to gain independence from family. What ever the underlying motive for an international student's presence, they share some common issues such as being a foreigner in a new country. Their common foreignness to South Africa makes them a special group who may have special needs, despite the students differing from each other in their background. However, to place international students into one homogeneous group would be a gross generalisation. International students should not be considered a group with serious problems requiring counselling – only some students may need assistance in adapting to their new environment.

International students' experiences have been studied extensively in other countries. However, little attention has been given to their sojourns in South Africa. Few studies have attempted to address international students' experiences here. Instead, the focus has been on the impact that the influx of international students has had on national policies. The presence of international students affects the lives of host students and staff at the university. This could be said to place the university under international scrutiny. It would be an overgeneralization to take one student from a country, or a small group of them, as representative of that country. However, their experience may affect the image of South Africa and its universities abroad. These students may also bring considerable revenue to South Africa and its universities.

This research aimed to explore the experiences of international students in universities in the Western Cape. Their experiences with the university, South Africans and problems they might have faced were examined. The objective of this research was to provide an overview of the students' issues, which might then be used as an indicator for the provision of additional support, if required, for international students by the universities.

### **1.1 Issues Facing International Students**

A variety of issues, all interlinked to some degree, has been found to affect students' enjoyment of their sojourn. According to Furnham and Bochner (1982), the area of international education is an important meeting ground for cross-cultural contact. This, however, is not without its problems. Sandhu (1994) noted in his review that international students have to face changes in the personal, social and environmental spheres of their lives. The most obvious changes for the students would be in the areas of academic work and their social and cultural experiences. International students have been found to experience more difficulties than local students (Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994). They have been described as an in-transit population (Luzio-Lockett, 1998), who face many challenges during their sojourn. These in-transit populations may experience distress. For example, a study on an immigrant population found that the distress levels of potential- and actual immigrants were higher than locals' levels were (Ritsner & Ponizovsky, 1999). As international students are immigrants of a kind, this result could indicate that distress levels are indeed higher for international students than local students. In addition, confusion, self-doubt, loneliness and distress often mark adaptation to life in a new setting (Tafarodi & Smith 2001). Therefore international students, as well as immigrants, are likely to experience at least some of these feelings.

In the South African context, when arriving from an American or European country, the experience may be bewildering for a student. South Africa could be considered an extremely heterogeneous society in terms of language, cultures and so on. Although South Africa is changing daily, it has been important for people in the country to distinguish between different groups, and judge others on this basis, in the past. International students, entering this diverse society, might face being categorised into a different group and might not be able to integrate into any of the groups present in South Africa. Additionally, having contact with all the various racial and cultural groups might present a problem for

international students, as they could be perceived as outsiders, perhaps more than they would be in other countries. Therefore, an international student's experience in South Africa may be markedly different to that in other countries.

## **2. CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

The culture of the country of sojourn has been found to exert an influence on international students' adjustment. Factors such as culture shock may exert a negative influence on these students' lives. Several theories have been constructed around the relationship between culture and adjustment.

### **2.1 The U-curve**

One of the most controversial hypotheses of sojourner adjustment is the U-curve. The U-curve depicts sojourners' adjustment over time, in terms of the emergence and dissipation of culture shock. Lysgaard discovered this phenomenon in the 1950's while interviewing 200 returned Norwegian Fulbright scholars (Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Gaw, 2000; Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Lysgaard found in these interviews that the scholars tended to go through three phases of adjustment; initial adjustment, crisis, and regained adjustment. The bottom of the curve was said to be somewhere between six to eighteen months, and the total period of adjustment would take approximately twenty months (Lysgaard, 1955, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The initial adjustment period is characterised by initial elation and optimism, the "crisis" period by frustration, depression and confusion, and the final stage would entail gradual improvement (Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

Klineberg and Hull (1979) reviewed the U-curve closely before testing it in their research. They noted that the time period differed across the various studies which had confirmed the U-curve. Additionally, they stated that the U-curve is a difficult area of study, as variables such as Christmas holidays (seen as a "down" period for locals and international students), might interfere with the research. They also noted that the arrival of the students, in terms of whether they arrived in the first semester, when social patterns are usually set, or in the middle of the year, could affect the U-curve. They criticised the fact that the U-curve had been studied at one point in time, where a series of ups and downs can be

missed. Their study followed newly arrived students throughout the year and included a questionnaire, which was sent to students midway through an academic year. This research was conducted longitudinally in various countries. In the statistical data obtained from the questionnaire in the middle of the year, they found that there was little support for the U-curve. These researchers found evidence of the U-curve in their series of interviews, but only in a small minority of cases. Thus, Klineberg and Hull (1979) asserted that the U-curve is the exception rather than the rule.

Furnham and Bochner (1982) stated that evidence indicates that when people enter a new culture they find the experience bewildering, confusing, depressing, anxiety provoking, humiliating, embarrassing and, generally, stressful. After a period, the sojourners begin to cope with the environment and lead satisfying lives. They claim that this, in essence, is the culture shock and U-curve hypothesis, and is quite accurate in a descriptive sense.

In their later research, Furnham and Bochner (1986) reviewed research conducted by Bochner, Lin and McLeod (1980). This research was based on the idea that the adjustment does not occur within the person, but entails the acquisition of behaviours, skills and norms appropriate to the host society. They said that the U-curve could be derived from the role the sojourner assumes in the culture – from observer to participant. Therefore, at the beginning of the U-curve the observer would be interested and excited with the new culture. The bottom of the U-curve - the less adjusted period - would occur when the sojourner has to learn to cope with everyday matters within the new society (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The end of the U-curve would then be when travellers have learned all the necessary skills to cope with the new society. Thus, the rate of culture learning would account for the U-curve's existence, and not all sojourners would experience it, as some would be experienced culture travellers (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Torbiorn (1982, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986) found in his study of Swedish expatriate businesspersons that both those, whose companions were predominantly fellow nationals, and those who spent more time amongst third-country nationals or locals, had experienced the U-curve of adjustment. However, the bottom of the U-curve was much lower for those who had made host-national friends. Despite this, when the U-curve began to rise these individuals were more satisfied than those who had associated with compatriots. Their satisfaction levels continued to rise and remained higher even after three years. This supports the suggestion that culture learning influences adjustment.

Argyle (1982) stated that persons who go abroad for a limited period show a U-shaped pattern of discomfort. The first stage has initial elation, enjoying the sights and similar experiences. The second stage is characterised by the sojourners having to cope with domestic life, and where they keep to the company of expatriates. At this stage, they are in some degree of culture shock. In the third stage, they have learned to cope better and are looking forward to going home. This view of the U-curve seems also reminiscent of the culture learning approach.

Surdam and Collins (1984) found support for the U-curve in their study of international students. They found that students who had been in the host country, the United States, between two to four years were less well adapted than those who had arrived recently or had lived in the US for more than four years. This study was relatively small scale, cross-sectional in nature, and from a single institution. Therefore, their results cannot be held conclusive, as the study could not be said to be generalisable. Parr, Bradley and Bingi (1992) also reported results reminiscent of the U-curve. Students who had spent less than one year in the host country reported feeling more positive about their sojourn than students who had been in the country between one and two years. Students who had been in the country less than one year did not differ significantly in reporting positive feelings from those who had lived in the host country for more than two years. The authors stated that international students arrive in the United States with high expectations that are subsequently not realised as the reality of culture difference and studies sets in. This study, however, had only 163 students as participants and employed a cross-sectional method. Therefore, although the result might be reminiscent of the U-curve, it could not be held as solid proof of the existence of the phenomenon.

Sojourner literature also includes other patterns of adaptation, which are similar to the U-curve. For example, Ritsner and Ponizovsky (1999) examined the patterns of psychological distress of Russian immigrants in Israel. They came up with the two-phase temporal pattern, where the first phase was characterised by elevated distress scores, and the second phase showed a decline in the distress, which reached and sustained a normal level. According to the researchers, the escalation phase lasted for the first 27 months and the reduction lasted until the end of the fifth year. They found no support for the initial euphoria and stated that the studies, claiming to have found this euphoria as a general

pattern, could have been limited. Again, a limitation to this study was the cross-sectional method. Therefore, there could have been differences in the migrants who had arrived earlier, as acknowledged by the authors. However, even if the lack of elation was valid for Ritsner and Ponizovsky's (1999) study, it is possible that initial euphoria could occur for overseas students. Migrants are leaving their home for good, to make a life in another country and may experience distress already in their home countries, as found by Ritsner and Ponizovsky (1999). Overseas students, on the other hand, are leaving home to return – they may assume that if life is not enjoyable in the host country they may return at will to their country of origin. They may also perceive the sojourn more as an exciting experience, whereas for migrants the excitement may be overcast by worry of building a life in a new country.

In his review of literature, Church (1982) noted that the support for the U-curve hypothesis must be considered weak, inconclusive and over-generalised. He cited several studies, which claimed to prove the existence of the U-curve, and several that claimed there was no proof for its existence (Church, 1982). He also noted that most studies finding support for the phenomenon were cross-sectional in nature. Furnham and Bochner (1982; 1986) agree with Church (1982) in that the U-curve is too vague and generalised to be useful in predicting students' adjustment. According to Furnham and Bochner (1982; 1986), more complex and longitudinal research is needed to determine its existence or usefulness. They also assert that the U-curve needs to be based within a theoretical framework. The authors claim that the reason the U-curve has invited extensive research over the years is the very vagueness of the hypothesis. Additionally, the dependent variable has varied from loneliness to climate, which could account for the contradictory findings (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

The literature reviewed above does not conclusively prove or disprove the U-curve. It is possible that the pattern is an exception rather than the rule. However, until the hypothesis has been tested empirically, with longitudinal data and accounting for most confounding factors, the hypothesis remains in controversy.

## 2.2 Factors Affecting International Students' General Adjustment

### 2.2.1 Cultural Exposure

There are two opposing views regarding exposure to different cultures (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The first view suggests that cultural exposure broadens perspective, and enhances personal growth and insight into one's own culture. This view maintains that intercultural contact results in better international relations and greater understanding between cultures. The second point of view sees exposure to unfamiliar cultures as stressful and potentially harmful. It maintains that intercultural contact may sometimes promote hostility between the involved parties (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Furnham and Bochner's (1986) suggestion with regard to the contact hypothesis in general and its application in the host- foreign student relationships, is that depending on a large variety of factors, contact between cultures or groups may increase, or reduce, tolerance and understanding. Earlier, Brown (1965) asserted that the notion of mere contact with another culture bringing about cross-cultural understanding is false – favourable circumstances are needed for positive contact. There is a possibility that educational exchange can lead to undesirable cross-cultural attitudes (Brown, 1965). This notion was confirmed by Tajfel and Dawson (1965, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). In his review, Bochner (1982) found that inter-group contact is less likely to reduce hostility in tense, frustrating or unpleasant circumstances. However, Church (1982) noted that cross-cultural contact is more likely to result in personal growth than changes in values or norms. He states that the sojourn experience, and with it the cross-cultural contact, may increase interest in international activities, rather than changes to international- as opposed to national values. Therefore, the nature of contact, as well as the circumstances surrounding it, may greatly influence the outcome of the sojourn.

The outcomes of the sojourn may differ. Some foreign students may return home with strong dislike for the country in which they sojourned (Tajfel & Dawson, 1965, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Not all students return home – a phenomenon that has been termed the "brain-drain" (Adams, 1968, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). According to Alatas (1972), as cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986), students sometimes return home with new technologies and ideas, and implement them without regard to cultural requirements or applicability of the innovations. Some students may also use their more

privileged position to exploit their co-nationals, either for their, or the host country's, interests (Curle, 1970, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Wade, 1975, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). All this led Furnham and Bochner (1986) to conclude that the assumption that foreign students return home full of good-will to their hosts and the assumption that educational exchange will be part of economic aid (Bochner & Wicks, 1972, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986) is not always correct. They also asserted that overseas sojourns must be examined more thoroughly and the actual, rather than assumed or intended effects of educational exchange programmes should be determined.

The culture faced by international students and their engagement with it affects the students' enjoyment of the sojourn. According to Brown (1965), culture difference and its effects on a student's life sets international students apart from the rest. Church (1982) found that the majority of the students make reasonable adjustments to their new cultural and institutional demands. This is not to say that the students have no problems in adapting and adjusting to the new cultural norms. Research has noted that cultural differences may cause distress for the students (Kaczmarek et al., 1994; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992). Parr, Bradley and Bingi (1992) found that cultural differences, such as how to respond to certain characteristics of the hosts, understanding how the hosts think and adapting to new cultural norms posed a problem for students. In a study by Lewthwaite (1996) students remained on the periphery of the host culture, due to a lack of time to engage with it and a lack of relaxed opportunities to do so. Thus, they could not have been able to adjust to the cultural norms present in the host country and could have had a prolonged period of distress. According to Arthur (1997), a prominent issue specific to international students is the adjustments they have to make when moving between cultures. Similarly, Mori (2000) observes that international students are continually challenged to cope with new values and beliefs. These challenges or adjustments may present a considerable amount of distress for a student and affect the rest of their experience in a country.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), the new theoretical models of the sojourn experience are less clinical than before, in that they liken cross-cultural exposure to learning and suggest orientation programmes instead of therapy. The merit of this approach is that culture shock is not seen as a weakness or a disease, but as a "product of a complex set of social, psychological, between-skin influences played out over a long period of time" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p. 13). The authors see the concept of 'adjustment' as clinical,

and containing the implicit assumption that a newcomer should reject their culture of origin. There is an alternative theoretical model developed by Bochner (1972, 1981, 1982), as cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986), which is named 'culture-learning'. This model suggests that the migrant should not 'adjust', but learn the new culture's salient characteristics. Thus, a well-functioning individual in a new society would be one who has learned the necessary skills to cope with the new environment. The culture-learning model has been expanded to incorporate social skills (Argyle, 1979, 1980, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986) with cross-cultural competence (Furnham & Bochner, 1982), as well as to "draw attention to the importance of a social-support system of the sojourner as the context in which appropriate culture-learning can take place" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p. 14). Culture learning seems an appropriate term for becoming a functional member of a new society. However, there is a difference between knowing the salient characteristics of a culture and acting accordingly. The culture learning approach seems to suggest, quite appropriately, that culture is actively acquired. However, to learn and perform culturally appropriate activities one would have to change in some way; either in ways of thinking, or perhaps in attitudes towards the host country. Although the term 'adjustment', when related to acquiring parts of a culture, may seem clinical, it could be said that to learn and to perform aspects of a culture, one has to make some compromises, or 'adjustments' within oneself. This, however, does not presuppose the loss of the person's original culture - merely an adjustment of one's behaviour and attitudes to a more suitable form, which is more acceptable within the bounds of the host culture. Therefore, discarding the concept of adjustment would not be appropriate in the context of intercultural relations.

Argyle (1982) states that competency in dealing with another culture or its members can be regarded as a social skill. Sojourners in a new culture and society could be likened to people without appropriate social skills to negotiate their way in their own society (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), sojourners are often highly skilled in their own society, both verbally and non-verbally, and may find their newfound inadequate social skills especially frustrating and embarrassing. The learning of a new culture occurs mainly by contact with host nationals, therefore, sojourners should have close links with the host society (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). There are similarities between learning a second or third language and learning to cope with a new culture. A person may forsake their first language for another one, retain them both or use neither. This can also be done with different cultures (Furnham & Bochner,

1986). According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), this similarity between the two processes supports the idea of 'culture learning'. Culture learning is a hypothesis that does not presuppose that an unadjusted person in a new culture is ill, or dysfunctional. Rather it assumes that a person has to learn to cope with the new culture, and that the process may take some time.

### ***2.2.2 Coping with Cross-cultural Relations***

People react in different ways when exposed to a new culture. They also engage with cross-cultural relations with different coping mechanisms (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). They may use the response of 'passing', which is forgetting their own culture; they may become 'marginal' which means rejecting the new culture completely; or they may become 'mediating persons' combining elements of both social systems. The mediating response seems the best solution (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), because it allows a traveller to experience the new culture and does not presuppose the loss of his or her own culture. This provides a framework for acquiring multicultural attributes (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). However, research has not yet shown why some people react in a specific way (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), or how the most positive reaction could be elicited.

Various reactions to cultural contact have been recorded. Some students may reject their own culture (Bochner, 1982). This may be due to over-identifying with the host culture (Church, 1982), which may lead to problems in international exchange schemes, as the students are then unwilling to return home after their sojourn. Although the experience is valued by some, intercultural contact may also cause stress or tension to students, (Lewthwaite, 1996). This tension could be due to contrasts between the students' own, and the host culture (Arthur, 1997). Students also have been noted to fear losing their own culture (Lewthwaite, 1996). A way of maintaining their own culture has been keeping in contact with fellow nationals (Lewthwaite, 1996; Sparrow, 2000). Students may also reject the host culture, which may lead to superficial and defensive adjustment (Church, 1982). Arthur (1997) observed the rejection of the host culture by some students. Students may resolve to grasp their own culture's values and reject the host culture's, which may cause the students to miss opportunities to engage with the enjoyable aspects of the host culture (Arthur, 1997). This lack of exposure to the culture, as well as the lack of enjoyable

occurrences within the students' lives could affect negatively both their opinion of the country and of their stay.

According to Luzio-Lockett (1998), adjustment to a new culture and setting requires accommodating to the frames of reference of the host culture. This necessitates compromising and trying to fit one's identity into the new sets of rules and conventions (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Sparrow (2000) also found that the respondents spoke of constructing new identities, always within the definitions of culture prevalent in their host society. She also observed that the identity of her respondents was a reflection of the situation they were in and that maintaining a positive self-concept was "an essential challenge" (Sparrow, 2000, p. 194). These responses seem as though the participants were blending into the new culture – the response categorised as 'passing'.

The motives of migrants might affect the style in which they cope with cultural stress. Researchers have tried to examine this, but the examination of reported motives has its disadvantages and the linking of motives to specific coping patterns has been difficult (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Different kinds of travellers have different motives, and similar travellers may also have differing motives (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). One student might travel to learn, another to experience life on his or her own. The motive with which the traveller or immigrant leaves their home country might have an effect on how they perceive their experience, how they cope with the change, and on the amount of stress they experience during their sojourn. Perhaps from future research it will become possible to determine whether motives for changing one's environment have an effect on the capacity to cope in a new environment.

### **2.3 Culture Shock**

The culture shock phenomenon is one of the most dominant concepts relating to international students' experience in their sojourn country. Students do not only enter a new country, but also a new university. The culture within the university, styles of instruction, and teacher-learner relationships may differ from what international students were accustomed to in their home countries. This sometimes drastic change from the familiar may cause the students to experience culture shock. Informing students of this

possibility, as well as having knowledge of this phenomenon, could help in the provision of more efficient support for international students.

Culture shock was first described by Oberg (1960), cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986). Oberg listed six aspects of culture shock. Some of these are strain due to psychological adaptations, a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation, and being rejected by- or rejecting the new culture, or both. He also asserted that culture shock consists of role confusion; confusion in values, feelings and self-identity; surprise, anxiety and similar feelings following awareness of cultural differences; and feelings of impotence with regard to coping with the new environment.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), Oberg's definition has a clinical flavour and gives a sense of the experience of culture shock being a symptom of abnormality. They mention that researchers, since Oberg's 'discovery' of culture shock, have seen the phenomenon as normal, and a part of engaging with a new culture. Bock (1970), as cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986, p. 49) saw culture shock as "primarily an emotional reaction that follows from not being able to understand, control and predict another's behaviour". Furnham and Bochner (1986) noted that other writers in the field have agreed that culture shock is a stress reaction to the uncertainty and unpredictability of receiving psychological and physical rewards. A person reacting to this uncertainty would manifest symptoms such as confusion, anxiety and apathy until he or she developed new cognitive constructs to understand and enact appropriate behaviours in appropriate situations. This would account for the tendency of culture shock to dissipate over time, as suggested by, for example, the U-curve hypothesis. The experience of anxiety, in general, seems to pervade culture shock literature. Some authors label this anxiety as a free-floating anxiety, which is said to affect normal behaviour (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Individuals may begin to behave in a way that differs from their previous behaviour, and exhibit some negative symptoms. \

Argyle (1982) stated that culture shock might be a problem for those who live abroad for the first time, and may last for six months or longer. According to Sandhu (1994), culture shock may be produced by new expectations and social norms that students face on arrival in the host country. However, Arthur (1997), although stating that international students may present symptoms relating to culture shock, asserts that international students start their transition prior to actual arrival in the host country – they invest much time and

energy in preparing for their sojourn. Therefore, preparation for the sojourn may lessen the effects of culture shock.

The culture shock theory has not been studied sufficiently. Furnham and Bochner (1986) point out that most investigations into culture shock have been descriptive, and there is little research on who will experience the phenomenon most severely, what causes it, and how long it will last. There is also abundance of evidence of the negative effects of culture shock, but little of the positive effects. In small doses, culture shock might even be beneficial (David, 1971, Adler, 1975, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). It may, according to these authors, promote personal growth and self-development. Thus, more research is needed regarding the specific characteristics of culture shock, and its effects and causes. Following new research, it can be assumed that the experience of culture shock, if not prevented, could be controlled. After this the lives of international travellers might be eased with respect to the negative effects of culture shock.

### ***2.3.1 Reverse Culture Shock***

Another theory related to culture shock is reverse culture shock, which students have been noted to experience on returning home (Arthur, 1997; Gaw, 2000). Reverse culture shock is the process of a traveller's readjustment to their home culture after an overseas sojourn (Gaw, 2000).

Gaw's (2000) study examined the adjustment of students returning to the United States. He discovered some support for reverse culture shock and found that those who experienced more severe levels of reverse culture shock also reported more adjustment problems, shyness and were less likely to use campus support systems than those with lower levels (Gaw, 2000). Gaw's (2000) research was limited by his sample—his participants were between 18 to 25 years old, who had been overseas on average ten years. He also used participants with extremely varied backgrounds. Therefore, it is questionable whether the students were American in their culture, as their exposure to American culture varied. Some of the participants could have had exposure to American culture only through their parents, and it is possible that they related more to their "sojourn" culture than to what could be called their "original" culture. Therefore Gaw's research does not provide

conclusive proof of this phenomenon. However, there is a possibility of the existence of reverse culture shock. The phenomenon could be due to the acculturation of a person within the host culture, and in returning home discovering that much has changed in the time they were away. Therefore, if culture shock is an accepted phenomenon, there is no reason why reverse culture shock should not have the same status. However, the status can only be ascertained after more research.

The W-curve is an extension of the U-curve by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), as cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Gaw (2000), that also depicts the return of the sojourner to the home country. They found that the returning student would go through a re-acculturation process similar to the process experienced when they initially arrived in the host country. This can be seen as a reflection of the students' expectations of returning home; they often expect their home to remain unchanged, and thus expect no cultural differences. Therefore, they cannot prepare for culture shock as they would when entering a foreign country (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963, as cited in Gaw, 2000).

### ***2.3.2 Causation of Culture Shock***

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), most studies in the field of migration have shown a "small but positive relationship between long-term migration and psychological disturbance, however measured" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986, p. 161). The researchers state that it is likely that some aspects of migration determine the severity and type of psychological disturbance. There are various explanations given for the psychological disturbances – none of which are sufficient to explain the phenomenon in its entirety. Three of the earliest explanations are grief, fatalism and selective migration (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Grief could serve as a theory of the relationship between migration and culture shock, in that the migrant would be deprived of relationships and objects that used to be an integral part of his or her life. The grieving process could be resolved once the relationships and objects have been replaced by new ones from the host culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), grief could account for the differences between migrants' reactions from different countries – the grieving process is largely culturally determined. However, the authors also note various faults in this theory. Not all migrants experience negative reactions, there is no prediction in grief literature of

which people would suffer more or less, and administering grief counselling for migrants seems quite inappropriate (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Nevertheless, this theory could account for a part of the phenomenon of culture shock. The phenomenon does not seem to last the duration of a persons' life, and since this theory suggests that the mourning process only lasts until the objects and relationships are replaced, it seems possible that people could grieve their lost possessions and friends. As for the type of people that could suffer more or less from culture shock, the relationship between the perceived importance of these objects and relationships for the migrant could be examined.

Fatalistic beliefs have been related to distress and depression and culture shock (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Certain groups are said to be prone to fatalistic beliefs, and thus might cope less well with geographic movement (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Fatalistic beliefs are related to having an external locus of control, which according to this theory may be related to adjusting to migration less favourably. There are several problems with this theory – it does not help in making predictions about immigrant adjustment, and does not account for the different rates of distress in immigrant groups. Additionally, migration requires the assuming of control over one's life, such as successful management of one's financial and social affairs. Therefore, it could be argued that people who are most likely to migrate are people with an internal locus of control (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Attributing culture shock only to fatalism could give rise to difficulties, in that government agencies might become less likely to accept members of identified groups due to their increased proneness to fatalistic beliefs and the possible problems in their subsequent adaptation.

The theory of selective migration espouses the view that individuals, who are selected for immigration to an environment for which they are suited, cope better than those who immigrate without a selection process. This may account for the differences in adaptation of different immigrant groups (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). However, this view also has a number of limitations – it was developed retrospectively, and is less explanatory than it could be (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). It does not clarify which barriers or obstacles hinder adaptation and which do not; it is difficult to test and does not leave free choice for the immigrant or the receiving country. Additionally, according to Furnham and Bochner (1986), this hypothesis has some undertones of racism – suggesting that some predetermined trait could make some race or another particularly prone to positive or

negative adjustment. A similar problem can be noted for selective migration and the theory of fatalism, in that the exclusion of certain groups could be a pitfall in the application of the theories.

Migrants' expectations of a country could also affect their adjustment (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). In general, the hypothesis of expectations states that people with unrealistically high expectations of the host country may be bitterly disappointed and, therefore, adjust less well, whereas people with negative expectations may be pleasantly surprised and cope better (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This hypothesis has its value and some support, but also a number of problems. All migrants will have some expectations of a variety of factors in the host country. This approach does not make clear which expectations are the most important. Additionally, the process by which unfulfilled expectations lead to poor adjustment has not been specified. Finally, the literature suggests that low expectations may lead to better adjustment, but it may also worsen overall social mobility (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

Expectations had a role in a study of overseas students by Carey (1956, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). He found that the lack of fulfilment of the students' unrealistically optimistic expectations caused the students to frequently become very depressed. A similar reaction was found by Tajfel and Dawson (1965, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Initial optimism was replaced by unfavourable comments about the local British people, flavoured by surprise at the class system and reports of prejudice and discrimination. The theory of expectations seems plausible, as disappointment may lead to negative perceptions of the sojourn, regardless of the actual events or circumstances.

There are three more recent explanations for culture shock. Negative life-events theory suggests major changes in one's life may lead to psychological or physical illness. The assumption is that a negative life event, such as losing one's job, can make a person ill. The more negative in intensity, duration and consequence the event, the more severe the illness (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). It is obvious that the negative life-events theory would account for some of the culture shock associated with migration. Migrants have to change their daily routines and there will be a number of other important changes to their lives. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), some psychological and physical illnesses relating to migration can be directly related to changes encountered during migration.

There are, of course, also changes that may lead to positive consequences in the person's life (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This hypothesis has its limitations, as regards causality and the retrospective nature of the interviews (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). However, the hypothesis has some value as a part of culture shock. Large changes in one's life cause stress, which may result in anxiety, which may further influence the emergence of negative symptoms that are deemed part of the culture shock phenomenon.

The 'social support networks' hypothesis concerns the alleviation of stress rather than its origins. The hypothesis suggests that migrants who have developed dense and available support networks experience less distress (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Furnham and Bochner (1986) asserted that if this hypothesis is true, then migrants and sojourners need a supportive social network, which may consist of co-nationals. This may explain the tendency of migrants and sojourners to prefer spending time with their compatriots rather than host nationals and in some instances preferring to live in 'immigrant ghettos' (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The literature on this hypothesis is somewhat equivocal, however, and needs to be explored further (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Social support networks may assist adjustment and adaptation by communicating to the migrants that they are cared for, valued and needed (Cobb, 1976, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). In general, as the hypothesis does not conclusively indicate the way in which social support prevents psychological problems (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), it may be considered a part of the buffering factors for culture shock and associated psychological problems. There is some evidence of the positive effect of social support networks on international students' lives and its relation to their adjustment. This is discussed later in the review.

Value differences have also been used as an explanation for some of the stresses experienced in cross-cultural contact (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This hypothesis is based on the assumption that people with different values living together may experience stress, anxiety, and a lack of well-being. However, according to Furnham and Bochner (1986), the actual consequences for the individuals involved in a cultural clash are not explicitly stated. Value differences may be predictors of the amount of stress travellers will be faced with, but they may be only one factor and cannot be considered the only cause (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Additionally, people may encounter others with radically different values in their own country, especially in heterogeneous societies. It could be assumed that some people have built a high tolerance level to value differences and would

experience less stress. Thus, it is possible that individuals from more heterogeneous societies would experience less stress.

None of the above hypotheses has yielded conclusive evidence towards the origin of culture shock. This phenomenon remains contested, and further research is needed in the field.

## 2.4 Cultural Distance

Cultural distance is a factor that could affect the social integration of students. The culture from which a student originates and the culture that he or she enters may differ to a great degree. Furnham and Bochner (1982) conducted a study, which determined that as the distance between the host society and the student's culture increased, so did the social difficulty. Culture distance does, according to Furnham and Bochner (1986), appear to be a large determinant of culture shock. Similarly, Lewthwaite (1996) noted that international students experienced difficulty in crossing into the local New Zealand culture partly because of the disparity between their own and the host culture.

Redmond (2000) studied the effect of cultural distance on intercultural competence and stress. He found that cultural distance does seem to have an effect on what skills are utilised in the handling of stress and which skills play a role in the amount of stress when faced with a new culture. He found that the skill of social decentering had an effect on the amount of stress experienced by the students. Redmond (2000) expected this, as he had hypothesised that people who are socially decentering might be more likely to recognise differences between their own and the host culture, while more egocentric people might not recognise the differences as acutely. Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama, Minami, and Fujihara (1997) noted that social networks are important for international student adaptation. They also noted that network effects seemed to be more powerful for Asian students entering Japan. Additionally, the 'Westerners', who have high affiliative tendencies, could need their networks more for support. This could be an indication of students from collectivist societies having a higher need for social networks (Tanaka et al., 1997). This is not entirely consistent with the cultural distance hypothesis, as social networks were found positive for adjustment, and more important, for Asian students who originate from a collectivist society and entering a collectivist society. However, the authors mention that Asian

students entering Japan usually fare worse than their European counterparts, as the Japanese are more disposed towards discriminating against Southeast Asians (Iwao & Higihara, 1987, as cited in Tanaka, et al., 1997). Related to this, Tafarodi and Smith (2001) state that in collectivist cultures self-acceptance is a reflection of social acceptance. They also assert that self acceptance is dependent on “fidelity to normative prescriptions and proscriptions for personal behaviour” (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001, p. 74). Therefore, international students who originate from a collectivist culture would experience more stress in general on entering a new culture, as their self-acceptance would depend on the norms for personal behaviour in their culture. However, they might be unable to determine the new norms surrounding them and thus adhere to their own culture’s norms in a new society.

According to Tafarodi and Smith (2001), there is a large cultural difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. As the culture distance hypothesis assumes that there is a relationship between the size of the difference and adaptation difficulties, Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed’s (1998) findings could be seen to support it. These authors found that Asian students had more difficulty in adjusting to the United States. Tafarodi and Smith (2001) studied the difference between individualistic and collectivistic sojourners in their depressive sensitivity to life events. They suggested that collectivistic sojourners would be more vulnerable to depressive dysphoria when faced with negative life events (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001). The study was conducted on Malaysian and British students in Britain. The authors found that social life events were associated with depressive dysphoria for the Malaysian students more than for British students, and that their levels of depressive dysphoria were higher than those of British students. The problems with this study, as noted by the researchers themselves, were that depression itself could have produced negative bias, and the Malaysians may have lacked the social support to act as a buffer against psychological disturbance (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001). However, the authors noted that the Malaysians had a strong support base in their co-national organisations and the possibility of Malaysians students facing objectively more negative life events was also countered (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001). However, according to Iwata and Higuchi (2000), who studied the reporting of positive and negative feelings between Japanese and American students, Japanese students were less likely to report positive feelings. The possibility exists, then, that Malaysian students may also be more likely to report negative

affect. However, cultural difference may exert an influence on the students' enjoyment of their sojourn.

### **3. THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

The social environment is important for the lives of international students. Not only does social support bring comfort in times of distress, but it is also an important vehicle for learning the ways and norms of a new culture. International students have left their friends and family behind and need to form new social support networks. Sandhu (1994) mentioned that international students are unable to find support systems in the host country that are similar to the ones they had at home. Mori (2000) also noted that international students are likely to have social support networks, which are very distinct from those of the native students. In a study conducted by Tanaka et al. (1997), the general finding was that the development of social networks is important for the students, because it facilitates adjustment to their new environment. In an earlier study, Surdam and Collins (1984) suggested that students who were in the middle of their stay might need additional intimate contact with others, as they have not necessarily developed a sufficient social network as a support system. Contact with locals is important in international students' coping process (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Schram & Lauver, 1988). Verma (1995) found that a lack of friends was amongst the most important problems for international students, and that peers were an important support in both academic and non-academic matters. Sparrow (2000) noted that the ability to work effectively has also been related to students' relationship to the host culture and social variables and context have enabled them to define who they are. Therefore, the quality and quantity of social networks is very important for the students, and may affect other spheres of their lives.

#### **3.1 Self-concept Change**

According to Luzio-Lockett (1998), the sojourn experience also has important implications for the self-concept. The social environment, especially, has a large impact on the self-concept. Luzio-Lockett (1998) stated that international students' transitional status reaches as far as their self-esteem – their self-esteem changes as their interactions with others change. Bochner (1982) observed that the groups in which individuals belong affect the individuals' identities. International students arrive in a new country and have to establish

new groups and networks for themselves, which can sometimes be markedly different from those in their home country. Thus their identity may also change. Arthur (1997) also noted that international students lose their “familiar roles, traditional sources of self-validation and the means through which social support is communicated” (p.266). This may affect their identity. In addition, as some international students have deficiencies, or perceived deficiencies, in their language facility, their self-concept may be affected. According to Luzio-Lockett (1998), our use of language is the manifestation of our cognitive processes. A speaker may be conscious of his or her accent, and become self-conscious about it. This may cause further problems in the language facility (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Luzio-Lockett (1998) also noted that students have reported their own sense of professional and personal worth as diminishing because of language restrictions. International students need to use language to establish an understanding of others’ view of them. Language is a tool for sharing feelings, and without being able to share their feelings and perceptions, international students may not be able to understand their new self which has emerged as a result of their sojourn (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Previously, Verma (1995) also noted that most of the students in her survey reported that problems during the sojourn had affected their self-confidence.

Luzio-Lockett (1998) also noted that significant others have an impact on a person’s self-concept. Since international students are far from their families and friends, they lack significant others when they arrive in a country. Failure to build a network of friends could impact on their self-concept and thus all other aspects of their lives. Additionally, individuals’ self-concepts change as they are in transition (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). The growth of the students cannot be achieved only through academic work – the students need to be able to communicate, interact, share experiences and be able to display their affective side (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). It can be assumed that this is one of the reasons for the facilitation of adjustment by a social network - interaction and expression of emotions necessitates a social life. If students fail to form a circle of friends as a support network, it could result in loneliness and in a wavering of self-esteem. The lack of significant others could eventually lead to the students’ personal growth remaining stagnant.

### 3.2 Social Support

The social support hypothesis, previously noted in the review of culture shock literature, assumes that interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in a person's well being (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), this hypothesis places more emphasis on the quality and quantity of the support rather than the nature of the support, as well as who provides it. The hypothesis, if valid, implies that it is important for sojourners to have access to a supportive social group, which may also consist of co-nationals (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Previously, Bochner (1982) emphasised social support and attended to the source of the support. According to his findings, students belong to two distinct social networks; a mono-cultural network, which comprises of fellow nationals and which provides an opportunity to rehearse and express ethnic and cultural values; and a bicultural network, which consists of host nationals. The latter network serves to facilitate the international students' academic and professional aspirations. In 1986, Furnham and Bochner reviewed a summary of studies and noted that there was also a third network. This multicultural network comprises of links with other foreign students and recreational and supportive function (Bochner, Hutnik & Furnham, 1986, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

However, studies seem to show that international students have little contact with host nationals. In Klineberg and Hull's (1979) study, more than half of those who reported having a good friend said that they were either a fellow national or another foreigner. Furnham and Bochner (1986) also noted that studies show that the bicultural network is consistently the least salient one. They noted that there is overwhelming evidence of many international students not knowing even one host student intimately, even after many years of staying in a host country, and international students thus remain isolated from the host society (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This finding is repeated in various more recent studies. Lewthwaite (1996) found that all students in his study, except one, said that it was difficult to meet locals outside the context of their studies. Arthur (1997) also noted that forming friendships with local students was often a disappointing and difficult experience. Tanaka et al. (1997) found that international students had the most contact with other international students, then with co-nationals, and lastly host students.

The tendency of international students to form groups with fellow nationals was previously noted by Klineberg and Hull (1979) and Church (1982). According to Church (1982), these groups largely determine other aspects of the students' lives, such as living arrangements. However, these groups are not without their problems. Arthur (1997) noted that students may be criticised because they have formed groups from similar backgrounds. This may appear to other students as though the international students have no inclination towards cross-cultural learning and affiliation (Arthur, 1997). However, groups formed with co-nationals can serve a very important function and should not be interfered with (Bochner, 1982). Similarly, Church (1982) noted that the groups enable the students to have primary group relations and maintain their values and belief systems without having to make behavioural and psychological adjustments. Therefore, these groups aid in maintaining psychological security, self-esteem as well as providing a sense of belonging. They may also reduce anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, and social stresses. International students are also able to discuss and interpret their new environment in these groups. More recently Mori (2000) observed that instead of approaching counsellors, international students tend to keep their psychological problems and symptoms among their fellow nationals. These functions of the groups make 'international student ghettos' as Klineberg and Hull (1979) called them, both a positive and negative phenomenon.

Spending more time with host students enables international students to adapt better (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984). Specifically, Klineberg and Hull (1979) noted that students who had spent more time with host nationals generally experienced fewer problems; they were less homesick, perceived discrimination rarely, were rarely depressed, and were generally more satisfied with the non-academic side of the sojourn. This brings into question the role of fellow national enclaves. Surdam and Collins (1984) found that contact with fellow nationals was relatively frequent in the first three months after the student's arrival, and was found helpful. Furnham and Bochner (1986) noted that researchers have found a relationship between the interaction with host nationals and the adjustment of international students. Interaction with host students has an important function for international students, thus isolation from host nationals could prove to be detrimental to their adaptation and to culture learning.

It seems that international students do have a desire to make friends with host students. In Lewthwaite's (1996) study, the students had the motivation and desire for contact, but their

academic workload made this difficult. Arthur (1997) stated that international students may have desired more contact with native-born Canadian students, but these relationships lacked the intimate quality that is usually present in a real friendship. According to Alreshoud and Koeske (1997), who studied Arab students' attitudes towards the host people and host country, visitors who have a positive image of the hosts prior to arrival can be expected to desire more contact. However, those students who desire more contact with host nationals, and are unable to establish relationships with them, may perceive their sojourn more negatively. Some attention should be paid to facilitating contact with locals, and discovering feasible means of alleviating the isolation sometimes experienced by international students.

Various factors may prevent students from engaging in the host society. In Lewthwaite's (1996) study, the students' academic pressures prevented them from meeting locals. Additionally, students who lived in student hostels noted that their environment did not facilitate opportunities for contact with host nationals (Lewthwaite, 1996). In a study by Tanaka et al. (1997), most contact occurred between international students and university staff and students. However, it was also found that contact with off-campus hosts was important for the adjustment process. Besides the general problems of contact with host nationals, international students have also been perceived as having difficulties with relationships with the opposite sex (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Tanaka et al. (1997) found that same sex pairing of international and host students was more common and hypothesised that this was due to the host students feeling more comfortable with friends of the same sex.

A variety of interventions have been initiated to promote contact between international and host students because existing programmes were found inadequate in some respects. Lewthwaite (1996) found that the university orientation programme was helpful in academic work, but less so in enhancing social interaction. The students had expected to make serious connections during orientation, which unfortunately did not materialise. Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1998) studied an international peer programme that entailed host students being paired with international students. This programme was aimed at increasing host students' knowledge and appreciation of foreign cultures and familiarising international students with the campus and residence halls. It had a positive impact on the interpersonal skills of the international students who participated and on the students'

utilisation of different campus services. A few years later, Nesdale and Todd (2000) studied an intervention designed to promote the social contact between international students and host students in an Australian university's residence halls. They found that intercultural contact increased on the part of the Australians, but not international students. However, this programme had an impact on the wider university campus and on the students' levels of intercultural acceptance. Peer programmes such as those above could be used to affect international students' social adaptation in a positive manner.

### 3.3 Communication

Intercultural communication, both verbal and non-verbal, may present problems in social contact. In a recent study, Mori (2000) stated that issues with language are important for most international students. In his review of literature, Church (1982) noted a positive relationship between language proficiency and contact with host nationals. Additionally, according to Verma (1995), a lack of social communication affected the self-esteem of international students and excluded them socially. The author stated that in her experience international students experience social anxiety in terms of language competency and in terms of socially appropriate behaviour. Arthur (1997) also noted that the language barriers and culture differences require additional time and commitment from both parties. Since international students may also have difficulty in the academic sphere, and have to devote considerable time to academic work, there may be few opportunities to form satisfactory relationships with locals.

Societal conventions can differ to a great degree in different cultures and may produce misunderstandings, especially if linguistic confusion comes into play. According to Church (1982), adjusting to social customs and norms is important for international students. Lewthwaite (1996) noted that because of misunderstandings, international students' difficulty to empathise with host students, and inability to establish interpersonal relationships, social integration was slow. Arthur (1997) noted that when host students failed to understand the needs of international students, the interactions were less than desirable. More specifically, Mori (2000) found that international students tended to confuse Americans' amiable characteristics as offers of serious friendships or romantic relationships. It appears, therefore, that misunderstandings may play a large role in inhibiting international students' integration into the host society.

### 3.4 Discrimination

When we are faced with members of other cultures, we read clues from their appearance, language and possibly their accent (Bochner, 1982; Bochner, 1976, Klineberg, 1979, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). These clues enable us to give them the status of a stranger – and this, in turn, causes us to categorise the people as ‘they’ – and distinguish ‘them’ from ‘us’ (Bochner 1982). Sherif (1970, as cited in Bochner, 1982) suggested that inter-group conflict stems from this very ‘us versus them’ classification, which in turn stems from inter-group competition. This type of classification may lead to discriminatory behaviour to the benefit of the ‘in-group’ (Tajfel, 1970, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This categorisation may be salient in South Africa, thus there is a high likelihood of international students being classified into ‘them’. The scarce resources present in South Africa, for example in terms of employment and educational opportunities, may increase international students’ exposure to discrimination, especially in the form of xenophobia. According to Sherif (1970), as cited in Furnham and Bochner (1986), this distinction may disappear if all participants in the interaction have a super-ordinate goal. However, Tajfel (1970), as cited in Bochner (1982), stated that no competition is required for hostility to arise between groups. Instead, he suggested that individuals have a subjective social order, which includes the classification of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and learn that the in-group member should have preferential treatment. This implies that simply the classification of a person as belonging to the ‘out-group’ makes them a target for less favourable treatment (Bochner, 1982). However, according to Bochner (1982), not all evidence supports the favourable treatment of the in-group. Other studies have suggested that under some circumstances strangers are treated more favourably. This was recalled much earlier by Goldman (1965), whose experience in China included better living conditions for international students than for locals.

Discrimination may present a problem for international students. Goldman’s (1965) sojourn in China in the 1950’s was also marred by discrimination against international students by the government. For example, the students were not allowed to take part in political meetings, in which host nationals spent time. This resulted in some disillusionment on the part of the international students (Goldman, 1965). Later studies have found that students who had perceived discrimination during their sojourn adjust less well than students who had not (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Surdam & Collins, 1984).

Church (1982) noted that one of the most important problems for some students is racial discrimination. Xenophobia may also pose a problem - Furnham and Bochner (1982) asserted that international students are often perceived as ambassadors or representatives of their nation – sometimes politely but also sometimes with prejudice. According to Sandhu (1994), perceived discrimination also interacts with international students' psychological problems. In Lewthwaite's (1996) study, there was no direct mention of discrimination, but one student noted that she did not know any locals from whom she could experience discrimination. This may suggest that discrimination did indeed exist, and may have manifested in host students' disinterest in social relationships with international students. Sparrow (2000) reported that some students in her study had found racial stereotyping, discrimination based on linguistic competence and gender discrimination to be an issue in their lives. As far as South African sojourner literature is considered, Ramphele (1998) points out that South African students may feel deprived because of international students who compete for resources, for example in terms of part-time jobs. In addition, staff and students from other African countries, who did not receive Bantu Education, may be able to compete for merit in academic positions (Ramphele, 1998). This may not only be in relation to staff and students, as Ramphele (1998) also observed that international students felt that the Department of Home Affairs restricted their access to the country by policy and practised xenophobia. It is obvious that students may experience discrimination – and that this discrimination may affect their experience negatively.

#### **4. ACADEMIC ISSUES**

Academic issues are of prime importance in many students' lives, and especially in the lives of international students. Adjusting to a new academic system has been found one of the most important issues for international students (Church, 1982; Sandhu, 1994; Verma, 1995). Lewthwaite (1996) found that when students prioritise the overcoming of their problems, academic problems are dealt with first. Naturally, academic and other aspects of a student's life are interrelated - all aspects of life affect students' academic performance, as academic success or failure affects other aspects of the students' life. According to Tanaka et al., (1997), it could be inferred that stability in academic work is important for psychological stability. Local students may experience similar problems, but as international students have to cope with a variety of issues in addition to academic problems, the effect of academic success or failure is magnified. Schram and Lauver

(1988) stated that academic adjustment could be hindered by a slow adjustment to the university in general. Additionally, personal issues are likely to impact on academic progress, especially in a climate of a lack of support or understanding (Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

International students are faced with pressure from home, in that their families may have spent much on resources for study overseas. The students might face embarrassment on returning home with little or no success (Arthur, 1997). Both Lewthwaite (1996) and Arthur (1997) noted that the fear or threat of failure was a significant stress factor in the students' lives. This fear may be justified, as the study conducted much earlier by Klineberg and Hull (1979) revealed that the failure rate of international students was slightly higher than the failure rate of native-born students. In a survey conducted by Verma (1995), most international students had problems with academic work – they either failed, withdrew or were unable to complete their courses in a minimum period. As academic success can be the most important reason for international students to leave home, failure can be devastating.

#### **4.1 Expectations**

The academic expectations of the students also affect their adjustment to the university. Some authors have noted the so-called 'matriculant myth' which implied that students arrive at university with unrealistically high expectations, only to have them dashed by reality (Arthur, 1997; Kaczmarek et al., 1994; Mori, 2000). However, in Kaczmarek et al's (1994) study, the students were not affected by this myth; instead, it seemed that the students had realistic self-perceptions of their ability to adjust to the college environment. This may have been because of high academic skills and aspirations (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988, Pedersen, 1991, as cited in Kaczmarek et al., 1994). However, Arthur (1997) was of the opinion that international students being the 'cream of the crop' is a notion of the past – it may be true in some cases, but some international students may be less motivated and unprepared for studying in a foreign academic environment. She, along with Mori (2000), noted that unrealistic academic expectations that are later unfulfilled could be a source of discomfort and stress.

## 4.2 Academic Discourse

Language and academic discourse also play a significant role in difficulties facing some international students. Communication and language problems have been said to be one of the leading stressors for international students (Church, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Mori, 2000; Sandhu, 1994). Verma (1995) found that university staff perceived the lack of English proficiency as the root cause of international students' problems. The survey indicated that some students found the accents of tutors and lecturers difficult to comprehend, felt incompetent in expressing themselves in appropriate language and did not understand examples from an Australian context (Verma, 1995). Similarly, Parr, Bradley and Bingi (1992) found in a previous study in America that one of the major school concerns of international students was understanding class lectures. Students have also encountered difficulty in essay writing, examinations and seminar presentation (Verma, 1995). Lewthwaite (1996) found that students felt tension in coping with academic discourse, and in using the discourse to gain membership into the academic community. This lack of confidence in the participants' English proficiency ranged from note taking to reading literature (Lewthwaite, 1996). Language restrictions and other affective and situational factors have also been noted as being detrimental to the students' academic performance (Luzio-Lockett, 1995, as cited in Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Luzio-Lockett (1998) found that the inability to fully understand academic discourse seemed to influence students towards having a negative perception of their professional worth. )

## 4.3 Campus Environment and Support

Klineberg and Hull (1979) noted that one of the problems facing international students was a lack of access to professors or instructors for advice. Parr, Bradley, and Bingi (1992) also observed that one of the international students' largest school concerns was finding an advisor who could devote time to them. Similarly, Tanaka et al. (1997) found that the frequency of academic support and contact was the most important element determining adjustment. A supportive campus environment has generally been found important for academic and personal success (Arthur, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998). In Lewthwaite's (1996) study, the students found that New Zealand lecturers and supervisors were approachable and that they took an interest in the students, which was found to have a direct relationship to their adjustment. However, approximately half of the students in this

study found that their lecturers or supervisors seemed to be very busy and the students were reluctant to approach instructors if they seemed stressed (Lewthwaite, 1996). Luzio-Lockett (1998) noted that the quality of the interactions within the academic context is a significant factor affecting international students' academic performance. In Verma's (1995) survey the majority of international students asked for help from their subject lecturers, tutors, or English as a Second Language teachers. However, it seemed that the students relied more on their peers for help in academic matters (Verma, 1995), which highlights the need for social support in international student adjustment.

Differences in instruction styles may pose a problem for international students hoping to succeed in their studies. Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that another problem mentioned by international students was an unsatisfactory level of instruction. Luzio-Lockett (1998) noted that international students bring with them an experience based on their own educational setting, which may involve academic conventions different from those of the host country. For example, in Lewthwaite's (1996) study, small seminar groups brought both comfort and stress. Comfort was found in overcoming a sense of isolation, but students experienced stress because of their own role in these groups. Their participation was made difficult by a lack of ability in the host language. However, in this study the international students said that they perceived New Zealand students as keeping to themselves in classroom interactions and not inviting international students into their groups (Lewthwaite, 1996). Similarly, Verma (1995) found that the different style of teaching, and the course content itself, posed problems for the students. In Lewthwaite's (1996) study, the students expressed surprise at the amount of freedom they had in research and assignments, as well as at the amount of interaction and questioning in the lectures. Some felt inadequate because they were unable to fully participate in lectures and tutorials, due to their lack of language facility. According to Luzio-Lockett (1998), the self-worth of a student is established in the classroom by association with shared values. Not achieving important aspects of classroom interaction, such as participating in discussions, may be detrimental to the self-concept, and may generate feelings of humiliation and rejection (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Additionally, when the student perceives him or herself as being deficient in some way in relation to others in the classroom, his or her attempts to participate in discussions will diminish (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). It could be said that this turns into a vicious circle – the student feels inadequate, participates less and thus feels more inadequate. The lack of a language facility, or the perceived lack of language facility,

may be detrimental to both the students' self esteem and to their academic performance. Verma (1995) also found that students respond emotionally to getting lower grades in examinations and this affects their self-confidence.

The quality of infrastructural support at the university may also have an impact on international students' academic contentment (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Luzio-Lockett, 1998). It has also been found that international students might have difficulty in seeking the appropriate type of assistance (Kaczmarek et al., 1994). Lewthwaite (1996) also noted that some students had little information before their arrival, and found their new environment bewildering. Many international students, especially recent arrivals, suffer from a lack of information on the host country, and on available campus resources (Mori, 2000). Therefore, the information and support that international students receive can have an impact on their adjustment.

Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that amongst problems with academic work were a lack of framework and direction in the academic program, problems with placement level and equivalence on arrival, and difficulty with courses and examinations. Luzio-Lockett (1998) also noted that the clarity of standards and expectations is important for the students. In particular, the problem with placement level relates strongly to the international student population. The different curricula in different countries, as well as the attitude that host universities take to courses taken previously (Klineberg & Hull, 1979) affect the academic lives of international students. The standard of universities in the home country might not be acceptable to the institution the student attends in the host country. Therefore, some courses might have to be repeated, which may cause some frustration for international students. The reporting of these difficulties varied in different countries (Klineberg & Hull, 1979), and probably in different universities. It seems clear that at least some international students experience great stress in terms of academic work. However, according to Klineberg and Hull (1979), most of the students were satisfied with the academic side of their sojourn despite the difficulties they might have faced.

( The campus environment may have more to offer besides assistance in coursework, but international students may not have the time or the inclination towards extra-curricular activities. According to Arthur (1997), as students attempt to manage their new lives, they may be reticent in taking part in campus activities. Locals may perceive the ambitions of

international students as indifference towards the hosts, which may add to international students' isolation from campus support (Arthur, 1997). Kaczmarek et al., (1994) also noted that international students might find it difficult to become involved in campus activities and leadership roles. Participation in campus activities is not necessarily related to successful adjustment (Surdam & Collins, 1984); however, it may bring some much-needed relaxation time and social interaction.

## **5. STUDENT BACKGROUND AFFECTING ADJUSTMENT**

International literature has revealed general concerns reported by students, besides cultural, social and academic issues. One of the most common problems reported by international students is contact with, and welfare of, the extended family (Arthur, 1997; Parr, Bradley & Bingi, 1992). Financial concerns (Arthur, 1997; Church, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Lackland, 2001; Parr, Bradley & Bingi, 1992; Verma, 1995) are also important. Problems such as loneliness (Verma, 1995), homesickness (Church, 1982; Sandhu, 1994; Verma, 1995) and similar personal problems are also common. Arthur (1997) stated that concerns about basic requirements may influence both academic and emotional lives negatively. However, Church (1982) was of the opinion that few students fare extremely badly. Parr, Bradley and Bingi (1992) noted that international students' concerns were relatively moderate and their feelings were more positive than negative. Therefore, we can assume that although students face these concerns, and other issues during their sojourn, their time within a new country also has potential to be pleasant.

Specific variables have been found to be related to students' adjustment. Parr, Bradley and Bingi (1992) found international students to be "determined, thankful, happy, confident, cheerful and cautious" (Parr, Bradley & Bingi, 1992, p. 20). However, some students seem to have a better chance of enjoying their sojourn. Language seems to be a variable that has an effect on the adjustment of students. Surdam and Collins (1984) found that students with a good capacity in the host country's language adapted better than those with a lesser language proficiency. Tanaka et al. (1997) found a similar result in that students more competent in the local language placed less importance on social networks. Language proficiency seems to have a positive impact on students' social life.

Other indicators of better adjustment are originating from better educated families (Surdam & Collins, 1984), developing a positive attitude towards religion (Surdam & Collins, 1984), and when entering a western country, being from the western hemisphere (Church, 1982; Lackland, 2001; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984). Schram and Lauver (1988) also found that being in an urban background was helpful in adjusting to the host country.

Age may also be a factor in sojourner adjustment. In Ritsner and Ponizovsky's (1999) study on immigration to Israel, age had an effect on the time pattern of psychological distress - participants in their forties reported more distress than their younger counterparts. It has also been found that older students and postgraduates are more satisfied with their sojourn (Church, 1982; Schram & Lauver, 1988). Adjustment problems have also been found more prevalent among female students (Church, 1982; Schram & Lauver, 1988). Additionally, Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that students with a spouse in the sojourn country were less lonely and homesick.

Previous travel may have a positive effect on adjustment (Church, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979). However, Church notes that these students may be a select group who share other similarities. Schram and Lauver (1988) and Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) noted that previous experience of the country of sojourn was also positively related to adjustment. Additionally, Furnham and Bochner (1986) found that one of the most important factors in the coping process of international students was prior foreign experience. Therefore, the background of the students may affect their enjoyment of the sojourn country. This information could be utilised to identify the most vulnerable individuals.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The literature on international students is varied, and no single theory accounts for these students' sometimes stressful experiences. As Church (1982) stated, not all students have negative experiences during their sojourn – some enjoy it, and only the minority of students have major concerns.

Various factors have been found to exert a large influence on the adjustment or adaptation of international students. One of these is social interaction in the host country. Another

very important issue for international students is their academic progress. These issues are something with which international students may require additional assistance, perhaps in the form of peer programmes. The cultural experience in a society may also be a factor that influences students' enjoyment of their sojourn, and attention should be paid to all these facets of the international student experience.

Some personal or background characteristics of international students, such as not having previous international exposure, seem also to have an influence on their adaptation. These predictors, if conclusively supported by research, could be used to identify high-risk groups in need of assistance. This would surely prove an effective way of ensuring the enjoyment or improvement of the sojourn.

The literature above suggests that although the experience might not be debilitating, the students do experience difficulties. Moving from their home, they lose their family and friends as support, and may not be able to reconstruct a support network for themselves sufficiently soon after arrival. The students may also experience academic difficulty or failure, which may exert a large influence on their lives – academic failure may embarrass them in the eyes of their family. Because of these issues, it is important to consider these students' experiences and feelings, while not neglecting the needs of the local student population.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **METHOD**

#### **1. RESEARCH AIMS**

Literature has indicated that international students may experience problems and need additional help when arriving in a new country. There is a lack of South African literature relating to international students' experience – instead, South African literature discusses policy implications of the students' presence in the country. This study aimed to explore students' experiences when arriving and studying in South Africa. This includes how they feel about South Africa and its people, what the students' problems are, if any, and what is especially enjoyable for them. Additionally, the characteristics that may make students more vulnerable, or more resilient, regarding problems during their sojourn are explored.

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of international students in three universities situated in the Western Cape, in relation to their social, academic and cultural lives. An exploration into the issues students may face during their stay can be utilised to improve current and future international students' experiences, and to identify those areas in which the students may require extra assistance.

Because this was the first study of its kind in South Africa, no definitive hypotheses could be made of how the students experience life in this country. The unique circumstances in South Africa, such as its history of racial segregation, may present a completely different experience for students arriving in the country, from that which they may experience when arriving in, for example, the United States. However, international literature indicated a number of factors, which have emerged across national boundaries. Therefore this study aimed to identify those variables that might have had an effect on the students' enjoyment of their stay.

The social variables examined were whether the students were in a relationship; the presence of, and interaction with family in the country; having a room- or flatmate; contact with racial and cultural groups; South Africans' knowledge and attitude toward the students' home country; and discrimination. The academic variables examined were

having enough information on arrival and the perception of a supportive campus environment. Other variables that were included in the analysis were the general background of the students, such as nationality; time in South Africa; gender; change in residence; previous travel experience both in South Africa and abroad; and the cultural difference between their home country and the culture with which the students are most in contact in South Africa.

The students' social interaction patterns were also examined. It was also determined whether students, in their opinion, had enough contact with South Africans. Other factors, such as partner's nationality, roommate's nationality and so on gave an indication of with whom international students prefer to spend time.

Finally, the students' opinions and experiences were examined to give a more holistic view of the kind of experience students are likely to have while studying in South Africa.

## 2. STUDY DESIGN

The study was a cross-sectional survey, which enquired about the students' experience at one point in time. Surveys are widely used in social and behavioural sciences. The type of survey that was used here is a research survey – the benefit of which is that a large amount of information can be elicited from participants easily (Lehman, 1991), and that a large amount of people can be reached (Neuman, 1997). Surveys can be used for descriptive, exploratory or explanatory purposes (Babbie, 1999), and surveys are a very flexible method of data collection. Another benefit of surveys is that the use of a self-report questionnaire eliminates any possibility of interviewer bias, offers anonymity and gives the respondent the opportunity to complete the questionnaire in their own time (Neuman, 1997). These aspects ensure that the answers elicited from the questionnaires are more straightforward than they might have been with an interviewer, take less time, and allow students to respond in their own words without perceived repercussions. )

## 2.1 Questionnaire

### 2.1.1 Questionnaire Design

Attempts to locate an existing questionnaire assessing international students' experience in a host country were unsuccessful. Authors were contacted via e-mail in 2000, but only one response was received, where a co-author indicated that he did not have permission to share the questionnaire. Attempts to locate the main author did not succeed. Because of a lack of model questionnaire, a questionnaire had to be specifically tailored for the study (see Appendix A).

The questionnaire was constructed from main trends in international literature. The questions were designed to explore those factors that had been shown to be important. A qualitative study was conducted in 2000 as part of an Honours degree programme, where students were interviewed about their general experience and any problems they might have encountered. The findings of this study also proved useful in constructing the questionnaire, as a more comprehensive view was gained of the students' experience. For example, these interviews revealed that international students responded negatively to being asked their population group, as they felt that these categorisations were not applicable to them. Thus, this variable was not included in the questionnaire. Another source for the questionnaire was a study conducted by Klineberg and Hull (1979). Questions that were deemed relevant were adapted from this study.

The questionnaire was designed to gain a comprehensive view of the students' experience. It included aspects of their social, academic, cultural and personal lives.

### 2.1.2 Piloting of the Questionnaire

The original version of the questionnaire consisted of 68 questions. These questions were both open-and closed ended. According to Rosnow and Rosenthal (1996), the benefits of open-ended questions are that their approach is exploratory, and are often not leading. This also allows the participant to express their thoughts in their own words. Closed-ended

questions, on the other hand, allow the researcher to address issues, which are specific to his or her interests (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996).

For piloting purposes, the questionnaire was sent via e-mail to 14 fourth-year international degree students at the University of Cape Town. These students were chosen as they would be similar to postgraduate students, and would not be included in the list of postgraduate students obtained from the university. The students were requested to return the completed questionnaire within two weeks, and an extension of two weeks was also given to the students. However, as only three students had returned the questionnaire after four weeks, a decision was made to utilise focus groups. These groups would assist in refining the questionnaire for use. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), focus groups are often useful in the design of surveys. These groups could assist in determining whether they survey questions were appropriate in the opinion of the students.

To attract members for the focus groups, students were contacted through notices on the University of Cape Town campus. The advertisements attracted eight international students who were paid for their participation. The students were from different levels at university: two from Master's level, four third year degree students and two fourth year degree students. These students were first asked to examine the questionnaire at their leisure, in the computer format in which it was to be distributed to the sample in the main study. Following this, the students were separated into two focus groups, in which they were asked to fill in the questionnaire and to discuss its limitations.

Following the discussion and the advice of the international students, the questionnaire was amended. Some of the wording was changed in the questionnaire to make it more understandable and appropriate for international students. For example, contact with 'ethnic' groups was changed to contact with 'racial' groups. The questionnaire was also divided into more coherent sections to ease the completion procedure. Additionally, some questions were omitted because they were deemed unnecessary by the focus groups.

### ***2.1.3 Final Questionnaire***

The final questionnaire comprised 55 questions. Of these questions, 37 were closed-ended and 18 open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was in the format of a Microsoft Excel sheet, with tick-boxes reserved for closed-ended questions. The paper version was a printout of the same questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A comprised 23 questions, mainly closed-ended, asking about the background of the students. In this section, information on demographics, the students' living arrangements, and previous travel experience was collected.

Section B consisted of nine questions, of which six were open-ended. This section dealt with motives for studying, and choosing South Africa as the appropriate country to further studies. It also dealt with general academic issues, such as perceived campus support and the students' satisfaction with their academic life.

Section C, consisting of 23 questions, was devoted to the social and cultural experience of the students. Questions ranged from "What do you think of your social life here so far" to "What would be your rating of your experience here, on a scale of 1 to 5?". The students were also asked their preference for their future country of abode, and to determine which were their worst and best experiences while studying in South Africa. These questions were both open- and closed-ended.

## **2.2. Participant Criteria**

As the international student population in universities was deemed large, it was decided that only postgraduate students' experiences would be explored. Additionally, due to time and resource constraints, only students in the Western Cape were asked to participate in the study.

There are differences in entering a university at undergraduate or at postgraduate level. Until recently, little orientation was provided for postgraduate students, at least at the

University of Cape Town, whereas undergraduate students were introduced to the university and its surroundings during an orientation week. Additionally, most undergraduate students come to a university for the first time, and thus have no prior expectations of what university life should be. Contrary to this, postgraduate students entering a university in South Africa for the first time have attended another university, whether in their home country or in another country. They would have certain expectations of how the university culture is 'supposed to be'.

Additionally, there is a difference in age between these two populations. Undergraduate students, in general, are younger than postgraduates and have different issues and attitudes about life in general. Some developmental literature marks a difference in adults in their twenties and adults over the thirty-year mark in terms of life events and similar issues (Mussen, Congen, Kagan, & Geiwitz, 1979). Postgraduate students may often have left behind a career or a family to further their academic career, and thus their experiences and issues will differ from those of undergraduate students. Additionally, the time and academic pressures faced by postgraduate students may hinder them from successfully integrating into South African society.

It was determined that since universities also usually have a smaller postgraduate population, and the possibility exists that postgraduates do not receive as much attention as undergraduates, the study should highlight the experiences of postgraduates. The participant criteria were simple; if a student was postgraduate, and an international student, he or she could participate in the study, regardless of other factors such as nationality. However, an attempt was made to separate semester students from the study, as they would have been in the country for a short period of time and might have considered their experience as more pleasant because they knew that they were going home in the near future.

### ***2.3 Sampling Procedure and Data Collection***

Non-probability sampling, or opportunity sampling, was used because it was likely that a sufficient sample would be obtained if all students were contacted. Opportunity sampling implies that the sample is made of the first units that are available (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996). This method was chosen because the pilot study gave an indication that

postgraduate students were not enthusiastic about sacrificing their time for research purposes without remuneration. Therefore random sampling, which entails the random selection of respondents (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996), was determined as not feasible as a sampling procedure.

To obtain a list of international postgraduate students, a request was sent to the international students' office at each university. If the requests did not receive a response, a request was sent to the Deans of students at each university. This request is available in Appendix B. When permission was granted for the research, international students' offices or admission officers at the universities were contacted for the purposes of obtaining contact details, specifically the e-mail addresses of the students.

In the beginning of the research, the sample procedure was intended to be uniform across universities. However, due to availability and initial response rate, the sampling method was adapted to the circumstances at each university. At the University of Cape Town, contact details were provided directly by the Dean of Students. It was determined that all students should be included in the sample, to enhance the probability of a large sample. The questionnaire was sent to all 889 students on the list, via their e-mail addresses provided by the university. Seventeen of these addresses were non-functional, limiting the population size to 872.

At the University of Stellenbosch, an agreement was made with the International Students' Office that they would assist in the distribution of the questionnaire. The International Student Office sent the questionnaire to 200 postgraduate international students.

At the University of Western Cape, a list of 236 e-mail addresses and student numbers of postgraduate international students was obtained from the Admissions Office. As at the University of Cape Town, the questionnaire was sent to all of these students. However, when the questionnaire was sent to the students, it was found that 19 of these addresses were non-functional. As the prescribed two weeks lapsed, only three responses were obtained from this university, even after a reminder was sent to the same addresses. Thereafter, it was assumed that the students were not utilising their university-supplied e-mail addresses. Following this, the students' postal and boarding addresses were obtained, and postal questionnaires were sent to approximately half of the students, 119 in total. The

students were chosen by selecting every second name on the list with an address in the Western Cape. The next person on the list replaced those who were to be chosen, but whose address was not in the Western Cape. Some of the questionnaires were hand delivered to the students' residences, and some were sent through ordinary mail. The students were given two weeks to return the questionnaire. Of the sent questionnaires, nine were returned unopened to sender.

The total number of questionnaires sent out was 1182. The number of valid responses returned was 142, which was a twelve percent return rate.

### 3. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was performed via e-mail in both Stellenbosch and the University of Cape Town. The same method was used for the University of the Western Cape, but as three responses were returned after two weeks, the decision was made to send out paper copies of the questionnaire, together with self-addressed stamped envelopes.

Students were asked to complete the form and return it either via e-mail, or to print it and return it through ordinary mail services. Two e-mail addresses as well as a telephone number were given in case of any queries or if further help was required. The students were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire. After one week, a reminder was sent out. When the response rate was low, the students were sent another reminder, and given more time to complete the questionnaire. Altogether, each group of students received the questionnaire and two reminders. The reminders can be found in Appendix C.

Some students experienced problems with completing the questionnaire or returning it via e-mail, mainly due to their lack of familiarity with e-mail attachments or Microsoft Excel. To those, detailed instructions were sent by e-mail to help them in either operating the programme or attaching the completed sheet to an electronic message.

During the data collection, it became apparent that some students were unable to open the attachment in their computer laboratories. This problem was remedied in one of the reminders, where the students were informed that paper copies could be distributed to them

if they were interested. Three questionnaires were distributed in this manner at the University of Cape Town.

A problem with the general sample frame was that there was no way of ascertaining whether all the students utilised their university-provided e-mail. Therefore the questionnaire as well as the reminders may have been sent to many e-mail addresses that were unused.

The low response rate from the two universities can have a variety of reasons. According to Bourque and Clark (1994), one of the major disadvantages of mailed questionnaires is a low response rate. This can be further extended to the use of e-mail surveys, which may be easier to ignore. An indication of this could be that in the University of the Western Cape, where hand-addressed envelopes, which contained the questionnaire and self-addressed stamped envelopes, were used as a means to distribute the questionnaire, the response rate was much higher. It is possible that the perceived ease of email distribution de-motivates the students from expending the effort to reply to the questionnaire.

Additionally, Bourque and Clark (1994) point out that there is a high likelihood of missing data in self-administered questionnaires. In this study, data was not filled in a variety of questions, and in some cases students found it difficult to limit their answer to only one option.

### **3.1 Sample Characteristics**

The total sample obtained from all universities consisted of 142 students. However, it is important to note that the return rate varied greatly in different universities. In total, 77 students responded from the University of Cape Town, giving a return rate of approximately 9% (8.8%). Sixteen students responded from the University of Stellenbosch, yielding a return rate of exactly 8%, and 49 students from the University of the Western Cape, yielding a return rate of 40%.

The average age of these students was 30.3 years ( $n=129$ ), with the youngest student being 22 and the oldest 52. Of the total sample, 82 were male and 60 female. The students were from all continents, except Australia. They were from 34 countries, with the most students

originating from Zimbabwe (9.9%, n=14). The faculties they attended also varied, with the most students in the humanities faculty (28.9%, n=41). The students had been in the country on average 23.7 months (n=125), with the shortest time being two months and the longest 105 months.

**Table 1: Gender According to University**

	UCT	UWC	US	Total
<b>Male</b>	48	27	9	82
<b>Female</b>	29	22	7	60
<b>Total</b>	77	49	16	142

**Table 2: Continent According to University**

Continent	UCT	UWC	US	Total
<b>Africa</b>	57	44	7	108
<b>America</b>	3	0	0	3
<b>Europe</b>	13	3	9	25
<b>Asia</b>	4	2	0	6
<b>Total</b>	77	49	16	142

**Table 3: Faculty According to University**

Faculty	UCT	UWC	US	Total
<b>Humanities</b>	27	14	7	48
<b>Commerce</b>	14	10	3	27
<b>Law</b>	6	2	3	11
<b>Health</b>	7	13	0	20
<b>Science</b>	1	6	2	9
<b>Engineering</b>	22	0	0	22
<b>Unknown</b>	0	4	1	5
<b>Total</b>	77	49	15	142

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The closed-ended questions yielded nominal data. Initially the data was converted into frequency tables, from which percentages were calculated. This data was analysed by the Pearson's Chi-square test of independence. Lehman (1991) states that this analysis can investigate whether there is a real difference between categories. Additionally, the major advantage of this test is that it has no stringent assumptions (Bless & Kathuria, 1993). This analysis is also extremely suitable for the analysis of nominal data (Sproull, 1988), such as was collected in this study.

Each questionnaire was assigned an identifying number, and marked for the respondent's university. The questionnaires were then coded separately for their closed-ended questions and collated into a spreadsheet. Spot checks were made on random cases to determine whether the coding procedure was accurate. Mistakes made during the coding process were corrected.

Contingency tables were generated to give an overview of the sample characteristics, with each of the three dependent variables of "social", "academic" and "general". According to the literature, some items in the questionnaire are related to each other. For example, the campus environment may have an association both with the academic and general enjoyment of the sojourn; family presence may have an association with the social and general enjoyment, and so on. These variables were related to each other in the analyses. Only cases in which both questions were answered were included in these analyses. Thus, the total number of responses in these sections was not always 142.

The contingency tables were then used in the chi-square analyses. In some cases, usually in the "social", "academic" and "general" variables expected frequencies were too small. Thus these variables were re-categorised, from five categories to three, of "positive", "neutral" and "negative". Other exceptions also emerged. For example, residence in South Africa had few cases, and this was re-categorised into "university residence" and "other". Nationality was also re-categorised into two groups, "African" and "Non-African". Here, the neutral category was merged with the "poor" category, which may have biased the test slightly. Following the categorisation of these frequencies, expected frequencies were

calculated, and the chi-square test was performed using the statistical package of Statistica. Unless otherwise indicated, variables were considered significant when their p-value was smaller than 0.05. In some questions, such as family presence, where there were too few cases for a chi-square test, a Fischer's Exact test was performed. In these cases, the "general" or "social" variables were categorised into two categories, "good" and "poor", by excluding the "neutral" category.

As the chi-square test only reveals whether there is an association between the variables, further analysis was required to determine whether any of the variables would be predictors of the dependent variable (S. Swanevelder, personal communication, April 20, 2002). Logistic regression can be used to determine how difference variables contribute, individually and jointly, to variation in dependent variables (Imrey, 2000). According to Howell (1997), logistic regression is useful when dealing with dichotomous variables, and has become popular in psychology in recent years. In this case, the effects of various variables on the dependent variables of academic, social and general enjoyment were examined.

For the purposes of further analysis, variables of academic, social and general enjoyment were re-categorised to two categories of "yes" or "no" and "positive" or "negative". The academic enjoyment was re-categorised with joining excellent and satisfactory to "positive" and poor, unsatisfactory and neutral into "negative". This categorisation was chosen because the academic variable had few cases in the "negative" category. The social and general variables were re-categorised with combining neutral, satisfactory and excellent into "positive" and poor and unsatisfactory into "negative". Those variables that emerged as significant in the chi-square test were included in the logistic regression analysis. To ensure that variables that may have had a relationship with the dependent variable were not excluded from the analysis, variables that emerged as significant at the alpha level of 0.1 were also included in the analysis. The Odds Ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals were calculated, and regression analyses were performed by using the SAS statistical package.

The qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions was analysed with the aid of thematic content analysis. This method reveals the most common themes in the students' responses, which can then provide an insight into the overall experience of the students.

According to Smith (1995), this method has no clear guidelines on how to proceed with the analysis. However, Smith (1995) had constructed some guidelines, and the analysis proceeded in a similar manner. As indicated by the author, to begin the analysis, a sample of the questionnaires was read through several times to gain a general understanding of the types of answers received. Thereafter, answers to specific questions were grouped together, and themes under these questions were explored. At this point, the analysis deviated from Smith's (1995) guidelines. Due to resource limitations, all questionnaires could not be printed. Thus specific responses were moved under each theme heading in questionnaires in electronic format, including the questionnaire from which the answer originated. For questionnaires received via post, a theme sheet was kept, and a code of the questionnaire from which the response originated was marked under the theme. These themes were then grouped under a more general category. This analysis was performed separately for each university.

Once generalised categories had been created for each university, these were brought together, into a coherent list of themes. After all the categories were gathered, they were re-examined and refined, to enable the identification of important issues pertaining to international students' experiences. Differences and similarities between groups of students were also explored. The qualitative questions are presented in the results section with percentages. Although students may have mentioned topics belonging to more than one category and the number of answers may have exceeded the number of students, percentages were calculated from the total number of students ( $n=142$ ).

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter describes the participants' background previous experiences and motives, to determine whether this affected their experience. The students' academic experience will also be described. Additionally, the students' social lives and their relations with host nationals are explored. Lastly, a general view of the international students' experience is taken, to obtain information on what the best and worst experiences of the students were.

#### **1. PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND**

The following section explores factors that may affect the way international students perceive their sojourn.

##### **1.1 Nationality**

As indicated previously, international students are not a homogeneous group. The students originate from different countries and continents, with different cultures and social interaction patterns. Therefore the country of origin may make a difference in a students' experience. The survey explored the students' nationality, country of birth and current nationality. However, as few students had more than one nationality, it was decided to include only current nationality as a variable.

As the students originated from a large variety of countries, the analysis could not be performed according to country of origin. Therefore a distinction was made between the continents from which the students originated. Broadly considered, there are similarities between societies in the same continent. Latin America, as opposed to North America was considered as an exception. However, as no students originated from that area this distinction was not necessary. Due to some continents being under-represented in the sample, chi-square analysis could not be performed on this variable, and another distinction had to be found. International literature has indicated a distinction between students from African and Non-African countries entering the Western hemisphere; thus,

these categories were utilised in the analysis, as a similar distinction could be made when entering an African country.

This analysis revealed that there is a significant difference between the rating of experiences of African and non-African students (Pearson Chi-square: 22.21,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.000182$ ). A closer examination of the frequencies suggested a tendency of African students enjoying their experience less, when compared to non-African students. Altogether, 72.7% ( $n=24$ ) of non-African students reported positive feelings, which is significantly more than African students (27.3%,  $n=27$ ). Negative feelings about the general sojourn were also reported more by African students (24.2%,  $n=24$ ) than non-African students (12.1%,  $n=4$ ). There is a possibility that non-African students see their experience as exciting, and new, as their countries differ more from South Africa than African students' countries do. However, African students may perceive South Africa as similar to their home countries – without the benefits of family and friends.

Because of this possibility, the students' origins were also examined in relation to the social aspects of their sojourn. This analysis also yielded significant results (Pearson Chi-square: 11.02,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.026356$ ), which indicate that there is also a difference between the two groups, when social enjoyment is considered. Specifically, students from the African continent reported far less positive responses ( $n=50$ , 49.5%) than non-African students (81.8%,  $n=27$ ). Negative responses were reported by 26 African students (25.7%), and by two non-African students (6.1%). The tendency of African students to rate their social experience more negatively could be due to discrimination. African students are more likely to be black, and therefore face discriminatory attitudes. Their society may be less discriminating than South Africa; thus they may face problems in this respect.

## 1.2 Gender

Gender differences in relation to the students' rating of their general experience were also explored. Although the chi-square analysis performed for this variable did not yield significant results (Pearson Chi-square: 0.96,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.916070$ ), the overall picture indicates that male students seemed to enjoy their experience less. Positive ratings were expressed by 36.8% of male students ( $n=28$ ). This was slightly less than female students'

responses (n=23, 41.1%). Negative responses were expressed similarly by male (21.1%, n=16) and female (21.4%, n=12) students.

There were also small differences in reported social enjoyment across genders. Male students emerged as enjoying their experience less – 17 males (21.8%) and eleven females (19.6%) reported their experience negatively. This was slightly countered by more male students (57.7%, n=45) than female students (57.1%, n=42) reporting positive opinions. It seemed that there was no great variation in reported social enjoyment. This was confirmed by the chi-square analysis, which did not indicate a significant difference (Pearson chi-square: 0.18, df=2, p=0.912160). Therefore gender may not have a significant association with enjoying a sojourn.

### 1.3 University

The three universities in the Western Cape, South Africa, differ considerably according to site, facilities, and the students attending them. Therefore, international students' sojourn experiences may also differ across universities. When general experience was related to university, students from the University of Stellenbosch reported the most positive responses (57.1%, n=8). These students also reported the least negative responses (14.3%, n=2). Following this university, positive responses were reported frequently by students from the University of Cape Town (36.5%, n=27), and lastly by students from the University of the Western Cape (36.4%, n=16). A similar proportion of students from the other universities also reported negative experiences, although students from the University of Cape Town reported slightly more (23%, n=17), when compared to the University of the Western Cape (20.5%, n=9). Despite the tendency of students from the University of Stellenbosch reporting the least negative responses, the analysis did not reveal a significant difference between the universities (Pearson chi-square: 2.4, df=4, p=0.663338). There was also little difference between universities when students' comments on academic enjoyment were considered (Pearson chi-square: 7.04, df=4, p=0.133879).

When the universities attended by students were related to their reported social enjoyment, no significant difference was found between the three universities (Pearson chi-square: 7.82, df=4, p=0.098370). However, the general trend emerging from this analysis was that

students from UCT reported the most positive ratings of their social experiences (64.9%, n=48), followed by the University of Stellenbosch (60%, n=9). The University of the Western Cape reported the least positive rating of their social lives (44.4%, n=20), and the most negative ratings (31.1%, n=14). This was followed by students from the University of Cape Town (17.6%, n=13) and lastly the university of Stellenbosch (6.7%, n=1). This indicates that the social sphere may in fact make the difference between universities.

This difference could be attributed to differences in student populations. The majority of students in the University of the Western Cape were from African countries (89.8%, n=44). Fewer students at both the University of Cape Town (74%, n=53), and the University of Stellenbosch (43.8%, n=7), were from African countries.

#### 1.4 Previous Travel

Previous travel experience may develop skills for students that help them cope with new cultures. This variable was compared with general enjoyment, concerning both previous experience of South Africa, and previous experience of other countries. A large proportion of students (78.2%, n=111) had previously travelled in another country and 21.8% (n=31) had not. However, more students reported not having previous South African experience (60.6%, n=86), than having some (38.7%, n=55). The students' length of stay was also explored. However, due to the varying nature of responses, and a lack of clear indication of length of stay, this variable could not be included in the analysis.

The frequencies indicate that students with overseas experience are slightly more likely to report positive opinions of their general experience (n=40, 38.8%) than students who had not travelled previously (n=9, 31%). Students who had not visited another country previously also reported more negative opinions of their general experience (n=7, 24.1%), than students with previous overseas experience (n=21, 20.4%). However, the analysis did not reveal a significant difference between the two groups (Pearson Chi-square: 0.91, df=2, p=0.635003).

A similar analysis was performed on previous travel to South Africa and the rating of general experience. However, there was also no significant difference between students who had previous South African experience and those who did not (Pearson Chi-square:

6.05,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.195313$ ). This was despite the tendency of students who had visited South Africa previously to report more positive attitudes (20 positive responses, 39.2% of students and seven negative responses, 13.7% of the students). Students who had not had previous travel experience to South Africa reported more negative responses in general (30 positive responses, 37.5% of the students and 21 negative responses, 26.3% of the students in this group). Students with previous experience in South Africa seem to enjoy their sojourn more.

### 1.5 Time Spent in South Africa

Students who have spent different amounts of time in a country may also have different perceptions of their sojourn. This variable was divided into three categories: less than one year (46.4%,  $n=66$ ), between one and three years (21.8%,  $n=31$ ) and more than three years (19%,  $n=27$ ). When this factor was examined in relation to the general enjoyment of the students, no significant difference was found between the three groups (Pearson Chi-square: 5.65,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.227203$ ).

However, students who had spent more than three years in the country were most likely to report their experience as positive ( $n=13$ , 48.1%). These students also reported the least negative responses (14.8%,  $n=4$ ). A quarter of both students between one and three years in the country (25%,  $n=7$ ), and students less than one year in the country (24.6%,  $n=15$ ) rated their experience negatively. A difference emerged between students who had been in the country less than a year and those who had spent between one and three years in the country. The first group reported more positive ratings (41%,  $n=25$ ) than the second (21.4%,  $n=6$ ), indicating that students who had just arrived may have had more positive opinions. The frequencies also indicate that students who have spent the most time in the country are more satisfied with their experience. These students may be used to life in this country, and some may be more positive because they are looking forward to returning home. Students' explanations for their rating did not yield information in this regard.

Time spent in South Africa also did not yield a significant result when related to students' rating of their social life (Pearson Chi-square: 3.35542,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.500204$ ). This was in spite of students who had spent more than three years in the country reporting the most positive experiences (70.4%,  $n=19$ ) and the least negative experiences (11.1%,  $n=3$ ).

## 1.6 Change in Residential Area

Change in residential area was determined from questions, which asked about the students' residence in their home country and in South Africa. A move from a village, farm or small town, to a city was deemed a change from a small area to a large one, and a move from a city to a small town, village, or farm was deemed a change from a large area to a small one. These variables were related to the students' rating of their experience.

Students with no change in their living areas were most likely to rate their general experience negatively ( $n=19$ , 24.4%). Twenty-eight students (35.9%) of this group reported their experience as positive. The students who reported the most positive feelings about their sojourn were those who had moved from a large area to a smaller one ( $n=6$ , 50%). A large proportion of students who had moved from a small to a large area also reported positive ratings of their general enjoyment ( $n=11$ , 44%) and relatively few reported negative feelings ( $n=3$ , 12%). Students reporting the least negative responses were those who had moved from a large area to a smaller one (8.3%,  $n=1$ ). Therefore the group who reported the most enjoyment in general was that which moved from a larger area to a smaller one. However, there was no significant difference between the groups (Pearson Chi-square: 3.17,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.530465$ ).

When this variable was related to social enjoyment, it was found that those students who had not changed the size of their residential area were the most likely to report positive feelings of their social life (62.5%,  $n=50$ ). Overall negative responses were also more likely in the group who had not changed the size of their residential area ( $n=17$ , 21%). Students who had moved from a large area to a small one reported the least positive ratings of their sojourn (33.3%,  $n=4$ ), but also the least negative opinions ( $n=1$ , 8.3%). Sixteen students (61.5%) who had moved from a smaller area to a larger one reported positive opinions, and four of these students (15.4%) reported negative opinions. The chi-square analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between the groups (Pearson Chi-square: 11.05,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.025998$ ). The frequencies indicate that those students who changed their residential area from a large one to a smaller one enjoyed their social experience less, and those moving from a smaller area to a larger one, in general, enjoyed their experience the most. This may be due to a lack of activities in smaller areas and more opportunities for activities for students moving into a larger area.

International students' enjoyment can also depend on the type of residence they live in. This variable was examined in relation to their general rating of their experience. For the purposes of analysis, a division was made between university residence and other types of homes, such as flats, houses and family homes. Students in university residences were less likely to report their experience as positive (29.2%, n=19) than students in other residences (47.7%, n=31). Students in university residences also reported their experience more negatively (27.7%, n=18) when compared to students living in other residences (15.4%, n=10). The analysis performed for these two variables revealed that there was no significant difference between groups who resided in residences and those who resided elsewhere (Pearson Chi-square: 5.47, df=2, p=0.064788). However, the differences could indicate that students in residences have fewer opportunities for social experiences. They may also lack transport from the campus. There is a possibility that students from residences are not able to interact with South Africans, and cannot experience all aspects of South African life.

A comparison between students living in residence and those living elsewhere, related to ratings of social life, also did not yield significant results (Pearson Chi-square: 8.95, df=4, p=0.062349). In this analysis, 68.2% of students (n= 45) in other residences reported positive feelings of their social life, and 13.6% (n= 9) reported negative feelings. However, students in university residences fared worse – only 48.5% (n=32) of these students rated their social life positively, and 28.8% (n=19) rated their social life negatively. Therefore the social life in residences may have an effect on the students' enjoyment of their social life.

## **2. PREPARATION FOR THE SOJOURN**

This section explores international students' motivations to study abroad; what they expected before arrival, and the opinions they held of South Africans before arrival. Additionally, this section explores the information students had received of South Africa.

## 2.1 Motivation for Studying Abroad

When investigating the students' motivation for studying abroad five distinct categories emerged. The first theme was academic motivation (48.6%, n=69). Students in this category chose to leave in search of a higher standard of education, or courses that were not available in local universities. Academic motivations were mostly expressed by students from the African continent (92.8%, n=64). A typical response in the academic motivation category was "The program I am doing is not available in my home country". )

The second most prevalent response by students was the desire for new experiences (40.1%, n=57). This category encompassed the wish to experience other countries, meeting new people, change from everyday life, self-development and cultural- or international exposure. Students wanted to study abroad because of the opportunities they would not be able to have in their own country. A separate, but similar, category from experience was studying abroad for the purposes of career building (9.9%, n=14). Some students perceived that a semester of study abroad would enhance their employment opportunities in the future – simply expressed, it would "look good on a [curriculum vitae]". The improvement of language skills also featured as a motive for the respondents (7.7%, n=11). Some students expressed that they wished to study in an Anglophone country to improve their English, and others wrote that it would also enhance their opportunities to gain employment.) Some students stated that the choice to study abroad was that of their sponsors, not theirs (5.6%, n=8). Having family in the host country also emerged as a minor motive in wanting to study abroad (4.2%, n=6).

One response, which should be noted as a reason for studying abroad, is: " I have led my life as a foreigner. Not that I wanted to but because my country is engulfed in civil war". Although this answer is a solitary one amongst many, it illustrates that in some cases students may end up studying abroad against their wishes.

### 2.1.1 Motivation for Studying in South Africa

Students' reasons for choosing specifically South Africa as a destination were also explored. Convenience emerged as a major determinant in choosing South Africa – forty-

nine (34.5%) students chose the country due to financial considerations. Some students portrayed their choice of South Africa more as a second or third option to other countries – one student stated in this vein: “Well[,] it’s relatively cheaper as compared to UK, Australia and USA”. Convenience in terms of travelling also emerged – thirty-five (24.6%) students, all from African countries noted that they had chosen South Africa because it was close to their home country. A direct quote from one of these students was: “It is the neighbouring country”. Some of these responses, which indicated convenience as a motivation, suggested that the students chose South Africa because of a lack of possibility to travel to a more attractive destination.

Academic aspects also featured frequently in the responses (28.9%, n=41). Many students chose this country because of a higher educational standard than in their home country, and a greater variety in courses. The majority of these students were from the African continent (82.9%, n=34). Twenty-six (18.3%) students indicated that their sponsors had chosen the university in which they would study. Some of these students also mentioned that their sponsors thought students were more likely to return home from South African universities, than from universities elsewhere. Nine students (6.3%) noted that they arrived in the country because they were accepted, or because they had an opportunity to study in the country.

Many students had chosen South Africa as a study destination because they thought it was an interesting country (10.6%, n=15). Similarly, nineteen students (13.4%) had chosen South Africa due to the environment, in terms of beauty, being an African country, or having good living conditions. A student, who responded that her choice to come to South Africa was due to environmental factors, wrote: “Cape Town especially is a beautiful place. ... an opportunity to see the sea and staying with people who do not have a culture very different from mine was attractive to me.”

Language was an attraction for eleven students (7.7%), in that South Africa gave them a chance to learn English. Another type of response to choosing South Africa due to language was “...had to do research for my doctorate in an Anglophone country anyway”. The presence of family and friends in the country also played a part for some students – eleven students (7.7%) mentioned this. Generally, the motivation for choosing South Africa was a matter of convenience.

## 2.2 Received Information

It seemed that students had researched South Africa before arrival. When the students were asked whether they thought that the information they received prior to arrival was adequate, and to specify the sources and types of information they received, most students stated they were fairly well informed (n=52, 36.6%). A total of 39 (27.5%) students perceived themselves as adequately informed before arrival. Forty-three students (30.3%) were of the opinion that they had not received enough information before arrival, and three students (2.1%) stated that they had no information at all before arriving in South Africa. Table 4 depicts the sources of information for international students.

**Table 4: Reported Sources of Information**

<b>SOURCE OF INFORMATION</b>	<b>NUMBER (responses)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE (N=142)</b>
<b>Previous experience</b>	16	11.3%
<b>Friends or family</b>	65	45.8%
<b>Media</b>	59	41.5%
<b>University</b>	19	13.4%
<b>Embassy</b>	9	6.3%
<b>Previous education</b>	7	4.9%
<b>Seminars</b>	4	2.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>179</b>	

A large proportion of students (n=65, 45.8%) indicated they had received information from friends and family. Many students stated that these friends or family had either studied in, or visited South Africa previously. An example of this was: "I got information from my parents, who both had studied in South Africa. My sister was also studying here at the time." Some students had also been in South Africa previously, or had prior knowledge of it: "I'm from Botswana [,] so I've been well informed about South Africa for a long time". Few students mentioned receiving information from the university (13.4%, n=19), which could result from students assuming that this channel of information was obvious.

Information received by the students included the general context of the country (26.1%, n=37) including history, geography, culture, economy and politics. Academic information

was specified by 32 students (22.5%), and the general lifestyle and weather by 23 students (16.2%). Students had also explored the negative aspects of South Africa such as crime (12%, n=17) and discrimination (5.6%, n=8).

The information received by the students before arrival made a significant difference to the way the students reported their general experience (Pearson Chi-square: 16.83, df=4, p=0.002090). In the analysis, a distinction was made between students who stated they had had adequate information and those who stated their information was inadequate. The frequencies indicate that students who had perceived their information as adequate on arrival rated their general experience as positive more frequently (44.3%, n=39) than those who had not received adequate information (26.8%, n=11). This difference could also be observed with students who reported their general experience negatively. Of the students who had not in their opinion received enough information before arrival, 29.3% (n=12) reported their general experience negatively. This was more than the number of students who had received enough information (18.2%, n=16).

### 2.3 Expectations

When students were asked to describe their expectations of South Africa, most had positive expectations. These ranged from positive social aspects, such as friendly people and no discrimination (21.8%, n= 31), to positive impressions of the country in general, for example its living conditions and weather (37.3%, n=53). A student who had expected better living conditions stated as their expectation: "Much better weather!". Some students had positive expectations of academic success (8.5%, n=12), and others expected South Africa to be similar to their home country (4.9%, n=7). Students in the latter group were all from the African continent. It seemed that students had been excited by the new experience, and looked forward to entering South Africa and beginning their studies.

Despite many students expressing positive thoughts, negative expectations also emerged. Several students reported insecurity, in terms of crime (12.7%, n=18). One of these students expressed her negative expectations as: "Hooliganism, thuggery, ruthless people". Another negative expectation was discrimination (7.7%, n=11). An example of racist expectations was expressed in the following manner: "I was expecting to be confronted headlong with racism. I also expected South Africa to be very rough". Twenty-nine

students (20.4%) indicated they had had no expectations, due to either previous experience or a conscious choice to discover the conditions in the country on arrival. This indicates that many students are realistic regarding their future experience – choosing to discover the attributes of South Africa personally, rather than having preconceived ideas.

Related to expectations of the sojourn are international students' opinions of South Africans before arrival. Again, some positive opinions emerged. Twelve students (8.5%) reported a general positive opinion, mostly indicated with "Positive". Many students also expected South Africans to be friendly (19.7%, n=28) for example writing: "Very friendly, interactive and welcoming". Some students expected South Africans to be enlightened about the rest of Africa, or generally enlightened (7.7%, n=11). Seven students (4.9%) expected an integrated society, for example: "I was assuming ... complete peace, harmony among the different racial groups but [it is] not as expected". Similarly, another student expressed that they expected South Africa to be a "non-racial" society.

Students' opinions of South Africans before arrival also included discrimination (21.1%, n=30). Ten of these students (33.3%) expected xenophobia. Racial discrimination was expressed by a student with the following: "We've always [got] a picture of South Africa as a violent country[,] where there is no harmony, [and there is] always fighting among the different races". Other negative aspects were expecting South Africans to be criminals (9.2%, n=13), and arrogant and superficial (4.2%, n=6). A student expressed their expectation of crime: "I thought there are a lot of lazy people [,] who are more concerned with getting their hands on a BMW without having to work for it and will not hesitate to shoot your brains out and take your ride". Again, some students indicated they had no opinion because of not having the opportunity to know South Africans before arrival, or choosing not to have an opinion (20.4%, n=29).

Students' opinions of South Africans today were more negative. An extreme example of this is the opinion of one respondent, who stated plainly that South Africans were "Just bad people". Thirteen students (9.2%) expressed a generally negative opinion – an African student stated the following: "But they are so inhuman. They do not care even about each other. They are so eager to see their own needs fulfilled. They don't compromise their rights even to the extent of lending a small possession to someone needy."

However, 14 students (9.9%) had not changed their opinions. One of these students expressed their opinion, as “It is indeed good”. Many students also responded with a general positive opinion (12.7%, n=18). One student remarked on this: Very positive, that is why I am here for so long already. It also helped that I was not opinionated when I came, especially if I hear other foreign students, especially ... who think they know everything already and judge accordingly”. Another student noted that South Africans possessed “... a good sense of humour and are big drinkers – not that that is really a bad thing”.

Thirteen students (9.2%) stood on a neutral ground and stated that some South Africans were pleasant and some were not. An example of this was: “They are all different people living their lives as best as they can. Some are unpleasant, others are a god-send [,] just like any other country”. However, 36 (25.4%) students stated that they found South Africans discriminatory. An example of this was “A very segregated society still, blacks are hostile towards foreigners, sometimes understandable given their history and only recent freedom, but very frustrating. Whites are still quite biased along colour lines, though many try to be politically correct - almost to the point of absurdity!” Of the students who had not perceived discrimination, more saw South Africans as friendly (6.3%, n=9) than not friendly (2.1%, n=3). Diversity, and less racism, were only reported by three (2.1%) students in each category.

Other opinions were that South Africans were disinterested in current affairs (6.3%, n=9), perceived as negative, and in need of improvement (3.5%, n=5). Students who responded that South Africans needed improvement did not explain this further. Some students commented only on the society as a whole, for example noting the crime (3.5%, n=5) or division between groups of South Africans (2.8%, n=4). A student expressed their dismay: “[A] divided country where some try to make a living despite [government’s] and leaders[’] attempts to the contrary. Others who have made their living leave. Very sad.” Students also mentioned that South Africans needed an identity (2.8%, n=4).

In general, the students’ perceptions of South Africans were more negative than positive.

### 3. RATING AND OPINIONS OF ACADEMIC ASPECTS OF THE SOJOURN

When the students' academic experience was explored, most students expressed a positive opinion (80.3%, n=114), and twenty-one students (14.8%) rated their academic experiences as average. Three students (2.1%) expressed negative ratings.

Several positive responses on academic life in South Africa emerged. Many students mentioned positive aspects of the universities, such as high standards (16.9%, n= 24). A student from Zimbabwe made a comment about the educational standard: "A university of excellent quality education. I am proud that I came here". Other aspects mentioned were good instructors (12.7%, n=18), good progress in studies (11.3%, n= 16) and good facilities (8.5%, n= 12). One example of this was the following: "The [university] has the enabling facilities to support a world standard university". Other mentions were the quality of classes (9.9%, n=14), good interaction and small class groups (2.8%, n= 4), being able to join any course they wanted, and studying in the field of choice (2.8%, n=4).

Some students noted a negative side to academic life. Eleven students (7.7%) were of the opinion that the standard at the university was not high enough, and alternately nine students (6.3%) complained of hard work. Thirteen students (9.2%) complained of instructor and support issues. One of these students noted that tutors were not eager to help, only "helping their own kind". Seven students (4.9%) in each category mentioned poor administration, inadequate facilities and a lack of interaction. One student wrote: "I was quite disappointed by [the fact] that most of the lectures I was interested in were cancelled". This was an example of poor administration, and perhaps a lack of information before arrival. A student who made a more disturbing comment wrote: "Not being able to do what I wanted is killing me". This student also rated most aspects of his sojourn very negatively. Other complaints were language problems and finances, both of which were reported by four students (2.8%).

Interestingly, European and American students were more likely to voice complaints. Two of the three American students (66.7%) and thirteen of the twenty-five (52%) European students complained about the academic aspect of their sojourn. This could be compared to the 30.6% of African students (n=33) and 33.3% (n=2) of Asian students who complained about academic issues. The difference could be due to the higher expectations of American

and European students, because of their experiences at universities in their respective home countries.

The relationship between academic enjoyment and general enjoyment was examined with a chi-square test. However, no significant difference was found (Pearson Chi-square: 7.31,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.120372$ ).

### **3.1 Received Information**

The information received by the students before arrival was examined in relation to the students' reported enjoyment of their academic experience. There was a significant difference between the ratings of students who had received adequate information and those who had not (Pearson Chi-square: 7.22,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.026998$ ). The analysis revealed that students who stated that they had received adequate information before arrival in South Africa rated their academic experience more positively (88.9%,  $n=80$ ), compared to students who had perceived their information prior to arrival as inadequate (70.5%,  $n=31$ ). Lower ratings of academic experience could be related to a lack of information about study opportunities as well as the environment in which the students would be immersed in once they arrived to study in South Africa.

### **3.2 Supportiveness of campus environment**

Another factor relating to international students' academic life is their perceptions of the helpfulness of campus staff and the general supportiveness of the campus environment. Most of the students (71.8%,  $n=102$ ) indicated that they found the campus supportive enough and only 19.7% ( $n=28$ ) found the campus environment not supportive.

The responses differed slightly according to the universities. Students from Stellenbosch University were the most content with campus support – only one student noted that staff was not as helpful as they wished (6.3%). Students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) reported the most complaints (22.1%,  $n=17$ ), and of students from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), ten (20.4%) were not content with the support they received. On closer examination of the complaints, twelve students (24.6%) from UWC and 17 students (22.1%) from UCT had mentioned misgivings of the campus environment. Generally, 74

students (52.1%) indicated that the staff was helpful in every way. A student expressed her gratitude in this manner: “The ... staff was really putting a sincere effort ... to help me [any time], that is really wonderful”. Four students (2.8%) noted that their university had good facilities.

Despite this, four students (2.8%), all from UCT, stated that foreign students need additional assistance, and the university had not provided that. A student expressed their disappointment in the following manner: “No [,] in terms of academic counselling, most of the time the student advisor cannot really help or is hardly there, secretaries are just not understanding and rude in some cases, some lecturers don’t even respect students.” This statement illustrated the opinion of a student who perceived the campus staff as unhelpful. A lack of information about support systems also emerged; three students (2.1%) stated that they knew of no support system available to them. Similarly, three students (2.1%) had no experience of a support system, one of them stating that he receives his support from his fellow nationals.

The supportiveness of campus environment was analysed in relation to the reported academic enjoyment. This aspect of the students’ lives was found to make a significant difference in the way students rated their academic experience (Pearson Chi-square: 13.91,  $df=3$ ,  $p=0.003025$ ). Students who perceived the campus environment as supportive were more likely to report positive feelings about their academic experience (88.9%,  $n=88$ ) than students who perceived the campus environment not supportive (59.3%,  $n=16$ ). Negative experiences were related by one student (1%) in the group, which perceived the campus environment as supportive, and by one student (3.7%) in the group who perceived the campus environment as not supportive enough.

This difference indicates that students who in their opinion do not receive enough support from the campus environment are less likely to enjoy their academic experience. International students arrive in the country and have to adapt to a new educational system, and may find it difficult when the campus environment does not seem facilitative to adaptation. Additionally, as most complaints indicate that staff was found unfriendly or unhelpful, this may affect the students’ inclination to ask for help or information, which in turn may affect their experience negatively.

#### 4. SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

When students' social experience rating and the rating of general enjoyment was analysed, a significant difference emerged in the way students who enjoyed their social experience, and those who did not, rated their general experience (Pearson Chi-square 30.45,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.00004$ ). A closer examination of this result revealed that those students who enjoyed their social life more, also tended to rate their general rating more positively (51.4%,  $n=38$ ). There were only three students (11.5%) who rated their social experience negatively and their general experience positively.

Students were asked to explain why they chose to rate their social experience as they did. The positive aspects of social lives that emerged were having made many friends (16.9%,  $n=24$ ), divergent opportunities for social activity in the environment (10.6%,  $n=15$ ), and doing whatever they wished (2.1%,  $n=3$ ). A student noted the following as positive of their social life: "I got to know a lot of people from different horizons and countries[,] I made myself a couple of very good friends [,] with whom I hope to keep... in touch". Some students perceived roles in the university or in church as helpful in their social life (3.5%,  $n=5$ ). Eighteen students (12.7%) stated that they had no problems in their social life. Family also emerged as a support – a student stated: "...under the circumstances I'm quite content with the situation. I'm in contact with my family almost on a daily basis". This student was the only one who stated that their social life was good due to their contact with family.

Approximately a quarter of students (26.8%,  $n=38$ ) noted that they experienced problems in spending time with South Africans. Students found South Africans "too liberal", unfriendly or "wanting something from you". This also included experiencing difficulty in getting to know people. An example from these answers is: "Still [,] it is too early to evaluate [,] but from what I have seen up to now, South African students [on] campus have little interest [in] others. I have not found anyone who is interested in [foreigners]. They do not even have interest among the blacks, coloureds or whites. This may be because of the legacy of apartheid". A lack of opportunities outside the study context, or a lack of appropriate activities, was experienced by eleven students (7.7%). Twelve students (8.5%) noted that they were too afraid of crime to go out and explore, which restricted their social activities. Problems with going out and exploring were also lack of transport (5.6%,  $n=8$ ).

and financial problems (3.5%, n=5). Time restrictions also emerged as a hindrance to a full social life (4.9%, n=7) Four students (2.8%), of whom three mentioned xenophobia as a hindrance, and one racism, noted discrimination as a problem. Five students (3.5%) stated that they were lonely and homesick. A student who rated their social experience as unsatisfactory wrote: “My family is not with me”. Another noted, “It was better at home”.

When a logistic regression analysis was performed to determine which variables had the greatest effect on the rating of social life, two variables emerged as significant. The logistic regression model can be found in table 5.

**Table 5: Logistic Regression Model for Social Enjoyment**

	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>Wald Chi-square</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	1.9459	0.6172	9.9397	0.0016	7.000	
<b>Relationship status</b>	-0.2412	0.8224	0.8860	0.7693	0.786	1.409; 8.128
<b>Discrimination</b>	-2.1691	0.7784	0.7643	0.0053	0.114	0.029; 0.987
<b>Interaction</b>	3.4600	1.3969	6.1350	0.0133	3.513	1.628; 7.581

The first significant variable was discrimination (OR: 0.114, CI: 0.029;0.987). This variable had a negative relationship with the social rating variable, in that students who were discriminated against were less likely to rate their social experience positively. Being in a relationship (excluding marriage) also emerged as a contributor to social enjoyment rating. However, being in a relationship was not a predictor by itself of social life. The interaction of being in a relationship and discrimination was the significant predictor (p=0.0133). Because of the interaction effect between discrimination and being in a relationship, these variables were re-examined separately. Table 6 describes the results of the effect of the relationship and discrimination on social life. The odds ratios for a good social rating are examined, under the condition that discrimination does occur.

**Table 6: Logistic Regression Model for Social Enjoyment and Discrimination**

<b>Relationship status</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>Wald Chi-square</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval</b>
<b>In a relationship</b>	1.2907	0.6172	1.2384	0.2658	3.635	0.374; 35.300
<b>Not in a relationship</b>	-2.1688	0.7784	7.7634	0.0053	0.114	0.021; 0.480

Although being in a relationship and being faced with discrimination was not found significant, we can see that students in a relationship were more likely to rate their social experience positively despite having experienced discrimination. (OR: 3.635, CI: 0.374; 35.300). However, students who were not in a relationship were unlikely to rate their social experience positively (OR: 0.114, CI: 0.021; 0.480). Therefore, we can assume that those students who have a partner are less likely to be affected negatively by discrimination.

#### **4.1 Personal Relationships and Family**

Having a life partner is also an important facet of students' social experience. A partner brings support in most aspects of a student's life. Additionally, postgraduate students may be more willing to settle down than undergraduates are. Thus the effect of being married or in a relationship was explored in relation to the students' rating of their social experience.

Because having a partner comprises either being married or being single but in a relationship, these variables were initially examined together. In total, 75 students either were married or were in a relationship. It emerged that students with a partner, whether married or single, were more content with their social experience. Positive responses were reported by 57 students with a partner (63.3%), and by 19 students without a partner (45.2%). Fifteen students who had life-partners had negative opinions of their social experience (16.67%), whereas this was only reported by thirteen students without a life-partner (31%).

The analysis was also performed separately for students who were married and those who were in a relationship. When having a partner was examined in relation to social enjoyment, being married (Pearson Chi-square 3.82,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.430285$ ) or in a relationship (Pearson Chi-square: 8.26,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.082647$ ) was not found to make a significant difference in the reports. When these variables were examined together, the chi-square test also did not yield significant results (Pearson Chi-square: 4.58,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.101292$ ).

When differences in general rating were analysed together with marital status, no significant difference was found (Pearson Chi-square: 6.02,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.198039$ ). A similar analysis was performed with general rating in relation to relationships, but this analysis was also not significant (Pearson Chi-square: 6.76,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.149111$ ). Being in a relationship, with combined married and students in a relationship, did not yield a significant result (Pearson Chi-square: 5.82,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.054346$ ).

It seems that students who are in a relationship tend to have more positive opinions of their sojourn, whether this is in the social aspect or in general. This may be due to students in a relationship having added support from their partners. Additionally, it is possible that students who are in a relationship with a South African have greater access to the host society.

However, when students were asked their partners' nationality, most students indicated that their partners originated from their home country (62.7%,  $n=47$ ). Of these students, 24 (51.1%) were married to their partners, and thus it was more likely that the students had met their partners in their home country. The next most prevalent choice was having a South African partner (25.3%,  $n=19$ ), with a partner from another country only reported by nine students (12%). Nevertheless, most students were in a relationship with a co-national, which indicates that international students may prefer to spend time with non-South Africans, or possibly experience difficulty in establishing relationships with locals.

A more important distinction to students' partners' nationality is whether the students' partners are in South Africa or elsewhere. The survey revealed that 49.3% ( $n=37$ ) of the students' partners were living in South Africa. Specifically, 36% ( $n=27$ ) were living in the students' home country and 14.7% elsewhere ( $n=11$ ). When the partner's country of residence and the students' rating of social enjoyment were examined, the categories of

partners in the home country and partners in another country were combined. This analysis revealed no significant difference emerged between the responses of students whose partners lived in South Africa and those whose partners lived elsewhere (Pearson Chi-square: 1.84,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.397619$ ).

However, students, whose partners lived in another country, were more likely to report their social experience as negative than the other groups. The frequencies indicate that positive responses were reported mostly by the group of students whose partners were in South Africa (67.6%,  $n=25$ ), followed by those, whose partners were in another country (62.5%,  $n=5$ ). Of the students with a partner in their home country 61.5% ( $n=16$ ) reported a positive opinion of their social experience. Negative responses were reported by 10.8% ( $n=4$ ) of students with partners in South Africa, 23.1% ( $n=6$ ) of students with a partner in their home country and, 37.5% ( $n=3$ ) of students whose partners were elsewhere. Students, whose partners are in another country, may rate their experience more negatively because they worry about their well-being – they might not have visited their partners in that country, and are unsure of the conditions there. Students, whose partners are in their home country, may find it comforting to know that their partners are taken care of by family.

The presence of the students' partners was also examined in relation to the students' general rating of their experience. Of the students who had a partner in South Africa, 50% rated their general experience as positive ( $n=18$ ). Of students whose partners were in their home country, 36% ( $n=9$ ) rated their experience as positive. This group rated their experience positively more often than students whose partners were in another country (36.1%,  $n=13$ ) Negative responses were more frequent among students whose partners were in another country (25%,  $n=9$ ), followed by students whose partners were in their home country (20%,  $n=5$ ), and were reported the least by students whose partners were in South Africa (8.3%,  $n=3$ ). The chi-square test for this variable, when performed with the categorisation of South Africa and elsewhere, was found not to be significant (Pearson Chi-square: 5.04,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.282894$ ).

Having family in the country may also bring some comfort to international students. In this survey, 35 students (24.6%) had family in South Africa. Since family presence is not enough for support, the students were also asked whether they interacted with their family

often. A large proportion of students who had family in South Africa (77.1%, n=27) interacted with them often, and only 22.9% (n=8) did not.

Students who interacted with their families were more likely to report positive feelings of their social experience (70.4%, n=19), than students who did not interact with their families (n=4, 50%). More students who did not interact with family reported negative feelings (n=2, 25%) than students who interacted with family often (n=2, 7.4%). These frequencies were examined with Fischer's exact test. Despite re-coding the social enjoyment variable to only positive and negative, by excluding the neutral variable, no significant difference was found ( $p=0.21791$ ).

A difference could also be noted in the way students who interacted with family and those who did not reported their general experience. Ten students (38.5%) who interacted with their family reported positive feelings about their general experience. Only two (28.6%) of those students who did not interact with their families reported positive experiences. Negative experiences were also reported by two students in that category (28.6%), whereas only two students (8%) who interacted with family reported their experience as negative. Despite the differences in reported enjoyment, Fischer's exact test did not yield significant results ( $p=0.18988$ ).

#### **4.2 Friendship Patterns**

The survey also explored the nationalities of international students' closest friends. An investigation into the nationality of international students' friends may give an indication of how the students have integrated into South African society. The students were asked to indicate the nationality of those with whom they spent most of their time. However, most students found it difficult to indicate only one group, and several categories emerged.

A trend emerging from the responses indicated that international students spent their time with non-locals. Most students spent time with other international students (17.6%, n=25). Fellow nationals were also a frequent choice, with twenty-one students (14.8%) indicating that their social time was spent mainly with students from their home country. Spending time with only local students was not a frequent choice for international students (11.4%, n=16).

Various friendship patterns emerged from this question. However, as seen above, the most prevalent choices were those that included either other international students, or fellow nationals. Spending time with local families was chosen infrequently (3.5%, n=5) and never without a combination of this and other groups. The tendency of students spending time mainly with other international students may be due to a common foreignness, which binds them together. Students may also spend time with their fellow nationals because they can find comfort and familiarity with them, and to have an opportunity to use their own language. The lack of interaction with local families may indicate that students experienced a lack of opportunity for contact with them – most international students are in a university setting and this may prevent them from integrating into the wider society. Additionally, time pressures may hinder postgraduate international students' experiences of the wider society.

An indirect indicator of the students' preference for friends may be their roommate or flatmate choice. It is acknowledged that especially in students' residences, students do not always have a choice concerning their preference of flatmates and some residences allocate international students close to each other. However, some indication of the students' preference can be gained from this question.

Of the total sample, 85 students (59.9%) had a roommate or flatmate. The presence of fellow national and South African flatmates was similarly represented (n=25, 29.4% and n=24, 28.2% respectively). Thirteen students (15.3%) had a flatmate from another country. Some students reported having several flatmates – eight students (9.4%) reported flatmates from South Africa as well as their home country, and another eight (9.4%) from South Africa and another country. Three students (3.5%) had flatmates from another country and their home country, and two students (2.4%) had flatmates from all three categories. This question revealed that the choice (or allocation) of flatmates is clearly leaning towards non-South Africans. There is no evidence that could clarify whether the choices were made by international students or South Africans.

The chi-square analysis performed for social enjoyment and the presence of a room- or flatmate revealed that there was a significant difference in the social enjoyment of students with- and without room- or flatmates (Pearson Chi-square: 11.26, df=4, p=0.023834). The

frequencies indicated that the proportion of students with a flat- or roommate enjoyed their social experience significantly more (67.5%, n=54) than students who did not have a flatmate (42.3%, n=22). Students with a flatmate also reported few negative opinions of their social experience (13.8%, n=11). The presence of a roommate or flatmate may bring added social support for the students. International students may not always have the time to explore the social scene outside their study context and having social support at home in the evenings, or during a study break, may help the students to relax and reduce loneliness.

When the presence of a roommate or flatmate was examined in relation to the students' rating of their general experience, no significant difference was found (Pearson Chi-square = 2.39, df=4, p=0.663867). Although the differences were small, students with a roommate or flatmate tended to report more positive ratings (42.5%, n=34), and more negative ratings (22.5%, n=18) than students without a room- or flatmate (34%, n=17, and 18%, n=9 respectively).

#### **4.3 Relationships Between South Africans and International Students**

The survey also enquired whether international students had adequate contact with South Africans. Fifty-five students (38.7%) perceived their interactions as adequate, or as frequent as they wished. This question does not indicate whether this choice denotes a dislike for South Africans, or whether the students have ample contact with them. The majority of students (57%, n=81) noted that they had less contact with South Africans than they desired. This may indicate a slight occurrence of xenophobia, in that South Africans may not be willing to spend time with international students. The result could also indicate that the students do not have sufficient time or opportunity to engage in contact with South Africans. Despite the majority of students wishing for more contact, two students (1.4%) indicated that they had more contact with South Africans than they wished, which could suggest that the students did not have a positive opinion of those South Africans that they had met.

It seems that in international students' opinion, South Africans are not very accommodating. They described their problems in making contact with them mainly as xenophobia (16.2%, n=23), and discrimination between different groups (6.3%, n=9). Seven students (4.9%) perceived South Africans as unfriendly, and two students (1.4%)

specified that they were cautious of South Africans. Eight students (5.6%) stated that they spent more time with their fellow nationals, one of which expressed their tendency to spend time with fellow nationals in the following manner: “My inmates as well as close friends are [fellow nationals]”. On the other hand, some students also noted that it did not make a difference what nationality their friends were (3.5%, n=5). Ten students (7%) stated that they lacked opportunity to meet South Africans, three (30%) of which stated that they did not share classes and only met in unavoidable circumstances, such as in a pub. Specific hindrances mentioned by the students for contact were time pressures (2.8%, n=4) and language (2.1%, n=3).

South Africans’ knowledge of international students’ home countries may also affect the way in which students perceive their social life. Not being knowledgeable of the students’ home country may indicate disinterest, and thus make international students feel unwelcome or unwanted. A total of 122 students (85.9%) were of the opinion that South Africans were not knowledgeable of their home country, and eighteen students (12.7%) stated that South Africans possessed a reasonably accurate knowledge of their country. Students from the African continent were most likely to state that South Africans were not knowledgeable of their country (89.8%, n=97). When examining the knowledge of South Africans of the students’ home country and international students’ reports of social enjoyment, it was found that there were not many differences in the rating of social experience between students who perceived South Africans as knowledgeable, and those that did not. Students who perceived South Africans as informed about their home country reported more positive feelings of their social life (61.1%, n= 11) than those that did not (56.5%, n=65). More negative feelings were also reported more by students who had perceived South Africans as uninformed of their home country (22.6%, n=26) than by those who perceived them as knowledgeable (11.1%, n=2). The chi-square analysis was not significant (Pearson Chi-square: 1.38, df=2, p=0.502756).

This variable was also examined in relation to the students’ rating of their general experience. The students who perceived South Africans as having a reasonably accurate knowledge of their home country reported more positive feelings (58.8%, n=10) than those who indicated that South Africans were not knowledgeable of their home country (34.5%, n=39). This slight trend towards students who perceive South Africans as knowledgeable

of their home country reporting positive feelings was not significant (Pearson's Chi-square=3.88, df=2, p=0.143696).

The students' desire to be in contact with locals may depend on locals' attitude towards the students' home country. It may also affect the students' enjoyment of their stay. When the students were asked what South Africans' attitude towards their home country was, the most responses were indicated as neutral (41.5%, n=59). The same number of students chose positive and negative ratings of South Africans' attitudes toward their home country (25.2%, n=36). However, when South Africans' attitude toward the home country and the students' social experience rating were examined, students who chose unfavourable options were also more likely to report negative social experiences (14.7%, n=5) than students, who perceived South Africans' attitude toward their home country as positive (11.1%, n=4). These differences from students who had perceived South Africans to have a positive opinion of their home countries were small, and the chi-square analysis did not yield significant results (Pearson Chi-square: 5.02, df=4, p=0.285352).

When general rating was examined in relation to South Africans' perceived attitude, it emerged that students, who perceived South Africans' attitudes toward their home country as positive, reported positive general experiences more frequently (65.7%, n=23). Of this group, only five students (14.3%) reported a negative general experience. On the other hand, only 28.1% (n=9) of students, who perceived South Africans as having a negative attitude toward their country, reported a positive general experience, and 21.9% (n=7) reported a negative experience. The frequencies indicate that students who perceived the attitude of South Africans towards their country as favourable, rate their experience less negatively than those who report South Africans' attitude as unfavourable. The chi-square test indicated that there is a significant difference in the rating of the general experience between groups who perceived South Africans' attitudes towards their home country differently (Pearson Chi-square = 18.08, df=4, p=0.001192).

This variable may have some relation to the students' nationality. European students were most likely to report South Africans' attitude toward their country as positive (72%, n=18), and African students as negative (30.6%, n=33). However, there were few differences in the other groups. This indicates that South Africans may be more inclined to express interest in students from a European country than in students from an African country.

#### 4.4 Race Relations

South Africa, having the legacy of apartheid, is still a divided society to some extent. Therefore it is worthwhile to note whether international students, in their opinion, have contact with all the racial groups. Interestingly, exactly half (50%, n=69) of those students who answered this question perceived their contact with all racial groups as satisfactory. The largest proportion of students not finding their contact with all races adequate was from African countries (54.6%, n=59). Students who expressed the most contentment with their racial contact were from America (100%, n=3).

Students who had perceived adequate racial contact reported more positive feelings toward their social experience (67.6%, n=46) than those who had reported not being able to contact all racial groups (46.8%, n=29). A lack of contact may have been due to racial discrimination on the part of South Africans, which may have affected the students' perception of social enjoyment. Additionally, students may have come from backgrounds where racial discrimination was less prevalent than in South Africa. Thus, the students may have felt uncomfortable with the divisions they saw in this country. Students who had not had contact with all racial groups were also slightly more inclined toward reporting negative opinions of their social enjoyment (25.8%, n=16), than students who had (16.2%, n=11). However, the differences were not significant (Pearson Chi-square = 6.21, df=4, p=0.184270).

The question also explored the barriers and aids to racial contact. Factors conducive to adequate racial contact noted by students were diverse environment (4.9%, n=7), and being foreign (0.7%, n=1). Some students (5.6%, n=8) wrote that they had made an effort to socialise with all groups, but did not indicate whether their efforts were fruitful. A few students noted that they had friends from all groups (4.2%, n=6).

However, 49 students (34.5%) found that they had difficulty in gaining access to some groups. One student wrote in this respect: "there should be more motivation and organising from the faculties or universities ['] side to bring races together. A hundred percent of my closer friends are white or indian. I had much more contact (and much fun and interesting talks) with black people in [three] weeks in Ghana than in my whole stay in [South Africa]!" Some students noted that they did not know many South Africans (4.2%, n=6).

Eleven students (7.7%) stated that they perceived xenophobia as a barrier to adequate contact, and similarly two students (1.4%) noted that although they had met members of various groups it did not mean they had befriended them. Three students (2.1%) were of the opinion that it made no difference; South Africans were “all the same”.

When the perception of adequate racial contact was examined in relation to the students’ reported general enjoyment, a significant difference was found between students who perceived their contact as adequate, and those that did not (Pearson Chi-square: 14.3,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.006412$ ). Specifically, it was found that students with adequate racial contact rated their general experience more positively ( $n=33$ , 51.6%) and less negatively ( $n=8$ , 12.5%) than students with less than adequate racial contact. Sixteen students (25%) who stated that their contact with all racial groups was not adequate reported positive feelings of their general experience, and twenty (31.3%) reported negative feelings. This indicates that adequate racial contact has an association with students’ enjoyment of the sojourn.

#### 4.5 Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the most unpleasant social experiences a person may have, and may spoil a student’s experience in any country. This survey revealed that 66 students (46.4%) had experienced discrimination and 71 (50%) had not. The forms of discrimination and numbers of students experiencing it can be found in table 7.

**Table 7: Frequency of Reported Discrimination**

<b>DISCRIMINATION</b>	<b>NUMBER (mentions)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE (N=142)</b>
<b>Racial</b>	30	21.1%
<b>Xenophobia</b>	30	21.1%
<b>Gender</b>	3	2.1%
<b>Positive</b>	3	2.1%
<b>No Explanation</b>	6	4.2%
<b>Language</b>	1	0.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>	

The main forms of discrimination experienced by the students were racism and xenophobia. An African student related discrimination by the following: “I am black [.] I think that says it all. Can you imagine in the school library being asked if my card was mine just because it says Kenyan and I do not look it. Believe it!” An extreme example of xenophobia was: “Once I had an argument with a white guy, he shouted out [that] ‘go back to your country!’” Other less abrasive incidents were also revealed by the survey: “It’s not always bad discrimination, they always tell us when we go out that we are different and definitely cannot be South Africans. Of course we have been called ‘Makwere kwere’ a few times as well”. This was a response by a student from an African country. ‘Makwere kwere’ is an onomatopoeic reference, usually used by black South Africans, to refer to other black Africans in a derogatory manner.

A woman from Zimbabwe seemed to have encountered all forms of discrimination during her sojourn. She recounted: “It is something you come across daily, both socially and in formal transactions. [For example,] opening a bank account, as a black woman resident in South Africa, has been difficult – I have had to produce my student card to open an account. At times, government officials will insist that your husband do transactions with them, they won’t deal with you – despite [the fact] that any contracts signed or decisions made affect you both”. Six students (4.2%) did not specify the type of discrimination, but recounted their experience. A student had refrained from responding that they had experienced discrimination, but stated: “I have not experienced outright discrimination. It might be subtle but there is no way to exactly confirm it.” Therefore, there may have been more students in the sample who had experienced discrimination, but who had not considered it noteworthy.

Some students had also experienced racial discrimination because they were white (2.1%, n=3). One of these students wrote: “Hey, I’m white, male, young, healthy and comparatively wealthy - the enemy [number one]! I know that my neighbour had no break-ins while I had four into my car last year alone, in front of my house. But to be fair, the majority of people are either undiscriminatory or at least act so.” One student noted that they had experienced positive discrimination due to being white – and another student stated that he had not experienced any discrimination, but it was difficult to “overcome whiteness”.

An analysis was performed to examine whether perceived discrimination had an effect on the students' rating of their social enjoyment. The analysis revealed a significant difference. Students who had perceived discrimination rated their experience less positively than those who had not (Pearson Chi-square: 9.64,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.046953$ ). Students who had experienced discrimination rated their social experience more negatively (27.4%,  $n=17$ ), when compared to students who had not experienced discrimination (16.2%,  $n=11$ ). Positive ratings of social experience were given by 30 students (48.2%) of those who had experienced discrimination, and by 44 students (64.7%) of those who had not experienced discrimination. This result confirms that students who experience discrimination during their stay enjoy the social aspects less than those who do not. There were few differences in the reports of discrimination when examined according to the continent the students originated from – only one student from Asia reported discrimination (16.7%). The most frequent occurrence of discrimination was with students from the African continent (50%,  $n=54$ ). This may be due to locals perceiving black Africans as not welcome in South Africa, as could be inferred by the frequent derision of black Africans.

The experience of discrimination may also affect the students' general opinion of the sojourn. Thirty-five students (52.2%) who had not experienced discrimination reported positive feelings about their sojourn. This could be compared to fourteen students (23%) who had experienced discrimination. A difference could also be seen in the reporting of negative feelings about the sojourn. Students who had experienced discrimination reported more negative feelings ( $n=15$ , 24.6%), in contrast to twelve students (17.9%) who had not experienced discrimination. A significant difference was found between these two groups. (Pearson Chi-square: 12,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.017350$ ). This indicates that the experience of discrimination has a negative association with students' overall experience.

#### **4.6 Cultural Contact and Cultural Difference**

International students were asked whether they had had experience with South African cultures. Although some students avidly pointed out that the multitude of cultures present in South Africa was not represented in the Western Cape, or in the university, 30 students (21.1%) noted that they had had contact with South African cultures.

Negative responses to this question included the opinions of 24 students (16.95%) who reported having experienced little contact with some cultures and 22 students (15.5%) who responded that they lacked opportunity to do so. As barriers to cultural contact, students observed the tendency of South Africans to stay among themselves (10.6%, n=15), Cape Town not being representative of South Africa (4.2%, n=6), lack of experience in the rural way of life (5.6%, n=8), time pressures (3.5%, n=5) and language (2.1%, n=3). Six students (4.2%) noted that they were still learning about the different cultures.

When cultural contact was examined in relation to the students' rating of their social enjoyment, no significant difference was found between the reports of students, who had reported adequate contact, and those who had not (Pearson Chi-square: 2.48, df=2, p=0.289137). However, students who perceived adequate cultural contact reported more positive opinions of their sojourn (n=18, 62.1%), and less negative opinions of their sojourn (n=3, 10.3%) than students who had not had adequate contact with all cultural groups. Fifty-seven students (57%), who had not had adequate contact with all cultures in the country, reported positive feelings about their social lives, and twenty-three (23%) reported negative feelings. This indicates that adequate cultural contact may have had a positive association with students' enjoyment of the sojourn.

Students' contact with South African cultures was also examined in relation to their general rating of the experience. It was found that students who perceived adequate contact were more likely to report positive feelings about their general experience (n=13, 48.1%) than students who perceived their contact as inadequate (n=37, 37.4%). Negative feelings were reported more by students who had not had adequate contact with all cultural groups (n=23, 23.2%) than those who had (n=4, 14.8%). The frequencies indicate that students who perceive that they were in contact with all cultures in South Africa may be more positive towards their sojourn. However, no significant difference between the two groups emerged in the analysis (Pearson Chi-square: 0.98, df=2, p=0.611440).

In some cases, exposure to culture difference between students' home culture and the host culture may cause distress. Only nine students (6.3%) considered South African culture to be similar to their home culture, all of whom were from the African continent. Differences between cultures were mainly stated as differences in social interaction patterns, including aspects such as friendliness and xenophobia (34.5%, n=49). A student expressed their

disappointment with the social interaction style in South Africa: “In my culture, we do not undermine other people when they are in my country, but in South Africa sometimes I feel that I do not belong here”. Differences in friendliness and social interaction were also expressed in the following manner: “The high level of social solidarity, respect of one another and generosity is virtually non-existent in South Africa”. Twelve students (8.5%) mentioned the “westernised nature” of Cape Town as a difference from their African countries, and sometimes expressed this as a negative opinion.

Students also mentioned negative aspects of the South African culture, such as perceiving South Africans as “morally poor” (12%, n=17). This opinion was expressed by one of the students: “morals are bearable [in my home country] not here, where people can kiss, can be in compromised situations in public without [considering] the feelings of others”. The high prevalence of crime (2.1%, n=3) and the slow speed at which things work in the country (2.1%, n=3) irritated some students. Two students (1.4%) saw South Africa less liberated than their home country. It was not clear whether this was seen as a positive or negative aspect of South Africa. Three students (2.1%) noted that South Africa was unique and could not be compared to their home.

Culture difference was analysed in relation to the students’ rating of their social experience. Students, who perceived their culture difference as large, were more likely to report negative (25.3%, n=19), and less likely to report positive (56%, n=42), ratings of their social enjoyment. Despite the percentages indicating that students from cultures more different to South African cultures rated their experience slightly more negatively than students from similar cultures the variable of culture difference did not have a significant effect on social enjoyment (Pearson Chi-square: 3.71, df=4, p=0.447292).

When culture difference between the students’ country and the culture they interacted the most with in South Africa was examined in relation to general enjoyment, the analysis indicated that there was no significant difference in the way students with large, small, and no cultural difference reported their general enjoyment of their sojourn (Pearson Chi-square: 8.78, df=4, p=0.066971). Students with no perceived culture difference reported having enjoyed their sojourn more (n=8, 72.7%) than the other groups. Those who had perceived a large cultural difference reported the least enjoyment (30.6%, n=22), and the most negative ratings of their experience (n=19, 25%). Students, who perceived their

culture and the culture they interacted with the most as similar, reported no negative opinions of their general experience. Those students who had reported a slight culture difference reported positive feelings relatively frequently (n=18, 42.9%), and an average amount of negative feelings (n=7, 16.7%). This could indicate that students, who perceive little difference between the culture they interact the most with and their own culture, enjoyed their sojourn the most.

Culture difference may have an impact on the students' general enjoyment. However, this impact is not seen in social enjoyment. Cultural contact, on the other hand, did not seem to have an impact in the way students rated either their social or general experience. Cultural difference may have an impact because some students may perceive this difference as disturbing instead of pleasant, whereas not being exposed to some cultures may not make a large difference in the students' lives.

## 5. Overall Experience

The students' overall experience was determined by questions that explored students' best and worst moments and their rating of their experience. The questions also explored the students' preference of the country they would live in after completing their studies, and their general opinions of their sojourn in South Africa. This aspect of the survey provided a more comprehensive view of how students perceived their stay, as well as what aspects of their life in South Africa affect their opinion of the sojourn.

The students were asked to rate their experience on '1 to 5', and elaborate on their rating. Twenty students (14.1%) chose '1', meaning 'excellent', 31 students (21.8%) chose '2', meaning 'satisfactory', and 53 students (37.3%) chose '3', meaning 'neutral'. 'Unsatisfactory' was indicated by '4' and 17 students (12%) chose this option. Eleven students (7.7%) chose '5', which meant that they perceived their experience as 'poor'.

When asked to elaborate, 35 students (24.6%) wrote that their stay was a good experience. An example of good experiences was "culture insight, sunshine, wildlife, [and I] learned that I like to share my life with my partner". Another student stated: "I learned a lot about myself and ... others. I have visited a beautiful country and met beautiful people". Nineteen students (13.4%) noted that there were both good and bad aspects to their

experience. Academic aspects were also mentioned, thirteen students (9.2%) had enjoyed their studies, and two (1.4%) had not. Five students (3.5%) stated that their time had been pleasant socially, and seven (4.9%) stated that their time had been unpleasant in this respect. Eight students (5.6%) were of the opinion that they had not been here long enough to rate their experience and three (2.1%) were not sure what to answer.

Unpleasant experiences were also mentioned in this question. Five students (3.5%) had not enjoyed the presence of crime and four (2.1%) the discrimination in this country. An example of both crime and social aspects is the following: "All the bad experiences in here, like I got robbed two times and felt lonely most of the time and others". Two students (1.4%) wrote that they had not enjoyed their experiences of unfairness, in terms of social circumstances.

When a logistic regression was performed with the general rating as a dependent variable, some variables emerged as having a significant effect on how students rated their general experience. The logistic regression model can be found in table 8.

**Table 8 - Logistic Regression Model for General Enjoyment**

	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Wald Chi-square</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval</b>
<b>Intercept</b>	-0.8257	0.9848	0.7030	0.4018	0.438	
<b>Race contact</b>	1.12191	0.4471	7.4348	0.0064	3.384	1.409; 8.128
<b>Culture difference</b>	-1.7808	0.9018	3.8998	0.0483	0.169	0.029; 0.987
<b>Social</b>	1.2565	0.3925	10.2505	0.0014	3.513	1.628; 7.581

As can be seen from the above table, racial contact, culture difference and social contact have an effect on the general rating of the students.

The most important predicting variable was social experience. If students had a positive social experience, they would also rate the general experience more highly (OR: 3.513, CI: 1.628; 7.581). The chi-square for this variable was significant ( $p=0.0014$ ). The second

most important positive effect on the general rating was race contact. If students had racial contact with all groups, they would have rated their general rating more highly (OR: 3.384, CI: 1.409; 8.129). The chi-square for this variable was also significant ( $p=0.0064$ ). Although it was noted earlier that this might have some relationship to discrimination, the variable of discrimination did not emerge as significant in the analysis. Another variable, which was found as having an effect on general rating, was culture difference. This variable had a negative relationship with general rating. Thus, if the student perceived a culture difference, they would be less likely to rate their general rating highly (OR: 0.169, CI: 0.029; 0.987). The chi-square analysis for this also emerged as significant ( $p=0.0483$ ), although less prominently.

The students' worst experiences while studying in South Africa were also explored. The most prominent response was the experience of, or being a witness to, crime (21.1%,  $n=30$ ). One student wrote: "I was raped by a house mate shortly after my arrival in Cape Town." Another student expressed their worst experience of being witness to crime as: "The times I used to see people fighting and killing each other in the trains in the areas of Philippi and Mitchell's Plain." The next most mentioned "worst experience" was of a social nature, whether loneliness, not being able to go home or being threatened by someone (16.2%,  $n=23$ ). A student stated "Last year I lived [on] campus and I had very few friends; I was alone". Also a social aspect, but deserving its own category was discrimination – this emerged as the worst experience for 15 students (10.6%). Academic experiences were mentioned by 14 students (9.9%) – for example, a student had found on arrival that they could not study on the course they had enrolled for. Ten students (7%) noted problems with administration or Home Affairs as their worst experience, and another ten students (7%) mentioned bad weather.

Five students (3.5%) found the experience of being homesick their worst experience in South Africa. The experience of sickness while away from home was also reported as the worst by three students (2.1%), one of whom stated plainly: "Being in hospital away from home". Some students (4.2%,  $n=6$ ) stated that their worst experience was their inability to communicate in the host language(s), and five (3.5%) wrote that financial constraints had affected their experience negatively. Exposure to inequality had affected four students (2.8%), and three (2.1%) reported that their worst experience had been the ignorance of South Africans. Another three students (2.1%) also mentioned a lack of transport. An

example of transport problems was “taxi usage – dirty, overloaded, drivers unhygienic”. Other mentions in this category included transport to the university, or to social affairs. On a positive note, 27 students (19%) stated that they could not think of their worst moments.

The students were also asked what their best experiences were while in South Africa. A large proportion of the students stated that a social experience was their best, for example having great friends (38%, n=54). Some were not as positive as others were; one student expressed: “The very rare cases where I have met South African nationals who are really interested in [being friends] with foreigners.”

Participating in activities, for example hiking, skydiving, or sightseeing was rated as the best experience by 48 students (33.8%). Twenty-seven students (19%) stated that excelling at academic work was the best moment in their stay in South Africa so far. An example of academic achievement was by a student: “When I obtained 80% pass-mark in one of my modules”. Three students (2.1%) noted enthusiastically that “everything” was the best moments of their stay. Negative responses were given by fifteen students (10.6%) who wrote that they had not had any positive times. One of these students wrote “N/A”, and two of these students stated that going home was their best experience: “crossing the border to my home country”. However, four students (2.8%) could not tell which experience was the best.

### 5.1 Future Plans

The future plans of students were also explored. The students were asked to indicate their preference of their future home country based on their experience in South Africa. Most students (44.4%, n=63) wished to go home, and the second most popular option was to go to another country (18.3%, n=26). The least popular option was to stay in South Africa (10.6%, n=15). The most prevalent elaboration on this answer was “home’s home” – noted by 18 students (12.7%). Nine students (6.3%) noted crime as a reason for going – “[South Africa] is not a secure place. You always need to be watchful. And I cannot help being watchful all the time. That is by itself a prison. In my country you can even walk as late as two a.m. without any fear. You may not believe it.”

On a more positive note, nine students (6.3%) wanted to leave to get more experience. Five students (3.5%) could not decide, and eleven students' (7.7%) responses were unspecified. Four students (2.8%) noted that they merely came to study -: "I came to [South Africa] for studies and will return to my country". Three students (2.1%) noted going back to help their country as a reason for leaving South Africa, and four students (2.8%) gave their reason either for going or staying, as their home country being in trouble. A motivation to stay in South Africa also emerged as future opportunities for the students - four students (2.8%) saw South Africa as having no future and three (2.1%) saw opportunities for themselves in South Africa. Two students (1.4%) noted that they would like to go somewhere else, as there was too much division in South Africa, and xenophobia also emerged as a reason for leaving (2.1%, n=3). Only two students (1.4%) mentioned wanting to come back to South Africa some day. On the other hand, tree students (2.1%) wanted to stay in South Africa, because they liked it here. A minor reason for going to another country was wanting to gain experience (1.4%, n=2) Overall, it seems that most students did not wish to remain in South Africa after the completion of their studies.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **1. DISCUSSION**

This chapter explores the results of the survey with reference to findings in literature. The most prominent issues, which emerged from the survey, were the cultural environment, social environment, students' motivations to come to South Africa and motivations for leaving or staying the country on completion of their studies. In addition, the experience of discrimination was frequent.

##### **1.1 Cultural Environment**

Different countries have different cultures. Thus, nationality is closely related to students' cultural experience. Nationality has been found to have an effect on student adjustment. Findings by Church (1982), Surdam and Collins (1984), Schram and Lauver (1988) and Lackland (2001) have indicated that western students entering a western country are better adapted than students from non-western countries. Thus it could have been expected that African students adapt well in an African country. However, the analysis revealed that African students rated both their social and general experience less well than students from other continents.

Besides for relating to nationality, this finding could also relate to the culture difference between the countries. African students may come from more collectivist cultures, and face problems in adjusting to an individualistic culture. According to Tafarodi and Smith (2001), individuals from collectivist cultures may be more vulnerable to depression during their sojourn. Therefore, students from collectivistic cultures could have rated their experiences more negatively. Similarly, Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1998) found that Japanese students did not adjust easily to studying in the United States. As South Africa is an African country, it is questionable whether the culture difference between African students' home country and this country is that large. However, some students in this survey noted that Cape Town was 'westernised'. Thus it is possible that Cape Town could be comparable to western cities such as in the United States. Thus the students may come

from collectivist cultures in Africa and perceive South Africa as westernised and individualistic. This might add to the perceived culture difference and make African students' experience more difficult. Unfortunately, there were not many Asian respondents in this survey. Asian countries, such as Japan, are generally seen as collectivistic cultures. Thus having both Asian and African students represented in the survey may have provided further clarity regarding whether individuals from collectivist or individualistic cultures have better or worse experiences in South Africa. In addition, this could have enabled analysis between different continents, which could have revealed more specific results regarding nationalities and perceived enjoyment. Further research is needed, firstly to determine how international students perceive themselves – as collectivistic or individualistic - and secondly, how they perceive South African culture.

In general, perceived culture difference was found to exert an influence on international students' enjoyment. This variable was found to influence the general rating of the sojourn negatively – thus, students perceiving a large culture difference reported negative opinions of their general enjoyment more frequently than those students that had perceived less culture difference between their home country and South Africa. The perception of culture difference did not affect the student's rating of social enjoyment. This finding is similar to Lewthwaite's (1996) and Redmond's (2000) findings of cultural distance having an effect on the students' enjoyment of their sojourn, and their adaptation to the host country. Culture distance is the measure of difference between two cultures. The students' explanations concerning culture difference were mainly of social interaction patterns, westernisation and lack of morals in the host country. Thus, social factors and social interactions may have had a larger impact on the general rating of a sojourn than expected.

Value differences also emerged in some questions. Furnham and Bochner (1986) reviewed causes of culture shock, and found that one of the theories related to value differences. Students in the survey expressed dismay at the morals in South Africa, and social interaction styles, which can be seen as a part of values. Value differences emerged mainly when students were asked to explain culture differences. Thus, it could be deduced that value differences and culture differences are closely related, and both could relate to students' negative perceptions of their sojourn.

Another theory pertaining to the causation of culture shock refers to the expectations migrants have of their future home. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), unrealistic expectations may result in bitter disappointment when faced with the reality of the host country. Thus, it could have been expected that students, who had high expectations of South Africa and its people, would have adjusted less favourably. While some students expected good social lives, living conditions and academic progress, others expected insecurity, discrimination, poverty and unfriendly locals. Most students seemed to have researched South Africa to some extent prior to their arrival, and their expectations seemed fairly realistic. The effect of expectations on students' reported enjoyment was not tested with statistical analyses, because few overly positive expectations emerged from the students' answers.

Students' motivations for arriving in a country may also affect their experience. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), the way in which travellers cope with cultural stress may depend on their motives. Students in this survey chose to leave their country mainly for academic progress, experience and career building. It is possible that these students would not be concerned with culture, as long as they would be able to achieve their goals here and then possibly leave. As for motives for studying in South Africa, convenience and academic goals ranked highly in the students' choices. Therefore students were not drawn to the country for motives they could not achieve, and may be less affected by cultural stressors and other factors that do not relate to academic experiences.

The U-curve hypothesis was also explored to some extent in this survey. Although the limits placed on the time that students had spent in the country were arbitrary, and based on whether students were in their first year at the university, whether they had arrived for their postgraduate studies, or had been in the country for their undergraduate studies, it was found that students between one and three years in the country reported the most negative responses. The results indicated that students who had been in the country the longest (over three years) reported the most positive affect towards their sojourn. This may be due to the students being used to conditions in South Africa, or possibly to their looking forward to returning home. These patterns bear some similarity to the U-curve. However, this result was not statistically significant. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of this study prevents the conclusive identification of the U-curve phenomenon. Based on the results of this research, the hypothesis cannot either be proved or disproved. As Church (1982) and

Furnham and Bochner (1986) indicated, the hypothesis may be too vague and generalised to be used with precision as a predictor of students' adjustment. Therefore, these results can only be taken as an indication of a pattern similar to the U-curve. Further research is required to determine the existence of the phenomenon conclusively.

Cultural contact may also exert an influence on students' enjoyment of their sojourn. The contact with a culture has been found to be a large factor in the students' adjustment. Church (1982) maintained that cultural contact might result in personal growth. Contrarily, Furnham and Bochner (1986) noted that cultural contact might also result in conflict, which in turn causes stress and discomfort for travellers. However, this survey found that students who perceived their cultural contact as adequate, and those that did not, had no significant differences in their reported social or general enjoyment. The barriers to cultural contact were South Africans' tendency to stay among themselves and Cape Town not being representative of the rest of the country. Therefore xenophobia may also be the reason for inadequate cultural contact. The non-importance of cultural contact for students may stem from practical attitudes towards studying in the country. As students were mainly motivated by academic and environmental factors, instead of the cultural diversity present in South Africa, it is not surprising that this variable did not have an effect on the students' ratings of their sojourn.

### **1.2 The Social Experience**

According to Verma (1995), students experience problems with making friends in the host country. In this survey, the effect of the social experience on the general rating of the sojourn was significant. Students, who rated their social experience positively, also rated their general experience positively. Therefore having a good social experience may be an important determinant of a good general experience. Factors conducive to a positive rating of a social experience were having made many friends and divergent opportunities in social activities.

Surdam and Collins (1984) found that a positive attitude towards religion is conducive to a smooth adjustment. Similarly, in this study some students noted that their roles in church and the university helped them in gaining social support and enjoying their social lives more. However, students also noted problems in spending time with South Africans,

lacking opportunities in social activities and being hindered in these activities due to a fear of crime. Additionally, a minor theme emerged, which indicated that time pressures inhibited opportunities for a full social life. Previously, Lewthwaite (1996) had noted this problem. Although this was not a major factor in the students' responses, some students noted that they lacked time to make contacts with host nationals and the host culture. As students arrive to study, it is possible that their work, especially when adjusting to a new academic environment, takes precedence over exploring the host country and its inhabitants. This may be related to students' comments of lacking opportunities for contact with host nationals.

When students' opinions of South Africans before and during the sojourn were explored, realistic expectations emerged. Although more negative opinions were reported on South Africans after arrival, expressions of bitter disappointment were rare in the responses. However, a large proportion of students, when asked their current opinion of South Africans, stated that the host nationals were discriminatory. It seemed that most students were realistic in expectations, but some changed their perceptions to the negative. Especially the emergence of discrimination indicates that some students may have been disappointed on meeting South Africans. However, as few students had changed their opinions to the negative, it is possible that their current experiences influenced the way in which they answered questions that explored their expectations and opinions before their sojourn. However, in this question, as well as others, it seemed that students were willing to establish contact with South Africans. A more comprehensive way of determining students' expectations would be through utilising a longitudinal study. Klineberg and Hull (1979) indicated that international students might experience difficulty in developing intimate relationships in the host country. This study found that international students also might experience some difficulty, as most students were in a relationship with a fellow national. It could be that students feel more comfortable with another individual from their own language and cultural group. However, a conclusion cannot be drawn from this, as the survey did not yield information on students' reasons for choosing foreign nationals over South Africans.

When the effect of having a marital partner was explored with relation to general and social experience, no significant difference was found. However, being in a relationship made some difference in the social rating of the students, with students reporting more

positively on their sojourn when in a relationship. However, no significant difference was found. Despite this, it was found that being in a relationship had a protective effect when students had been discriminated against. Those students who were in a relationship and had been discriminated against were more likely to rate their social experience positively than those who had been discriminated against and were not in a relationship. It is possible that students find their partner a support in adverse circumstances, or feel accepted at least by them, if not by host nationals. When being married or being in a relationship was related to general rating, it was found that students tended to report more positively on their general enjoyment. This could indicate that having a partner indeed has an effect on the adjustment and enjoyment of international students. Despite these effects of having a partner, no significant difference was found when students' responses were explored with taking into account the presence of a partner in South Africa. Thus, having a partner, whether in South Africa or elsewhere, could help international students in adjusting to their current circumstances and overcoming any problems they might experience. This finding could also be due to postgraduate students being in a life stage where a significant other is important for them.

Although family may also be a significant support when adjusting to the host country, the presence or interaction with family did not make a significant difference in the way students reported their social or general experience. When considered in the light of the finding by Parr, Bradley, and Bingi (1992) and Arthur (1997), that international students' worries are often about the well-being of extended family, this result seems strange. However, this may be due to the different types of family members that students have in the country. The questionnaire did not explore whether the family present in South Africa were the parents, distant cousins or siblings in the same university. Despite this, it could be assumed that the presence of family is not very important amongst factors that protect students from adjustment problems.

Friends are an important support for international students. Various authors have noted the importance of social networks in the adaptation of international students (Surdam & Collins, 1984; Tanaka et al., 1997). Authors have also noted that especially contact with locals is important for a successful adaptation (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Schram & Lauver, 1988). This study revealed that international students mostly spend time with non-locals. Furnham and Bochner (1982) identified networks that are often found in the social

interaction patterns of international students – the mono-cultural network, consisting of fellow nationals, and the bi-cultural network, consisting of host nationals. A third network was identified later by Bochner and his co-workers (Bochner, Buker, & McLeod, 1976, Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977, Bochner & Orr, 1979, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1982), namely the multi-cultural network, which consists of other international students. Klineberg and Hull had earlier noted that the least salient network has consistently been the bicultural network, and Furnham and Bochner (1986) also reached this conclusion. A similar finding emerged from this survey. International students in this study also spent the least time with locals. International students spent most of their time with other international students and their fellow nationals. This indicates that the multi-cultural and mono-cultural networks were the most salient and again bi-cultural networks were the least salient. Thus international students may experience difficulty in gaining access to groups of South Africans, as has been found in previous literature to occur in most countries.

Despite the tendency of international students to spend time with others than host nationals, this does not denote that psychological problems and poor adjustment follow. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), contact with co-nationals may be beneficial, especially in the absence of host nationals, and perhaps combined with contact with locals.

The room- or flatmate choice of international students may also indicate their preference for friends. This study found that international students chose both fellow nationals and South Africans as their room- or flatmates. This indicates that students tend to live with their compatriots – perhaps to maintain contact with their own culture – or with South Africans, who may have fewer problems in renting accommodation. However, the nationality of the room- or flatmate is a weak indication of the friendship patterns of international students. Students did not specify whether they chose their room- or flatmates themselves, or whether they were allocated to a specific room or residence.

According to Klineberg and Hull (1979), the knowledge host students have of international students' home country may affect international students' desire to form relations with host students. In this study, the knowledge that international students perceived host students as having of their home country did not have a relationship with either the students' social or general. As this was a solitary finding among the studies, it is not surprising that this hypothesis received no confirmation. Additionally, the amount of contact between

international students and host nationals may confound these results. It is possible that those students who are not in contact with South Africans perceive the hosts as less knowledgeable of their home country. On the other hand, students in contact with South Africans may have found out that the hosts do not know about their home country.

A related factor to the knowledge of host students is their attitude towards international students' home countries. Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that sojourners who perceived hosts more positive toward their home countries were better adapted. However, this also had a relation to the amount of contact with hosts. A similar conclusion could be reached in this study. The survey revealed that those students who perceived South Africans as having a negative attitude towards their home country reported significantly more negative ratings of their general enjoyment, than those who perceived the attitude of South Africans towards their home country as positive. It is possible that students, who perceive the host nationals as having a negative attitude towards their country, feel unwelcome and feel that the negative attitude is also towards the international students as individuals. There is also a possibility that international students perceive the hosts to have a negative attitude towards the students' home country because of a perceived negative attitude towards the individuals themselves.

However, the above-mentioned factors may also affect the desire international students have toward spending time with South Africans. Students in this study generally wished for more contact, but perceived barriers for this as xenophobia, difficulty in gaining access to some groups, unfriendly locals and a lack of opportunity to interact with host nationals. Lewthwaite (1996) also found that barriers to contact with locals were opportunity-related, in terms of time and academic pressures. As discussed earlier, these factors were found to exert a minor influence on the students' contact with locals, as well as their enjoyment of their social lives.

As South Africa is a multi-cultural country, and discrimination may be prevalent, it is interesting to note whether students have access to all racial groups. The survey revealed that half of the students found their contact satisfactory, while the other half did not. Barriers were seen as access to certain groups, not knowing South Africans, and xenophobia. This variable was found to have a significant influence on the general rating of the students. Therefore it can be assumed that adequate racial contact would assist in the

students' enjoyment of the sojourn. While examining this finding, the possible relationship between discrimination and racial contact should be considered. Those students who perceive discrimination may be less likely to engage in contact with all racial groups, or those that engage in contact and experience discrimination may then perceive their contact as inadequate. Thus, this finding should be interpreted with caution, and merely as an indication that the racial contact of international students may deserve further examination.

As noted above, discrimination may be closely related to racial contact and was seen by several authors as affecting students' adjustment and enjoyment negatively (Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Sandhu, 1994; Surdam & Collins, 1984). This variable made a significant difference in both the ratings of social and general enjoyment. Students who had reported that they had experienced discrimination directed at them rated their experiences more negatively. This was also found to exert a negative influence on students' social experience rating. However, as discussed earlier, being in a relationship had a protective effect on the students' social enjoyment. This could be due to support from partners, and the partners' nationality. If a student is in a relationship with a South African, it is possible that discrimination by other South Africans is not perceived as severe. Those students may think that all South Africans do not have a discriminatory attitude towards them, as their partner - and possibly their friends - do not express discriminatory attitudes towards the student. The main forms of discrimination reported by students were racism and xenophobia. Thus, the prevalence discrimination both off- and on-campus may be high and deserving of further attention.

### **1.3 Academic Experience**

In terms of academic progress, few complaints emerged. This seemed to be the students' main motivation to leave their home country, and could be a very important factor for their adjustment. Most students expressed positive opinions with regard to their general academic experience. This indicates that despite problems in other spheres, international students may have found their sojourn in South Africa worthwhile. Students noted high standards, good instructors and good academic progress as the highlights of their academic life. The standards at the universities, work pressures and instructor and support problems were noted as the concerns. This study did not support the finding of several authors that language difficulties were a major stressor in international students' lives (Church, 1982;

Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Lewthwaite, 1996; Mori, 2000; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi 1993; Sandhu, 1994; Verma, 1995). This could be due to a large proportion of students in this study originating from neighbouring African states, where English is often the medium of instruction. Additionally, as this study only included postgraduate students, they can be assumed to be well educated and therefore may be more proficient in the English language.

As seen above, negative comments in relation to academic work were few. An emerging theme from the responses was the standard at the university, as well as the work pressures. According to Luzio-Lockett (1998), students bring with them an experience based on their own educational setting. As a result, students may have found it difficult to adjust to universities in their host country. Overall, though, the majority of students expressed positive impressions.

The expectations of the sojourn have been found to affect student enjoyment. Unrealistic expectations have also been found to affect the students negatively in the academic sphere (Arthur, 1997; Kaczmarek et al., 1994; Mori, 2000). Students in this survey seemed to have relatively realistic expectations of their academic success, and it is doubtful that unrealistic expectations played a role in students' reported enjoyment.

Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that previous information had an effect on the way students perceived their sojourn. This finding received confirmation in this study, in that there was a significant difference between the opinions of students who reported adequate information before arrival, and those who had not. Students with adequate information before arrival reported their academic and their general experience more positively, which may reflect the importance of research, and having sufficient information, before embarking on a sojourn.

The tendency of students to receive their information about a country from other students or friends indicates that the reputation of a country is largely dependent on the impressions gained by previous visitors. Students also received their information through the media, highlighting the role of the media in distributing information about a country. University-provided information was the third most common source. No information was provided which could have explained whether the students had received information from the universities, but assumed it would not be important to mention, or whether it was perceived

as inadequate. Therefore the only conclusion that may be made from this is that universities had not necessarily provided all the relevant information pertaining to the country. The type of information that students indicated they had received was mainly on the general context of the country, academic matters and lifestyle. This indicates that students are interested in, and possibly require, information on the practical day-to-day matters when studying in a specific country.

In terms of the universities the students attended, no significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were found regarding the students' enjoyment. However, social enjoyment was rated more positively by students from the University of Cape Town and most negatively from students from the University of the Western Cape. It may be that the locations of the universities had some effect in this question. For example, the University of Cape Town is fairly central in the Cape Town area, when compared to the University of the Western Cape.

Several authors have found that a supportive campus environment is integral for a successful sojourn (Arthur, 1997; Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Lewthwaite, 1996; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Tanaka et al., 1997; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992). Campus support was also associated with the academic enjoyment of the students in this study, with students perceiving the campus environment as not supportive rating their academic experience more negatively than students who perceived that their university had a supportive staff and environment. Students in this study complained the most about unhelpful staff, poor administration and a lack of assistance to foreign students. This may indicate that international students require more assistance in administrative and other university-related matters. This result may also imply that there is a need for programmes to assist international students in university-related matters.

#### *1.4 Student Characteristics*

Church (1982), and Schram and Lauver (1988) found that adjustment problems were more prevalent among female students. However, in this study, no significant gender differences emerged in the rating of both general and social experiences. In contrast with the authors' findings, the slight differences that emerged indicated that male students showed a greater inclination towards rating their experiences negatively. Previous authors' finding to the

contrary could be due to different gender roles in previous years. It is possible that the gender roles in the time when Church's (1982) and Schram and Lauver's (1988) studies were conducted, were markedly different from those perceived by students today. Female students now may be more career-driven and less family oriented, thus faring better than they would have twenty years ago. However, this study could not provide evidence in this respect and this area should be reserved for further research.

A factor that was found by previous authors to have a positive effect on adjustment is experience outside the home country (Church, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Schram and Lauver (1988) and Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) also found that previous experience of the host country was positively related to adjustment. When this variable was examined with relation to general rating, students who had visited South Africa previously reported more positive attitudes, although the difference was not significant. It seems that previous experience in South Africa or in another country did not make a difference in the way students perceived their general experience. However, as the length of time students had spent in the country could not be analysed, this result should be interpreted with caution.

Authors such as Schram and Lauver (1988) have found that students who originate from rural areas find it difficult to adjust to a larger city, or urban area. This study found that students who moved from a smaller area to a larger one reported more positive opinions of their social experience. This variable was not found significant in relation to general experience, and therefore should be interpreted cautiously. It is possible that this result could be due to more opportunities in social activities in a larger area. The survey revealed that students who had moved from a larger area to a smaller one had the most negative opinions of their social experience. Therefore this result could be opportunity-related.

Another factor pertaining to the residence of the students is whether they reside in university residences or elsewhere. Lewthwaite (1996) found that student residences inhibited the social interaction of international students. This may specifically be the case in interaction with locals, as at some universities international students are allocated to the same residence. Additionally, student residences may be far from entertainment areas, and transport to other areas in a city may be difficult. A similar trend to Lewthwaite's (1996) study was found in this survey. Students in university residences reported both their social and general experience more negatively than students in other groups. Although this result

was not statistically significant, it suggests that student residences may not be the ideal place for overseas students. It is possible that the location of student residences limit the students' contact with the general society. Most students residences are on university campuses, thus transport may be difficult to obtain. Additionally, it is possible that those students who are in residences have not made friends with whom they could share accommodation. Thus this variable could be associated with these students' social interaction and a conclusive statement of the negative effects of student residences cannot be made. However, attention should be paid to the experiences of students who are living in student residences, and plans for intervention programmes could be made.

### *1.5 General Experience*

The general experience was mostly reported as neutral, which indicated that students were neither appalled nor exhilarated by their experiences. Positive ratings were more common than negative ones. This could imply that students are well adjusted in general and that only a few are experiencing severe problems during their sojourn, as was found by Church (1982). The social sphere featured frequently in students' best experiences and the rating of social life had an impact on the rating of the general experience. Therefore the social experience during a sojourn can be very important for international students.

The overall view of the students' experience was that their sojourn was positive. However, crime, discrimination and social unfairness shadowed this response. Worst experiences reported by students were mainly the experience of, or exposure to, crime, which indicates that more attention should be paid to the safety of these students. Negative social experiences, discrimination and lack of success in the academic field were also frequent in the worst experiences category. On the other hand, as noted above, students' best experiences were mainly of the social nature, as well as diverse opportunities for activities and success in academic work. Therefore it can be seen that international students' social experiences are important in determining the overall impression with which a student leaves the country. Additionally, these findings highlight the importance of academic matters to international students.

In terms of whether the students plan to return home or to stay in South Africa, most students reported that they wished to return home. Bochner (1982) and Church (1982)

noted that students might reject their own culture for the benefit of the host culture. Specifically, Church (1982) noted that students might over-identify with the host culture. However, in this study several students noted negative aspects of South African cultures, and few indications emerged of the students embracing the host culture. Therefore, it appears that the students in this study are not identifying with the South African culture, or rejecting their own. This is also directly related to the “brain drain” phenomenon noted by Adams (1968, as cited in Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Students in this survey mostly preferred to return home, in the words of many students: “home is home”. Few indicated that they wished to remain in this country. Therefore, South Africa may not stand to gain from the “brain drain” phenomenon, and locals do not have to fear foreigners taking their opportunities.

## 2. LIMITATIONS

The study was cross-sectional in nature, and could not sufficiently address questions of changes in the experience over time. Due to this limitation, the U-curve phenomenon could not be fully tested. This also prevents a full examination of the change in students’ responses over time. Additionally, some questions, for example those asking about feelings or opinions before the sojourn, were retrospective, thus recall bias may have affected the obtained responses.

The delivery of the questionnaire was not uniform across the universities, which meant different samples from different universities.

The nationality of married students’ partners was not sufficiently explored, due to a wording error in the questionnaire. Although the students who could be identified were contacted again, and additional instructions to fill in this specific question in the questionnaire was given to students at the University of the Western Cape, full data collection could not be performed for this question.

Due to differing English proficiency among international students, some questions were misunderstood. This problem did not emerge in the focus groups. As the focus groups consisted of interested individuals, it could be assumed that students with insufficient

English capacity felt more reluctant to participate in such a group. Some students misunderstood questions on the questionnaire, and their responses did not yield relevant data. In addition, students who were not confident in their English skills may not have been willing to respond to the questionnaire.

The sample frame was also not uniform across the sites of the study. It cannot be ascertained how many of the targeted group actually received the questionnaire. As an example, a student wrote to apologise for not filling in the questionnaire, due to having not utilised his university-provided e-mail address in 2001. This correspondence was received in 2002, and is included in Appendix D. Additionally, computer literacy may have affected the response rate negatively.

The sampling procedure was not random. Thus it is possible that the sample collected was not representative of the total international student population. The sample could have been biased because of the volunteer-based method of contacting participants. Individuals who respond to questionnaires may have different characteristics to those who choose not to answer the questionnaire. According to Rosnow and Rosenthal (1996), people who volunteer for studies may be more sociable, intelligent, educated, and need more social approval than non-volunteers. The social attributes of volunteers may have introduced bias into the study, especially if these respondents were more in need of social approval than those who did not respond. It is, then, possible that the effects of social enjoyment may have been over-emphasised in this study.

Additional bias to the sample may have been introduced at the University of Stellenbosch. These students had been on the mailing list of the international office, which makes it possible that they were receiving a service not received by other students not in contact with the office. At this university, the questionnaire was sent from the International Office. Thus it is possible that students with more positive impressions of their experience responded to this e-mail.

The selection of the universities also limits the generalisability of this survey. South Africa is a sizeable country, and conditions and populations differ across provinces and cities. Further research could address these differences, and determine what international

students' experiences in South Africa in general. For the moment, the generalisability of this study is limited as only students in universities in the Western Cape were contacted.

The higher response rate at the University of the Western Cape could have been due to the greater effort invested in the process. These questionnaires were eventually distributed to the students via self-addressed stamped envelopes. However, the mailing of the questionnaires coincided with the September the 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the United States, and the world-wide Anthrax scares. Thus it is possible that some students discarded the envelope without opening it. Specifically, a student called in September 2001, and expressed his disdain at the questionnaire being sent at this time. The length of the questionnaire could also have reduced the number of respondents. Some students responded only to closed-ended questions. Additionally, some students stopped filling in answers half way through the questionnaire, limiting the data. The length of the survey also resulted in more concise replies to open-ended questions, which resulted in unclear responses in some cases, and lack of sufficient explanations. This may have limited the qualitative data obtained for this study.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS

International students are an important part of university culture. This research has found that they face concerns during their stay, which mainly revolve around the social environment. These issues should be addressed to ensure a pleasant sojourn in South Africa for all visitors.

This study has had an important contribution to international student literature. This was the first study focusing on the experience of international students in South Africa. Additionally, it may be one of the few studies, which have explored the experience of international students in the African continent. This study has shown that international students have concerns, which reach across national boundaries.

It is recommended that future research focus on the students' social interaction. It seems that students feel left out of South African society, and desire more contact. Research should be focused on programmes that increase intercultural contact. Other issues to be

explored are the U-curve and the culture shock phenomena. This would assist in the identification of vulnerable student groups.

Postgraduate international students are not the only group deserving of further study. The adjustment of new arrivals to university, including undergraduates, should be addressed. The students are the core component of a university. Research should be focused on the student population to ensure that, at the end of their studies, the students can contribute positively to society. This can only be achieved through informed efforts to nurture balanced student development.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study has provided insight into the experiences of international students. It has revealed the importance of social life to a student, and revealed information on international students' general experience in South Africa.

While a criticism of this study would be the limited application of this information, the information could be used in more than one context. Students are a segment of society that may provide, through a convenient sample frame, indications of how migrants or visitors view South Africa, and what would draw them back for another visit, or choose to stay in the country. The recent developments in policy pertaining to the laws governing immigration have indicated that foreign nationals are increasingly welcome in South Africa due to their skills and expertise. While the immigration of people from other countries may invite increasing xenophobia, attention should be given to the adjustment of these individuals. Skilled individuals are important to a country and its development, and efforts should be targeted at retaining skilled labour.

Many of the concerns of international students may not differ greatly from those of local students. Local students may grapple with the same issues, such as the experience of crime and insecurity. However, local students are accustomed to the environment – thus they may be desensitised to the problems inherent in their society. International students may provide a different view of the state of the country, which should receive more attention if more visitors are hoped for.

In spite of these macro considerations, international students, themselves, need more attention. Although international students may be well adjusted in general, some of the students may need extra assistance. These individuals should be identified to enable the design of programmes to assist them, and a so-called 'safety net' could be in place to help these individuals.

In conclusion, the international students in the Western Cape have some problems. However, most students enjoyed their academic experience, which seemed to be the most important facet of their experience. The majority of students seemed well-adjusted and were looking forward to the rest of their experience.

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**APPENDIX A: Cover letter and questionnaire**

Subject: International students - humanities

Date: Sun, 02 Sep 2001 22:56:04 +0200

From: UCT Student - ATKSAL001 <ATKSAL001@mail.uct.ac.za>

To: UCT students

Hi!

I am Salla, studying at UCT for a Master's degree in Psychological research. I'm conducting research on the experience of postgraduate international students at universities in the Western Cape.

I have constructed an email questionnaire (attached below). It does not consist of any extremely personal questions, it does not delve into your childhood and is completely confidential. Students who participated in interviews for a study I conducted last year, found it to be helpful in thinking about their experience, as well as enabling them to see their time in South Africa in perspective. This study is aimed at helping international students, in pointing out where universities can provide extra support for them.

Please, help me out by filling it in!

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

The questionnaire is on an Excel sheet (Attached below). Most of them are closed-ended, so it shouldn't take much of your time, and will not require that much extra thinking.

The closed-ended questions have boxes next to them, which can be ticked by placing the mouse over the box (a little hand will appear). The boxes can be un-ticked, too, by doing the same thing - in case you make a mistake. The open ended questions, or questions requiring short fill-in words or numbers can be filled in the cell next to, or below, the question. There is plenty of space. You can also print the questionnaire out and fill it in on paper.

After you have filled in the questionnaire, save it on any drive you choose, and attach it to an e-mail addressed to:

atksal001@mail.uct.ac.za , or alternatively to

iitumari@hotmail.com.

If you have printed out the questionnaire and filled it out, please send it to:

Salla Atkins

Psychology Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch 7701

If you have any questions, e-mail me at the above addresses or call me on 083 317 3862.

Please return the questionnaire by the 17th September 2001!

Thank you!

Salla

University of Cape Town

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### SECTION A

1. Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Country of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Current Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
4. University: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Faculty: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Number of years/months in South Africa: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Sex:
 

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9. Marital Status:
 

Single	<input type="checkbox"/>	Married	<input type="checkbox"/>	Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/>
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10. If single, are you in a relationship?
 

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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11. If yes, where does he or she live?
 

South Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your home country	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. His or her nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Do you have any family in South Africa?**

Yes  No

**14. If yes, do you interact with them often?**

Yes   
No   
Not applicable

**15. Residence in home country:**

City   
Small Town   
Village   
Farm

**16. Residence in South Africa:**

City   
Small Town   
Village   
Farm

**17. Where do you live in South Africa?**

University residence   
House   
Flat   
Family home

**18. Do you have a roommate or flatmate?**

Yes  No

**19. If yes, what is their nationality?**

**20. Had you visited South Africa before starting your studies here?**

Yes  No

**21. If yes, how long were you here?**

**22. Had you visited any other foreign countries before coming to South Africa?**

Yes  No

**23. If yes, for how long?**

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**SECTION B**

**24. Why did you choose to study abroad?**

**25. Why did you choose South Africa, specifically?**

**26. What were your expectations of South Africa before you arrived here?**

**27. Before leaving your home country, do you feel you received enough information about South Africa?**

Yes, I was adequately informed

Yes, I was fairly well informed

No, I was not adequately informed

No, I had no information at all

**28. What information did you get and how did you get it?**

**29. What do you think about your academic experience in the country so far?**

- Excellent
- Satisfactory
- Average
- Unsatisfactory
- Poor

**30. Explain your answer:**

**31. Do you find the campus environment supportive in terms of helpfulness of staff, counselling etc.?**

Yes  No

**32. Explain your answer:**

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**SECTION C****33. What do you think of your social life here so far?**

- Excellent
- Satisfactory
- Average
- Unsatisfactory
- Poor

**34. Explain your answer:****35. When you are in contact with others socially, are they mainly:**

- Local students
- Local non-students
- Local family
- Fellow nationals
- Other foreign students

**36. Are your contacts with South Africans:**

- As frequent as you wish
- Less frequent than you wish
- More frequent than you wish

**37. Explain your answer:**

**38. Is your contact with all racial groups in South Africa satisfactory?**

Yes  No

**39. Explain your answer:**

**40. How would you rate the difference between your own culture and the culture you are most in contact with in South Africa?**

No difference   
Slight difference   
Large difference

**41. Explain:**

**42. Do you feel that you are in touch with all the cultures in South Africa?**

Yes  No

**43. Explain your answer:**

**44. In your experience here, have you found that South African people in general have a reasonably accurate knowledge of your country?**

Yes  No

**45. In general, is the attitude of South Africans towards your country:**

- Very favourable
- Favourable
- Neutral
- Unfavourable
- Very unfavourable

**46. What was your opinion of South Africans before you arrived?**

**47. What is your opinion of South African today?**

**48. Have you personally had the experience of being discriminated against in this country?**

- Yes  No

**49. If yes, describe:**

**50. As a result of your experience in this country, and if you had the choice, would you prefer to:**

- Stay in this country
- Return to your own country
- Go to another country
- No preference

**51. Explain your answer:**

**52. What would be your rating of your experience here on a scale of 1 to 5?  
(1 meaning excellent, 3 neutral, 5 poor)**

**53. Explain your rating:**

**54. What have been the worst moments during your stay in South Africa?**

**55. What have been your best moments during your stay in South Africa?**

University of Cape Town

**APPENDIX B: Correspondence with Universities**

University of \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

RE: Permission to use international students in research

I am completing a Masters degree in Psychological Research at the University of Cape Town, and the objective of my research is to examine the experiences of international students studying in South Africa. This study could be useful to universities by providing information, which would assist in the design of orientation and support programmes for international students at campuses.

My research proposal has been approved by the departmental thesis committee, and my supervisor is Associate Professor Cheryl de la Rey. The research plan identifies a need for a sample from higher education institutions in the Western Cape. The universities of UCT, UWC and Stellenbosch will be contacted for this purpose. In order to conduct the study, I would like to distribute questionnaires to all international students registered for postgraduate courses. The questionnaire includes items on the students' social and academic life, their reasons for studying in South Africa and their satisfaction with their experience in general.

I would like to request permission to approach international students as participants in the research, and would appreciate your assistance in obtaining a list of postgraduate international students and their contact details. The questionnaire would be distributed via e-mail. Participation will be voluntary, and the identities of the participants would remain confidential. At the end of the project, a report on the findings will be available.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Salla Atkins

**APPENDIX C: Reminders**

Subject: REMINDER

Date: Mon, 10 Sep 2001 21:04:18 +0200

From: UCT Student - ATKSal001 <ATKSAL001@mail.uct.ac.za>

To: UCT students

Hello again.

Thank you to those that chose to fill in my questionnaire. I really appreciate it. For the rest, PLEASE can you fill it in my Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September.

I know you don't want to do it for free or anything, and it is a bit of a drag, but I would offer something in return if I could. But I can't, so my eternal gratitude and heartfelt thanks is all I can offer...

So please please please fill it in!

Thanks. If you don't have it, I will send it to you again.. Just let me know...

Thank you so much

Salla Atkins

atksal001@mail.uct.ac.za

OR

iitumari@hotmail.com

Subject: It's not too late!  
Date: Tue, 2 Oct 2001 05:31:55 -0700 (PDT)  
From: UCT Student - ATKSAL001 <ATKSAL001@mail.uct.ac.za>  
To: Humanities - UCT

Thank you to those who have already filled in the questionnaire.

I just wanted to tell all of you that it's not too late to fill in the questionnaire. If you choose not to, or are unable to, I do understand.

If you choose to fill it in, and find that you don't have a copy, or are unable to attach it to an email, I can email it to you again or even deliver a hard copy to you. Just let me know.

Thank you very much I really appreciate it

Salla

University of Cape Town

**APPENDIX D: Student Correspondence**

From : UCT Student <XXXYYY001@mail.uct.ac.za>

To : UCT Student - ATKSAL001 <ATKSAL001@mail.uct.ac.za>

Subject : Re: International students - humanities

Date : Wed, 27 Mar 2002 11:43:24 +0200

Dear Salla,

I am writing to apologise to you for having not responded to your questionnaire last Sept. The issue is that I never accessed my UCT email account until now. I preferred to use my yahoo account for all communication. Please accept my apology for the inconvenience that this may have caused. I am hopeful, however, that you were able to collect adequate data for your study.

Best regards,