

Caribbean Students' Experiences At One Hbcu: Implications of Acculturation and Adjustment  
For Undergraduate Students

by

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(Under the Direction of Charles Knapp)

ABSTRACT

Although international students make up an important part of the diversity on American college and university campuses, there is very little understanding of their college experiences. The number of international students in the United States has increased by 72% in fifteen years, from 514,723 in 1999-2000 to 886,052 in 2013-2014 (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). This number includes undergraduate and graduate students to colleges and universities throughout the world. This study focused on international students from the Caribbean and their perceptions surrounding their college experiences in the United States. Interviews were conducted with undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 24 who self-identified as international students from the Caribbean (male and female). The data revealed that international students from the Caribbean played a key role in their own acculturation process. The students shared their interest in connecting with other international students as well as non-Caribbean students on their campus. In addition the findings supported previous literature indicating that students acculturate at different levels and adjust differently than their peers. The study brings more awareness about Caribbean students' experiences and educational success to college administrators, academic advisors, directors, faculty, and staff as they seek to bridge the gap between Caribbean students and their American peers within U.S. colleges and universities.

INDEX WORDS: Acculturation, Culture Shock, Caribbean students in U.S. colleges and universities, Caribbean students in HBCUs, Caribbean student's experiences and international students on U.S. campuses.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing husband, Burchell Gordon, your love and support throughout this journey is endless. Your wisdom and encouragement taught me that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). With love, forever.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The number of international students pursuing their studies in the United States has increased significantly in the last decades (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2012). Smith and Khawaja (2011) argued that these students experience a process of acculturation that is difficult, self-motivated, and multi-dimensional. A major characteristic of this process of acculturation relates to themes of academic and social adjustments and a student's potential to form relationships within his or her new environment. Students' interactions and their ability to communicate with their peers play an important role for socializing and acculturation in social activities (Gallagher, 2013). In addition, Caribbean students who lack the opportunity to fit in or adjust appropriately in American colleges and universities may hinder their educational success if this situation persists over a period of time.

The United States has been the host country for many international students, particularly since the early 1960's, and studies show that international students still struggle to adjust to American universities (Lorraine Brown, 2009, Lorraine Brown & Immy Holloway, 2008, Senel Poyrazli & Kamini Maraj Grahame, 2007, Sheryl Ramsay, Elizabeth Jones & Michelle Barker, 2007). International students move to the United States for many reasons: academic goals, individual growth, and/or to experience studying in a foreign country (Marie Vafors Fritz, Dorothy Chin, & Valerie Demarinis, 2008). Traveling from their home country, students experience many transitions resulting in culture shock (de Araujo, 2011). Having resilient personalities and social support are

important strategies international students can use to assist their adjustment process. Yuefang Zhou, Divya Jindal-Snape, Keith Topping and John Todman (2008) described international students as temporary people between societies from one country to another. International students experience similar issues as their American peers, such as separation from their families, social and academic adjustments, loneliness, anxiety and lack of a support system (Ramsay et al., 2007). Students' transitions and culture shock must be addressed during their adjustment period, which can last between six and twelve months (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

Moreover, Yusliza and Shankar (2010) describe the feelings that students may have during the transitions, which could negatively impact their academic goals. Yusliza and Shankar (2010) argued that all students still find it difficult to adapt in their new environment. International students' positive outlook on the American education system can quickly decrease as a result of those feelings. An important way for students to maintain success is to have a clear understanding of who they are and how to identify their self as part of the growing transition in their educational journey in the U.S.

This chapter provides a brief overview of international students and the many challenges they experience while pursuing their academic studies in the United States. Moreover, factors that influence their adjustment to a new environment, barriers, and higher education institutions will be briefly discussed. The problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and definition of terms will also be presented.

### *Problem Statement*

We know that international student enrollment has increased consistently in the U.S. to more than 886,000 in 2014 (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). According to Zhou et al., (2008) international students spend some time adjusting to the move, which is described as “stress and coping” (Ward, 2001, p. 65). In addition, Hanning (1990) and Ramsay et al. (2007) argued that adjustment is complicated and multi-layered with the individual learning how to cope in the new environment. Yusliza and Shankar (2010) also argued that individuals should be willing to change their perception regarding their new environment, including mindsets, behaviors, and views about the host country. Ramsey et al., (2007) further believes that international students have the opportunity to improve their adjustment process by being inspired by their new environment, instead of the student influencing the new environment. In addition, international students should effectively manage the progression of their own stress and accept responsibility of their own experiences within the new environment.

Although we know that international students need support and that they may face barriers, there is very little understanding of what institutional officials are doing to address these problems. Since international students make up four percent of students in the U.S. (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014), it was important to understand their experiences so that institutions can help them succeed. It was also imperative that American colleges and universities continue to bridge the gap for international students who choose to pursue their educational goals away from their home country.

Ana Maria Villegas (1991) argued that college and university officials should be culturally responsive, meaning that they should allocate resources and incorporate programs to

include all students, since diversity and acceptance are a part of most institution' mission. This study furthers the body of knowledge related to adjustment and the acculturation process for international students, as it aims to identify Caribbean students' perceptions of their experiences in U.S. colleges and universities. This study also highlighted factors contributing to international students' academic and cultural adjustments. Findings from this study corroborated and challenged previous literature shedding additional light on significant predictors in the adjustment process for international students from the Caribbean.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Framed by Berry's (2005) notion on acculturation, the study examined the experiences of international students from the Caribbean at Florida Memorial University (FMU) a liberal arts undergraduate institution in the U.S. southeast, also identified as a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The institution has a student body of 1,891, with 10.4% of them being international students from the Caribbean. In this study, Caribbean students' social and cultural adjustments, educational success, cultural shock, acculturation, and challenges will be discussed to capture a clear understanding of their experiences. The study will also examine how international student's experiences might lead to recommendations for campus initiatives and future policies to accommodate this growing population. An outcome of the study might foster better relationships between faculty, staff, and international students from the Caribbean. In addition, knowing more about a student's background can assist faculty and staff in determining and structuring a cohesive learning environment that results in postsecondary success for international students from the Caribbean. Results of the study are intended to enlighten college administrators, academic advisors, directors, faculty and staff.

The current study investigated the adjustment of international students from the Caribbean attending a liberal arts college in the southeast region of the United States. In addition, the study examined significant impact that HBCUs have on international students' from the Caribbean and the acculturation process related to their academic and social adjustments in the United States. It is important for higher education institutions to study Caribbean students' acculturation, since acculturation and interpersonal skills play a major part of Caribbean student's educational success. Several studies have researched the adaptation of international students in post-secondary education, how they adapt to U.S. cultures and factors that lead to their educational success, specifically grade point average in this study (Fuligni, A. J., & Witkow, M. 2004).

Several barriers to this study were the sample size, time of each interview and the institution location. The study interviewed a small sample size of fourteen Caribbean undergraduate students. While this small number does not speak to the larger international population, the data was able to tell the story of the student's experiences and their educational success at an HBCU. In addition, conducting the study at this time did not permit for a longitudinal study to be able to track student's experiences and educational success over a period of time. The study was intended to provide insight for those in higher education institutions to get a better understanding of international students' college experiences. In conclusion, the study aspired to inform the reader about this growing population of international students from the Caribbean and give them a voice that is not expressed in the current literature.

### *Research Questions*

1. How do Caribbean undergraduate students perceive their adjustment to college in the United States?
2. To what factors do Caribbean undergraduate students attribute their educational success and cultural adjustment experiences?

The answers to these questions can help college administrators, academic advisors and directors who develop specific programs geared towards serving the needs of Caribbean students on their campuses. For this study, a qualitative research design was used. The research questions focused on students' experiences in adjusting to U.S. colleges, social and cultural adjustments, and specific factors identified as contributors to their experiences.

Students had the opportunity to share their experiences on the topic as well as changes they would like to see for future students who will travel to the U.S. to pursue degrees. By conducting interviews, I was able to capture each student experience through his/her own perceptions and what it means to be an international student from the Caribbean attending a college or university in the U.S.



### *Definition of Relevant Terms*

The following definitions are from the relevant literature and will be used for this study.

1. *Acculturation* “When cultural patterns of the dominant group are adopted by the new or oppressed group” (Campbell, 2002).
2. *Assimilation* “Refers mainly to the newcomer’s adoption of the culture (i.e., behavior patterns, values, rules, symbols etc.) of the host society (or rather an overly homogenized and reified conception of it)” (Campbell, 2002).
3. *Culture* “A set of shared beliefs, knowledge, values and rules shared by groups or members that when acted upon by members, creates behaviors that exist within a society and is acceptable by those members”. The collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions, of all of which guide the behavior of individual and groups...and which provide frames of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions” (Campbell, 2002).
4. *Cultural Identity* “One’s individual characteristics, traits, and values that pertain to his/her culture. Traits and values learned as part of one’s ethnic origin, religion, gender, age, socioeconomic status, primary language, geographic region, and place of residence. These characteristics are all aspects of one’s cultural identity” (Campbell, 2002).
5. *Caribbean Student* (in this study): Students who are considered international and are a part of the subgroup population. This subgroup will be categorized as non-U.S. citizens because their experiences will be different from other students who are Caribbean-born and have lived in the United States over a long period.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study investigated the experiences of international students from the Caribbean at FMU located in Miami Gardens, Florida. This chapter presents a review of the literature related to these specific variables. Also included are overviews of the following: acculturation, international student experiences, international students in the U.S., challenges facing international students in the U.S., international student incentives in the U.S., international students in HBCUs, challenges facing international students from the Caribbean in the U.S, and culture shock and Caribbean student's experiences of culture shock. Finally, a synopsis of the literature will be offered.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

##### *Acculturation*

In Berry's (2005) *Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures*, the author discussed the experiences of acculturation among individuals and how they settle into a new country that is unknown to them. He focused on the cultural and psychological phases that occur during the process known as acculturation. The study was developed for the primary purpose of predicting behaviors among groups and individuals who come in contact with each other. In addition, the conflict that may arise as well as negotiation to produce the best outcomes for all involved is considered.

Kevin Chun, Pamela Balls-Organista and Gerardo Marin (2003) suggest that there are many studies over the years related to acculturation and the effects it has on individuals and the host countries they choose to call home, whether temporary or permanent. Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits (1936) suggest that acculturation takes place when individuals or groups have “continuous first-hand contact” with their own peers or others outside their environment. The authors further suggested that change takes place over time in one’s cultural identity as they adapt to the dominant culture. The change takes place when one or more individual cultures are blended, causing a delay in both groups to accept or decline each cultural background.

Later, Graves (1967) argued that acculturation is “psychological” it defines individuals who are culturally and heavily impacted by their new or existing environments. In addition, Berry (1997) expanded the original study to include the transformations in which individuals experience “psychological acculturation” highlighting the phenomena that individuals who coexist within the same environment experience this change at different levels. Berry’s (2005) theoretical framework not only encourages the need for this study, but also highlights the importance of understanding acculturation and the benefits both for Caribbean international students and host countries.

This study was guided largely by the framework outlined by Berry (2005) whose research serves as a catalyst to future examination of acculturation and related changes that occur during the process. Prior to this work, Berry (1976) found that behavioral changes could be identified as normal, based on an individual’s general way of thinking and how they were raised. However, later studies focused on the attitudes and behaviors towards acculturating immigrants who choose to settle in other societies outside of their home country. The first, done by Andrew

Ryder, Lynn Alden and Delroy Paulhus (2000) who found that there are ways individuals acculturate on many different levels and share similar patterns in behaviors. The second done by Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) examined the psychological effects of individual attitudes and behaviors related to acculturation and found no literature that supports a specific way that individuals or groups should acculturate. Years later, Berry and Sam (2003) responded to the critique and stood by their original results of the research and evidence, which supports integrative ways in which international youth acculturate in new settings.

Berry, et al., (2006) later found and identified ways in which individual youth acculturated, which are also known as the “four acculturation strategies.” The strategies are identified as the following: 1) integration (bicultural – e.g., both Caribbean and Anglo oriented), 2) assimilation (Anglo oriented), 3) separation (Caribbean oriented), and 4) marginalization (dissociated with both cultures).

Ryder, Alden and Paulhus (2000) set the framework for investigating the “unidimensional and bidimensional models of acculturation” towards attitudes and behaviors of individual personalities, self-identification, and adjustments while living in a country other than their home country. The authors suggest that the bidimensional model gives a clear and concise meaning of acculturation while the unidimensional model gives a misleading understanding of the acculturating process. The bidimensional view defines individuals based on how they differ in cultural background and traditional values; however, others may define their culture based on their new environment encounters, i.e., jobs or beliefs. The unidimensional view insists that individuals should engage in the new culture in order to help them assimilate in the process without forgetting their cultural backgrounds. With a sample of 208 female students and 106 male students representing two studies, the authors examined demographics, personality, history,

cultural preferences, ethnic identity, language and attitudes. Results of the study suggest that both bidimensional and unidimensional models play a role in acculturation and assist individuals to assimilate in new environments. However, assimilation and cultural identity, when compared, have significant similarities, indicating that there are other independent traits identified in the study (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000).

### *Literature Review*

This section summarizes the importance of acculturation in research and the implications it has on individuals and groups residing in another country outside of their home country. This section also helped to build the foundational basis for this study and discusses how acculturation can be expanded on Caribbean students who pursue their education in U.S. colleges and universities. In recent years, research has made some progress related to acculturation; however there are no specific studies identifying the impact acculturation have on Caribbean students on U.S. campuses. This study sought to reduce this gap in the current literature.

### *Overview of International Students' Experiences*

There is limited scholarly literature about international students' experiences in U.S. colleges and universities. In fact, most of the literature speaks about this particular group in broad generalizations and fails to realistically identify cultural adaptations and adjustments international students face during their college experiences.

The significant gaps in knowledge concerning international students from the Caribbean experiences indicate a pressing need for research to be conducted to capture their past and present experiences on U.S. campuses. Without such data, we cannot ensure accurate representation of student experiences or projection of future successes. In order for U.S. colleges and universities to continue to be attractive to international students (and specifically Caribbean

students), it is imperative that academic leaders begin to capture the experiences of each student or group and maximize this knowledge for future recruitment strategies.

Incorporating new strategic plans could possibly assist in increasing international awareness within their college or university. In addition, incorporating changes would also assist in developing supportive processes and transitions for international students from the Caribbean as they adjust to new life in the U.S.

### *International Students in the U.S.*

The Institute of International Education (2014), through its publication *Open Doors*, provides statistics on international students in the United States. Students travel from all around the world to come to the U.S. to further their education. In 2012, the enrollment of international students at colleges and universities in the U.S. rose by 7% to a record high of 886,052 in the academic school year (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2012). In 2012/2013, an additional 55,000 international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions, with China and Saudi Arabia leading the numbers (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2012, 2013). To date, 40% more international students are enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities than ten years ago. International students make up about 4% percent of the student enrollment at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the United States. Data shows that international students contribute almost \$24 billion dollars a year to the U.S. economy (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2013).

The U.S. has less than four thousand colleges and universities and hundreds of degree programs to choose from, based on students' areas of study interest (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). Many of the students are supported through their families' savings and scholarships from their home countries in order to support their education in the U.S. In addition students who are non-U.S. citizens are usually not eligible for most financial aid, loans or scholarships because of their

non-resident status. (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). These students also contribute to the U.S. science and research fields as they add new perspectives to the classroom. (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). There is a significant trend of increased numbers of international students migrating to the U.S. to complete their undergraduate degrees (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). International students target top 20 U.S. institutions to pursue their degrees of interest and have expectations of future jobs in their fields. Researchers predict that American classrooms will continue to change rapidly, as we continue to see an increase of international students who have interest in attaining degrees from American colleges and universities (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014).

#### *Challenges Facing International Students in the U.S.*

In the United States, the excitement of attending college (at the undergraduate level) for international students is practically a dream come true, however, it comes with the fear of the unknown related to their new environment. The new setting is always the biggest change for most students, as it could be intimidating, even overwhelming. Students' perceptions of their social adjustment are another challenge often faced by international students. Leaving their native land and coming to America for their education contributes to their future, not only for themselves, but for their families as well (Ebinger, 2011). American colleges and universities have taken many approaches to meeting the needs of international students. They also realize that addressing each need of the diverse populations will take some time.

#### *International Students' Incentives in the U.S.*

International students chose to pursue their education in the U.S. because they hoped to create a better life for themselves and family. With the growing number of international students who travel to the U.S. each year to pursue their undergraduate studies, many of them look to mentors, faculty, and peers to help them grow beyond their current circumstances. Many students

also travel despite the lack of emotional support and/or financial backing from their families. They seek out student loans, scholarships, grants, and/or sponsorships in order to fund their education once they get to the United States (Woodhall, 1983).

### *Education*

Earning an American degree speaks volumes for many international students. American colleges and universities are well known throughout the world for their scientific and technological discoveries (Bok, 2013), signifying the weight of the American degree and its meaning to an international student who earns it. Many students realize that coming to America to pursue a degree can be expensive, so they look for opportunities that will help them pay for their degrees. The average cost (tuition, fees, room & board, books, etc.) for a four-year private institution in the U.S. is about \$35,000 annually, with public institutions averaging \$17,000 each (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

For two-year institutions, private institutions cost an average of \$23,000 and public institutions \$9,000 annually (NCES, 2014-2015). Most families of international students cannot afford to pay such tuition; therefore, students seek out colleges and universities who offer resources and programs that will enable them to study in the U.S. for free (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). Some of the programs offer incentives like work-study. This is where students can attend classes during the day and are assigned a job during the week, such as a position in the finance officer research labs, assisting with administrative duties, or working as a teaching assistant (TA). This is another means to support themselves while in school. Farrugia & Bhandari (2014) through its *Open Doors* publication is one of the U.S. organizations that offer scholarships and other funding opportunities for international students.



*International Students in Historically Black Colleges and Universities*

The study of student athletes may not be easily extrapolated and does not speak to the larger population of international students, however a study by Sato and Burge-Hall (2008) lends insight into some experiences international students faced while attending an HBCU. Based on a project conducted using semi-structured interviews with international students attending a comprehensive institution in Virginia, Sato and Burge-Hall (2008) wanted to get an insight on international students and their experiences at an HBCU. According to Sato and Burge-Hall (2008), “15% of the student athletes are international students at Hampton University” (p. 16). Sato and Burge-Hall (2008) found that international students struggle with English as a second language, which causes barriers “academically, athletically, and socially” (p. 16). These authors/researchers further identified that international students struggle with communication, writing papers, reading assignments, and class presentations because they could not shift from their native language to English. Due to the language barrier, many of the students stated a lack of confidence in their ability to finish undergraduate studies (Sato & Burge-Hall, 2008). The above findings further indicate the importance of this research and support the need to track the achievements of international students from the Caribbean.

Like Sato, Burge-Hall, Minami and Ovando (2004) also argued that the lack of English was further aggravated by the students’ comprehension and their own dialect and cultural backgrounds. Wan (2001) argued that students also identified issues in their adjustment to the HBCU academic culture, including their professor’s enunciation of words and pedagogy styles. With students who continued to struggle in class, on-going issues certainly contributed to their hesitation in class discussions (Lin & Yi, 1997). The project not only identified learning issues with international students but it also identified issues within the athletic systems such as rules,

procedures, and registering for classes. Many of the students continued to express their feelings of frustration beyond the classroom, which led to numerous mistakes in their athletic performances, perhaps exasperated by Hampton University's lack of English as a second language course for international students (Sato & Burge-Hall, 2008).

The authors relied on a prior study conducted by Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990) *Promoting Success of Latino language-minority students*, which identified three factors that supported international students in their use of the English language in the U.S. These factors were: 1) more diversified educational training and conferences for faculty who would advise international student, 2) institutional programs that would support basic learning needs for international students, and 3) courses that highlight diversity and adjustment issues for faculty who are well aware of cultural differences in the classroom.

Sato and Burge-Hall (2008) suggest that faculty members at Hampton University and other HBCUs should commit to inspiring international students to finish their undergraduate studies. By doing so, faculty members could become more familiar with international students' experiences on their campuses. In addition, identifying these experiences could lead to the implementation of new programs to support not just international students but international students from the Caribbean at all HBCUs. Sato and Burge-Hall (2008) found that international student athletes maintained positive relationships not only with their athletic peers but with their professors as well. In addition, international students reported that their African American peers were hospitable and approachable while living on campus.

According to *International Students' Perceptions of University Assistance with their Social Adjustment* (Ebinger, 2011) international students should have the opportunity to feel connected to their community, which help them to have great experiences during their

adjustment process. Research suggests that international students will continue to experience many transitional changes, however, the research is being conducted to enlighten the reader and the broader community about this underrepresented population (Ebinger, 2011). American colleges and universities must become more sensitive to all cultures of students who come to America to pursue their education. This means not just acceptance of the student but acceptance of the whole student including their cultural background and social differences.

The findings by Sato and Burge-Hall (2008) suggest that HBCUs still have a long way to go in order to meet the needs of this growing population. As previously noted, researchers have found that international students struggle with their college adjustments, and being able to share their cultural backgrounds within the HBCU community will help them to alleviate some of their issues and concerns (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The literature identified few studies that currently represent international students' academic and cultural experiences within HBCU settings (Sato & Burge-Hall, 2008). It is also important to note that no students of Caribbean decent were self-identified in the study. In order to give this population a voice in the current literature, data from this study and future research could be used not only by HBCUs, but also by other colleges and universities that enroll international students from the Caribbean. In addition, the data could serve as a tool to help implement or improve programs, increase international students' graduation rates, and improve student enrollment and retention performances at HBCUs. Finally, as mentioned in chapter one, international students are discussed in the literature in a broader context and lack discussions of this sub-groups under the larger population. The discussion below was intended to shed light on a specific group related to international students from the Caribbean who chose to come to the U.S. and pursue their degrees in American universities. An overview of culture shock, Caribbean

students experiences of culture shock, challenges facing international students from the Caribbean in the U.S., and a summary will also be presented.

### *Overview of Culture Shock*

International students face many challenges in the adaptation process; if no resources are available, it can foster feelings of vulnerability. Colleen Ward, Stephen, Bochner and Adrian Furnham (2001) found that in order to be a part of any culture and to be effective, a person must role-play in order to understand an individual process of the transition. Symptoms experienced during this stage include: sadness, nervousness, fatigue, sleeping problems, separation anxiety, and loss of memory. Caribbean students often struggle with the idea of not being able to fit in with their new environment, which can also lead to loneliness.

Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) suggest that one's adaptation process is based on changes that occur in their physical environment. Climate is one aspect that tends to create changes in Caribbean students' new environment. For example, students adjusting to the winter season find it to be a difficult transition since they have never experienced the cold weather of northern locales in the U.S. (Pederson, 1995). Food is another external change many students face, resulting in students feeling homesick and experiencing a need to eat their traditional home cooked meals (de Araujo, 2011).

Culture shock was given its name by Oberg (1960). In his research *Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments* he describes four phases that individuals experience during this process. The first stage is known as the "honeymoon stage" (Oberg, 1960). This stage describes the first time an individual is in the host country and their excitement grows out of the excitement of the unknown. This stage also tends to connect individuals of the same cultural background who sometimes share similar experiences.

The second stage is referred to as “crisis stage” (Oberg, 1960). This stage describes the uncomfortable feelings of individuals trying to understand the new culture they are currently living in and the disconnectedness they experience from their counter-parts (e.g. home, school and work). The third stage is referred to as the “recovery stage” (Oberg, 1960). During the recovery stage, individuals learn how to function in the new culture and be independent. The fourth and final stage is the “adaptation stage” Oberg (1960). The final stage describes individuals or groups accepting their present cultural transition to the host culture and adapting to the environment. In addition, Oberg (1960) found that if the individual was to return to their home country after many years of living in the host country they too may experience what is known as the reverse culture shock.

#### *Caribbean Students’ Experiences of Culture Shock*

Based on a study conducted by Edward-Joseph, and Baker (2012), 72 Caribbean students (men and women) from 15 Caribbean countries, ranging in age from 18-21, were invited to be a part of the study to find out if they experienced culture shock while attending U.S. colleges and universities. The study aimed to bring awareness about Caribbean students’ culture shock experiences and to provide recommendations to U.S. colleges and universities. The authors wanted to understand Caribbean students’ perceptions and stages of culture shock through their experiences. Limitations of the study were evident due to some students not being able to identify any concerns about experiencing culture shock.

During the study, students were honest in their responses to culture shock and the steps they initiated to help improve their current situation (Edward-Joseph & Baker, 2012). According to the study no previous research was conducted and the researchers had no resources to review or data with which to compare their study. However, their findings did present common themes

associated with experiences of Caribbean students: They are as follow: 1) loneliness, 2) anxiety, 3) value systems and cultural differences, 4) cultural identity, and 5) environmental factors (Edward-Joseph & Baker, 2012). Edward-Joseph and Baker (2012) described loneliness as not being able to “fit in” (p. 723). Many Caribbean students experienced loneliness due to being separated from family members and friends while attending college in the U.S. (Edward-Joseph & Baker, 2012).

As the pressures increases for Caribbean students to perform well in their educational studies in the U.S., symptoms of anxiety usually play a significant role in their lives. Students reported that anxiety often manifested itself as a result of loneliness inherent in the cultural adaptation process (Edward-Joseph & Baker, 2012). In addition, some students claimed that mild depression and anxiety became overwhelming as they continue to talk with family and friends back in their native country (Edward-Joseph & Baker, 2012). Other major elements causing students to experience anxiety were their new environment, grades, and the need to excel above their American peers and become overachievers to impress instructors and staff.

In general, Caribbean students perceived American culture as far different from how they were raised in their native country (Edward-Joseph & Baker, 2012). Caribbean students believed that the U.S. “stresses independence and individualism,” whereas Caribbean cultures were generally based more on “collectivism” (p. 724). For example, one individual stated “at home you can get a taxi ride home for free out of the kindness and I always got lunch free by just dropping in on a friend” (p. 724). Another individual described the experience of “lack of respect for resources and wastefulness” (p. 724) in American culture. Students identified “wasted resources, such as the throwing away of food every day when others are starving in other countries, as well as American attitudes toward “money and credit cards” (p. 724).

In conclusion, Caribbean students often associate themselves with people of similar races, who can relate to the same cultural experiences. The reason for the connection is the strong heritage that taught them how to survive. However, no clear explanation was identified in the study about heritage or survival. In addition, Edward-Joseph and Baker (2012) argued that Caribbean students struggle with being characterized as “Black” or “ethnic,” (p. 724) however, no further explanation was given for this description.

Migrating from one’s native country to a U.S. college or university is considered to be a life changing experience (Fisher & Hood, 1987). Exploring the idea of traveling abroad to the U.S. to attend college shows signs of being a mature and responsible adult (Zunker, 2006). Many international students studying in the U.S. experience an overwhelming number of issues and concerns related to their psychological and emotional state (Fisher & Hood, 1987). The pressure for Caribbean students to excel in studies, learn new communication strategies, and adjust to their new environment increases (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007).

Similar to Coppi (2007) *The Changing Landscape of International Students’ Advisement* describes the above experiences as a form of culture shock. The author suggests that feelings of doubt and fear often times replace the first feelings of excitement one may feel prior to arriving in the U.S. Popadiuk and Authur (2004) argued that stress, anxiety and depression cause all international students to be more concern about their social environment than their American peers. International students face many challenges just like Caribbean students, for example: loneliness, feelings of anxiety, lack of support and financial difficulties (Greenidge, 2007). Greenidge (2007) further suggests that if stress is not dealt with first hand, students’ educational success and relationships may be hindered in the long run. As international students’ enrollment continues to rise in the U.S. (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014), one can only hope that U.S. colleges

and universities will increase the awareness of mental health issues for this particular group (Mori, 2000).

*Challenges Facing International Students from the Caribbean in the U.S.*

Historically, one of the main challenges that Caribbean students face is cultural identity (Campbell, 2002). Individual characteristics, traits, values, language, and religion are some qualities that speak to cultural identity. In his research, *Caribbean Students' Adjustment to a Culture at a Small Liberal Arts College*, Campbell (2002) argued that most international students want to feel connected to their culture away from home. These students searched for groups and programs that can help them to feel connected to their beliefs and customs, while living on an American college or university campus. Feeling connected to their home cultures also help students to deal with loneliness, depression, and the anxiety of being away from home. While each Caribbean country has a different cultural background and different traditions, Caribbean students still identify with similar struggles when it comes to cultural identity and living in a new country.

Campbell (2002) further described a phenomenon known as shared culture, whereby cultural traits and similarities tend to bring individuals together and make it possible for groups to understand each other. Cultural adjustment is part of developing a new-shared culture for Caribbean students studying in the U.S. Over a period of time, as students live together, they learn how to function in new environments with their peers, faculty, and staff (Campbell, 2002). Students begin to feel a sense of belonging, allowing them to be themselves in a new setting without disregarding their customs or values. Some students quickly adapt to the process of adjustment, while others find it difficult, especially if little support is available to meet their needs as they transition to a new country and a new environment.



Language is another cultural barrier for Caribbean students in the U.S. (de Araujo, 2011). Many students who travel to the U.S. for the first time to attend undergraduate institutions tend to be a bit shy, in the beginning, with other students and faculty/staff. They are more careful of what they say and how it will be interpreted. Most Caribbean countries speak Patois, a combination of their native language or dialect and English. English is also a first language for some; however, words may have different meanings in American usage, making it difficult to communicate with their counterparts (de Araujo, 2011).

In his research, *Adjustment Issues of International Students Enrolled in American Colleges and University* de Araujo (2011) suggests that students find ways to adjust at a great pace, especially when it comes to learning the English language. Many students may enroll in English courses to strengthen their speech, while others pay for personal tutors who can work with them one-on-one, which seems to be more comfortable when in private.

#### *Summary of the Literature*

Along with a discussion of the theoretical framework, this chapter presented a review of the literature related to the contents of the study. Findings from the research identified factors that contributed to the adjustment of international Caribbean students not only in the U.S. but on college campuses as well. An in-depth review of the literature found that international Caribbean students face many challenges associated with acculturation and college adjustment to new life on U.S. campuses. A review of the literature also highlights the paucity of acculturation and adjustment research on the Caribbean population outside their native land. More specifically, identifying those factors which influence the perceptions of international Caribbean students and helping them to transition in a new environment is lacking in the international literature.

Due to one HBCU being used for the research in this study, the data is quite limited. However, there is a greater need for research with this growing population and continued work that needs to be done to shorten the gaps in the current literature. Several studies advocate for more research that will speak to the transition of Caribbean students and how they contribute to the U.S. population (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001, & Berry, 2005, & Sato & Burge-Hall, 2008). In 2007, the American Journal of Education reported 43% of the Caribbean students who study abroad were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities.

Results of the above study identified Caribbean students as more motivated, driven and likely to succeed based on their characteristics. Implications of this research include development of programs, which focus on increasing diversity for this population, facilitating better opportunities of those factors that influence Caribbean students to come to the U.S. and pursue their educational goals. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers learn more about this group of students in order to help develop programs aimed at improving the transition of this growing population.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, in-depth interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of Caribbean students' experiences in U.S. colleges and universities. Caribbean students were carefully selected from one baccalaureate-granting institution in the Southeast of the United States to address the following research questions:

- 1) How do Caribbean undergraduate students perceive their adjustments to college in the United States?
- 2) To what factors do Caribbean undergraduate students attribute their educational success and cultural adjustment experiences?

Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) from the University of Georgia, I submitted the IRB approval to Florida Memorial University in order to begin my research. FMU IRB has acknowledged that they will rely on the IRB approval from the researcher's home institution. I also provided a letter of information to the IRB co-Chair, outlining the purpose of the study and how the information will be used, and discussing confidentiality and risks and benefits for participants. This chapter presents the procedures and data analysis methods used throughout the study. A detailed description is outlined below: 1) site

selection, 2) participants, 3) recruitment, 4) interviews 5) data collection procedures, 6) data analysis, 7) limitations and 8) researcher biases.

### *Site Selection*

Florida Memorial University, a liberal arts college, is the product of a merger of two colleges in 1941: Florida Baptist Institute, which was founded in 1879, and Florida Baptist Academy, founded in 1892. The institution was renamed Florida Memorial University in March 2006. Located in southeastern Miami, it is a private not-for-profit university with a total enrollment of over 1,800 students per academic year. Florida Memorial University has an endowment of about \$9.76 million dollars to support programs for students, faculty and staff. The cost of tuition per year was \$14,776 in 2013-2014.

The school is one of 99 HBCUs recognized by the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Higher Education Act, 1965). HBCUs were established to serve the educational needs of African Americans, as they were historically not permitted to attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). As a result, HBCUs became a gateway to provide postsecondary education for African Americans. These institutions play a key role in providing all students, including more than 8,000 international students, with the knowledge and skills to prepare them for careers in professional fields.

This institution for this study was selected as the research site for two reasons. Its Office of Institutional Research reported that 10 percent of the student population identified themselves as Caribbean born. Secondly, FMU is identified as a HBCU (Higher Education Act, 1965).

The university offers several services to the students, i.e., federal work-study and internship programs, student counseling services, online courses, remedial classes and ROTC programs. In addition, the university provides the following assistance to help students pay for

their tuition: 1) pre-paid tuition plans, 2) payment plans for tuition cost and 3) certain interest free loans (based on requirements from the institution). Eighty-seven percent of the students enrolled at the university receive a specific amount of tuition assistance. The school yields a total financial aid endowment of a little over nine million dollars, and each undergraduate student receives an average of fifty-six hundred dollars in tuition assistance.

Seventy-six percent of undergraduate students attending FMU receive Pell grants. Seventy-nine percent of the student body receives an average of any grant aid towards their tuition cost annually. Most students choose to apply for federal loans to help pay their tuition cost. In 2012, eighty-five percent of students were awarded federal aid. The institution is primarily a general arts and sciences school with few graduate programs: the institution focuses more on undergraduates. The school also has a student retention rate of seventy-seven percent with sixty-one percent female and thirty-nine percent male. In the fall of 2013, just over ten percent of the students were international based on the total distribution by ethnicity and definition from the IPEDS data (IPEDS, 2013).

The IPEDS data identified fourteen percent of students graduated from FMU on time, in two or four years depending on the degree and only forty-one percent graduate overall, ranking the school below average when compared nationally (IPEDS, 2013). The data never identified what percent of those graduating are from Caribbean origin; however, this research aims to identify their experiences along with the educational success of this growing population of international students from the Caribbean. Finally, due to the diversity of the institution, I believed the environment has highly impacted the acculturation process for current and future students.

### *Participants*

Participants for the study were selected based on the following criteria: 1) students must self-identify as international students from the Caribbean (male & female); 2) be non-U.S. citizen; 3) be 18 to 24 years of age; and 4) be enrolled (full-time) in an undergraduate U.S. institution. The age group was selected because it fits the criteria for undergraduates according to the U.S. educational standards (Scott Ginder, Janice Kelly-Reid, & Farrah Mann, 2014). The study aimed to identify 10 to 20 undergraduate students from various Caribbean countries who would willingly participate in the study. For this study, nonprobability sampling will be utilized. Nonprobability sampling investigated the differences among relationships and any common themes associated (Campbell, 2002). “Purposeful sampling is one of the most common forms of nonprobabilistic and is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Campbell, 2002, p.37).

### *Recruitment*

Subjects were invited to participate in the study by posted advertisement flyers (see Appendix B) with information about the study. The researcher traveled FMU to recruit students for the study. Flyers were distributed and posted in the following locations on the campus: student centers, libraries, cafeterias and student dorms on campus. An advertisement was also submitted to the college’s student newspaper. In addition, the study used the snowball method effectively employed by (Mouzitchka, 2006). This process asked current participants to invite others who fit the research criteria to participate in the study. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were screened to determine whether they met the eligibility criteria (full-time).

I also made contact with the president of the Caribbean Association at FMU to request assistance in the screening process. During that process I was able to obtain the names and email of each student, which helped to finalize the recruitment process. I then contacted the interested individuals to schedule their interviews by teleconference. Limitations in selecting the students in this method derived from the following: 1) students may be pre-selected by the institution; 2) not being in person may limit the face-to-face interaction; and 3) students may decline to participate in either method for the interviews. Participants were selected on a first-come basis without any biases built into the process. I discontinued interviews once saturation was identified. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to complete consent forms of their agreement to participate in the study. The consent forms (see Appendix C) were emailed to all students prior to the interview process. In addition, I discussed and reviewed the consent forms, time expected for the interview, the purpose of the study and how the results will be used from the study for future contribution to the literature.

### *Interviews*

Each member of the study population was interviewed via teleconference with in-depth questions (see Appendix D) by the researcher. For this study, I employed the second sequence, which was developed by Seidman (1991) and is also known as “the details of experience” (Campbell, 2002). The interview questions were tailored to fit the current study. The research questions were also guided to get an in-depth understanding of this growing population. The questions also helped to capture each participant’s current experiences related to the research topic. Interviews were semi-structured to ask students questions about their college experiences in the United States. The interviews were approximately 30 to 60 minutes for each session. Participants had the opportunity to refuse or answer any question without penalty (Patton, 2002).

At the time of the interview, I read the consent form for recording purposes. The participants were informed of the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I also obtained permission from the participants to record each interview session. Recorded interviews helped the researcher to capture collected data, which were reviewed at a later time for clarity (Neuman, 2006). The recordings were transcribed immediately following the interviews by professional transcription services. During the transcription process, the researcher stayed in contact with participants through phone and email in case additional clarity was needed (Mouzitchka, 2006). All participants were issued copies of the final transcripts for their records.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The method used for this study to capture the data was interviews, which helped to address the research problem, purpose of the study and the research questions. During the interviews, each participant was able to share their experiences related to the research topic. The consent letter was read to every student and each interview was recorded and transcribed in Microsoft Word. Additionally, the qualitative data analysis program, QSR, International NVivo 10 qualitative software was used. The software program helped to organize and analyze the collected data for this research. In addition the software allowed (a) transcribed interviews to be imported and coded for analysis, (b) annotation of source documents by the researcher and (c) coding. The goal of the data analysis was to divide the data into parts to derive meaning units. Transforming the units makes it possible to decide which are valid for the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997).



### *Data Analysis Procedures*

A thorough analysis of the data was conducted. Merriam (2009) argued that the researcher must work through the process to make sense out of the data analysis findings. As a result of the review of the literature and theoretical frameworks, numerous themes have been established a priori, including themes of cultural shock, cultural identity, cultural differences and acculturation. In addition, themes that evolved during the interviews were included in the data analysis. I organized the data by co-occurring themes in order to refine the study.

According to Rossman & Ralls (1998), “coding entails thinking through what you take as evidence of a category or theme” (p. 180). In coding, the researcher was able to clearly identify phrases, recurring ideas and groupings to compare themes previously uncovered through the theoretical frameworks and the literature review. To ensure verification and that students met the requirements, the researcher confirmed participants in the study by nationality, age and enrollment status at FMU. Concept mapping was used to help provide a clear understating of the data collected. This process was to identify major themes and document them, showing how they connected or relate to relevant ideas. Through matrices, the researcher identified ways to help create new insights for the research topic.

During the time of data collection, I collected personal information from each participant. Participants who met the inclusion criteria mentioned above were scheduled for an interview at a time that was convenient for each student. Each participant was interviewed once via teleconference. Prior to the interview, participants received a friendly reminder of their scheduled interview through email or text from the researcher.

### *Limitations*

First, one potential limitation is that some students may not be honest about their experiences once recording of the interview begins. As the interviewer, I encouraged students to feel comfortable in giving their responses, as the information will not be shared with anyone else. Second is the lack of full participation by Caribbean students between the ages of 18 and 24. I realized that not every student who is a freshman beginning their undergraduate studies is between the ages of 18 to 24. Third, the research questions were limited to the perceptions of the students interviewed. For example, others such as fellow students, parents, and university administrators may have different perceptions. Results may be different if the researcher sought quantitative measures of these issues.

Additionally, extrapolating the experiences of Caribbean students at FMU to the broader population of international Caribbean students could serve as a limitation. Also, limitations of interviewing only Caribbean students at one HBCU may have limited the study, due to other international groups not being a part of the criteria and not including non-HBCUs or PWIs. In addition, the study may have been limited due to interview recorders and note taking not captured correctly for future transcriptions. Finally, the study may have been limited as a result of the researcher's personal and cultural background.

### *Researcher Biases*

I am the sole investigator in this study. I have nine years of experience working in higher education, specifically in research administration. Prior to conducting this study, I had no connection or investment with FMU. I also did not have any connection to the faculty or students at this institution. My views were objective during the recruitment process, interview and coding the data. In addition, I did not have any difficulties establishing trust and rapport with the

participants in the study. Designing this study was objective, which I was able to employ measures in order to eliminate any personal injunctions that may have caused limitations in the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This study focused on the experiences of Caribbean students at one liberal arts college located in the southeast region of the United States. During the interviews, students shared their views on the importance of FMU being an HBCU and why they chose to make this their study institution. First, the history of HBCUs spoke volumes to each student and helped to bring awareness on the significance not only to educate African Americans but students from different cultural backgrounds. Second, several students identified that their motivation for attending FMU was based on the ranking of the institution, degrees offered, activities, alumni and the city in which the school is located. Third, the students exhibited great pride in their decision to come to the U.S. to pursue their education which they believed assisted in a positive acculturation transition at FMU. Hence, the above further supported the significance of the targeted institution being an HBCU, which is important to the findings of this study. This chapter is devoted to the results of the research questions included in the study. The key questions were: How do Caribbean undergraduate students perceive their adjustments to college in the United States? To what factors do Caribbean undergraduate students attribute their educational success and cultural adjustment experiences? The study utilized interview questions as the method to help answer the research questions. The questions also help to capture the experiences of each student, their perceptions of their adjustments, and factors that influenced their cultural and academic growth in the United States. This chapter is presented in four sections: demographic and background of participants, findings, themes, sub-themes that emerged from the research and a summary.

### *Demographic and Background*

The participants were identified as eight (57%) females and six (43%) males. Fourteen interviews were conducted through teleconferences. The academic levels of the participants included (a) freshmen, (b) sophomore, (c) junior, and (d) senior. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 22 years old. In addition, their nations of origin included: British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Haiti, Bahamas, Dominican Republic and Saint. Maarten. It was critical for this study to have a diverse representation from all groups who identified themselves as international students from the Caribbean in order to achieve the goal of learning about the experiences of these students and their adjustment to academic life while attending a U.S. university. Each participant was able to share their experiences based on their perceived adjustment at their current academic level. Table 1 below is a description of the participants interviewed.

Table 1. Comprehensive view of Demographics

		Number	Percent
Gender	Female	8	57%
	Male	6	43%
Age	18-20	6	43%
	21-22	8	57%
Academic Level	Freshmen	3	21%
	Sophomore	5	36%
	Junior	4	29%
	Senior	2	14%
Countries of origin			
	British Virgin	3	21%

Islands		
Jamaica	3	21%
Haiti	1	71%
Nassau Bahamas	3	21%
Dominican		
Republic	2	14%
Saint Maarten	2	14%

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All interviews were recorded after obtaining the consent forms from each participant. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher collected the demographic data of each participant to ensure that they met the study criteria mentioned in chapter three. A guided questionnaire containing thirteen questions was used to conduct the interviews. In the data analysis process, codes were developed, sorted and organized to fit each research question. After a review of the transcripts, major and sub-themes emerged from the interviews. To help sort and analyze the data QSR, International NVivo 10 qualitative software was utilized for a more methodical data analysis process. In that process, the researcher was able to group similar meanings and categories which helped to develop the four themes.

#### *Keywords and Theme Identification*

Interview transcripts were formatted for and imported into QSR International NVivo 10 qualitative software. Each transcript was reviewed and responses were coded based on each individual interview question. Each interview question was coded into a parent node, or thematic category of data. Child nodes, or sub themes, emerged from each parent node. Node, or theme, identification was conducted through the manual review responses for common ideas, concepts, keywords and sentiments.

Word frequency queries were conducted on the first round of interviews to establish theoretical data saturation (Neuman, 2011). Data saturation was determined after running two

rounds of analysis (see Appendix E & F). Conducting additional interviews beyond the population chosen sample would have not been beneficial as the same results likely would have surfaced. The participants responses would have been similar, thus theoretical data saturation was met. Themes were further explored through the use of word frequency queries to validate results and enhance theme descriptions. Word frequency queries were run cumulatively on all the interview transcripts as well as independently on each interview question. In addition, the data saturation tables have four columns along with four headings. The first column shows words captured by each participant during the analysis, the second column is the length of each word, the third column is the number of times the word appeared in the analysis and the last column is the percentage of times each word was used by participants in the interviews.

To provide a structured understanding of the findings, I relied on the theory utilized by Berry (2005) *Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures*. He focused on the cultural and psychological phases that occur during the process known as acculturation. Given the focus of this study, the problem statement identified that international enrollment has increased consistently in the U.S. to more than 886,000 in 2014 (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). Due to the little understanding of the experiences of international students from the Caribbean in U.S. colleges and universities including HBCUs, the research questions were developed to get a clear understating of their perceptions, cultural adjustments and educational success.

The above author's model supported the framework, which helped to guide the literature review. Scholarly authors also identified adjustment challenges, stress and coping in new environments, and cultural shock as part of the process for individuals that live outside of their home countries. In addition, the literature review identified one HBCU in its research findings for international students, but did not address Caribbean students, further indicating the need for

this study and the lack in the international literature. The data was gathered through a series of interviews that included fourteen participants. The data was organized by similar findings and analyzed using the QSR International NVivo 10 qualitative software, which included the transcription and coding of each interview. Several themes emerged from the interviews and will be discussed in the next section.

Four major themes emerged in the data analysis along with several sub-themes: perceptions (pre-college); adjustment (post-college); cultural adjustment, which focused on factors that helped/hindered cultural adjustment; and the educational success adjustments factors that helped/hindered academic performance. Each theme helped to address each research question for this study.

The first theme (perceptions) emerged from the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the data, which focused on Caribbean undergraduate students' perception of college in the United States. The participants mentioned the themes repeatedly during the interviews. The data in Table 2 is relevant to the first theme. Perceptions of cultural differences arose about black culture, academic perceptions about HBCUs and stereotype and social adjustment in a new environment and new country. Theme two (adjustments) also emerged from the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the data, however after students began to actually adjust in college their views were different. The participants mentioned the themes repeatedly during the interviews.

The data in Table 3 is relevant to the second theme. Academic challenges like, balancing the workload and poor performance emerged, financial challenges and adjusting to dorm/campus life. Social interactions with American and other international students also emerged. In addition, cultural and language barriers arose including food and weather adjustments.



The third theme (cultural adjustment) emerged from the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the data. The participants mentioned the word cultural adjustment repeatedly during the interviews. The data in Table 4 is relevant to the third theme. Areas of cultural acceptance in a new environment, school sponsored events, activities and clubs for Caribbean students also emerged. Students found that they were more willing to get to know other students outside their culture, and were aware of becoming more open-minded and accepting outside of their comfort zone. Challenges of cultural differences separating students on campus arose, and cliques emerged based on cultural background due to the lack of home culture on campus.

The fourth and final theme (educational success) also emerged from the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the data. The participants mentioned the themes repeatedly during the interviews. The data in Table 5 is relevant to the fourth theme. Sub-themes that emerged were learning new skills, balancing social life with academic work, difficult faculty/professors and different pedagogy styles. Factors that helped to academically motivate students were one-on-one support by individual professors, study groups, peer-to-peer mentorship, self-motivation, personal growth (maturity) and developing long-term plans and goals for the future. The next section will show how each interview question was categorized, specifically to help answer each research question that helped to build the framework for the findings from this study.

Thirteen interview questions were developed for the study, however during the data analysis, I found that only six of the questions were effective in addressing the research questions for this study. The additional seven questions addressed overall general concerns, for example: weather, food and living on campus, etc. Omitting those questions did not impact the outcome of this study. In addition to answering the research questions, the study hopes to inform the reader about the experiences of international students from the Caribbean and shed light on this growing

population. This study was intended to contribute significant understanding of factors to the literature not just regarding international students from the Caribbean. The results from the study may provide insight into the role that the institution as an HBCU might play in the lives of the students from other cultures. Finally, below is a brief description of both research questions and the interview questions that addresses each research question.

**Research question one (RQ1):** How do Caribbean undergraduate students perceive their adjustment to college in the United States? Based on the shared views of the students who participated in the study, this research identified factors of students' perception prior to traveling to the United States to pursue their studies. Interview questions 6 and 7 prompted participants to provide their definition and perceptions of the U.S. and of HBCUs based on what they knew prior to traveling for college. These questions also gave participants the opportunity to speak candidly about changes they have made in their personal life as a result of attending FMU.

**Research question two (RQ2):** To what factors do Caribbean undergraduate students attribute their educational success and cultural adjustment experiences? Based on the shared views of the students who participated in the study, this research identified factors that contributed to relationships the participants have with professors, faculty and staff related to their academic experiences at FMU (i.e. classes, grades, etc.). Interview questions 8, 9, and 10 supported research question two in several ways: 1) understand how the participants are learning in a new environment that will help them to grow academically; 2) gave participants the opportunity to compare where they are now to when they began their studies at FMU and 3) focusing on the whole student and whether those experiences will have an effect post-graduation.

### *Specific Thematic Findings*

#### **Theme 1: Perceptions** – thoughts of pre-college/HBCU prior to attending FMU

This major theme emerged from the data analysis, which helped to further the initial insight into Caribbean students and their thoughts prior to attending college in the United States. The sub-themes under perception also emerged from the data and revealed key areas where the students expressed and emphasized their experiences at FMU. After completing the interviews, I exported participants' responses to a Microsoft Word document and individually analyzed them. Next, I organized significant statements into clusters of meaning, and then identified textural and structural themes for each. After completing the analyses, I analyzed themes across the interview responses. However, as different levels of abstraction became apparent, some themes or subthemes were combined or discarded. Specifically interview questions 6 and 7 prompted the participants to provide descriptions about their perceptions prior to coming to the United States. In addition, I employed the above processes for the additional three themes and sub-themes in this study.

Table 2. Perceptions

Sub-themes	Theme Frequency	Percent	References
Perceptions	14	100%	32
Challenges	5	36%	5
Academic Colleges HBCU specific	1	7%	1
Perception view of HBCU like TV (negative)	1	7%	1
Perception HBCU with fighting and bullying	1	7%	1
<b>Cultural</b>	2	14%	2
Perception of cultural barriers	3	21%	3
Perception worried about different black culture	1	7%	1
<b>Social</b>	2	14%	2

Perception of no connection	1	7%	1
<b>Academic College HBCU specific</b>	7	50%	9
Desire to be in an environment similar to home	1	7%	1
Perception view HBCU like TV stereotype (positive)	3	21%	4
Perception College will be hard work	1	7%	1
Perception HBCU African American History	3	21%	3
Perception more opportunities than my home country	1	7%	1
<b>Cultural</b>	1	7%	1
Perception presence of diversity	1	7%	1
<b>Personal growth</b>	3	21%	3
Perception of college independence	1	7%	1
Perception independent motivated students	1	7%	1
Perception self-growth	2	14%	2
<b>Social</b>	3	21%	3
Perception family close-knit atmosphere	2	14%	2
Perception Party life	1	7%	1
No perception	5	36%	5

The following responses were provided based on the inquiry into perceptions of attending a U.S. university and/or a HBCU.

- Sub-themes of perceptions challenges – cultural & social
  - Cultural
    - Cultural barriers (21%) (3 participants)
    - Worried about different black culture (7%) (1 participant)
    - HBCU with fighting and bullying (7%) (1 participant)
  - Social
    - No perception (36%) (5 participants)
    - Family close-knit atmosphere (14%) (2 participants)
    - Party life (7%) (1 participant)
- Sub-themes of perceptions challenges – growth & academic
  - Growth
    - Self-growth (14%) (2 participants)
    - College gives independence (7%) (1 participant)
    - Independent motivated students (7%) (1 participant)
  - Academic
    - HBCU stereotype (21%) (3 participants)
    - HBCU African American history (21%) (3 participants)
    - More opportunities than their home country (7%) (1 participant)

## Cultural Barriers

Cultural barriers derived from the data analysis showed that 3 of the 14 participants (21%) encountered language barriers during their experience at FMU. They also indicated that their accents might have hindered conversations with their non-Caribbean peers and professors.

*“The only friends I do have are the two students from Saint Martin as well, and they’re guys. I find it quite challenging to make friends over here because they don’t really understand my culture, and understand me as a person. First of all they hardly understand me because of my accent, or they look at me funny because I dress different than they do.”*

*"The professor mostly told me the same thing I said, there's greater things. It's how their students are brought up. They don't like to get out of their comfort zones. They just speak around each other. They don't want to get to know other people and other cultures, so that's what they do."*

## Worried about different black culture

One (7%) participant indicated they were concerned about the African American culture and how they would fit into this new culture. They had concerns since they are black and their peers are mostly black at the university. In addition, they wondered if it would be easier to connect in an environment where everyone looks the same.

*“I went to school all my life with other black individuals, but they were Caribbean....”“Okay this is my culture,”.... “Whereas now this is different black culture moving together, so I didn't know how it would be.”*

### Close-knit familiar atmosphere

Two (14%) participants explained their desire to be in a close-knit atmosphere, which makes them feel comfortable with the people in their circle. Seeking out individuals from their own country/island also gave them a sense of comfort.

*“I was just basically looking for people that I knew from back home.”*

*“Before I actually came well its exactly how I was thinking you know there's people look like me. You know it'd be very comfortable like it's like ways family ways and I like family. It helps out that you know now more of my sisters are here and cousins. But yeah it's a very good atmosphere away from like my actual, actual family you know like mom and dad.”*

### Perception of party life

One (7%) participant shared their view prior to arriving in the country. For example: they thought that no one in U.S. colleges focus on their studies and that most students party. Watching television before coming to America gave them the assumption that all universities enjoyed the party life.

*“Oh. The perception I had of college was like, the party life, you know. Nobody really focusing on their studies or their college and the different things.”*

### No perception

Five (36%) participants shared they had no perception prior to attending a college or university in the United States. The data analysis showed no significant impact of students adjusting because they did not have a perception about their current university.

*“To be honest with you, I never deeply thought about college. All I know is I wanted to go to college, all I know is that's my need to become a millionaire, let's put it like that.”*

*“I wouldn't specifically say U.S. institution, all I knew is I wanted to go off to school. I didn't want it to be home for school.”*

*“To be honest, I found out about HBCU's in my first semester here. I knew there were black colleges, but I didn't know they had a name for it and a whole setup for it and I didn't know it was this organized.”*

### College independence

One (7%) participant shared that the university gives the student a sense of freedom.

“Going away to college gives you the independence you needed to experience life as a young adult.” Making my own schedule has taught me how to balance college and life, which is a huge step for me.”

*“It definitely gives you more freedom to do what you want and at your time. So that's definitely a plus.”*

### Perception of independent motivated students

One (7%) participant indicated being a part of groups outside of your country/island helps a little since most students want to do well and succeed in college.

*“Oh. The perception I had of college was like, the party life, you know. Nobody really focusing on their studies or their college and the different things. People, a different set of people have their own goals and are a part of their own group that achieves goals as well.”*

### Perception of self-growth

Two (14%) participants indicated at some point through their academic career they realized that the institution is preparing them for the future. They understood that it is their responsibility to learn all they can, in order to be successful in their careers. In addition, they shared their views

on the importance to earn an American education and what it means to obtain a college degree in order to take care of their family back in their home country.

*“I know your education take you around the world so my thing was that I had to go the college institution get an education, learn a lot so I could reach my goals and my dreams. That was my first intention, but you know going off to college, not even understand what's college all about. Realize as I now realize it's preparing you, preparing you for the, how can I say, the real life?”*

*“I thought it would be. I knew it would have challenges but I thought it \would have gone smoothly, I would have made friends. I would have worked hard and tried to finish and get that diploma, that degree.”*

### HBCU African American History

In addition, one (7%) participant shared they chose FMU because of the history and what it would mean to graduate from a HBCU. The participant also has family members who are alumni of the university, which made it even more special to attend a HBCU because it was the same institution.

*“Not that much but every time my sister would come home she would like you know tell me about it and this university has like a lot of background around like Martin Luther King time and like a lot of racial. I was just like okay you know it sounds awesome you know.”*

### More opportunities than my home country

One (7%) participant shared their perception for greater opportunities in education once they arrived at FMU. This included scholarships and additional financial resources that can support them while in the U.S.

*“I didn't really think much of it. I thought it would be a better education, and it will be more rounded than the education in*



*Jamaica, and I would have more opportunities. Interviewer: More opportunity is in what?*

*Dominic: As in internships and more resources on campus basically, like tutors, technology.”*

## Theme 2: Adjustments – Actual in college experience

This major theme emerged from the data analysis, which helped to capture a better understating of Caribbean students and their adjustment experiences. The sub-themes under adjustments emerged from the data and revealed key areas of the students' actual adjustment experiences at FMU. Specifically, interview question 7 prompted the participants to provide descriptions about their adjustments during college in the United States.

Table 3. Adjustments

Sub-themes	Theme Frequency	Percent	References
Adjustments			149
Experiences	14	100%	
Challenges	13	93%	84
<b>Academic College HBCU specific</b>	11	79%	29
Experience Challenge to balance workload/social life	3	21%	3
Experience Financial adjustment	3	21%	3
Residential Life	3	21%	3
<b>Cultural</b>	13	93%	41
Adjusting to HBCU all black students	1	7%	1
Adjustment to food	9	64%	9
Challenges adjusting to American culture	1	7%	4
Experience Positive social interactions across diverse groups	7	50%	10
Language and adjustments barriers	5	36%	6
Weather adjustments	5	36%	5
<b>Social</b>	7	50%	10
Peers negative	2	14%	3
Peers neutral	4	29%	6
<b>Awareness</b>	10	71%	65
Academic experience (positive)	2	14%	4

Adjustment College gives independence	1	7%	1
Positive Student Influence on school decisions	1	7%	1
Small school (size)	1	7%	1
<b>Cultural</b>	1	7%	3
Personal growth maturity	6	43%	15
Personal growth open mind to diversity	3	21%	3
<b>Social</b>	12	86%	25
Inspired to share experience with others	1	7%	1
Experience Relationships better with time	2	14%	2
Supportive faculty	4	29%	4

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The following responses were provided based on the inquiry about adjustments students made in their life as a result of attending FMU.

- Sub-themes of adjustments – cultural and social
  - Cultural
    - Adjustment to food (64%) (9 participants)
    - Personal growth maturity (43%) (6 participants)
    - Open mind to diversity (21%) (3 participants)
    - HBCU all black students (7%) (1 participant)
  - Social
    - Peers neutral (29%) (4 participants)
    - Supportive faculty (29%) (4 participants)
    - Experience relationships better with time (14%) (2 participants)
    - Peers negative (14%) (2 participants)
- Sub-themes of perceptions challenges – awareness & academic
  - Awareness
    - Positive student influence on social decisions (7%) (1 participant)
    - Small school size (7%) (1 participant)
  - Academic
    - Challenge to balance workload/social life (21%) (3 participants) Financial adjustment (21%) (3 participants)
    - Residential life (21%) (3 participants)

### Adjusting to food

Nine (64%) participants indicated food was and still is a challenge given that they are use to different foods in their home country. Nonetheless, they indicated that they are slowly adapting to American dishes.

*“The food, definitely. The food is a big adjustment. It doesn't have much taste. It's under cooked. It's awkward. Americans call healthy but it doesn't taste good. Home we're used to seasoned, big portioned meals.”*

*“Oh yeah food. The food's terrible. I'll be honest. I guess I'm just spoiled when it comes to food. In the Bahamas you really have like good food. Like greasy, hearty food. Like soul food is what it's called here.”*

### Personal growth maturity

Six (43%) participants indicated their personal growth and maturity since attending FMU. They also share other experiences of their cultural growth giving credit to their professors and peers.

*“Oh yeah like than rather going to a gym like before I've stopped going to a gym it was so hard to get to you where I have to go and now it's like literally a walking distance and I can just go every time I want to. I think that was it yeah I think that was it, it's really you know eating right and actually going to the gym because I'm doing amazing, I'm changing.”*

*“I've mostly just been paying for the things I need. I go for what I need instead of what I want, then I save for the other months. I do with what I have.”*

### Personal growth open mind to diversity

Three (21%) participants shared that they had an open mind not just to their American peers but also to the professors and staff as well. They also indicated that being at FMU helped them to adjust easier to different groups.

*“Because it's a culturally diverse university, a lot of cultures are here like, Jamaicans, Africans, Americans. The culture is very diverse so you're able to learn more about different types of people and how to work with them, how to deal with them. We learn a lot about the different cultures.”*

*“Socially, it's the same thing. You get to understand people and how they do things. It would impact different people on campus to understand how, what to say and what not to say to certain individuals because sometimes in their culture, it is seen as something bad or negative, which you might end up arguing or something. It's a learning experience.”*

### Peers neutral

Four (29%) participants indicated they had neutral feelings and did not have direct responses about their American peers. They expressed interest in getting to know their peers as time progress in their educational journey.

*“Firstly, I know I can say for sure, one thing I always remind myself is that all of us are here for the same reason. All of us want to get a diploma so all of us are putting in our hard work so we can get what we have to get.”*

### Supportive Faculty

Two (14%) participants shared their experiences about faculty members that supported them during their initial adjustment to the university. They indicated the classroom sizes were small enough to have one-on-one support from each professor they encountered.

*“Academic wise, not really. The teaching was somewhat the same. Teachers were very understanding, small classroom settings. It was good, academic wise it was very good.”*

### Academic college HBCU specific

Eleven (79%) participants shared their adjustments to living on campus and adjusting to different cultural backgrounds at FMU. In addition to campus adjustments, social, personal and educational changes also played some roles to participant’s adjustment.

*“The first adjustment, I learned how to live with different background of different people. The second adjustment was speaking so that others can understand me. ”*

*“One of the adjustments I made is to accept everyone not to judge in any different views because it's different nationalities here so we have to adjust the different styles, the different types of food even food. I'm getting used to it now. Different people and then the food is different and sharing stuff. I'm getting used to it now.”*

### Balancing workload/social life

Three (21%) participants indicated that they had challenges adjusting to social life on campus. The participants shared their experiences in managing academic life without the guidance of their parents, which made it even challenging as new students.

*“It was mostly in my second semester, I branched out and I started hanging out with more state-side students and we went all over the place.”*

*“Now you had to step it up and make sure that you stay on task to try to graduate. Plus work and take care of yourself, too. That's a big adjustment for a student, which I understand because in my undergrad I ended up coming off campus myself. That was another experience for me, too. I do understand somewhat along those lines of having to balance both work and school.”*

### Financial adjustment

Three (21%) participants shared they valued money in a different way prior to attending college. Working full-time and going to school is a challenge in itself and learning how to budget finances is a new task.

*“Another adjustment is starting to actually work instead of just going to school. I was going to high school around there, so I wasn't used to the whole work thing to have your own money.”*

### Residential life

Three (21%) participants indicated living in dorm rooms with their peers was challenging. They also expressed challenges mostly in personalities and cultural backgrounds while adjusting to new life on campus.

*“Living in the room, when I first got there I lived in a room with 3 other young ladies. That was very interesting. Different personalities and attitudes. Then I lived in a room with 1 other person so it was a little more decent, but*

*again, never had to share a room in my life so it was hard to adjust.”*

*“The housing system was a little not what I expected, but I adapted and I dealt with it. Because when I came up here the first time I was in one of the regular dorms for the Freshmen and I was uncomfortable with how it was set up because it was me and three other guys in one room. I'm seeing them everyday and when I open my eyes he's there watching me and it's like, "Ugh!" And then the bathroom situation was horrible as well, so that took a little adjustment because when I'm home it's not like that, everything is all me.”*

*“Okay, well right now I'm in the new dorms, which is for the higher class-men and this is more feasible for me, let me say it like that. Because it's just me and one other guy and we share our own bathroom but in the other old building it was, like they had the general bathroom for the whole wing, like the whole side, and I really didn't like that.”*

#### Adjusting to HBCU all black students

One (7%) participant shared their experience not only with Caribbean students but their American peers at FMU. They also expressed the openness of their American peers in wanting to get to know them, which made them feel comfortable.

*“I've met a lot of other students from the Caribbean and normally back home we don't really. You have a certain amount of friends that go from and stuff, but often it's Jamaican, West Indian, Antiguan. It was just a whole lot of Caribbean students attending that college. Everybody that was from the states, like in Florida and Chicago, they always wanted to hang out with the Caribbean people and I was like, "What? I thought it will be separate." But it was not. It was cool.”*



### Adjusting to American culture

One (7%) participant indicated the challenges faced when it comes to understating the American culture. One of the challenges identified was language, since they have an accent; it was hard for their American peers to understand them in conversations.

*“Well firstly, it's hard dealing with ... Let me not say that. It's hard to talk to American students, not because I have any problem with them, but mainly because they wouldn't understand what I would be saying.”*

### Positive social interactions across diverse groups

Seven (50%) participants shared their positive feelings of social interactions with their American peers from the inception of attending FMU. The participants shared great stories of connecting with new friends from different cultures, which helped to open their eyes to more diversity on campus.

*“I met my friends in sophomore year. When I went in my freshman year, and I was meeting friends, I don't think they were the right friends at the time, or I didn't know. Towards the end I started to meet senior friends actually in my major are older.”*

*“Because there's a lot of different cultures around and the only way you're really going to develop that social aspect is communicating. With everyone sticking to himself or herself and sticking within their culture you don't really have that mixture of culture so my social impact was by being more outgoing. Learning to step out of the circle like I said.”*

*“That impacted me too because I've realized that networking gets you really far. So I sort of broke out of my shy shell. I started talking to more people and I like meeting personalities and that stuff, so I'm a nice, friendly guy. And I found out I was friendly when I started opening up more and getting to know more people.”*

### Language and adjustment barriers

Five (36%) participants shared their struggles on adjusting to the American language, which caused cultural barriers in their initial experience at FMU. They also shared how some of these barriers over flowed in the classrooms during classes. As the participants continue to adjust, they share that the language barrier gets a bit easier.

*“The second adjustment was speaking so that others can understand me. Okay, so there was a language barrier?”*

*“Let me see... Well I had a little language situation due to the fact that sometimes I speak a little fast, a lot of people won't understand me, but I tried to break it down as slow as possible. It's hard to understand some times.”*

### Weather adjustments

Five (36%) participants indicated their adjustment to the weather in the United States. The weather in their home country is usually sunny all year round, however they continue to adjust to the different seasons living in America.

*“The weather in Miami it's on and off. It would rain one second and then thunder the next, then sunny right after. It's quite a big adjustment, about the weather.”*

*“Yeah. It wasn't a big adjustment for me. It's basically the same. A little bit colder at nights.”*

*“The weather, not much different. It gets much colder than the Bahamas, but I can deal with that.”*

### Peers negative

Two (14%) participants indicated the negative experiences faced among their American peers during their freshman year. They also indicated not all Americans students were negative because they have friends who are different.

*“Another thing was before in my freshman year I had American friends. It was difficult at first, but they didn't do anything to work the hardest because they have the most to lose. I'm not going to assume Americans are lazy because it's not true. It's just true at Memorial. You do have hard-working Americans in school at Memorial. It's just that the other students, they're just lazy, I think because they already get financial aid.”*

*“Stereotype is not always true. It just depends on the culture and on the environment you are in.”*

### Academic experience (positive)

Two (14%) participants shared their academic experience about being positive at FMU. They also shared that their American peers contributed to the positive experiences just as much as the faculty and staff.

*“I just really think they try to give other students knowledge about where they come from, their African decent, and stuff like that. It's knowledgeable.”*

*“I applaud everyone that comes to a university and I see a lot of hard working students here. They take a lot of time out to do what they have to do.”*

### Adjustment to college gives independence

One (14%) participant shared that their adjustment of independence started after they entered college at FMU. They credited time management as one of their biggest teachers in life, which helped them to focus more in class.

*“I also was a procrastinator doing homework as well as getting to my classes, so I had to learn some time management skills to allow me to pass those classes. It definitely gives you more freedom to do what you want and at your time. So that's definitely a plus.”*

### Positive student influence on school decisions

One (14%) participant shared that their positive experience came from their upbringing and great influences at Florida Memorial University, which helped them to make sound minded decisions.

*“Well lots of changes, my whole entire life basically. It made me realize that you know parents are important, I guess. My first year, you know as a college student everyone goes through that stage and I was like, you know what, you should never have to break away from your home training, you should always take your home training as long as you go so I have a better appreciation of where I was brought up.”*

### Small school-size

One (14%) participant shared their surprise about the size of the campus at FMU. They expected a larger campus like what they viewed on television from their home country.

*“I actually thought the campus was going to be a very big one. I love the fact that- Okay, I like the fact of how small it is but it's not too big. So when I have to go to class, I don't have to be travelling long or if I ever need anything it's right there.”*

### Inspired to share experience with others

One (7%) participant shared their excitement to share their cultural background with their American peers.

*“I met a lot of new friends just because I was from the Islands. They have this that they think that everybody comes from this one particular island which happens to be Jamaica. I have to tell them there's a difference between Jamaica and the British Virgin Islands and Bahamian.”*

### Relationships better over time

Two (14%) participants asserted they have to work with many students on class projects and over a period of time everyone seems to get along. At times the participants felt shy, however they continued to be themselves and their peers treated them just the same as any other student.

*“As far as people's reaction, I'm not too shy because I'm not one that actually hangs around with a lot of people, so if they had something to say, I wouldn't really know. But after that, they start to treat me just about the same as....”*

*“Of course I had class, and with classes of course you have to work with your peers. After working with them, your perceptions are usually just that, perceptions. It's not reality. After working with them and attending some functions with them, most people just get along with them.”*

**Theme 3: Cultural Adjustment Factors** – factors that helped/hindered cultural adjustment. The third major theme that emerged was the perception participants had of their cultural adjustment factors associated with attending a U.S. university and/or a HBCU. The sub-themes under cultural adjustment emerged from the data and revealed key areas of the students’ cultural adjustment experiences at FMU. Specifically interview questions 8, 9 and 10 prompted the participants to provide descriptions of their cultural adjustments experiences that lead to their educational success at FMU

Table 4. Cultural Adjustments

Sub-themes	Theme Frequency	Percent	References
Cultural Adjustments Factors	13	93%	59
Challenges	8	57%	28
<b>Adjusting to Others' cultures</b>	7	50%	7
Cultural differences separating people	12	86%	14
Perceived lack of home culture diversity	2	14%	7
<b>Awareness</b>	12	86%	31
Culturally accepting environment	9	64%	14
Cultural differences bring people together	6	43%	8
Family tight-knit atmosphere	2	14%	2
Focus on blacks Camaraderie amongst people of similar backgrounds	2	14%	2
Home-like environment	3	21%	4
Personal growth open-mind to diversity	5	36%	9

The following responses were provided based on the inquiry for factors that contribute to Caribbean student’s cultural adjustments.

- Sub-themes of cultural adjustment factors
  - Adjusting
    - Cultural differences can separate people (86%) (12 participants)
    - FMU culturally accepting environment (64%) (9 participants)
    - Perceived lack of home culture diversity (14%) (2 participants)
- Sub-themes of adjustment factors – awareness
  - Awareness
    - Cultural differences can bring people together (43%) (6 participants)
    - Personal growth open-mind to diversity (36%) (5 participants)
    - Home-like environment (21%) (3 participants)
    - Focus on blacks camaraderie amongst people of similar backgrounds (14%) (2 participants)

### Cultural differences separating people

Twelve (86%) participants shared their cultural difference can also separate people especially when they are in a new environment. The participants also shared that language is usually the biggest challenge that causes a barrier among students on their campus.

*“Well firstly, it's hard dealing with ... Let me not say that. It's hard to talk to American students, not because I have any problem with them, but mainly because they wouldn't understand what I would be saying.”*

*“Yeah so like in the cafeteria we have like all different types of cultures and you know the Blacks, you know Jamaicans and you know every other people they are just around. Then you see Hispanics in just like one table making like a rowdy like they are speaking Hispanic and everyone is just like oh wow but I wish they were more like out there like okay let them be with the Blacks, let them be. I feel like they are like just those are the only people you know.”*

*“I still, of course, talk to other people, and there are people that I wouldn't have to change how I talk for. They would understand, but the majority of the people who are not from the islands, I would have to always repeat myself or speak a little more proper, or articulate a little more at least.”*

### Culturally accepting environment

Nine (64%) participants shared their experiences of being in a new environment with hopes to being accepted at FMU. The students also shared interacting with other cultures over a period of time helped in building relationships.

*“Yeah and me I like to be everywhere like I'm friends with the Hispanics, I'm friends with my Black people, I'm friends with you know over here Hungarian and everything else.”*

*“Because there are a lot of different cultures around and the only way you're really going to develop that social aspect is communicating. With everyone sticking to himself or herself and sticking within their culture you don't really have that mixture of culture so my social impact was by being more outgoing. Learning to step out of the circle like I said.”*

### Perceived lack of home culture diversity

Two (14%) participants shared their perceived lack of home culture was challenging at first, however over time they found students from their home country which helped them to cope at FMU.

*“Yes. That's why normally most of the school doesn't know anything in the Caribbean besides the Virgin Islands.”*

*“I tried to get in to the other cultured, but I still have the Haitian culture in me. You have to go back to the. I've been here for one year. It's still ... I felt like. The food sometimes, the music ... it hasn't done anything much. I still feel like I miss the Haitian.”*



### Cultural differences bring people together

Six (43%) participants shared their thoughts of how being different has also helped to bring students with similar and separate cultures together. As a result of the constant communication they agreed that cultural differences could bring people together.

*“Yeah actually it turned out for the better because my accent actually brings more even communication because a lot of people, they don't get to hear accents like that.”*

*“I met a lot of new friends just because I was from the Islands. They have this that they think that everybody comes from this one particular island which happens to be Jamaica. I have to tell them there's a difference between Jamaica and Virgin Islands and the Bahamas.”*

*“Yes. We have all the different islands and then you have some people from the States and there were even a few people from France or Italy. One of the two. It was a lot. I didn't expect them to accept us the way that they did but they apparently love people from the Islands so that was cool*

### Personal growth open-mind to diversity

Five (36%) participants asserted their personal feelings about their growth process since attending FMU. Students indicated they would forever be grateful for the experience of this cultural journey.

*“I recommend anyone to go to college. Even if you're not that academically inclined, but you can make the minimum requirement if you can go to college, go to college. Just go to college is like because it teaches you, yes, your first thing is you come there for the education you're going to receive an education once you apply yourself. It's up to the student to see to his or her own education.”*

*“With that and then you just take the opportunities that college granted you. You see your emails, like some students don't check their student email, simple as just applying you can get a scholarship, you don't even have to do much but just apply. You want to go to New York, I went to Washington see a Washington University, I have no leadership position, no nothing, and this is my first year in college for \$50. All they say is you have to pay \$50 and we have to pay for our food, or whatever case there may be and I loved it.”*

### Adjusting to others' culture

Seven (50%) participants indicated having the freedom to express their cultural background is important for the adjustment process at FMU. Sharing their culture helped them to learn from other peers that have different cultural backgrounds, which helped them to adjust to others.

*“Tremendously. Firstly as relates to culture. Well brought up on the islands or whatever the Bahamas, I don't know American life. The only time I asked people from the Bahamas or we converse about America is when are we going to go and shop. Basically that's what everyone, oh we going to America to shop or whatever. Understanding the American way of life, it was different. It's law, I guess. They call it freedom over here, freedom or things you can do freely, and the rules that we were brought up in are not rules here, so it makes me, at first I wanted to take adventure on the free rules, but at the end of the day there was a reason I was brought up in that environment, so I can now understand the world. You adapt, not necessarily change who you are.”*

*“I find there's no culture here. It makes me, sometimes makes me home sick because there's no culture here. There's not a place I go to be around Caribbean people, where it's more understanding. Socially, as well.”*

### Home-like environment

Three (21%) participants shared no matter how far they traveled to the United States they wanted to choose a university that was close to their home country. Based on the countries identified in the study, geographically FMU is closest to their Caribbean island.

*“Well, when I was applying to colleges, I wanted to go somewhere which was in the United States but still close to the Caribbean. I didn't want to go too deep into the United States, so I was looking for schools in Florida.”*

*“Well I did initially apply to but then after I heard about this school, which is also close and basically the same, I applied here as well. And after I checked it out, it seemed like I would like it.”*

### Camaraderie amongst people of similar backgrounds

Two (14%) participants shared their thoughts of comfort at FMU, meaning having similar backgrounds with students from the same country gives a sense of comfort in their cultural adjustment.

*“I would say my friends also came from Jamaica also. That's another positive. The fact that you have a friend attending college in the U.S. is great.”*

**Theme 4: Educational Success Factors** – Factors that helped/hindered educational performance. The final major theme that emerged was the perception participants had of their educational success factors associated with attending a U.S. university and/or a HBCU. The sub-themes under educational success emerged from the data and revealed key areas of the students’ educational success factors at FMU. Specifically interview questions 8, 9 and 10 prompted the participants to provide descriptions of how their cultural adjustment experiences lead to their educational success at FMU.

Table 5. Educational Success Factors

Sub-themes	Theme Frequency	Percent	References
Educational Success Factors	14	100%	101
Challenges	3	21%	3
<b>Challenge being in a U.S. school</b>	1	7%	1
Challenge with different teaching styles	1	7%	1
Non-supportive professors	1	7%	1
<b>Awareness</b>	10	71%	98
Felt prepared because of island education	6	43%	6
Academics require hard work	7	50%	51
Learning to balance workload and social life	1	7%	1
Motivation first generation college student	1	7%	3
<b>Personal growth reflection maturity</b>	2	14%	5
Developing long-term plans	1	7%	1
Supportive peers	4	29%	7
Supportive professors	10	71%	17

The following responses were provided based on the inquiry regarding factors that attribute to Caribbean students’ educational success adjustment factors.

- Sub-themes of educational success factors – awareness
  - Awareness
    - Success requires hard work (50%) (7 participants)
    - Felt prepared because of island education (43%) (6 participants)

- Learning to balance workload (7%) (1 participant)
- Motivation first generation college student (7%) (1 participant)
- Sub-themes of success factors
  - Personal growth reflection maturity
    - Supportive professors (71%) (10 participants)
    - Supportive peers (29%) (4 participants)
    - Developing long-term plans (7%) (1 participant)

### Success requires hard work

Seven (50%) participants shared they have to work hard to be academically successful for the future. Several participants also indicated because of their hard work at FMU they are now on academic scholarships.

*“Why I say that is because if you go to class, you make the best out of it, you do your work, you're going to get good grades. If you do the opposite, you're going to expect bad grades. For me my current GP as a senior is a 3.67, and I'm involved in different organizations. For me I would be able to be involved academically and socially, and I maintain it, I have a good relationship with my professors. I think academically, it was good.”*

*“Well academically I do like it because in the first two weeks you think about different things and you'll be like okay, this is what I came to college for. Simple things like how to think critically.”*

*“None of the professors I had are like trying different ways of teaching. They opened my understanding to the whole part of science on a whole new level because in high school it was like the baby stuff it was nothing like how it is now for me. Teaching the concept, it was like; I had to adjust from not being in a Caribbean-based school, to being in a US-based school. And I had to adjust at first.”*

### Felt prepared because of island education

Six (43%) participants asserted their feelings of being prepared for their educational studies prior to coming to the United States to attend FMU. They also shared that they wanted to earn good grades and be successful in all they do with hopes for great jobs in the future.

*“I'm doing even better than high school. I believe high school prepared me, or the training I was brought up on academic schooling in the islands of the Bahamas, great.”*

*“It prepared me to handle stress when I need to handle stress, how the overload of work or when I'm not prepared to do something, or what I need to do. Let's say I have a test tomorrow or something like that I know what to do in that aspect. As relates to academic my GPA right now is 3.83.”*

*“Over here the professors give you a lot of chances. They give you their phone numbers, their office hours. They're on your back. They're telling you, "Hey, you can do this." Back home, you're kind of on your own. They try to prepare you to be independent. Back home, you have to ... if you don't get this done on your own you're not going to survive out there in the world. Where as, over here, it's much easier. There's no pressure. They tell you to come if you need help. I'm passing all my classes, it's pretty easy. I hope it stays that way this past...”*

#### Learning to balance academic workload and social life

One (7%) participant asserted they had to learn how to balance academic workload and social life. They admitted that the transition was challenging at first, however as time went on the process became a little easier.

*“Academic experience. It has been impactful because it taught me a lot just this last school year. If you don't know how to manage your time between academics and fun or whatever activities that you're doing, you will end up in problems when it comes to your classes and your grades.”*

#### Motivation of first generation college student

One (7%) participant asserted they were motivated to do well at FMU because they wanted to make their family back home proud. The participants felt extremely proud of what they are doing now knowing that it will profit them and their families in the long run.

*“My first year in college. My parents never went to college. For me to keep on living that is kind of hard, but that's my push as related to my academic that's what I'm doing it for. Yes you have your ups and downs where professors don't believe you, whatever the case may be or person give you a hard time. You just got to get it done.”*

### Supportive professors

Ten (71%) participants indicated their professors at FMU are supportive in their academic work, which pushed the students to work harder in class. They also indicated that the teaching styles are delivered clearly which makes learning much easier.

*“Okay. The classes are good because like I said, they are small. The professors are very helpful. If you need anything, they will assist you. Even if it seems like a silly question, you feel comfortable to ask it. The grades, so far I think I'm doing well, and I feel that is because of the discipline the professors make us have. Overall, the classroom and professor, again, are very good.”*

*“I am getting to know your teachers and your professors. When you talk to them, they would meet you and they could help you in any way they can. I learned they would help you to do better.”*

*“The plus side is the class size is small. You get to have a personal relationship with your professor. Some professors are unwilling to be helpful, but I'm not going to very helpful professors. We have professors that in the classroom, they're strict, but also in the classroom, they're a friend and a lending hand.”*

### Supportive peers

Four (29%) participants indicated they encountered supportive peers not just from their home country but their American peers as well. They also indicated meeting new peers helped them to form small groups and bring about a more cohesive learning environment on campus.

*“Well, that part I feel like I learned that we should get to form study groups with different people. Don't try to do it on your own. If you have homework or a test coming up, we would usually come together. We would study together because it's helpful. I should say, I am learning more facts and more English here.”*

*“I learned that we should form study groups and I realized that good study groups will help me more with my grades. I'm in the honors program. The first year I was struggling but then I got friends together and sharing ideas and the other children who had previously done the class.”*

*“Yes, at first it was a little hard, but I understand how we should practice together, we study together, form groups after class or before class. It helped me a lot.”*

#### Developing long-term plans

One (7%) participant shared the importance of developing long-term goals post graduating from FMU. The student indicated they wanted to get a master's degree and having long-term goals is essential.

*“When I came into the school, I was just coming straight to undergrad plan. As I went actually through my second year, I started to realize there has to be more than just undergrad because I'm just a biology major. Before I was like, “I'm going to be a biology major, and I'm just going to work.” Then I realized you need information that you can't just be a biology major. You have actually go to grad school or go to professional school. Throughout my freshman year and sophomore year my junior year, I've learned that I have to develop a plan, meaning a whole life goal plan.”*

#### Challenges being in a U.S. school



One (7%) participant asserted their challenge of being in a U.S. university, specifically a HBCU. For example, as a freshman they had to adjust to campus rules and were not sure if the same rules applied for a freshman American student given that they were Caribbean.

*“No, just the rules on the campus. And something I would view differently at our school is a lot of people do the things but they'll enforce in a certain group. So let's say like the freshmen will be the ones who will say, "okay, yeah you better not be doing this, you better not be doing that." But then you see the older ones; they eat, drink and shit. I'm in on the way out of this campus and they... simple things like that.”*

#### Challenges with different teaching styles

One (7%) participant shared their adjustment to the different pedagogy styles of the professors at FMU. They also shared forming study groups and personal relations with professors and peers have helped tremendously to learn in the classroom.

*“Simply because of the way we speak. We speak kind of broken down and having to speak to you now like this right now is a task in itself. I guess that's the main thing. Being able to speak to just about anyone and being able to be understood and to communicate, critically think on the spot.”*

#### Non-supportive professors

One (7%) participant shared their challenge with non-supportive professors and how that may have hindered their teaching styles to be effective for some students at FMU.

*“I have to be honest, there are some professors that act like because they went through a lot to get their degree that they have to talk down on others, who don't understand their teaching styles.”*

Overall, all of the participants agreed that each of them experienced some form of

acculturation in their journey at FMU. Their acculturation process occurred at different stages but they learned to adjust over a period of time. The students also agreed that FMU has supportive programs, faculty and administrators that helped them along the way which further motivated them to do well in all classes. Further findings of this study showed that international students from the Caribbean showed great signs of taking responsibility in helping to shape their own experiences despite the challenges faced. The four themes helped to capture the initial insights of each participant view related to their adjustment at FMU, however the sub-themes gives an in-depth understanding about the deeper issues and concerns of their actual college experience. In addition, results of this study should be taken into consideration by the administrators, faculty and staff at (FMU) to support this growing population in their adjustment process.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to align the themes developed in chapter four with the literature review. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the experiences of international students from the Caribbean at one liberal arts university. The study is appropriate as it examined Caribbean students' acculturation, perceptions (pre-college), adjustments (in-college actual experience), cultural adjustments (factors that help/hinder cultural adjustment) and educational success (factors that help/hinder academic performance). Leaders and faculty might be interested to know how international students from the Caribbean on their campuses adjust, and what challenges they face throughout the duration of their college journey. In order to facilitate a better understanding among leaders, faculty and staff, this study presents facts that may help to increase new programs and resources for this growing population. This chapter presents a discussion of the summary findings, discussion, implications for practice, implications for research and a conclusion.

#### *Research Study Problem and Questions*

Although we know that international students need support and that they may face barriers, there is very little understanding of what institutional officials are doing to address these problems. Since international students make up four percent of students in the U.S. (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014), it was important to understand their experiences so that institution officials can help them succeed. This study also highlighted factors contributing to international students' educational success and cultural adjustments. The following research questions were explored to address the research problem:

1. How do Caribbean undergraduate students perceive their adjustment to college in the United States?
2. To what factors do Caribbean undergraduate students attribute their educational success and cultural adjustment experiences?

### *Summary of Findings*

Florida Memorial University has successfully demonstrated institutional preparedness not just for students of color but international students from the Caribbean to assist them in their adjustment experiences. “First Year Experience” (FYE) is a required course that all students must take to help them reinforce their transition from high school to college. The program assists students in learning the history of the school, developing interpersonal skills and learning new skills that will prepare them for educational success. Some of the participants felt the course was helpful in helping them to adjust not only to a new country but to a new school as well.

Second, the data revealed that international students from the Caribbean played a key role in their own acculturation process. The students shared their interest in connecting with other international students as well as non-Caribbean students on their campus. In doing so, the adjustment process became a bit easier, which opened the door for initial friendships causing the long-term experience to be more meaningful. Some of the participants also shared that their American peers had a greater interest in their culture than they expected. As a result of this inquiry, Caribbean students felt even more comfortable to share past experiences prior to coming to the U.S. to pursue their college degree. deAraujo (2011) study corroborates the above findings signifying that students learn to adjust at a great pace once they feel comfortable in their new environment.

Third, the data revealed that Caribbean males assimilated easier than the female students in their new environment. In the initial recruitment process, I found that it was easier to speak to or connect with the Caribbean male. They were receptive to the idea of participating in the study and in fact, helped to recruit their peers they felt that would best fit the criteria for this study. The Caribbean females were more reserved initially, however as they gained a better understanding of what the study would entail, they subsequently agreed. Keep in mind the demographic profile for this study is 57% (8 females) and 43% (6 males); nonetheless this was all due to the Caribbean males recruiting their female friends to be a part of the study. In addition, it is important to note that participants in this study showed great signs of confidence which I believe can lead to acculturating not just among their own peers but non-Caribbean students as well.

### *Discussion*

#### *A Contrast between Acculturation and Culture Shock*

In this study, international students from the Caribbean were interviewed based on their experiences at one HBCU located in the southeast region of the United States. In chapter two of the literature review, acculturation and culture shock were used as a framework to examine future findings in this study. Acculturation in this study specifically addressed groups that come in contact with each other in a new environment. This term also looked at the cultural and psychological stages these groups may face. In addition, the stages are assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (Berry, 2005). Findings from this study suggested that participants assimilated slowly into their new culture at FMU.

Initially, students only participated in activities within their home culture, however after the first year of being in the environment, many students ventured out to participate in other cultural activities on campus. Berry's (2005) theory confirms the above transitions of groups and or

individuals in a new environment. His theory also suggested that all groups and/or individuals will experience the stages at some point in adapting to their new environment. Additionally, Berry's (2005) theory does not discuss differences by age or level of students. However, (Edward-Joseph, Baker & Stanley, 2012) suggested that students experience some forms of anxiety based on their grade level and the need to excel in a U.S. college and/or university. Hence, participant's interest to do well in college may differ from freshman to senior based on their transition and acculturation process.

Furthermore, the Caribbean students also shared that their American peers were more interested in learning about their culture than the Caribbean students were interested in learning about the American culture. The findings also highlighted that some students did not assimilate at all by choice. The next stage of acculturation is integration (Berry, 2005). This stage urges students to participate not only in their own cultural activities but to participate in the new culture as well. During the interviews, some participants indicated they felt more comfortable over time to learn about other cultures, since some of the same students were in their classes, lived in the same dorms and participated in many committees together. Participants also shared the friendships gained through participating in similar activities, which helped them to appreciate another culture outside of their own.

The third stage is separation. This stage suggested students maintain their Caribbean culture and not participate in a new culture. As mentioned above, there were some students during the interviews that chose not to integrate because they expressed reservations of losing their home culture. They felt that their American peers may not understand them culturally or socially, so they chose to cope with their new environment in the best way they knew how. At some point, I would hope that those students would incorporate the integration stage as part of

their journey. Berry's (2005) theory would say it is still up to the individual to play a role in their own acculturation process even if they chose not to participate in the new culture while learning to adjust. Finally is the marginalization stage, in which Berry (2005) describes both groups (in this study Caribbean and American students) as not interested in either culture. Fortunately, in this study Caribbean participants did not express such behavior nor was it reported during the interviews that their American peers were not interested in their culture. I would argue not every group experienced all stages throughout this journey in the acculturation process.

Culture shock is the opposite of acculturation in that it refers to the individual rather than the group. In the literature review, I used the models of culture shock termed by Oberg (1960). He argues that individuals who migrate from one culture to the other usually experience culture shock due to anxiety and other attributes that cause the changes. Culture shock has four stages: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adaptation (Oberg, 1960). In all fourteen interviews, participants expressed their excitement (honeymoon) in coming to America and attending an American university. They felt proud and aimed to take on their new journey by force, however in the assimilation stage students cautiously approached the journey and frankly had many fears of rejection and failure.

Second is the crisis stage (Oberg, 1960). This stage speaks to potential situations that individuals may face on their campuses. For example: language barriers, cultural adjustments, food, loneliness, etc. Individual's transition from excitement to panic mode in a matter of months causes mixed feelings of emotions. In the assimilation second stage, participants experienced integration and willingly participated in both cultural activities and events. In the culture shock stage, participants felt they had no time to adjust to the new environment, but rather they had to adapt the best they knew how to in the situation.

In the third stage recovery, (Oberg, 1960) individuals not only adapted but also coped with the situations at hand. Participants in the study shared their experiences of solving issues on their own or with their peers, faculty and staff. Unlike the acculturation stage, participants experienced the separation stage in groups instead of facing the challenges. Culture shock in this stage assisted students in understating their new culture and gives them the opportunity to experience greater things beyond their current situation. Participants also expressed the level of comfort and feeling a part of their environment.

The fourth and final stage of culture shock is adaptation (Oberg, 1960). This stage is when individuals have adapted and have moved to a place of owning the culture that they are in but not forgetting their home culture. Participants in this study expressed their thoughts of wanting to stay in American beyond graduation with hope to go on to graduate school or obtaining a job. Again, unlike the acculturation stage, in which participants would have nothing to do with other cultures, during the culture shock stage individuals have an easier process of transition. This is not suggesting that one is better than the other, however we are able to see the different stages each theory offers related to groups and/or individuals who transition to another country outside of their home country/culture.

Previous literature does not specify if acculturation or culture shock is more favorable for international students or international students from the Caribbean. In fact, not just these sub-groups but also all students at some point experience acculturation and culture shock, including American students. The literature also does not express or consider whether if across U.S. colleges and universities, (Oberg, 1960). These theories are truly applicable among HBCUs, PWIs and Christian private institutions. The literature is precise in capturing stages and experiences of both theories (Berry, 2005 & Oberg, 1960), which gives a great introduction to



this growing population and can certainly add more data to future writing in the higher education sector. Lastly, the data drawn from the analysis suggest that FMU supports Caribbean students through acculturation, which helped them to be successful in their experiences. The university has current programs, events, and activities that support this growing population of students. During the recruitment process at FMU, I had the opportunity to review and analyze written materials about programs and organizations on campus that supports international students from the Caribbean and non-Caribbean students with their educational experiences. They include but are not limited to: Caribbean International Student Association, Lion Country Peers Educators, Future Educator of America, etc. In addition, the university has well- equipped faculty and staff to serve the needs of each student with or without a Caribbean background. The institution has also responded to cultural changes and has demonstrated acceptance of different cultures on their campus (Villegas, 1991).

#### *Preparation of learning in different models*

The data analysis highlighted the preparedness students received prior to coming to the United States to attend FMU. They expressed their experiences relating to their British, Spanish, French and Dutch educational backgrounds and the confidence they felt toward embracing American teaching. Participants from countries like Jamaica and Nassau Bahamas represent countries that were colonized under the British government. They shared prior knowledge of advanced math, English and biology during their secondary level of learning. Some of the students had tutors and the support of parents that helped to guide their educational journey. Others expressed their eagerness to excel in class, which further helped them to grasp the materials even though it was challenging. Therefore, enrolling in required courses at FMU as a freshman to take some of the same classes became “redundant and boring.”

Subsequent, participants from the Dominican Republic represent colonization under the Spanish government. These students expressed their love of science, English and writing/grammar in high school. With English being their second language, students were permitted to speak only English in the classroom and Spanish on the playgrounds. Thus, enrolling in an English course at FMU was not as challenging since students had prior knowledge of the English language. They did express some challenges in learning new words or pronunciation, however writing/grammar was easier since students took part in classes every day during high school. The love of science was also mentioned, which this group of participants felt more prepared to enroll in science/lab courses at FMU. In addition, they shared their experiences in taking part of science fairs, the development of hands-on materials for projects and some exposure to the American current advanced placement system in the science arena.

The students from Haiti and Saint Maarten represent colonization under the French and Dutch governments. Participants from this group shared their prior learning experiences of biology, English and math. Particularly, English was very important since French is their first language. Students also expressed their training in biology courses, which prepared them for their major of interest at FMU. Upon enrolling in biology and chemistry courses, the students felt previous learning tools in their home country prepared them for the rigorous teaching and potential challenges at hand. In addition, students took classes in U.S. world history, which focused on the internal social, political and economic development of the United States. This class also helped to prepare their views and expectations of living in the United States.

The final group is from the British Virgin Islands, which represent colonization under the British government. Similar to Jamaica and Bahamas teachings, this group also participated in prior courses including math and English. In addition they expressed confidence in undertaking

the different pedagogy styles of their American professors. Overall the data analysis suggested that international students from the Caribbean have some level of academic preparedness from their home country and will easily adapt to or cope with new learning environments. Despite the many challenges students faced coming to United States to pursue their education, it is important that all students are equally prepared on the latter end in order to pursue future careers.

### *Implications for Practice*

In this study, one of several perceptions that were important to international students from the Caribbean is that of being on a campus that is culturally diverse. Participants were in agreement about the importance that all administrator, faculty and staff help to foster better relationships among international students and their American peers. One participant admits that the Caribbean association on their campus is mostly student run because of the interest of a particular group and or individual. Another participant explains that this sometime causes a division among social groups, which cause a cultural separation. Ideally, students would like to see a more uniformed presence of leaders on their campus taking the stand to encourage both American and non-American students to engage in social events outside of their cultural background.

Another perception is that participants in this study experienced instances of rejection by their professors and peers due to their heavy accents. One participant describes that her professor's neglectful behavior toward her made her feel as if she would never participate in class discussions. The participant also felt that this experience might have impacted her academic learning for future classes. As a result, I would challenge all administrators, faculty and staff at FMU to be more aware of their diverse student population prior to teaching the class and realize that they are highly influential to their student's educational success.

In the fall of 2014, FMU president, Dr. Roslyn Artis launched several initiatives that stemmed from a panel discussion (The State of the Florida HBCU: Pathway to Preeminence for Retention and Graduation in partnership with the United Negro College Fund) focused on retention and graduation among Black Colleges and Universities. One initiative is to implement a five-year strategic survey that encourages all students at FMU to share their thoughts and concerns related to the university's future. The school's second initiative is to partner with the Supporting and Empowering Educational and Developmental Services (SEED) School of Miami, the first college preparatory school, to encourage all students to be successful in their academic endeavors not just for college but in their future careers. This program also supports international and Caribbean students that choose FMU as their home institution. To date, faculty and staff have incorporated these initiatives through effective learning for students that are actively engaged in the learning process. They also found that by creating such an environment would allow students to enhance their learning experience while assisting them to acculturate and attain educational success.

### *Implications for Research*

The purpose of this study was to examine how international students' experiences might offer recommendations for campus initiatives and future policies to accommodate this growing population. Another focus was to corroborate previous findings and compare the impact of Caribbean students' experiences at one HBCU, their acculturation, their cultural adjustment, and their educational success. The findings from this study supported previous literature indicating that students acculturate at different levels and adjust differently than their non-Caribbean peers. In addition to reviewing the previous literature, the adjustment of international students in U.S. colleges and universities does not differ from Caribbean students. International students

experience different levels of adjustment based on their environment and they are not exempt from it but they do experience acculturation at some point in their transitional journey.

In addition, this study is significant because there is not a specific study that has investigated the correlation between a HBCU and the acculturation and adjustment experiences of international students from the Caribbean over a period of time. The study reinforces the importance of investigating diverse populations before attempting to categorize them into one or more groups. Current literature speaks to international students at large, however the literature never sub-categorize the different groups that make up the international population, as this study does with Caribbean students.

### *Recommendations for Policy*

Finally, FMU administrators and leaders should invest in resources to broadly focus their initiatives to improve the adjustment process for Caribbean students and the larger international population on their campus. This initiative should also include American students and other cultures that experience acculturation, culture shock, assimilation, etc. According to the authors referenced in this study, the literature support the findings related to acculturation and experiences of all groups and or individuals who come in contact with a new environment. Additionally, FMU should incorporate online-learning courses as an integrative way to assist students with networking across local campuses in the Florida area.

### *Conclusion*

Conducting this study was a personal journey for me. As a current student who was formerly educated under the British colony in South America, I often wondered if my experiences of acculturation and adjustment would be the same as the current participants in this study. This study is intended to provide insight not only for the leaders, faculty, and staff at

FMU, but for those at other HBCUs and non-HBCU institutions who continue to recruit and accept international students from the Caribbean to their campuses. The study is also intended for use as a referral tool for future researchers who intend to study this diverse population of students. It is my great hope that the American system will move from a state of ignorance into a stage of accepting all diverse groups, specifically Caribbean students. In conclusion, the study will give international students from the Caribbean a voice that is not expressed in current literature and will inform the reader about this growing population.

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APPENDIX A:  
IRB Approval Letter

APPENDIX B:  
Recruitment Flyer



# CARIBBEAN STUDENTS

Join us to be a part of an important research study. We need your opinions and feedback about your experiences such as adjustment to college life and culture shock issues in U.S. Universities.

We are seeking undergraduate students (male & female) between 18-24 years of age and self-identify as Caribbean born. The research activity will include an interview for 30-60 minutes for each participant.



Results from the research study will be used to help develop new programs and resources for future Caribbean students who choose to attend colleges in the U.S. The study will also involve a phone and or Skype interview (students please specify). The purpose of this study is to investigate the adjustment of international students from the Caribbean attending a liberal arts college in the southeast region of the United States. In addition, the study will look at the significant impact that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have on international students' from the Caribbean, acculturation process related to their academic and social adjustments in the United States.

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You will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation

If you are interested in participating or need more information please contact Tandeca King Gordon at 404-388-2128 or at [tandeca@uga.edu](mailto:tandeca@uga.edu)

APPENDIX C:  
Consent Letter

September, 2015

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Charles Knapp in the Department of Institute of Higher Education at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled “Caribbean Students’ Experiences at one HBCU: Implication of Acculturation Leading to Educational success for Undergraduate Students.” The purpose of this study is to investigate the adjustment of international students from the Caribbean attending a liberal arts college in the southeast region of the United States. In addition, the study will look at the significant impact that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have on international students’ from the Caribbean, acculturation process related to their academic and social adjustments in the United States. In this study, one HBCU will be the focus since international students from the Caribbean issues of adjustment and experiences will likely be different at a non-HBCU institution.

The participants must be between the ages of 18-24 and self-identify as international students from the Caribbean (male or female). The inclusion criteria are international students from the Caribbean. The exclusion criteria are excluding anyone over the age of 24.

Your participation will involve an interview of 10 to 13 questions by telephone or Skype and should only take about 30-60 minutes. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. *The researcher will (1) retain and analyze already collected data relating to the subject up to the time of subject withdrawal; or (2) honor a researcher subject’s request that the investigator destroy the subject’s data or that the investigator exclude the subject’s data from any analysis. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.*

All information collected will be kept confidential and only the researcher will have access to the data. The data will be secured on electronic files for safety. After, three to five years the data will be deleted from all files. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only.

The findings from this project may provide information on the experiences of international students from the Caribbean academic and social adjustments, acculturation and educational success. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. (Each participant will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the study).

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at 404-388-2128 or send an e-mail to [tandeca@uga.edu](mailto:tandeca@uga.edu). Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

By agreeing to the consent letter and answering all the interview questions, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Tandeca King Gordon

APPENDIX D:  
Interview Guide

1. How old are you?
2. What gender are you?
3. Which academic level are you?
4. In what country were you born?
  - a) Under what rule was your country colonized? (I.e. example; British, French, or Spanish, etc.)
  - b) Have you ever traveled or lived in the United States?
  - c) If so, how many times have you moved prior to coming to the United States
5. What factors led you to choose Florida Memorial University as your study institution?
6. Prior to traveling to the U.S. to pursue your studies, what were your perceptions of attending a U.S. university and/or a Historically Black College and University?
7. What adjustments have you made in your life as a result of attending this university?
8. Based on your experience thus far, what can you say about your academic experience at Florida Memorial University (i.e. classes, grades, etc.)?
9. Has your academic experience been impactful? If so, in what ways?
10. Have your cultural or social experience been impacted by attending Florida Memorial University? If so, in what ways?
11. How has your experience affected the way in which you view your peers at Florida Memorial University?
12. If you had to do it all over again, would you still have attended a Historically Black College and University? If not, why not?
13. What have been your most positive and negative experiences that you had at Florida Memorial University? Were they related to the fact that the school is a Historically Black College and University?

APPENDIX E:  
Data Saturation Round 1 of Data Analysis

## DATA SATURATION ROUND 1 OF DATA ANALYSIS

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
speaker	7	310	2.46
like	4	223	1.77
interviewer	11	208	1.65
okay	4	187	1.48
university	10	127	1.01
experience	10	110	0.87
really	6	104	0.83
florida	7	100	0.79
alfred	6	95	0.75
levise	6	93	0.74
memorial	8	93	0.74
know	4	90	0.71
hbcu	4	88	0.70
school	6	87	0.69
academic	8	85	0.67
dawson	6	85	0.67
different	9	85	0.67
inaudible	9	85	0.67
people	6	83	0.66
just	4	81	0.64



APPENDIX F:  
Data Saturation Round 2 of Data Analysis

## DATA SATURATION ROUND 2 OF DATA ANALYS

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
okay		4	3342.32
speaker		7	3282.27
like		4	2521.75
know		4	1801.25
inaudible		9	1581.10
university		10	1511.05
just		4	1390.96
interviewer		11	1330.92
yeah		4	1250.87
experience		10	1170.81
justin		6	1160.80
female		6	1140.79
researcher		10	1140.79
study		5	1060.73
hbcu		4	1040.72
academic		8	1010.70
florida		7	990.69
johnson		7	990.69
memorial		8	990.69
school		6	970.67