Exploring the Continuity of Experiences Within Ghanaian International Students' Voiced Narratives

Jocelyn R. Amevuov

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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EXPLORING THE CONTINUITY OF EXPERIENCES WITHIN GHANAIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ VOICED NARRATIVES

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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May 2014
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Considering the limited amount of research regarding Ghanaian international students studying in the U.S., this thesis examines the experiential, voiced narratives of four Ghanaians who studied or have studied at a United States university. By using a narrative inquiry, the study looked into the experiences of the participants prior to, during, and after studying at the U.S. university in order to uncover the continuity of the participants’ experiments. Each of the participants’ narratives are looked at and analyzed separately in Chapter Four while in Chapter Five, common themes across cases are looked at. The specific themes found are: Experiencing others’ ignorance about Ghana and Africa, influence of experts in communities of practice, accent and identity, and financial challenges. Recommendations for teachers as well as international student officers are provided considering the powerful experiences of the participants.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

Zechariah 4:6B

There is really nothing special or strong about me. Thus, on my own I could not have conducted this research or written this thesis. Lord, You have strengthened me and given me grace for Your glory, and all the glory of this thesis goes to you.

I believe that the Lord placed very amazing people in my life in order to help me achieve this task. First is Dr. Gloria Park, who has been a door opener for me in so many ways. She heard my needs and worked with me to find solutions. She not only taught me about humanizing pedagogy, she exemplified it. I am forever thankful to Dr. Park for making this program and this thesis a force to advocate for a better world.

I am also so thankful to my committee members, Dr. Hanauer and Dr. Sitler. Dr. Hanauer was a part of my thesis from the beginning, and he did his best to make it better through stimulating questions and conversations. Many times my interactions with Dr. Hanauer reminded me of the proverb “What an elder can see sitting down, a young man cannot see from atop a tree.” I am so thankful to have such an experienced researcher on my committee.

Dr. Sitler has been a constant support, starting from my first research writing experience in ENGL 202. Her support even extended to the point that she agreed to be a reader on my committee when she had no obligation to do so since she is not a faculty member of the MATESOL Program. I feel so grateful for the potential that Dr. Sitler saw in me throughout the years and for the doors she opened for me to act as an instructional associate and to work in the writing center. She has been a very strong and positive
influence throughout my academic journey.

To my cohort, I am so thankful for each of you. Each of you has touched me in a very special way, and I count it as my honor to have embarked on this journey with you and to call you each friend. Thank you for taking this journey with me.

Specifically, I would like to personally thank just a few friends. Tati—you have always made me laugh and smile and reminded me that I should not take circumstances around me too seriously. Wenxi—your kind and sensitive heart has really touched me and reminded me of the importance of being kind. Adelay—you have been a sister to me. Our discussions have helped me understand how I view the world as well as how I need to improve as a person. When I have needed a friend, you have been there. Whether it was about my thesis or about other aspects of my life, you have listened to me, advised me, and prayed for me. I love you.

To Gramma, no one will ever know how much you have helped and supported me. On days where I was too exhausted to move, you gave me food to eat and tea to drink. You took me out when I needed to get out of the house, and you stayed out of my way when you knew I needed some time alone. You even let me drive your car to school. Throughout this thesis, you have continually come to my room to check on me and listened to me as I complained about my struggles and rejoiced about my victories. You have put up with a lot from me, and I am so thankful that God gave me such a gracious Gramma who is willing to lend a helping hand.

To Aunt Deb, you have made me laugh when I really needed to laugh. Your phone calls and support have been so important to me. Your love has been constant, and you have gone way out of your way for me, while your own successes in life have been
an example to me that women can go far in the world.

To Mom, there are very few words I can use to express your role in my life. You instilled in me the importance of academia, and you always made me feel smart. Your encouragement has instilled in me great self-esteem while your willingness to let me see your own struggles has made me a more sensitive and understanding person.

All three of you women, Mom, Gramma, and Aunt Deb, have largely influenced the woman I am today. Any success I have is largely due to the sacrifices you all have made for me and the prayers you all have prayed for me. Love yinz!

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my participants. Without their willingness to tell me their voiced narratives, I would not have had any narratives to share. Participants, you are my inspiration, and this thesis is dedicated to you.

To my husband, you are also my inspiration. You inspired this thesis just as you inspire me to be the best version of myself. You are so right: books are not the only way to gain knowledge. In many ways, you are my book. You have given me so much knowledge by teaching me how to cook (or at least tried to), how to watch my finances, how to take care of the car, the importance of a healthy body and a clean room, but most importantly, you have taught me about how loving and life-giving our God is. Not a day goes by that I don’t count myself as blessed to know you as I do. I can’t put into words how much I love our life together, but maybe this will help you understand what I mean: *Our house is a very, very, very fine house, with two cats in the yard. Life used to be so hard. Now everything is easy because of you...*

Finally, I would like to once again acknowledge God’s hand in this thesis. I wrote a list of all the things my husband and I were waiting on God for. Two of the big
ones relating to my life involved finishing my education debt-free while another was that we would finally be able to have a baby. With this last semester, the answers to those two prayers were manifested. In the end, all the glory goes back to God.
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PROLOGUE

[During my national service] I went to a village, and I saw how the girls were managing and the little stuff, and I don’t even know what is it, like they were making it day to day. I don’t know how to explain this, but they have just like a little stuff, but they participated in everything we were doing and they were trying to better their lives even though they didn’t have much. So I was like, if these girls who comes from nothing and have a vision, then...if I put my mind to it, I should be able to do it. (Maame, August 2013, lines 34-40)

Living in New York it’s like where I was living it was like a battlefield where there was, it was just a one bedroom apartment with about eight guys in the room, and it was really difficult, you know, you were sharing actually one bedroom apartment with eight guys, and you go to work and come back and the place is all like crowded and there’s no room to do anything, and all you have to do is just go to sleep, and wake up the next morning and go to work. So, it was kind of tough, you know, it made me stronger. It actually made me stronger, so, with that experience, bringing that experience to Pennsylvania, it kind of made me stronger. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 131-139)

I remember one of the things, [my mom] told us that there would be a time when all of us, including her, are going to be in school, and that brought me, when I was in my final year in college, she had gained admission to college, and all of my siblings, as of that time, we were all, some were in high school, and two others were in college, and I was like, come on where did this woman dream, like,
anything’s possible, but I think that drive is really something that I inherited from my mom and it’s kept me going. (Yaw, August 2013, lines 157-163)

People who are here don’t want to give people back home the perception that life is hard here, with Facebook and all of that, they put nice pictures and nice stuff...And then my friends say you never know, because we are very superstitious, you never know whose star might shine, so you don’t tell someone here is stressful. So let him come. Maybe his star will shine. (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 608-609; 611-613)

During my defense, I was asked whether it was my participants who were optimistic or myself. From the quotes above, I would say that I am not sure if optimistic is the word I would give to my participants. Rather, I would call them strong and resilient. Each of them has faced real struggle or witnessed someone else’s struggle, which makes their optimism more than just a fantastical “hope”. Rather, their optimism comes from their belief in hard work in that they believe that they can create their own successes and breakthroughs via hard work. For that reason, when they see someone who, in the midst of challenges, is still working hard to be the best, they use that as an example, a motivation to do their best, as Maame and Yaw pointed out. Then, when it is they who go through the struggle, they don’t downplay that struggle to themselves through false optimism. Selasie did not downplay how hard it was living in New York; rather, he described it as like living in a battlefield. However, in general, they do try to grow from those challenges and become stronger instead of complaining or giving up. Then, in the end, instead of telling their friends and family how terrible their experiences were, as Kwesi explained, they rather allow others to go and live their own experiences
because they do not know who will or will not be successful. Such resilience may seem like a cliché or even an over-simplification of the circumstances; however, I believe that the ability to work hard and achieve something in the midst of great tragedy, disillusionment, and deferred hope is one part of the Ghanaian spirit that my participants have demonstrated throughout this study.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

My Narrative

It was a chilly September morning. I arrived at the campus early in order to get a good parking space, and walked to the library to wait. To my dismay, the library doors were locked, so I took my place among all the other early risers waiting for the doors to open. I had not been there long when I noticed a guy walking up the library pathway. He stood near me.

“Do you have a pen, please?” he asked me.

I provided him with a pen, and we engaged in some small talk.

“Where are you from?” I asked him.

“I’m from Ghana.”

Ghana, I thought to myself. Where is Ghana? South America? Somewhere else? How do you even spell that? What do you even call someone from Ghana? Ghana-nese?

That was the first time I spoke with a Ghanaian, and my subsequent relationship with him opened many doors for me into the Ghanaian community, including leading me to meet my Ghanaian husband. However, before any of that could happen, I had to go home and Google where Ghana was on the map.

Background on Ghana

Considering how little is typically known about Ghana and the immigration process, background on these two topics will first be provided before delving into this particular study.
The Republic of Ghana is a country located on the west coast of Sub-Saharan Africa. It borders Togo, Cote D’Ivoire, and Burkina Faso (see fig. 1). It was colonized by the British and continues to have a “mixed system of English common law and customary law” (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.). Also as a result of its history with England, English is the official language in Ghana (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.).


**Background on Immigration**

Before a Ghanaian international student can board a plane to come to the U.S., they must first obtain a visa. Most international students apply for an F-1 or J-1 student visa. The difference between the two visas is that an F-1 visa is for students who wish to study in the U.S. full-time at an accredited college, university, or other academic institution (USCIS, 2013) whereas a J-1 visa “is for educational and cultural exchange programs” (USCIS, 2012). These visas restrict them in terms of where and how much they can work legally. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (2011) website:
F-1 students may not work off-campus during the first academic year, but may accept on-campus employment subject to certain conditions and restrictions.

There are various programs available for F-1 students to seek off-campus employment, after the first academic year. F-1 students may engage in three types of off-campus employment, after they have been studying for one academic year. These three types of employment are:

- Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- Optional Practical Training (OPT) (pre-completion or post completion)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Optional Practical Training Extension (OPT)

On the other hand, a J-1 visa holders are subject to the terms of the exchange program they are working or studying through (USCIS, 2009). Therefore, the restrictions on their visas vary depending on the exchange program.

Regarding the visa restrictions, if students go to school and work within their limits, there is no problem. They are considered a “lawful presence” (Visapro Immigration Attorneys, n.d.). However, students may fall out-of-status under a number of circumstances. Visapro Immigration Attorneys (n.d.) explains:

Out of Status means that you have violated the terms of your ‘Lawful Status’ in some way. Each status comes with a bundle or rights, or activities that you are allowed to participate in. Examples of activities that will leave the foreign national out-of-status: working without authorization, a fiancé(e) who [does] not marry the U.S. citizen who petitioned him or her for K-1 fiancé visa, student not
going to the school which issued him or her their 1-20, and conviction of a serious crime.

Therefore, even after obtaining their visas and flying to the U.S., the students must continue to operate under the restraints of their visas. For most students, this involves going to school and working within the restraints of their visas. With this background information that situates the focal participants’ contextual background in mind, I now turn to the statement of the problem.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the Open Doors Report, there were 2,769 Ghanaian international students in the United States as of 2011/2012. At the university where the participants of the present study came from, Western Pennsylvania University¹ (WPU), there were nine Ghanaian students of those 2,769 Ghanaian international students in the U.S. These numbers reveal just how small the Ghanaian international student population is in the U.S. as a whole and within universities like the one in which this study is situated. With such a small population, it is easy for Ghanaian international students to fall under the radar in the literature as well as in the actual institutions themselves. Just as Essandoh (1995) asserted that few studies have looked at African international students or their unique needs in higher education, even fewer studies have looked at Ghanaian international students, who also have specific needs and experiences that need to be uncovered. Thus, there is a need to research about Ghanaians studying in the U.S.

Although limited, there are some studies that focus on Ghanaian international students studying in the U.S. There are two that were found that appear to be related to

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¹ All names of participants and institutions are pseudonyms.
² In the Ghanaian community, fees refer to tuition, fees, and other expenses associated with being a student. This thesis adopts this term because it is a part of their language.
the topic of this study. Ofori-Attah’s (1995) dissertation found that many of the Ghanaians students who responded to his study’s survey came from affluent, urban homes from the Middle Belt and Southern areas of Ghana. Furthermore, it also found that Ghanaian female students, as compared to Ghanaian male students, came from higher socioeconomical backgrounds, though the male students had more diverse social backgrounds than the female students. Ofori-Attah’s (1995) findings are significant because they reveal that, as Vandrick (2011) and Park (2013) stated, the Ghanaian students studying in the U.S. may come with a certain amount of privilege that affords them the opportunity to not only study in higher education, but to do so outside of their home country. However, Ofori-Attah’s study is dated and a new study needs to be conducted in order to find out if the Ghanaian international students still have the amount of privilege that they had in when Ofori-Attah’s study was conducted.

The second study is a very compelling dissertation that explored the attitudes of Ghanaian international students studying in the U.S. The study was done by Fischer (2012) and investigated the attitudes of Ghanaian international students before and after migrating to the United States. Interestingly, it found that the students had a generally positive perspective before migrating to the U.S. Fischer (2012) discussed why this might be when she mentioned that many students migrate because they perceive that life will be better for them somewhere else. Her participants further supported this in their interviews. For instance, several of her participants said that they expected their experiences in the U.S. to be good because the U.S. was more developed than Ghana in terms of infrastructure (Fischer, 2012). The participants also showed a desire to meet new people.
However, after their first semester, many of the students’ attitudes changed. Some found the informality of the American culture stressful while others felt that the culture was too individualistic, leaving them to fend for themselves (Fischer, 2012). For one participant, this was further complicated by the racism they witnessed in the U.S. because, in that participant’s example, when she sat on a bus, no one wanted to sit beside her because she is black, therefore that participant felt very alone (Fischer, 2012). This is reminiscent of Park’s (2013) study because it also supports the idea that students can be marginalized because of their race in one context whereas they may not have been marginalized for their race in their home context. Despite Fischer’s (2012) similarity in population and the fact that it was conducted just a year before the current study, it is still important to uncover the similarities and differences of the participants’ experiences between the two studies in order to continue adding to and collaborating knowledge gained about Ghanaian international students and their experiences. Therefore, more research is needed regarding Ghanaian international students in the U.S.

**Research Question**

In order to research the continuity of Ghanaian international students’ experiences in the U.S., I ask the following research question:

What are the experiences of Ghanaian international students leading up to, during, and after attending a U.S. university?

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is largely related to the need for more research about Ghanaian international students’ experiences in the U.S. This study is an answer to that need in that it looks at Ghanaian international students who are studying or have
studied at Western Pennsylvania University (WPU). Although other studies have been conducted about Ghanaian international students in the U.S. (i.e. Ofori-Attah, 1995; Fischer, 2012) those studies did not look deeply into the narratives of the participants prior to, during, and after their educational experiences. Thus, this study adds to the scant literature related to Ghanaian international students while also looking at the continuity of their experiences related to becoming international students in the U.S. Finally, this study raises awareness about the need for faculty and staff alike to know about students’ backgrounds and lived experiences.

**Organization of the Thesis Chapters**

This thesis is organized in the following way. First, literature is presented in Chapter Two. The literature review is divided into three main sections. The first is a short introduction to Dewey’s (1938/1963) book *Experience and Education* and its relevance to the study. Next, studies related to international students’ experiences are discussed. Finally, literature regarding Ghanaian international students in the U.S. is presented, which leads to the gap in the literature.

In the third chapter, the methodology is presented. A justification for the use of narrative inquiry is provided. In addition, participant recruiting methods and data collection methods are described. Then, the participants are briefly introduced.

The fourth chapter presents the results of each participant as a case. Each participant’s experiential narrative is presented individually along with a short analysis at the end of each narrative. The purpose of presenting the findings this way is to provide a view of the diversity of experiences within the Ghanaian international student community.
In order to reveal themes that can be investigated with larger populations in the future, themes obtained from the experiential narratives are analyzed in Chapter Five as a discussion. The main themes that will be analyzed are: experiencing others’ ignorance about Ghana and Africa, influence of experts in communities of practice, challenges with accent, and financial challenges. After discussing the themes, implications of the study and recommendations are provided.

It is important to note that parts of my own narrative are presented in each chapter in order to show my own experiences within this community. My hope is that, by presenting sections of my narrative, readers will be able to situate me, as the researcher and writer, within this study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Moment of Initiation into the Community

*Oh beautiful raw umber colored soup

*With your flecks of bright red pepper

*And your flavors

*Of ginger, tomatoes, and groundnuts

*You make us one

*Through a singular bowl.

I wrote the above poem about the first time I ate groundnut soup during a small dinner party a Ghanaian friend invited me to. Everyone sat in groups of three or four, surrounding a large bowl filled with soup. Each of us were to take a piece of rice ball and dip it into the soup. Although I could never get the technique down for how to use the rice ball as a spoon, it didn’t matter. I had already triumphed. I could eat from the community bowl. I was a part of the community.

Dinner parties like these gave me access to the stories of the Ghanaian community at my campus. Listening to those stories, I was surprised about the experiences my Ghanaian friends had while studying in the U.S. Their experiences included worrying about how to pay their fees\(^2\), answering presumptuous questions about their homelands, and trying to understand cultural aspects of the U.S. that they were unfamiliar with. Even within those shared experiences, however, each one had a different story, a different way they arrived at the point they were. Their conversations about their experiences inspired

\(^2\) In the Ghanaian community, fees refer to tuition, fees, and other expenses associated with being a student. This thesis adopts this term because it is a part of their language.
the question: What are the experiences of Ghanaian international students leading up to, during, and after attending a U.S. university?

This chapter provides the foundation for answering the research question by providing an overview of the literature related to the topic. First, the importance of incorporating experiences in education is discussed. Then, the experiences of international students and, more specifically, Ghanaian students will be looked at. Although the research question is geared toward Ghanaian international students, there is a limited amount of literature regarding this population in the United States. Therefore, the experiences of the broader international student population will be looked at first. Even within those populations, I primarily used those studies of international students that included African students in their methodologies. After providing an overview of the literature pertaining to international students’ experiences while studying in the U.S., this chapter focuses on the literature specifically concerning Ghanaian international students before delving into the methodology in Chapter Three.

Although this chapter groups populations, such as international students, African international students, and Ghanaian international students, it is important to note that the literature from these groups is not meant to be generalizable. As McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) noted, people who are categorized within the same group are often essentialized within the group. They explain, “For example, women are emotional, educated people are tolerant, and gang members are violent. These essentialist attributions ignore the vast differences in the social worlds that these people occupy” (p. 415). Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is not to essentialize that all international students have these experiences, but rather to look at the experiences that have been
noted in previous studies in order to see if their findings are collaborated by the present study.

**Experience and Education**

Dewey (1938/1963) wrote *Experience and Education* as a call to value the experiences of students, whether those experiences happened before or during their educational journey. Dewey’s recommendation to consider all of the students’ experiences is important to this study because this study also relies on the idea that “Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 27). This belief emphasizes the need to understand and know the experiences of the students because their previous life events influence how they will experience school. Likewise, their experiences in school will affect their experiences after school. Regarding this idea, Dewey (1938/1963) described:

> there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end. (p. 37)

This idea is further supported by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who stressed the importance of looking at the past, present, and future spaces when using a narrative inquiry because all the spaces are interrelated. As a result of the continuity and cause and effect relationship of experiences, some experiences prior to the participants coming to school will be looked at in this study.
There is another reason why this study places so much emphasis on experiences in that the cause and effect relationship does not only impact the person who has the experience, but others as well. Dewey (1938/1963) explained how experience does not just affect the person directly involved in the experience, but impacts the lives of others. In other words, choices made based on past experiences may have far reaching impacts in the world. The wide effects of experiences make them even more important to study because they create a broader picture of how the choices individuals made based on their past experiences impact others. A study conducted by Trice and Yoo (2007) provides an example of the far-reaching effects of experiences.

Interested in how international graduate students perceived their academic experiences, Trice and Yoo (2007) conducted a quantitative study in which they mailed questionnaires to 497 international graduate students studying at an American institution. These students were from East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Oceania, Canada, and Africa, with only two percent of the study’s population being from Africa. The authors found that only 32% of the participants planned to return home immediately after finishing school. Another finding was that the participants were concerned about how relevant their studies overseas were to the work they would do in their home contexts. In conjunction with this, Trice and Yoo (2007) discovered that more students felt prepared to work in the U.S. than back home, which indicated that they did not feel their educational experiences in the U.S. adequately prepared them to work in their countries. It also indicated that those students who felt less prepared to work in their home contexts were less likely to return home after graduating. This is an important finding because it reveals how the
experiences of the students within their classes and their institutions may impact life
decisions, like whether they will return to their homelands to work or not. Deciding
whether to go back to their home countries or not does not just affect the student,
however. Their home context is also impacted because a number of their students are
choosing not to return home, which means that the home context is losing the expertise
and training of those students, leading to brain drain. Considering how important
experiences are both to the student and to the broader population, the following section
focuses on the experiences of international students in the U.S.

**International Student Experiences in the U.S.**

Since the literature specifically regarding Ghanaian international students is
limited, the experiences of the international student population as a whole is looked at
first. Once again, the purpose of looking at the literature regarding international student
experience is not to generalize international experiences in the U.S., but rather to provide
some background information about what literature has found regarding some
international students’ experiences. Most of the studies used in this literature review did
specify that they had either Ghanaian participants or participants from other African
countries within their population sample. Within these articles regarding international
students, several themes were found, including the daily challenges that international
students face, perception and struggles associated with racial identity, English proficiency
challenges, and the importance and challenges related to social interaction.

**Daily Challenges**

The daily challenges of international students was one of the first themes to arise
out of the literature. Daily challenges in this literature review refers to the difficulties
that international students face in meeting their everyday needs, such as housing, food, transportation, and coping with the educational and governmental regulations. The oldest study found that revealed the daily challenges of African international students was Adelegan and Parks’ (1985) study about African students’ adaptation to American society. The quantitative study surveyed 33 African students, including students from West Africa. The study found that the participants had social, food, transportation, and loneliness challenges. This study is important because it reveals the everyday challenges of African students, like finding and using transportation and accessing food that they like. However, since the study is so old and the sample was so small, it is important to conduct additional studies in order to see if these challenges are still common for certain African international student populations, like Ghanaian international students.

Wang’s (2007) findings were similar to Adelegan and Parks’ (1985) findings, except that Wang focused on the broader international student population. Wang (2007) asserted that some of the keys to an international student’s success include coping with the government regulations, finding a place to live, accessing registration services, and finding food, along with socializing with Americans and adjusting to the social and cultural differences. In comparison to Adelegan and Parks’ (1985) findings, Wang’s (2007) findings unveil newer struggles related to the immigration process, like government regulations. Understanding the importance of knowing how to navigate the government regulations and knowing how to register, Wang (2007) focused on the relationship between the international students and the International Service Student Office. In order to research this area, Wang (2007) sent out surveys to 228 potential participants, of which 190 were returned by both undergraduate and graduate students.
studying in New York from 45 countries, including Ghana. In terms of findings relating to difficulties with daily life, Wang (2007) revealed:

64.7 percent of the international students faced little difficulty in their daily life, whereas 22.1 percent found it moderately difficult. The remaining 13.2 percent found daily life extremely difficult. Apart from communication difficulties, food, weather, and technological adaptation were added factors in presenting these day-to-day difficulties. (p. 84)

This finding could be considered contradictory to the other findings because it shows that the majority of international students surveyed did not have moderate difficulties relating to their daily lives. Although 22.1 percent is relatively not a large number, the study lacks information about what exactly made it difficult for them in their day-to-day lives. The current study attempts to overcome this limitation by allowing the participants to discuss what challenges they considered most difficult in their day-to-day lives.

Like Wang (2007), Essandoh (1995) also asserted that one of the challenges of African international students is immigration-related issues that impact their ability to meet their daily needs. However, he added to the knowledge provided by Wang’s (2007) study by revealing issues related to finances. Pedersen (1991) explained that most international students receive financial aid from the government, their family, or a foreign sponsor. Essandoh (1995) pointed out why these options might not apply to African international students. He set up the problem related to finances by explaining that most African governments do not have the resources to support their students abroad, thus they only aid those students in select fields. This may leave African international students relying on their family. However, as Essandoh (1995) pointed out, family members in
the students’ home countries often expect to be financially supported by the students, not the other way around. Sam, Boateng, and Oppong-Boakye (2013) supported this by explaining that many Africans who migrate send support to people both related and unrelated to them through remittances.

The expectation of those back home that their relations abroad can provide for them could largely be a result of some Africans telling those back home how great life is in the United States and not discussing the negative and challenging aspects of life in the U.S., thus perpetuating the perception that the U.S. is a very wealthy place. Therefore, in some cases, both students and their family members may be under the false assumption that it will be easy to access financial resources in the U.S. The wrong perceptions may be further perpetuated as students provide positive descriptions of the U.S. that may result in less financial support from their families (Essandoh, 1995). Furthermore, because they are given F-1 student visas, they are limited to working on campus and they can only work a certain number of hours on campus during a semester (Essandoh, 1995). All of these complications regarding immigration and family obligations result in the students struggling to pay even for their most basic needs, such as housing or food (Essandoh, 1995). Sam, Boateng, and Oppong-Boakye’s (2013) and Essandoh’s (1995) assertion that family members in African countries are often unable or unwilling to help their relatives studying abroad leads to questions as to how students could even come to study in the U.S. in the first place, if no one helped them financially. Such questions will be looked at in the present study by looking at the experiences of the participants leading up to as well as during and after studying in the U.S. Furthermore, both of these studies grouped African international students as if they were one; however, just because they
found some African students with these experiences does not mean that all African international students, including those in the present study, will have had those experiences.

**Race**

The challenges experienced by African international students are not limited to monetary and immigration problems, however. As is clear in the following section, Black African students coming from countries like Ghana are also confronted with racial experiences that they may not have previously had in their home contexts where their racial identity makes up the majority of the population. Njubi (2002) paints a very real picture of some of the experiences Africans may face in their day-to-day lives as they interact with those in the community they migrate to. He wrote,

> What exactly does it mean to be an "African" in Europe or America? One quickly learns that the answer is not pretty. It is written in the faces of obnoxious waitresses, the teacher who slams the door of opportunity, the policeman who treats you like a criminal. It is reflected in the floods of negative media images that poison people's minds with racist stereotypes. (p. 5)

Njubi’s (2002) quote reveals the struggle that some Africans have when they migrate to the U.S. because of their race.

Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) looked at racial identity as well as perceptions of American ideals of African American and African students studying in the U.S. They conducted a quantitative study in which they surveyed 113 Black American and 93 Black African U.S. college students through a questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed racial identity, perceptions of American ideals, and self-esteem. The finding specifically
regarding black African students was that the longer the students stayed in the U.S., the more they emphasized their racial identity. This finding is important because it is possible that they increasingly emphasized their race the longer they stayed in the U.S. because they had more experiences related to their race, such as racism. This study again reveals that race is an important factor to look at when studying African students. However, it is limited in that it does not provide specific racial experiences of participants.

The idea that the racial experiences of the participants in Phinney and Onwughalu’s (1996) study impacted how much the students emphasized their racial identity is supported by Manyika’s (2000) study, in which the identity negotiation of African students studying in the U.S. and the U.K. were compared. Manyika (2000) used a mixed-method study, including a quantitative survey, which was returned by 86 participants from 18 countries in Africa. Two of those students from Africa were studying in the U.S. and six studying in the U.K. The study also used a qualitative method of in-depth interviews. The author interviewed 13 participants in the U.K. and 9 from the U.S., including two Ghanaians studying in the U.K. and two students from other West African countries studying in the U.S. Manyika’s (2000) main finding specifically related to the U.S. was that the U.S.’s unique history of segregation and racism impacted the experiences of Africans studying abroad. This finding is important because it reveals that the historical context of segregation and racism does impact the experiences of African students studying in the U.S. Although Manyika (2000) asserted that racism was dominant in the students’ experiences, the study’s focus on racial identity may have influenced how dominant it was in their experiences. Therefore, the current study
attempts to look at the experiences of Ghanaians that they wish to share, allowing the participants to reveal what they consider dominant parts of their experiences.

Like Manyika (2000), Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, and Utsey (2005) also found that their participants had to confront racism and discrimination. They conducted a qualitative study in order to examine the adjustment experiences of 12 international students in the U.S. from Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria. One of the themes identified within their data was that racism was pertinent in the experiences of the participants. This study is important because it is recent, and it contained Ghanaian participants, thus making its findings regarding experiences with racism more salient. However, it only provides a picture of the adjustment of African international students, which may be limited because, as Phinney and Onwughalu (1996) revealed, students’ perceptions of their racial identity changed the longer they stayed in the U.S. Therefore, the current study hopes to contribute an in-depth view of the continuity of Ghanaian international students’ experiences by discussing not just the time that they studied, but also their time prior to and after studying, in order to see if and how racial experiences impact the students’ later experiences.

Although this section has emphasized the challenging experiences of black African students related to race, it is important to note that just because these students might be labeled as racially black does not mean that they identify themselves with black Americans. Yirdong Lobnibe (2012) conducted a qualitative study in which 19 African graduate student mothers from a mid-Western university in the U.S. were interviewed individually and in groups over a period of six weeks. Like in the other studies noted, Yirdong Lobnibe’s (2012) participants noted racial discrimination from both white
professors, students, and staff. Interestingly, they also noted experiencing hostility and discrimination from other minority groups who viewed them as competition for limited resources. This is an important finding because it reveals that African students, although considered racially black in the U.S., do not necessarily feel that they are accepted within or perhaps fit within other black communities in the U.S. Not all the literature that this study looked affirmed race as a major problem for African international students in the U.S. Compared to other researchers who found discrimination to be a common experience among international students, Senyshyn, Warford, and Zhan’s (2000) conducted a quantitative study in which 30 participants completed a questionnaire, and they found that their participants did not largely experience discrimination. The students were also socially accepted and felt fairly accepted by their American colleagues. It will be interesting to see if, in the present study, the participants will discuss struggles with racism as a predominant issue.

Although race can play a significant role on international students’ experiences, it is important to note that there are other identity markers that can impact a student’s experience. Although Yeh and Inose (2003) described, “it is possible that European students experienced less acculturative distress because they may encounter less racism and discrimination than their Asian, African and Latin/Central American counterparts” (p. 23), it is important to note that those students may experience discrimination as a result of other identity signifiers, such as their English language noting their non-native speaker identity. The following studies reveal just how prevalent English proficiency is in the experiences of international students.
English Proficiency

Language proficiency can be one of the biggest hurdles when studying abroad. Another of Wang’s (2007) findings support this because she found that English proficiency was the most difficult part of studying in the United States for most of the participants. Therefore, Wang (2007) recommended that the International Service Student Office monitor the students’ proficiency and intervene in different ways, depending on the student’s academic level. This finding is important to the current study because it brings to light the struggle that international students have with language. However, since Ghanaians come from an English as a second language context, it is important to understand their unique struggles and experiences with using English in the U.S.

Nassim (2011) also emphasized his participants’ struggles to communicate in English. However, he added another dimension to the idea that the students struggle to communicate by explaining that the international students in his study struggled with communicating outside of the classroom as much as they did inside the classroom. For his study, Nassim (2011) used a mixed-method approach in which he surveyed and interviewed first year international students individually and in focus groups in order to uncover their experiences from their first year of studying in the U.S. He also looked at three websites in order to find out the services offered to international students. According to Nassim (2011), his findings were that many of the participants “shared their struggle to communicate with students and staff. Several of them shared their frustration with the lack of services available to them and the lack of cultural sensitivity toward their needs” (pp. x-xi). Thus, in the classroom, they struggled to communicate with peers, and
outside of the classroom they struggled to communicate with service personnel, making it difficult for students to feel comfortable in many settings within their study abroad context. The lack of comfort is a problem, as Yeh and Inose (2003) pointed out, because it causes acculturative stress.

Yeh and Inose (2003) summarized how English proficiency affects acculturative stress by explaining that international students’ fluency level, how comfortable they felt speaking English, and the amount of time they used English, predicted lower levels of acculturative stress in their participants. This finding shows that the experiences of international students related to English may cause stress, depending on their self-reported English proficiency. Yeh and Inose (2003) suggested that the reason self-reported English proficiency levels resulted in higher acculturative stress was because having a higher English language proficiency helped them feel more comfortable speaking and participating in class. They also suggested that higher English proficiency levels aided them in having smooth interactions with the majority group. The idea that English proficiency impacts the social aspect of international students’ experiences both in and outside of class reveals just how influential English is on the experiences of international students. Without the linguistic capital, the international students could easily feel isolated from the larger society.

**Classroom Experiences and American Education Practices**

Along with struggling to communicate in class because of English proficiency, some international students may also struggle with adjusting to American higher education practices. Park, Rinke, and Mawhinney (2011) conference presentation regarding the life histories of West African teacher candidates shed light on the transition
that some students may go through as they enter into the American higher education system. The study looked at the life histories of two teacher candidates, one from Burkina Faso and the other from Mali. From the teacher candidates’ life histories, Park, Rinke, and Mawhinney (2011) uncovered information related to the classroom experiences of the participants in their home countries. Interestingly, both participants were exposed to mostly teacher-centered pedagogies while in West Africa, although one participant was largely impacted by a teacher in his home context who largely used student-centered methods. The other participant explained that her classroom was also overcrowded, which may have been one reason that the teachers used teacher-centered methods.

This relates to Bamba’s (2012) thesis on effective teaching approaches in large ESL classrooms. In her literature review, Bamba (2012) explained that, because the number of students was so large, teachers relied on teacher-centered methods. Although both of these studies are related to teacher candidates and their pedagogies, both studies are important because they provide some background about what classrooms might be like in some educational settings in West Africa, such as they may be large classrooms that are typically teacher-centered. However, both studies focus on West African contexts that exclude Ghana. Hopefully the present study can add to knowledge regarding the experiences of West African students, specifically from Ghana, in classrooms in their home contexts.

It is important to understand the classroom contexts of Ghana because the students’ experiences in their classroom contexts in Ghana could largely impact how they expect their classroom experience in the U.S. to be. Tucker and Ang (2012) revealed the
importance of understanding international students’ past educational experiences in a conference paper based on the initial stages of a study of two international student focus groups in Australia. It uncovered that Asian students in those focus groups were less willing to engage in arguments related to class topics. Furthermore, the students in the focus groups described wanting a clear hierarchy in groups. Tucker and Ang (2012) attributed these discomforts to the discrepancies between Asian and Australian classrooms. Although this was a preliminary study done in Australia with Asian students, it still sheds light on the idea that international students’ experiences in the classroom may be related to the classroom experiences they had in their home countries. Therefore, the present study may help add to the research related to this topic by revealing the experiences of Ghanaian international students’ transition from Ghanaian classrooms to U.S. higher education classrooms.

The Importance and Challenges of Social Interaction

One reason it is important to improve students’ experiences in the classroom, as well as outside of the classroom, is that social interaction is very important for international students. Feeling isolated from the larger society, or even the class, is particularly damaging for international students, as Nassim (2011) showed, because social interaction is key to international students having positive experiences. Nassim (2011) found that isolation was a major problem for the international students in his study. For example, 42 percent of the participants he interviewed revealed that their saddest moments were a result of a feeling of isolation. Some of his participants explained sources of their feelings of isolation. For example, some described that when they arrived at their campuses, there was no one to guide them. In addition, they felt
alone during holiday breaks when other students left campus and residency halls closed. The isolation also occurred within the classroom when interacting with American classmates, particularly while working on group projects. In order to cope with their feelings of isolation, Nassim (2011) found:

…they tried to go out and meet people, even when people did not want to talk to them. Students also mentioned getting involved in campus clubs and organizations. The primary influence on their ability to feel comfortable was the availability of a helpful staff or faculty member. For the most part they shared their experiences with a single person such as a helpful professor or a helpful staff member who encouraged them to always ask for help. On the other hand, one student said that some staff members were unhelpful and impatient; another said that she feels that people are not really interested in what she says and that made her afraid to talk to people or ask for help. (p. 43)

This quote reveals how much Nassim’s (2011) participants desired and sought social interaction. One of the parts of this quote that really resonates with the current study is the participant who felt that no one was interested in what she had to say about her experiences and struggles. This is the primary reason why research like the current study must be done, so that what the students have to say can be heard.

Adding to Nassim’s (2011) study, Hayes and Lin (1994) provided a little insight into why social interaction was so important as well as such a challenge for international students. They conducted a literature review containing 38 pieces of literature in order to investigate their unique experiences as international students, so that counselors could help them better. Although their study did not look at any particular international student
population or national group, it did provide an overview of some of the common challenges international students as a whole usually face when studying abroad. From their literature review, Hayes and Lin (1994) found that international student have the common challenge of losing their social networks, which they leave behind in their home country, and creating new social networks. Thus, the students have left many of their networks behind in their home contexts, and are left to form new networks and communities.

Another one of Hayes and Lin’s (1994) primary findings in the article was to establish that international students need a supportive campus because they encounter social, personal, and academic problems when they study abroad, but they have fewer resources to cope with or overcome those challenges than host nationals. Therefore, Hayes and Lin (1994) emphasized that social interaction is vital for international students. However, they acknowledge that international students come with their own unique set of experiences that may cause barriers for accepting potential social support. This is an important point for this study because it goes back to Dewey’s (1938/1963) idea that there is continuity between experiences.

Similar to Hayes and Lin, Zhang and Goodson’s (2011) statistical analysis of 64 studies about the psychosocial adjustment of international students published in peer-reviewed journals from January 1990-January 2009 found that the most frequent predictors of psychosocial adjustment included stress, social support, English language proficiency, country of origin, length of time spent in the U.S., acculturation, social interaction with Americans, self-efficacy, gender and personality. For the purposes of this study, the finding that “The reviewed studies found international students with higher
stress levels had more psychological symptoms, whereas those with greater social support had fewer such symptoms” (Zhang & Goodson, 2011, p. 142) is significant because it supports the idea that social support is important to students’ experiences in the U.S.

Since Hayes and Lin’s (1994) and Zhang and Goodson’s (2011) studies looked at literature over time, they lacked the data of personal experiences to support their claims. Therefore, the current study will attempt to show what Hayes and Lin (1994) study pointed out, that experiences are important when understanding how to help international students in our institutions.

While Hayes and Lin’s (1994) and Zhang and Goodson’s (2011) study revealed the importance of social interaction, Yeh and Inose (2003) conducted a quantitative study that looked at age, gender, English fluency, social support, and social connectedness as indicators of acculturative stress. Their data came from 359 international students from Asia, central and Latin America, and Africa who completed a survey. Through this method, Yeh and Inose (2003) found that “…English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness were all predictors of acculturative stress” (p. 15). They explained the finding that indicated the importance of social support satisfaction by suggesting that such support impacts African, Asian, and Latin American students in particular because these students typically come from collectivistic and interdependent cultures. This elaboration is important because it supports findings by other researchers, including those who focused on African students, such as Essandoh (1995) who emphasized that “most African cultures value connectedness” (p. 355). However, the notion of all African, Asian, and Latin American cultures as collectivist is problematic in that not everyone or every group within those cultures would fit under that notion.
Therefore, the current study will attempt not to essentialize about Ghanaian society based on the participants’ narratives.

Both Essandoh (1995) and Yeh and Inose (2003) revealed that the independence of the American culture presents a challenge for African students studying in the U.S. As a result of these potential challenges, Yeh and Inose (2003) suggested that international students may need help “developing closer and more satisfying relationships and in clarifying their needs in existing relationships” (p. 26). Essandoh (1995) provides insight into why this clarification is important by describing that, since relationships in Africa are often founded on reciprocity, African international students may feel very connected and even indebted to their counselors or other authoritative figures. Likewise, African students may also struggle to gauge their relationships with those in authoritative positions because of different African cultures’ emphasis on respect. For example, Essandoh (1995) described a situation where an African international student expressed discomfort in scheduling an appointment by phone because he or she felt it would be more respectful to do so in person. Likewise, Essandoh (1995) also described a student who did not want to tell his or her advisor that an arranged meeting time was not convenient, so the student instead skipped the meeting altogether. Interestingly, the idea of Africans struggling to actively pursue help could explain why Trice and Yoo (2007) found that the participants desired more access to the faculty for guidance. Perhaps the authoritative position of the faculty made it difficult for those African students to make an appointment with their professor. In my own experiences while working in a writing center, I had the opportunity to read the comments that a teacher left on a Ghanaian student’s paper. Each comment’s tone became more and more frustrated, and the final
comment revealed why this might be. In it, the professor explained that she had asked the student to visit her office, and he had not. After reading these studies, part of me wonders if the student did not visit because he feared to make an appointment or to tell her that her office hours were not convenient for him. My own reflection on this situation reveals why it is important to look at studies like Essadoh’s (1995) research, as well as to conduct current research regarding African international students.

Although Essandoh’s (1995) article provides insight and ideas to reflect on, it discusses Africans as a group, even though he explicitly wrote that “…there seems to be no justification for writing about all African students as if they were all the same” and that “[i]t is not the intent of this article, then, to categorize all African college students as belonging to one homogeneous group” (p. 349). Despite his claim, his article’s purpose, which is to talk about counseling issues with African college students studying in the U.S., clumps African college students in the US as one group. As a consequence, there still needs to be literature that focuses on specific experiences of African students, particularly, perhaps, African students from a specific country. Thus, the current study focuses on Ghanaians in order to have some basic commonality among the participants, but it also uses the element of individual, unique stories in order to showcase the variations between the participants’ lives. Considering the focus of this study, the following section presents the literature related specifically to Ghanaian international students studying in the U.S.

**Ghanaian International Students’ Experiences in the U.S.**

Since there are not may studies related to the experiences of Ghanaian international students studying in the U.S., this section presents just three piece of
literature that were found to contain this emphasis. The first is Amevuvor’s (in press) narrative of a tutoring session with a Ghanaian international student. The narrative revealed the tension between the Ghanaian student and his safety sciences professor who did not accept his written Ghanaian English. Amevuvor’s (in press) narrative case of that tutoring session reveals the struggle that some Ghanaians may have as speakers of an English that is not always accepted by Americans, like the student’s American professor. Although it adds to the scant literature about Ghanaian international students studying in the U.S., Amevuvor’s (in press) narrative only highlights the case of one Ghanaian student. Therefore, hopefully the present study will add to that literature related to Ghanaian international students’ experiences related to being multilingual, Ghanaian-English speakers in the U.S.

In the second study, Ofori-Attah (1995), revealed a little bit about the background of some of the Ghanaian international students and provided some insight into how their background influenced their experiences in the U.S. In Ofori-Attah’s (1995) study, 222 Ghanaian students studying in the U.S. were given a questionnaire through the mail. The questionnaires contained questions relating to family background in relation to schooling experiences. From there, ANOVA and T-tests were used to find the differences between the mean scores of male and female students. The results found that female students came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. It also found that many of the students, whether male or female, came from urban areas in the Middle Belt and Southern areas in Ghana. Male students were also found to have more diverse social background than female students. Ultimately, it found that family environments have a major impact on Ghanaian students’ educational experiences in the U.S., which supports Dewey’s
(1938/1963) theory of the continuity of experiences. Although this dissertation provides pertinent information about Ghanaian’s socioeconomic backgrounds, it does not provide the in-depth stories of those Ghanaians, nor does it contain the element of fluidity of experiences, including the ever-changing nature of socioeconomics and privilege related to economics.

Finally, Fischer’s (2012) study was a qualitative study with eight participants who completed interviews in Accra, Ghana, about their pre-migration expectations of the U.S. and studying in the U.S. Then, four of the participants participated in a follow-up email correspondence about their post-migration experiences. The goal was to look for similarities and differences between the pre-migration expectations and the post-migration experiences. According to Fischer (2012):

Regarding pre-migration, participants acknowledged the following: the importance of preparation prior to departure, the likelihood of an adjustment period upon arrival, specific goals to strive for during the time abroad, and the emotional impact of discrimination and racism. Regarding post-migration, participants acknowledged the following: stress related to unfamiliar experiences with discrimination, stress related to overwhelming academic responsibilities, and the importance of culture-specific coping strategies, (e.g. family support and religiosity)…Participants discussed a yearning to meet new people and gain exposure to foreign perspectives and viewpoints; however, they also expressed a strong desire to return home afterward and impart knowledge to others. (p. v)
The participants’ post-migration experiences revealed that some things happened which the participants did not anticipate. Fischer (2012) explained, “Upon their arrival, participants recalled unanticipated causes of stress including transportation, time management, and communication with foreign counterparts” (p. v). Additionally, some of Fischer’s participants also discussed unexpectedly experiencing racism.

Fischer’s study contains the depth of the participant’s first hand experiences. However, since only four of the participants responded via email about their post-migration experiences, it could be argued that Fischer (2012) did not provide as much depth about the experiences of the Ghanaian students once they were in the U.S. Thus, my study builds on the work of Fischer’s (2012) study and attempts to fill the gap by providing in-depth data that focuses on the experiences of Ghanaian international students. Considering that only three studies were found investigating Ghanaian international students’ experiences, it is important that more studies be conducted to investigate the experiences of the Ghanaian international student population while studying in the U.S.

Chapter Summary

As Dewey (1938/1963) pointed out, experiences are important to consider within education because they are continuous. Thus, the experiences of the experiences before entering school will affect their experiences in school, and what they experience in school will impact what they experience long after they leave school. Considering the importance of experience in education, this chapter overviewed some of the literature regarding the experiences of international students studying in the United States. From this literature, several common experiences of these international students came to light,
including facing daily challenges, race, English proficiency, and the importance and challenges of social interaction. The literature relating specifically to Ghanaian international students in the United States, like Fischer (2012) and Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, and Utsey, (2005), also echoed the themes found in the literature relating to the broader international student population, including struggling with daily tasks, dealing with discrimination, facing English language issues, and having a strong desire for social interaction.

**Overview of the Methodology**

The next chapter describes the methodology used by this study in order to look at the experiences of Ghanaian international students who are studying or are studying at an institution in Western Pennsylvania. A justification for methodological choices is also provided, along with my positionality within the study and individual introductions to each of the four participants of the study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used to answer the research question. First, my researcher positionality is presented, followed by a restatement of the purpose of the study and research questions. Then, I rationalize my use of qualitative inquiry, specifically narrative inquiry, to conduct and present my study. Later, I provide a detailed description of my sources of data, introduce my participants, and the data collection procedures and analysis. Finally, I conclude with a chapter summary and provide a synopsis to the next two chapters.

Researcher’s Positionality

My Narrative Story Continued

Why the heck would a white girl who has lived in the same house in the same small-town for the past 24 years be interested in the experiences of Ghanaian international students? It is a fair question, but hopefully my own narrative journey will provide some insight into where my passion comes from:

When I first started dating my husband, I did not understand how he was suffering. Looking back, small things should have tipped me off, such as his pillow-less bed and the fact that when I came to his house, he could only offer me a small piece of candy to eat. He would try to explain to me a little bit of his struggle to pay for books or for rent, but it was not until the end of the semester drew near that I understood how severe the money issue was. I realized he might actually not come back to school. I drove him to a friend’s place in Philadelphia over summer break, and with sore red eyes and alligator tears, I told him goodbye. Perhaps to cheer me up, he unbuttoned his shirt in the middle of the street and gave me it to me before quickly running back into the
This excerpt of my own narrative describes just another small part of my journey with my Ghanaian husband. The hopelessness that we felt at that time as well as the hopelessness we still feel when we see another friend have to drop out because of fees or to struggle with other challenges, like not being understood or struggling to keep up with new forms of coursework, continues to be the driving force behind this research idea since before I even entered my master’s program.

Originally, I wanted to conduct this research during my English 202 Research Writing Class during my undergraduate studies. I knew I wanted to write about the experiences of Ghanaian international students because I knew that my friends had extraordinary experiences to share that directly resulted from the institutional and federal policies. I wanted to show the institution the unseeable places of the university that lie within its students because their experiences were like the untapped resources that lie within the back-stacks of the library, rarely seen or used. However, at that time, I could not find enough literature about the topic for my research paper. So, I put the idea on the backburner until I sat discussing possible thesis topics with my thesis advisor.

**Narrative Inquirer Situated Within the Inquiries**

Some may wonder why I include my own narrative story throughout this research. The reason is that, often times, the narrator also finds him/herself situated within the participants’ narratives because as the researchers participate in others’ narratives, they also actively work within the narrative inquiry space. For this reason, narrative inquirers may find their “…own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as much as those
of our participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62). Milner (2008) alluded to this experience when she wrote that she used first person because she was telling her own narrative story as much as she was telling the narratives of her participants.

Like Milner (2008), I have found myself telling my own narrative story through my participants’ narratives. In some of them, I actually play an unnamed role within the narratives, while other parts of my story are shared through parallel experiences between my participants’ narratives and my own. Such a positionality strongly influences how I interpret these narratives, and at times it may even influence how I present them. For this reason, I share some of my own stories throughout this thesis in order to show the reader where my own view of the participants’ narratives comes from. One positive aspect of my position is that it enabled me to relate and understand the participants’ narratives better. However, having this placement within the narrative inquiries does present some challenges to eliminating my bias. I had to recognize when to step back and remove my own versions or perceptions of the participants’ narratives. In order to do this, I have tried to privilege the participants’ narratives by adding their voices in the prologue of the thesis as well as by concluding the thesis with some thoughts regarding the Ghanaian population as viewed through what the participants shared. This was challenging since the participants’ voiced experiential narratives are more descriptive than interpretive. Therefore, I had to rely on my interpretations of what they said; however, in order to ensure that what was written in that concluding section was accurate from a Ghanaian’s perspective, I member-checked that section with a Ghanaian. Through these steps, I have tried to balance my views with my participants’ views in order to do justice for what the participants shared.
Restating the Purpose of the Study and the Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to research the experiences of Ghanaian international students who are studying or have studied in the United States. Thus, the research question guiding this study is: What are the experiences of Ghanaian international students leading up to, during, and after attending a U.S. university?

Why Qualitative Research?

Since this research looks at the experiences of Ghanaian international students, it was important to find a methodology that looked at the uniqueness of the participants’ experiences. The goal of representing the uniqueness of their experiences was spurred on by Hayes and Lin (1994) who stressed the fact that no student comes from a single culture. Like them, I also believe it is important to emphasize the fact that all international students have unique backgrounds that influence where they are and how they perceive themselves and the world around them. Thus, there was a need for one-on-one in-depth interviews in order to uncover these unique differences in personal cultures and discover how they impact the students’ experiences studying abroad. For this reason, I chose to conduct qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, in order to provide an in-depth look at each of the students’ experiences.

Within qualitative research, I chose to conduct two semi-structured interviews with each of the participants because of the flexibility allowed within the interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to take the interview in the natural direction they desire to go (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004). They also allow for follow-up questions to be asked for clarification (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004).
Although some follow-up questions were asked during the first interview, having a second semi-structured allowed me to ask follow-up questions that I had as a result of analyzing the first interview transcriptions. Another reason behind conducting a second interview is that even the act of retelling a story in and of itself “allow[s] for growth and change” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). This growth does not just occur within the narrative story, but also in the fabric of the person who is reflecting on those experiences. For this reason, it is important to conduct a second semi-structured interview in order to uncover more of the narratives that may have grown or changed as a result of telling the story in the first semi-structured interview.

**Why a Narrative Inquiry?**

Story to tell?

Looking for peace and love?

Put an end to injustice with words,

Waging war by showing the world around its own wonders.

The power of our voice,

A hammer to kill fires on all fronts.

A quality story

Raises the flag of victory.

I wrote the above poem while playing a game creating poetry out of newspaper cutouts with some of my classmates at a small party. At the time that I wrote the poem, I was thinking about what my professor had discussed with me regarding narrative inquiry. The way that professor described narrative inquiry made it seem like the perfect fit for the spirit of this thesis because this thesis is meant to stand as a platform and vessel...
for the participants to share their stories and to, as the poem declares, show the institution around its own wonders.

Despite the ease in choosing narrative inquiry, clearly, as Pagnucci (2004) expressed, “there is some risk in pursuing narrative in one’s work… [as it] represents an ideological decision” (p. 44). Within this thesis, that ideological decision is that I see the world through stories and expect others to be able to see the world that way, too. Thus, there is an assumption that, like myself and Pagnucci (2004), others who read about my participants’ stories will discover the power of those stories and will “learn to trust more in stories” (p. 54) and begin to value narrative inquiry as an important and necessary methodology.

The risk associated with looking at the world through stories in academia may be declining, considering that recently more researchers are using narrative inquiry in educational research. Perhaps one reason it has become so popular is because researchers are seeing the value of narratives, namely that narratives reflect on and make sense of experiences and identities (Menard-Warwick, 2004). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1988) expressed the nature of narrative inquiry when they wrote “According to this approach, stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world; at the same time, however, they shape and construct the narrator’s personality. The story is one’s identity” (p. 7). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also defined narrative inquiry as “aimed at understanding and making meaning of experience” (p. 80). Considering that narrative is a way to reflect on and make meaning of experiences, this study utilizes this method in order to understand the experiences of the participants. Thus, my main reason for using narrative inquiry is because I believe that the power of stories will affect those
who read this research in such a way that they would try to understand the journeys of Ghanaian international students and use different approaches when working with Ghanaian international students in the future. Such an affect would truly be the flag of victory referred to in my poem.

**Ethics of Research**

Since all of the participants were either friends or acquaintances, my role as a researcher was sometimes confused. Even recruiting participants was not as black and white as I thought it would be, as I did not want any of my participants to think they had to join my study because of their association with me. This was particularly difficult since Ghanaians come from collectivist communities that are interdependent (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Therefore, I realized some of my potential participants might elect to volunteer for the study because they felt obligated as part of the community. In order to avoid this, I sent a description of my study and emphasized the fact that there would be no negative repercussions if they elected not to participate. For this reason, I was actually glad when two of the people I contacted did not contact me back because it showed me they were not afraid to ignore or decline my request.

As I began collecting data from those who willingly elected to participate, I found that my prior relationships with my participants enriched my interviews with them and made them feel more like conversations rather than interviews. This was important because, since their stories were emotional and sometimes dealt with loss, I wanted my role to be as much of a listener who cares as it is a researcher.
Prospective Participants

Criteria for Choosing Participants

Since my research topic focused on the experiences of Ghanaians while studying as international students in a U.S. higher education institution, the only criteria for my participants were that they were Ghanaians who have studied or are studying in a U.S. higher education institution as international students.

Methods of Selecting Participants

Because this topic is attempting to obtain quality narratives related to a very specific population, I chose to find potential participants via purposive sampling. Specifically, I chose purposive sampling because, as Perry (2011) explained, the emphasis in purposive sampling is “the quality of the information taken from the sample” (p. 65, emphasis in original).

In order to recruit participants after obtaining the IRB, I emailed potential participants, except for one who I spoke with face-to-face. I contacted six Ghanaians who were studying or had studied in a U.S. institution by providing them with an initial overview of the study and asking if they were interested. As mentioned before, it was important that I stressed to them that if they did not want to participate or if participating would be too strenuous on them, they could decline without any adverse affects on our relationship. I also stressed to them that the study would be anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and password protected files.

Three of the potential participants that I contacted immediately requested the informed consent forms so that they could sign it right away. One requested that I meet with him face-to-face in order to discuss the study in more detail. After meeting with
him, he chose to participate and signed the informed consent form. One potential participant never responded while another did correspond with me and requested the informed consent form, but never returned it. Thus, I continued on with the study with the four participants who showed genuine interest in participating.

Each participant was asked to choose his or her own pseudonym in order to keep their anonymity in the study. They were informed that if they did not choose a pseudonym, one would be chosen for them, though this was not necessary since each one chose their own pseudonym.

**Introducing the Research Participants**

In this section, I will provide a brief description of each of my research participants. First I will provide a table of the background information about the students. Then, I will provide a more in-depth introduction of each participant. It is important to note that all of the participants attended the same university, WPU, although they did not all attend at the same time.
Table 1

*Participant Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Graduate/Undergraduate</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Current Education Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kwesi</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Graduate, Master’s</td>
<td>Spanish, Applied Linguistics Track</td>
<td>Currently in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maame</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship, then changed to Nursing</td>
<td>Deferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selasie</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>Deferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yaw</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Graduate, Master’s</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kwesi**

Before continuing his studies in the U.S., he studied general arts in secondary school and psychology and Spanish for his undergraduate studies in Ghana. Through his undergraduate studies, he received a scholarship to study in Cuba for eight months. As an undergraduate in Ghana, Kwesi worked as a teaching assistant in Spanish. He was also awarded a graduate assistantship in his graduate studies in the U.S., through which he tutors students taking Spanish courses.

Although Kwesi had proof that he was accepted to a Master’s in Spanish program in the United States and had a graduate assistantship, he was initially denied a visa to come to the U.S. However, he was able to book another visa appointment and pass
through the immigration. His struggles to obtain the visa forced him to arrive a week after classes started, which made it difficult for him to acclimate. However, he arrived in the U.S. in September to study for his master’s degree in Spanish.

After struggling through his first semester, he had a much smoother second semester in which he was able to balance work and coursework as well as make friends. He is set to graduate with a master’s in Spanish in the spring. After graduation, he hopes to either teach in a high school in the U.S. or to enter into a doctoral program in either the U.S. or Canada.

Maame

In secondary school, Maame focused on home economics because she always had the dream of opening her own restaurant. After secondary school, she went to a polytechnic school, which is the U.S. equivalent of a community college or technical school, for hospitality management. After finishing her two years at the polytechnic school, Maame completed her national service teaching food and nutrition. Afterwards, she worked for three years for a clothes department before pursuing her higher education in the United States.

She chose to come to the U.S. to obtain her bachelor’s degree because she knew that if she wanted to open her own restaurant, then she needed to learn the business part of the restaurant business. She also came because her boyfriend at the time was coming to the U.S. Although she was concerned about how she would pay for her fees, she was advised by her uncle to come to the U.S. and sort out the details of how to pay later on.

As a result, she arrived in the U.S. in September, staying with her uncle’s family in California. Although she came to study, she was forced to defer a semester until she
could find a way to pay for her fees. Her uncle agreed to be a cosigner for a student loan, and in the spring she began studying at Western Pennsylvanian University as an entrepreneurship major.

Though she lived on campus and had a meal plan during her first semester, she decided to move off campus for the second semester to a place where she could cook for herself in order to save money, so that she would not be a burden on anyone. She also decided to get a job on campus and worked sometimes 35 hours a week in order to pay her own bills. Although her dream and passion was to own a restaurant, at the advisement of her uncle, she decided to change her major to a nursing major so that she could more easily find a job after graduation.

After switching majors, she attempted to go to a community college in Philadelphia in order to take some of her major’s core classes. However, her loan was not applicable to paying for a community college. Thus, she continued at the university in Western Pennsylvania. During her third semester, she discovered that her uncle no longer had the credit needed to take out another student loan, so Maame was forced to stop school. After leaving the school, she became the supervisor of a cleaning service, had a baby, and got married. Since she is currently paying for her fees and loans, she hopes to return to school in the future. For now, she is enjoying her time with her family.

Selasie

Selasie studied business while in secondary school in Ghana. After graduating from high school, he worked in an airport and took some professional courses in Information Technology (IT). He came to the U.S. with the goal of studying human
resource management. However, after learning about the difficulty he might have in paying for his education, he chose to take a semester off to try to work.

On his way to Houston to get a job with the help of his friend, his bus was stopped in Louisiana, and he was detained by immigration for being out of status because he was on a student visa, but he was not in school. With the help of his friends and family, he was able to post bail, while the international student advisor aided him in getting back into school and back into status.

Thus, he began school at his university at WPU in January as a human resource management major. During that semester, he continued to struggle to pay for his fees, attend immigration hearings, and complete his coursework. In the summer, he tried to pay for his fees by working in a store in New York from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. However, he did not make enough money to pay for the fees. Thus, his friends and his girlfriend helped him pay his fees so he could attend his second semester.

Although the hold was lifted from his account long enough for him register, the cards that he used to pay for his fees were denied for reasons unknown. Thus, he was able to complete his second semester. However, since the money was given back for that semester, that semester was left unpaid. Thus, he accumulated debts from both of his semesters. As a result of his position, he and his girlfriend chose to get married in order to keep him in a good immigration status. After their marriage in December 2009, he was able to become a permanent resident and has been working.

**Yaw**

Yaw came to the U.S. to complete a master’s degree in Chemistry. In secondary school, he studied general sciences. From there, he wanted to go for his bachelor’s in pharmacy, but did not have the test scores to get into the program. Therefore, he decided
to go into chemistry at a university in Ghana with the hope of branching into pharmacy later.

After finishing his bachelor’s, he completed his national service for a gold mine company in the western part of Ghana as an analytical chemist. When he decided to pursue his master’s in Chemistry, he decided to go to the United States because he felt it was the best place he could get an education, and he was motivated throughout the entirety of his education to pursue only the best education.

Two weeks after beginning his studies in the United States, his mother unfortunately passed away. Along with the emotional strain of losing his mother, this also put Yaw in a difficult position because she was going to help him pay for his second semester. His uncle, who helped him pay for his first semester, lost his job and was unable to help Yaw further. Thus, Yaw decided to work, sometimes 60 to 70 hours a week, while going to school. In his second semester, he was able to have a part-time graduate assistantship for one year, through which he worked with Marcellus Shale Drilling Company. Although this aided him financially and educationally, he still had to work 60-70 hours a week to support himself while studying. Despite all of his struggles, he was able to graduate. Since then, he has stayed in the U.S. to work for his optional practical training.

**Context of the Study**

Because each of the participants came from the same university, and because the number of Ghanaian students at WPU was cut in half, going from 18 in 2009 to 9 in 2012, it may be worth exploring the themes that come from this small population’s experiences at this particular campus in order to perhaps find out how to improve
Ghanaian international students’ experiences at WPU and motivate more to come. The table below shows how the number of Ghanaians at this university in Western Pennsylvania has decreased during the time of the participants’ enrollment in the university.

Table 2

*Number of Ghanaian International Students Enrolled at WPU from 2009-2012*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Ghanaian Students enrolled at WPU on J-1 and F-1 Visas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table, it can be seen that the number of Ghanaian international students, those coming on a J-1 or F-1 visa, has been steadily decreasing over the past five academic years. Furthermore, the table also reveals that there is not a large population of Ghanaians at this campus. Therefore, if four of the Ghanaians who attended that school in the last 5 years had common experiences, it might be worth researching about the experiences of the entire population at the university in order to uncover if these are common themes in all the Ghanaian international students’ experiences at this university. Next, the themes experiencing others’ ignorance about Ghana and Africa, influence of experts in communities of practice, challenges with accent, and financial challenges will be analyzed.
Research Site

Due to the sensitive nature of the stories, it was important that my participants felt comfortable wherever the interviews were completed. Therefore, they were provided with the option of either doing the interviews via telephone, via Skype, or face-to-face at a place of their choice. Maame chose to do her interview via telephone because she lives far away and her computer was not working well. Therefore, we conducted our interview over the phone with us both in quiet places at our houses. Kwesi and I met in the library to discuss the study, and he chose to do the interview there in a quiet, private space. Selasie also chose to do a face-to-face interview in the privacy of his home, while Yaw chose to do his interview via Skype because he lives far. We used our computer video function through Skype so that we could have a face-to-face element, though his video was very dark.

Data Collection Methods

Considering the preferences of my participants as well as knowing their backgrounds, I felt that it was important to only use one-on-one semi-structured interviews in order to uncover their stories and unpack their experiences. Since Ghanaians tend to be private, I refrained from the idea of doing a focus group, and after talking with some of the potential participants, I realized that having the participants write about their experiences through narratives prose or poetry would not be a method liked by the participants. Therefore, I chose to do two semi-structured interviews with each participant. Both interviews were 30-90 minutes, depending on how much the participant wanted to talk. I used an interview protocol, but I was flexible in that I allowed the participants to defer from the topic at hand, and sometimes, I asked questions
regarding wherever their responses led the interview. After the interviews were completed, I transcribed them and saved them in a password-protected file, then I began the data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

**Narrative Method**

Before discussing the specific steps taken in this study’s data analysis, it is important to understand what this method usually contains data analysis. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reveal how narrative inquiry is more about a way of thinking of life than it is a set of methods. Xu and Connelly (2009) explained this further when they defined narrative inquiry as being:

…A conception of the phenomenal world in which experience is mediated by story. Philosophically, narrative inquiry is less about method than it is about the phenomena studied via method. For this reason we define narrative inquiry as both phenomenon and method. Narrative is the phenomenon of inquiry because everything, including teacher development, is a phenomenon narrated through stories. The phenomena of narrative inquiry are, themselves, narrative in nature. In this, narrative inquiry differs from other methods. It would make no sense, for instance, to say the phenomena of factor analysis or ethnography were factor analysis and ethnography. But it does make sense to say that the phenomena of narrative inquiry are narratives. (p. 221)

Although there is no specific set of methods attached to narrative inquiry, Xu and Connelly (2009) described an appropriate first step in narrative inquiry as being to “imagine their topic or phenomenon as an ongoing life space” (p. 223). Therefore, in this particular research, the topic being studied is Ghanaian international students’
experiences in higher education. In order to imagine their experiences as an ongoing life space, this study considers the continuity of the experiences, which insinuates that their past space within their narratives impacts their present and future spaces. Richardson (1990) explained that people use narrative in order to connect two separate events. Similarly, narrative provides a way to see the continuity of experiences, which is important since Dewey emphasized that experiences breed further experiences (Dewey, 1938/1963).

Thus, it is important for a narrative inquirer to be aware of the interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place) of a narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This is further clarified when Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained the four directions: inward, outward, backward, forward. They said “By inward, we meant toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future” (p. 50). Therefore, the inquirer should ask questions that direct the narrative in these directions. Within this research, steps were taken in order to uncover these directions within the participants’ narratives.

**Steps of Data Analysis for this Research**

The first step of the data analysis was to read each of the interview transcriptions carefully in order to uncover the progression and cohesiveness of the narratives. The goal of this step was to “identify the axis of each stage, that is, the thematic focus for the development of the plot” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilbar, 1998, p. 89). This allowed me to also identify the past space, present space, and future space of the
participants’ narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), thus providing the outward direction of narratives.

The inward direction of the narratives was looked at during the second part of the narrative research. During the second part, I looked into the dynamics of the plot by analyzing the specific phrases of the interviewees. Some of these provided the reflections of the interviewees. This was important because, as Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilbar (1998) explained, “Sensitivity on the part of the reader, for instance, to the detail and degree of emotion with which each stage is described or to discrepancies between different descriptions of the same stage may provide useful clues” (p. 91). During this data analysis, a lot of emphasis and focus was put into looking at the emotion within the descriptions in order to understand how the participants reflected on their experiences.

To note these inward directions of the narratives, I would read these parts of the transcriptions several times, underlining key phrases and making notes in the margins.

In order to code the data, once the transcriptions were carefully read through and the different stages of the plots were identified and analyzed, a table was created in which transcription phrases related to the experiences of the participants as well as the different stages of the plots were entered into the first column. Afterwards, these transcription phrases were looked at and themes related to those phrases were added to another column. From there, the themes which were consistent among the participants were identified. These themes dealt with experiencing others’ ignorance about Ghana and Africa, influence of experts in communities of practice, challenges with accent, and financial challenges. Finally, I shared the narratives of the participants, located in
Chapter Four, for member-checking as well as to verify the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Chapter Summary and Preview of Chapters Four and Five

In this chapter, my research positionality was presented. Then, the use of a qualitative, narrative inquiry method as well as the data collection process was explained and justified in the research design and data collection section. In addition, the participants were introduced individually. Finally, the data analysis process was explained. The data will be presented in both Chapters Four and Five. In Chapter Four, the data will be presented in the form of the individual narratives of the participants. This is meant to reveal the uniqueness of each participant’s experiences. Chapter Five will also present data by looking at common experiences across participants’ voiced narratives. However, Chapter Five takes the data analysis a step further than Chapter Four by providing themes that can be used to make recommendations for the specific university where these participants attended while also providing themes that can be verified through future studies with larger samples.
CHAPTER FOUR
CASES OF THE GHANAIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

My Narrative Journey Continued

During the four short years of my undergraduate degree program, I got married, became passionate about pan-African studies, met many students in the MATESOL program, and finally graduated. After graduation, I decided to follow where I felt led and enter into the MATESOL program. I made an agreement with my husband, however, that I would not take any loans. Moving from an undergraduate career that was fully funded by grants to a master’s career that I had no idea how to fund was a serious leap of faith. My faith had to grow even more when I was informed that first-year MATESOL students do not receive graduate assistantships.

Still, in church I would dance, sing, cry, and pray all to show God that I was trusting Him to make a way for me.

During the thirty-minute ride home from church, I would talk with a Ghanaian friend who was also paying most of his own way through his master’s.

“It’s possible, right?” I asked him.

“Oh yes. It is difficult, but you can do it. It’s possible.”

Just before school started, I received an email informing me that I may be offered a part-time graduate assistantship. I must have checked my email every three minutes waiting for an official offer. Finally, I took a fast from the computer and focused my attention and faith on God. When I checked my email a few days later, the offer was there.
I was elated, to say the least. However, as the semester progressed, I realized that the combination of paying for half of the tuition plus the fees left me paying a couple thousand dollars out of pocket on nothing but a stipend and my writing center job. But God had provided once, so I kept waiting for further provision. In the meantime, I rejoiced in the fact that I now knew how my Ghanaian friends had felt when they had very few financial options. They could not receive grants or loans, and now I could not either. Looking back, I am so glad that when I interviewed my participants for this study, I was not only listening as an outside observer, but as someone who had tasted, even if just for a moment, some of the same fears related to funding education in the U.S.

**Participants’ Narratives Extracted from the Data**

The findings of this study about the experiences of Ghanaian international students prior to, during, and after studying in a United States university are presented in this chapter. In order to show the diversity and uniqueness of each of the participant’s experiences, this chapter presents experiential the narratives of the four participants, which have been extracted from the data.

**Kwesi: The Spanish Teacher**

Kwesi studied general arts in secondary school, which, according to Kwesi, includes “reading subjects, so government, literature, French, Christian religious studies and stuff like that” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 33-34). When he applied for his bachelor’s in Ghana, he tried to get into psychology, political science, and English course focuses. However, of the three focuses he chose, he was only given psychology, along with Spanish and French. Kwesi was not too concerned about taking French because he had previously studied French; however, he was sad that they gave him Spanish classes
because he had never studied Spanish before, so it was a new subject for. Therefore, he hoped to drop the Spanish-focus during the next year, since in Ghana a student must take one year of that focus before dropping it.

He did not end up dropping the Spanish, however, because sometime during that first year, he fell in love with Spanish. He explained that because Spanish was not a popular subject in Ghana, the professors worked hard to make sure the students enjoyed the classes. They were also more lenient with grades than professors in other focus areas. What truly sealed Kwesi’s passion for Spanish, though, was when he received a scholarship to go to Cuba. The top six in the class of 67 were given a fully-funded government scholarship to study in Cuba for a year. When he received that scholarship, Kwesi expressed that it was a confirmation that he was doing well in Spanish and should not waste all he had done with Spanish.

Although the scholarship was for one year in Cuba, Kwesi explained that because of a recent transition in the Ghanaian government from one party being in charge to the other, the study abroad program was originally cut. So, since the scholarships were for all of the top language students in Ghana, about 200-250 students, the students rallied together to fight for their scholarships, and although they finally received the funding to study abroad, they were not able to leave until November when they should have left in August.

Despite arriving late to Cuba, Kwesi’s experience was very good and very different than his experiences in the U.S. would be. He described the experience as “basically like living in Ghana” (Kwesi, August 2013, line 176). This was largely because the Ghanaian government paid for everything during the study abroad, from food
to tuition, while also providing students with a stipend. He also went with other Ghanaians, so he had their support. In addition, he explained that the Cuban culture was even less strict about time and punctuality than Ghana. Thus, his experiences in Cuba were very good because they were not too different from his experiences in Ghana.

Because of his study abroad in Cuba, it took Kwesi five years to finish his bachelor’s degree. During those five years, he not only had the opportunity to go to Cuba, but he was also able to complete his national service through the school as a teaching assistant. He tutored sometimes up to 20-25 students, depending on how many signed up for tutoring, three times a week. He also found that, because he was good at conjugating verbs, his friends often came to him for help. So, he would tutor them apart from his teaching assistant duties. After all of this experience, Kwesi decided to continue with Spanish by pursuing an MA in Spanish abroad.

When deciding what university to go to abroad, Kwesi first thought about the economies of the countries. For that reason, he did not go to a Spanish speaking country, like Spain, because he heard through the media that their economies were not strong at the time. Thus, he decided to apply to the U.S., where Spanish is the second most popular language. Because he was only looking for a linguistic-oriented Spanish program, Kwesi’s search was narrowed. He finally applied to three schools, and he chose WPU because they offered him a full graduate assistantship.

Despite the fact that Kwesi had all the documents he needed and had a full graduate assistantship, his visa was originally denied. He explained,

The first time, I was refused the visa ‘cause I didn’t know the talking points.

That’s how they call it. They say you have to look the counselor in the eye, you
know, little tidbits...to get you through. Although...all your documents are legal, and everything is right. (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 299-302)

After his initial visa was refused, Kwesi’s professor advised him to quickly apply again. So, Kwesi paid the 300 Ghana cedis for a second interview and was granted a visa. However, because he received his admissions package late and thus obtained his visa late, Kwesi ended up coming to the U.S. after the semester had already started.

He discussed how his professors would ask his advisor, “‘Are you sure Kwesi is coming’ and he’s like ‘Yeah, yeah he will come. He will come,’” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 582-583). Coming late also concerned Kwesi because he was not sure if he would be able to get through immigration if they saw on his I-20 that the date that he was supposed to come had already passed. However, he was ushered through without any issues.

When Kwesi finally arrived in New York, he emailed his advisor to tell him he had arrived, and his advisor replied by welcoming him to the U.S. That welcome had a strong effect on Kwesi who said,

…that was a big plus, to feel welcomed, it’s just like being welcomed at home because I felt that if I had come and like nobody really gave me attention and then because I was new here, it would have been tough because I had to cope with that and then studies too, but...when I received the warm welcome from him and then he guided me like “go here, do this, do this, you have to do this” I felt like it lessened my burden, like, there was someone I could lean on in times of difficulties. (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 290-296)

Clearly, his advisor’s initial as well as continued support of Kwesi had a large influence on Kwesi’s experiences.
Because Kwesi arrived late to the school, he felt as though he did not have time to prepare or become adjusted before beginning school. In fact, he was thrown into the school system so quickly that he found out in an email that he would have to present the following week. Kwesi elaborated,

I’ve come late to school, I had to catch up because I missed the first week of class and…I already check my mail and then she already has a mail that says “Kwesi, for next week, you are to take care of this model…monitor model…’cause …we were learning about some approaches to teaching language, people’s theories, so I had to study that and go present it in class (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 729-734)

It was during that presentation that Kwesi realized that his accent was not well understood in the class. He explained that Ghanaians pronounce the “t” sound more than Americans when saying words like “monitor” and since he was presenting the monitor model, this made it difficult for him. “So then, the model I had to talk about was the monitor model, so I was like monitor model, and she was like, she kept saying ‘Huh?’ ‘Monitor Model.’ She didn’t know what I was saying…” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 751-753). He explained that now he tries to cluster his words as Americans do, such as trying not to pronounce the “t” sound so strongly, so that he can be understood.

Kwesi continued to meet challenges during that first semester, “I remember I kept saying I wanted to go back because it was so…although I’ve had travel experiences in Cuba, it’s very different here” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 237-328). His reasons for wanting to go back were as much related to him coming late as they were to him trying to adjust to being in a new country. He explained, “I felt that if I had come earlier, it would have helped. I would have settled and been ready for school, but then everything was,
everything was new, and then the course load and everything…” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 334-336). When Kwesi wanted to go back to Ghana, his Ghanaian friends encouraged him to continue at WPU. He explained,

my friends were like, this is what we all go through, so you have to, and then you are even lucky, you have an assistantship. So, you don’t have to complain. So sometimes when I’m in my bed, I think about those things that they tell me and I’m like, okay, then, I think I have to put in more effort. (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 452-455)

So, Kwesi persevered in the face of his challenges.

Many of those challenges were related to the course work. Kwesi struggled with the new expectations that were placed on him as a student. For example, he described how, as an undergraduate in Ghana, his largest writing assignment was five pages typed. He explained of his writing background in Ghana, “the biggest assignment I had was 5 pages, typed work. Yeah. And that was only in one course. But mostly what we do is written. And we usually don’t get assignments because of the numbers because you have 800 students” (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 208-201). This background made it very difficult for him when he was given a 15-20 page-typed, literature review to write during his one-week break. Kwesi was not a fast typer, which made the assignment even more difficult.

Similarly, Kwesi was also given two assignments that involved Powerpoint presentations. However, he had no previous experiences using Powerpoint. So, he had to go to the campus’s writing center in order to learn how to use the Microsoft
Powerpoint software as well as to learn the appropriate writing style of a Powerpoint presentation, such as not having full sentences on the slide.

On top of having assignments that were very new to him, Kwesi was also receiving assignments that he had to do every night, as compared to Ghana where his professors did not give homework because of the amount of students they had. So, Kwesi explained that, even though he was taking 10-14 classes in Ghana, he was not prepared for the amount of coursework he encountered in his three classes in the U.S. It is worth noting that Kwesi was not sure whether or not the amount of coursework would be the same in Ghana or not at the graduate level. Thus, he was uncertain whether he struggled because of the U.S. higher education system or because he was at the graduate level.

Because he was struggling with the amount of coursework he had to do, Kwesi was not able to socialize much. Although he is very religious, he explained that he could only go to church twice during the entire semester. When the semester was over, Kwesi went to visit a friend, which made a big difference in his second semester:

luckily I travelled to Missouri. I had this friend in Missouri, so I was relaxed. I was at home for the five weeks, so I had time to relax and strategize for the upcoming semester…I knew how the first semester went, and I knew the rhythm. The second semester I was ready to face it. (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 342-346)

Being prepared for his second semester seemed to positively impact Kwesi’s experiences for the second semester. Although many of his roommates left school, and Kwesi had to live with a Ghanaian-American girl, he explains that his friends “already
guided me or they showed me around or they gave me some tips, so I was ready to live on my own now” (Kwesi, June 2013, 675-677).

That semester, Kwesi also began working on campus on top of working for his 20-hour graduate assistantship. Although he was sometimes working 16 additional hours, on top of his 20 hour graduate assistant work, he explained that he needed to take on the second job:

to be able to pay my bills because you pay telephone bills and then you pay rent and then you have to eat and then I couldn’t do that with the GA alone. The stipend from the GA can’t take care of that alone, so I had to take on jobs to be able to pay my rent and then eat and then buy my clothes and all of that.” (Kwesi, August 2013, 557-561)

Even with the additional work hours, he was still able to balance all of his activities that semester: school, work, friends, and church. For example, as compared to the previous semester where Kwesi only was able to attend church twice, he was able to go to church every week during the second semester, which was a sign of just how much his situation improved during the second semester. Other areas of Kwesi’s life that he felt were improving where his accent, which he felt that he was making more accommodating to Americans, and his typing skills.

Although Kwesi still had a year left before he graduated at the time of our interviews, he was already making plans for what he would do after school. At the time of the interview, he was thinking of either finding a job teaching in a U.S. high school or going onto a Ph.D. in either an American or Canadian university. His ultimate goal, however, is to obtain a Ph.D. and return home with the knowledge and teaching skills he
has obtained in his studies, particularly related to student-centered methods. He explained:

the teaching skills, and then the especially the rapport between the teachers and the students. We don’t have that in Ghana. And then I think that’s because of the numbers, but I think even with the numbers, there can be a way even if you can meet the students in groups and then give them feedback on their performance. I think it helps because it helped me a lot here, having to meet my professor and then he telling you “Okay, you did this right. You have to do this” which we don’t have in Ghana. It’s you and then your books yeah.

(Kwesi, August 2013, lines 504-510)

Thus, just as Kwesi has seen his own teaching methods change, he hopes to go back home and help change common Ghanaian teaching strategies. However, he explained that to do this he needs a Ph.D., or else his ideas won’t be as readily accepted.

Although Kwesi encountered many challenges when he arrived to the U.S., he has worked on overcoming them in order to become acclimated to the system. Kwesi said that sometimes when he looks at the past two semesters, “I’m like ‘Whoa, I have a story’” (June 2013, line 912).

**The Family Driven Woman: Maame**

Maame is a very family-oriented woman. Her perception of family has impacted many of her experiences in the United States; from her dreams to open a restaurant, to her decision to come to the U.S., and finally to the way she treats and views others, family has played a big role in her experiential narrative. For example, while discussing Ghanaians, she would often point out that they treat everyone like family. She once
explained, “In Ghana, you will meet someone for the first time and you guys will behave like you’ve been friends like forever” (Maame, August 2013, lines 144-145). It is no surprise that her family has been influential in many areas of her life.

It was her grandfather’s house that inspired her to open her own restaurant. It was a big house, and she told her father, “Dad, you know, I’m just going to open a hotel and a restaurant because you guys are not using this house for that.” (Maame, August 2013, lines 14-15). That dream inspired her to focus on home economics in secondary school and later go to a polytechnic school for two years studying hospitality management. After graduating from the polytechnic school and completing her national service teaching food and nutrition, Maame could not find a job in her field. So, she worked in a store for three years before coming to the United States.

Eventually she decided to travel to the United States to go to school because she could not get a job in her field, and she felt going to business school in the U.S. would prepare her to open her own restaurant. She also thought it would be good to go to the United States because her boyfriend at the time was in the U.S., and she wanted to follow him.

As she prepared to come, her uncle told her not to worry about how she would pay for school until she arrived in the U.S. He was most likely basing his advice on his own experiences because he had taken a student loan when he studied in the U.S. So, he planned to co-sign a student loan for her to go to school.

Maame came to the United States in 2008 and lived with her uncle’s family in California while they tried to sort out how she would pay for her fees. However, once she arrived, she noticed that he seemed uncomfortable co-signing for her because he
worried that if she didn’t repay the loan, his finances would be affected. Since she was not able to pay her tuition, Maame had to defer for a semester and stay in California.

After Maame signed an agreement that she would repay the loan, her uncle co-signed for her. Maame’s uncle did not only have an influence on her finances. He also mentored her about her educational choices. After she began studying at WPU, he advised Maame to go into nursing, which he felt was a more lucrative choice after graduation. Since she was worried about paying her loans back, Maame decided to switch majors and go into nursing.

Before Maame entered into WPU, she had to reapply for the spring semester because she did not attend school in the fall. She did this with the help of the international student officer, She found the international student officer very helpful and described, “…she didn’t judge me, or ask me why I didn’t come in straight away or anything. She was so helpful. She helped me through the process. Everything.” (Maame, June 2013, lines 210-212). Thus, she was finally able to attend Western Pennsylvania University.

When Maame arrived in the spring, she met other international students in the airport, including a girl from Japan. In the following days, Maame got to know the girl from Japan and other international students well because they were all there before school had begun. Maame explained that those friends were important to her because “they kind of were my first friends because they were ready to be my friends than the Americans were ready to be my friends and we could all relate and we could share our experiences.” This is in strong contrast with her experiences with American students who she found to be much more individualistic. “It’s like Ghana you treat everyone like
family or friends, it’s like what is yours is mine. But in this country, it’s like, it’s me, me, me, me, me alone” (Maame, June 2013, lines 321-323). She found this to be particularly true whenever she tried to share textbooks with classmates because she could not afford to buy them.

So, I realized the serious ones, the first time they’ll give it to me, the second week they’ll give it to me, the third week they’ll be like “I’m learning” and they’re not even learning it, so I’ll be like, “Can I meet you at the library when you’ve got a minute, we can switch it up?” She’ll be like, yes. And you’ll go sit down and they’ll never come. Even when they should, they’ll be like, “Oh, I’m still learning.” But you’ll see them, the book will be open and they’ll be talking to a friend. (Maame, June 2013, lines 330-336)

Although Maame was disheartened that her American friends were not always willing to help her, she found comfort when she discovered a Ghanaian community on campus. “It made me feel like home even though Indiana wasn’t like home-home, it felt like home to me because I could talk to people in my native language, relate to them, we can share stories and everything” (Maame, August 2013, lines 256-258).

During the second semester, Maame tried to depend less on her uncle or anyone else. Thus, she chose to live in a cheaper apartment off-campus. It had a kitchen, so she could cook for herself instead of having to buy a meal plan. She also decided to work on-campus in a restaurant. Although international students are only supposed to work 20 hours a week, Maame decided to take the shifts of those who called off. This meant that she would sometimes work 30-35 hours a week. Although her bosses did not want her to
work so much, they allowed her because she was the only one willing to replace those who called off.

It was a struggle for Maame to work so many hours while going to school. She described how she would go to class with her uniform in her bag so that she could go straight to work. She also mentioned,

But whenever I come working and I see people holding their books, going up and down, I’ll be like, I’m missing out. Even though I’m getting money, I feel like people here are learning, and I’m just there getting money. That wasn’t my main focus of coming here. My main focus was to learn. So, I felt like I was missing out on something. (Maame, June 2013, lines 559-563)

Because she worked, Maame had to take early morning classes. This proved to be a challenge when she had to take her physical education class. She explained,

It was like early in the morning, I go to class, because I had to work on campus, I took the earliest classes, it was like 7 in the morning or something, and we had to go to the gym every morning. And then I didn’t like it because…I don’t gym, I don’t do any kind of exercise. So, I had to go back to make up for that class, so I didn’t really like the class at all, but I didn’t want to fail that class, so I had no choice but to go to the gym every morning. (Maame, June 2013, lines 645-651)

Maame also struggled in other classes where she felt she was not understood or taken seriously because of her accent. She described how such experiences would silence her in the class when she said,

I realized whenever I raised my hand to answer a question, they’ll be like what “What? What?” Like they don’t understand what I’m saying. And sometimes I’ll
say that the professor is embarrassed to tell me “oh I didn’t hear what you said, can you repeat it?” And so when I’m done, they’ll all clap and I’ll sit down, and the professor will ask the same question, so I’m like, then I have to be quiet in class, so most of the class if I’m not required to say something or do a presentation, then I’m just silent in class. (Maame, August 2013, lines 149-154)

At one point, Maame was required to do a presentation with another student. She described how her partner seemed to underestimate her ability to complete the project.

She recounted her conversation with him starting with him telling her:

“Oh, don’t worry, I will do everything. I’ll just do a print out and I’ll tell you where you have to present, and I’ll also highlight where I have to present.” And I’m like “If you show me and I go back to class and people ask me questions after the presentation, how am I supposed to answer questions if I have no idea how this came about?” And he’s like, “You don’t have to do anything” so I’m like “Okay. You do your research and I’ll do my research and let’s meet and go over and take the best points out of it.” So he was like “Okay.” (Maame, August 2013, lines 168-174)

Later, Maame and the other student had a second meeting in which they shared their work with one another. She described his reaction to her handout:

So we met at the library and he brought his print out and I also brought my print out. And we started going over, and when he started reading mine he was like, “Oh my gosh this is a great piece, wow.” And he was like, “I’m even embarrassed to bring mine because I never did the research on it, I just did the
points that the professor said and I highlighted it, so we got to use yours” so I’m like, okay, then let’s use mine.” (Maame, August 2013, lines 176-181)

Whenever they finally presented, Maame noticed that many of the students asked him questions instead of her. She explained, “they started asking him questions from my side and because he didn’t write the paper, he didn’t know all of the answers, so I ended up answering all the questions, so after that the professor was like ‘Wow, you really did well’ and I’m like ‘thank you’ So that was a nice day,’” (Maame, August 2013, lines 183-189). Thus, the experience turned out to be an opportunity for Maame to prove her abilities to both students and the teacher.

Perhaps Maame’s best class experience, however, was when she accidently registered for an ESL English class. Her Japanese friend suggested she register, but when she arrived in the class and realized that it was an ESL class, she wondered how she ended up in there because English is her first language. However, her advisor told her to try to remain in the class, since it would give her the same number of credits as a non-ESL English 101 course. The class required her to write a lot of poetry, and she discovered that she really enjoyed it. When she discussed the class with her dad, she found out that he also enjoyed writing poetry, so as a gift to him, she compiled her poetry into a book and sent it to him. She said, “…so I’m even happy I took that class because I might not even knew I had passion for writing poems and that” (Maame, June 2013, lines 385-386). She also noted that the poetry gave her the opportunity to let out her emotions whenever she was feeling depressed. She noted that poetry is, “…kind of like a shoulder on which I cry on and pour my heart out, so I’m happy I took that class” (Maame, August 2013, line 329).
It is good that Maame had a way to let out her feelings because in her final semester, Maame encountered many challenges. She discovered that her uncle had a change in his credit, making him ineligible to co-sign for loans for the following semesters. This left Maame without a financial plan for her education. As she worried about this, other problems occurred. A Ghanaian friend who offered her a place to live rent-free appeared to be irritated with her, so she decided to find another apartment. She also had a falling out with her other Ghanaian friends when she tried to advise a friend she considered to be like a younger sister about her relationship. She described that after she experienced this, she felt

I felt like most of them would smile at your face like they’re supposed to be your friend, but when it comes to something serious like they should stick up for you, that’s when they don’t. But I don’t really have negative views about them, but I’m just conscious now who I call my friend and who I call an acquaintance.

(Maame, August 2013, lines 263-266)

The experience may have especially been painful because Maame believed that Ghanaians should treat one another like family. She explained, “I opened my whole heart feeling like I’m helping these people or just one person and it like turned on me and I was the bad person” (Maame, August 2013, lines 269-270)

Thankfully, during that difficult time, Maame had a new Malaysian roommate who offered her the support she needed. She said of her friend, “She had an ability to even make me laugh and forget about my worries, and it’s like she was really matured, so we could have like deep conversations about life and everything,” (Maame, June 2013, lines 612-614).
After that semester, Maame had no way to attend school because she could not get a loan without a co-signer. Although she sometimes feels sad when she hears of friends on spring break or friends who have graduated because she knows that could be her, she says of her uncle’s credit, “I’m almost happy that his credit got messed up and I wasn’t able to continue because I’ve come to realize that I’m paying double what I got.” (Maame, August 2013, lines 80-82). In other words, because of the interest rate on her loans, Maame is now paying twice as much as the fees originally cost.

Immediately after leaving school, Maame went to live with her then-boyfriend. She got a job working with a housekeeping business, for which she is now working as a manager. She became pregnant, had a daughter, and got married. She explained that sometimes she wonders how she and her family made it because it was difficult for her, especially with never being pregnant before. She described how the transition was difficult,

In the beginning, I’ve never been pregnant, so my first three months it was like hell to me. I had to go to work, full time job, come back home and be a wife and everything and sometimes my husband helps me out, and if you know Ghanaian men as I do, they make you do most of the stuff. So I had to come back home and be a fulltime wife too. (Maame, August 2013, lines 298-302)

Maame hopes that she will be able to become a permanent resident and citizen soon through her husband so that she will be back in status. After she is back in status, she hopes to go back to school for respiratory therapy. She explained, “My main concern is how I’m going to get through it. I know I’m going to get through it, but I don’t know how I’m going to get through it” (Maame, August 2013, lines 304-305) because she is
aware that it will be difficult to balance all three important aspects of her life: school, work, and family life.

**The Business Minded Man: Selasie**

Selasie views the world through a business lens. As such, he weighs each of his decisions in terms of costs and benefits.

I believe in life everybody has to take a business class because business is an everyday situation. You going to a store to buy something, like you going to Walmart to purchase something or you comparing the prices of something online as compared to you walking into Walmart and buying it, it’s a business decision. Because you are trying to save money. Or you going to a grocery store and trying to get the best deal out of whatever you are going to purchase, I believe it’s a business, so it’s not necessarily going to school to study business. I think that business is an everyday life. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 329-335)

Business has played an important role in his education. His secondary school major was business, and even though he now contemplates going into the information technology (IT) field, he explicates that even that is a business decision because he believes that it might be easier to get a job in IT, thus it would benefit him more now.

Selasie’s interest in IT initially began because after he graduated from secondary school, he took care of his cousin’s Internet café, since he could not find another job at the time. He chose to take some professional courses in the National Institute of Information Technology in Ghana in order to gain more knowledge about the field, since it was so popular at the time. However, he did not get a job in IT after taking those
professional courses. Instead, he worked in the airport as a ramp personnel until he was able to come to the United States to study.

Although Selasie contemplated going to school in Finland or another European school, he chose to come to the U.S. for his education because the U.S. is an English speaking country. Thus, he felt that he would have an easier time because there would not be as much of a language barrier. He chose to apply to Western Pennsylvania University as a human resource management major because he felt that the embassy would be more willing to grant him a visa if his major was less trendy, which he learned from friends who had tried to go through the immigration process before him. Since he felt IT was popular at that time, he decided to try to apply as a human resource management major.

As Selasie prepared to come, his uncle agreed to fund his education. However, after Selasie arrived in New York during the summer of 2008, his uncle informed him that, because of unforeseen financial problems, he would not be able to help Selasie.

Since school was not in session, Selasie decided to stay in New York with his friends for the remainder of the summer. His life in New York was not easy. He explained:

…where I was living, it was like a battlefield…it was just a one bedroom apartment with about 8 guys in the room, and it was really difficult, you know, you were sharing actually one bedroom apartment with 8 guys, and you go to work and come back and the place is all like crowded and there’s no room to do anything, and all you have to do is just go to sleep and wake up the next morning and go to work. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 131-136)
Although those experiences were tough, Selasie explained that they made him stronger for what he was about to experience. His coming experiences were foreshadowed by a roommate who was a previous student of WPU. The roommate explained to Selasie that WPU was a remote school where it would be very hard to find a job as well as to work and go to school at the same time. Towards the end of the summer, he and his friends were evicted from their New York apartment. With the knowledge about the difficulty in financing his education in mind, Selasie decided to go to Texas to live with a friend and work.

Selasie would not make it directly to Texas, however. As he travelled by bus through Louisiana, his bus was pulled over and immigration checked everyone’s documents. Since school had begun and Selasie was not in school, the cops handcuffed and detained Selasie for being out of status. Selasie poignantly described how he felt during that experience,

The shock of being arrested, like I didn’t know that just not going to school was a criminal offense…it was actually a culture shock to me. Just being arrested and put into handcuffs and all that. I thought it was only criminals who got arrested and all that, but just not being in school and put in handcuffs and chains and all that on your legs was kind of a shock to me. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 189-193)

Selasie’s friends and family worked to gather money to post his bail while Selasie talked with the international student advisor about how to get back into school and resolve the situation. He explained, “I think [the international student advisor] was really helpful, and she was understanding, and she gave me some tips of what I needed to do and how I needed to get back into status and all that” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 186-188).
Selasie was able to post bail and get out of jail, though he had to return to Louisiana several times for court hearings until his final hearing, which the judge agreed to conduct over the phone. Although Selasie was in jail for almost a week, the experience left its mark on him. He described how every time he saw cops he would have flashbacks and returning memories about his experiences in Louisiana.

After Selasie was let out on bail, he went to live with a friend in Texas until school started in the spring. His experiences in Texas were much happier than in New York or Louisiana. He explained, “in Texas, it was a normal life. The apartments were nice, I was actually living with my friends. It was nice in Texas” (Selasie, August 2014, lines 141-142). Once school started, however, Selasie’s reprieve from trouble ended as he headed for Pennsylvania to begin school at WPU.

Since it was January of 2008 when Selasie arrived at WPU, there was a lot of snow that Selasie was not prepared for. The bus dropped him off on campus, so he had to drag his luggage through the snow to find the international student office. To make matters worse, Selasie had never been to WPU before and, therefore, had no idea where the office was located. He asked several people how to get to the office, and found that some knew, some did not know, and some pretended to know and sent him to the wrong places. When he finally arrived in the office, the international student advisor was very kind to him and helped him contact some other Ghanaians on campus who could share a place with him.

Although he had a place to stay, that first semester was not easy for Selasie. He had to travel back and forth from Pennsylvania to Louisiana for his hearings, which caused him to miss classes. Although he noted that one of his professors was
understanding of his situation, most of them were not. He explained his feelings towards one professor’s ignorance about his situation when he said, “I don’t blame him because he didn’t have a clue as to what I was talking about” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 166-167).

Along with Selasie’s immigration problems that filtered into his class experiences, Selasie also struggled financially. He could not find the money to pay for his books. He described his experiences trying to talk to one professor about his struggles obtaining a book,

I told him that I didn’t have the resources, I didn’t have the finances for the book. And that I was going to share the book with somebody else so I could do the assignment, and I think he refused. He didn’t like the idea or he didn’t like the idea that I was behind classes, and he didn’t even know what I was going through, so that was tough. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 156-160)

Along with trying to afford his books and catch up in his classes, Selasie experienced other struggles pertaining to his professors’ accents.

First of all, when I came out here, I always [thought]…that English as in English was normal English, like British English, and like English, when you speak English, no matter how you speak it, with an accent or something, people are supposed to understand you, and I had difficulty, like, even understanding some of the professors in the class because they spoke with a different accent, and it was really difficult to understand what the people were saying. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 293-298)
Worrying about the immigration hearing, missing and catching up in classes, trying to afford the books, thinking about how to pay his fees, and struggling to understand his professors made his first semester very difficult. He described how sometimes he would struggle to concentrate in class because of all of the stress that was weighing on him.

Because he was so worried about paying his fees and staying in school, Selasie decided that he would have to work in the summer. He explicated, “it wasn’t legal, but it was something that I had felt I needed to do to survive” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 355-356). His friends gave him a place to stay and found a job for him in New York City. He explained that at that time, “I was working, I think I had a job in the store, and I think I was working about 60 hours a week just to make up the money and come back to school” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 350-352). His life revolved around work. He worked from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. each day and came home ready to sleep. Even with working that much, he still did not have enough money to pay for his fees by the end of the summer.

Throughout the summer break, Selasie was able to save $4,000 of the $7,600 that he needed in order to pay for his fees and return to school. However, he explained that, with the help of his girlfriend, he was able to pay for his fees,

I actually had a girlfriend, and I actually talked to her about it, and she was actually willing to help, so that is how…she actually came up with some money and we added it to it, and we had to pay for the fees. And that is how I returned. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 385-388)

Although when they paid for the fees, the hold on his account was lifted and he was able to return to school in the fall, Selasie later discovered that the school did not accept the cards he used to pay for his fees. Consequently, he still owed $7,600 for that semester.
This meant that in order to return for the next spring semester, Selasie would have to repay the $7,600 on top of whatever he would owe for that fall semester.

Despite the continued problems with paying for the fees, Selasie’s second semester was a true turning point. He moved in with his girlfriend and her family. He elaborated,

I think it helped living with an American family because they spoke to me in their accent, and it was a good experience for me because you kind of talk to them about like the culture shocks and the differences in the culture and all that, so it kind of makes you understand the American culture better. And it makes you understand why they do some stuff and why they don’t do some stuff. So, it was a good experience. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 400-404)

Thus, Selasie was able to understand the accents and cultural issues that he experienced at WPU because of his experiences living with an American family.

Also during his second semester, Selasie no longer had to attend immigration hearings, and therefore did not have to miss classes or worry about getting behind. With the weight of his fees for the previous semester also lifted temporarily off of his shoulders, he was able to concentrate in his classes. Similarly, his ability to get his hands on the course texts improved as he found people who were willing to share with him.

In one case, he was able to tutor some students, mostly African and African-American students, who were struggling in their math class. During those tutoring sessions, he would teach them while at the same time using their books for his assignments. That group study experience played a key role in improving his semester. He explained, “I felt empowered because at least some of my problems were solved and
At the end of the semester, Selasie still did not have a way to pay his fees in order to come back the following spring. Although he had someone willing to cosign a loan for him, the person’s credit was not approved for the loan. Selasie had no way to pay, thus he felt that his only option for staying in the U.S. was probably to get married. When asked why he did not just go back to Ghana and take his girlfriend with him, he explained that he had no guarantee that he would get a job in Ghana. He elaborated, “after high school, I actually stayed home for three years before getting [the airport] job” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 244-245), and he did not want to go through that again. Therefore, his girlfriend and he decided to get married in December right at the end of finals week. Thus, he “had a final in the morning of my wedding day” (Selasie, June 2013, line 459).

His wedding marked a third transition in his life. He was able to obtain a green card and work for any employer.

it was a relief, you know? Like being able to work for anybody I wanted to work for and being able to like move around or drive around without the fear of being caught or yeah being stopped by the cops or anything. It was a big relief. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 261-264)

With that relief came added responsibility, though, as Selasie had to adjust to being married. “I had a wife to take care of, and that is an added responsibility” (Selasie, August 2013, line 268).
Currently, Selasie is working in the IT healthcare field and taking some professional courses in IT on his own. When asked why he is now interested in IT instead of business, Selasie explained,

I look at the market right now, and I look at like jobs and where I think I’m going to make it and where I’m going to find an easy job, and that is where I lean towards, and sometimes it leans towards business and sometimes it leans towards IT. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 337-340)

Thus, although he is choosing to go into IT, that choice is largely motivated by his business epistemology in that choosing IT is in and of itself a business choice.

Along with transitioning into the IT field, Selasie has also been advocating for those who may go through a similar experience that he did trying to go to school. He explained,

Some of the professors should actually be educated on the challenges of international students so they become aware of whatever goes on and the differences in the culture and even the language you know, and I believe when they do that it’s going to help a lot because sometimes you go into a class not understanding whatever a professor is saying. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 787-791)

When it came to advocating for international students’ financial struggles, Selasie made a very poignant point,

This is one of the things I didn’t understand. Like, you go on campus and all you hear about is Africa being a third world country and all that, but it was amazing to realize that actually students from foreign countries, or Africa in particular, paid
higher fees than people who were from a developed country. And that was shocking to me. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 704-707)

Thus, Selasie emphasized that international students should be given options, such as where they can work and how many hours they can work, in order to fund their education.

In the end, after looking back on all of his experiences prior to, during, and after going to WPU, Selasie reflected,

Well, all I can say is it’s been…a learning experience for me and I hope this kind of experience does not kind of continue…just to create the kind of awareness that this is the kind of experiences that people go through, and just to make aware that hey, the kind of experiences that people from another country or another culture come from is kind of difficult getting used to a new culture, a new country, and everything that goes in it. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 794-799)

Selasie explained that sharing his story of experiences in this thesis was one step towards creating that awareness.

**Yaw: Striving for the Best, Even in the Midst of Tragedy**

Many of Yaw’s choices have been motivated by his desire to have the best. For instance, he sought out the best secondary schools and universities in Ghana. He also sought out a profession with some level of prestige attached to it. Originally, he wanted to be a doctor, but he found out he had a phobia of blood. So, he decided to look for another profession within the medical field with prestige attached to it, which was pharmacy. However, his test scores were not high enough to get into the pharmacy program. Since many of his family members were into the sciences and chemistry, he
felt that chemistry would be a good field to start in, and later he thought he could branch into pharmacy. However, after he completed his bachelor’s in chemistry at a university in Ghana and completed his national service with a gold company as an analytical chemist, he decided that he would go on to do his master’s abroad, since he thought that would be the next level in going to the best schools and becoming the best he could be.

In order to prepare to go abroad, Yaw attended workshops at the U.S. embassy. He cited that he went to a GRE workshop and other similar workshops. Although some people could pay money and complete their interview with the schools at the embassy, Yaw decided not to do this. He applied on his own and received acceptances from Canada, Australia, and the U.S. The U.S. formally accepted him first, and even though Canada and Australia offered him partial scholarships upfront, Yaw decided to go to the U.S. because of factors like the distance from home and the weather. He was also influenced by the fact that the U.S. sent him his acceptance first, so he could proceed through the immigration system in order to obtain a visa. Although the Western Pennsylvania University did not offer him a scholarship in his first semester, Yaw knew that one of his friends studying in the U.S. had received one right away while another had worked hard the first semester and talked to his advisor until he received one in the next semester. Thus, Yaw figured that if he worked hard and discussed his situation with his advisor, he might receive a scholarship later on.

Yaw arrived in the U.S. in January 2011, and went directly to campus. Although school was not in session, Yaw was already impressed by the campus. He explained, “the buildings were kind of nice and I saw it I saw it was well-planned, structured” (Yaw,
June 2013, 178-179), and such a well-planned and structured campus made him feel like he needed to work harder. He described,

I kind of look at that what I had and what I’m experiencing now, what I had wasn’t anything like what I was experiencing. But if I could go through it and get to this height, that to me was telling me that this is not a time for relaxing. But it’s a time to work harder to achieve more. I felt like it was just telling me that you haven’t arrived yet. You can still get higher. (Yaw, August 2013, lines 313-317)

Thus, Yaw did not feel as though he had reached his goal yet, but rather he felt that he should work even harder because, in order to reach his goal of graduating from a master’s program in the U.S., he needed to work hard. Although he was mentally prepared to work hard, nothing could have prepared him for the strife he would have to work hard through.

Soon after arriving in the U.S. and beginning school, Yaw lost his mom.

His mom was and continues to be a motivation and inspiration for his work. He explains that he believes it is because of her and the way she exemplified working hard and striving for the best that he has always sought the best for himself.

Honestly, I think it’s something I inherited from my mom. She was one of those people who will never give up on herself. She always dreamt big, and no matter how small her beginning was, you will see her get to that point…I remember one of the things, she told us that there would be a time when all of us, including her, are going to be in school,…when I was in my final year in college, she had gained admission to college, and all of my siblings, as of that time, we were all, some were in high school, and two others were in college, and I was like, come on
where did this woman dream, like, anything’s possible, but I think that drive is really something that I inherited from my mom and it’s kept me going. (Yaw, August 2013, lines 153-163)

Even after his mom passed, Yaw continued to work hard in order to make her proud and carry on her legacy of having good work ethic. To do so, he decided, “okay, I’m going to work hard, go through, make sure I graduate, and when I come out, I’ll take my photograph, have my thesis, and I’ll dedicate it to her” (Yaw, August 2013, lines 463-464). When asked how he got through such a trying time, Yaw explained,

I knew God, and I knew who Jesus Christ was. And I had a relation with my God and I came to a point to understand that there are things we know that God knows more and what God knows, we don’t know. So it kind of kept me going, and at one point, I nearly packed my bag,…and said, you know, I can’t take these things any longer… But that night I prayed honestly, and I felt like life sometimes can be unfair…, but giving up doesn’t make you victorious, and I had to encourage myself that if I’m able to withstand the test, tomorrow it can be a testimony to somebody. I can speak better to somebody who is going through the same thing that I have been through. And as long as you experience, you can speak better. And you know, when you do something, you understand it better. (Yaw, August 2013, lines 447-457)

In this quote, we can see that Yaw’s spiritual identity and relationship with God encouraged him that what he was going through was for a greater purpose. Thus, he saw his suffering as a way to perhaps help someone else who suffers in the future. For that, he chose to continue through his studies instead of going back home.
Yaw also took into consideration what others would think if he left. He realized that he was not the only who had lost a loved one in life, so quitting school because of that loss was not an appropriate excuse in his eyes. He explained:

but another thing is that, it was like, I told everybody I am coming to school. If I pack up, and I go back home tomorrow, what do I show those people? Do I show them the tears? Do I have to tell them that my mom passed away so I couldn’t…I don’t think I’m the only one who lost a mom or who is going to lose a mom.

(Yaw, August 2013, lines 458-462)

He also knew that he had to strive to do better because he wanted to be a good example for his siblings, just as his mom had been. He felt that, since his mom passed, he was now the captain of the ship, and if he gave up, the rest of the crew members would sink.

So, instead of giving up, Yaw actually made the decision that he would continue in school and not only continue, but also get a 4.0 that semester, and he achieved his goal.

Yaw’s uncle paid for his first semester of school. His mom was supposed to pay for the second semester, but she passed away before she could. Then, his uncle ran into financial problems that also prevented him from helping Yaw financially in the following semesters. Thus, both of Yaw’s financial options fell through and he had to find a way to pay for his education on his own.

Thankfully, in his second semester, he received a one-year partial graduate assistantship. On top of the graduate assistantship, Yaw had to work in order to support himself. He described his work schedule,

And one of the jobs I was working 20 hours, another one I worked, the least was 30 hours, and the third one, the third one was more like working for my professor
with my, with my, you know working with my, you know it was also 10 hours a week. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 306-308)

Thus, in total, he could work around 60 hours a week while going to school full-time. He explained that he discovered he was smart and that he did not need to spend too much time studying to be successful in the class.

He also noted that one particular professor was surprised by his success in the class. Yaw stated,

all along I never knew she was just checking my work, she was monitoring my progress, so she was watching the assignments, no, I think what surprised her was I hardly went to her for help, and where you could see the other students going to her office for help, but my kind of learning was figure it out yourself. And if you have a problem, go to your professor, but if I didn’t have a problem that was so challenging to me, I felt like I didn’t have to waste time to go there, so I think there was one or two instances when I was really challenged, and I went to her, and that is when she told me, she was kind of surprised because she sees me quietly in class, sometimes she doesn’t know how I’m able to do it. She was always expecting to see me in her office, but she realized she’d go through…mark everything, and she’d realize that I’m doing better than all those who are coming for help everyday. (Yaw, August 2013, lines 582-593)

That professor encouraged Yaw to keep up the good work and not give up. She even recommended him to do a Ph.D. and offered to write him recommendation letters whenever he needed it.
Yaw’s graduate assistantship provided him with other unique classroom and research experiences. In the classroom, his interactions with students revealed to him the students’ ignorance regarding Africa. He found that many of their perceptions regarding Africa came from media images of rural and impoverished parts of Africa. Therefore, he used his time helping in a lab to advocate for a better image of Africa. He described:

I was able to learn some of the naivety on the part of the students. Some would think that, oh we sleep on trees. “We hear you sleep on trees, you sleep with lions” but I seized the moment to explain to them that no, whatever they watched on TV was not [what] was going on, and we even had to watch some videos about Africa, and most of them were very surprised. I ended up making a lot of friends through that. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 387-392)

Thus, Yaw recognized the power of the media and its influence on the students he worked with. So, he used his own position of power to educate his students about how he viewed Africa.

Along with educating the students in the labs he worked in, he also was able to do some research connected to Marcellus Shale in his second semester. Although he had this research experience, Yaw explained that he wishes the WPU sciences had more opportunities for research because that would lead to more funding and financial support for the students. Although Yaw’s focus for encouraging more research opportunities was to get more funding for students, there is no doubt that he was also impacted by his own experiences doing research through his graduate assistantship.

The second semester was a turning point for Yaw because he was working on the Marcellus Shale project, which he described as a very nice project, meaning that the
project was significant and worth being a part of. He also felt that his accent was becoming more Americanized so that people were better able to understand him. Through his description of that semester, it is clear that there was a shift from the first semester to the second semester in how he viewed the semester as well as himself. Even the way he perceived his accent changing reveals that he felt he was becoming more legitimized in the U.S.

After two years of working hard, Yaw was finally able to reach the victory of graduate in December of 2013.

Well, a major victory for me was going through all of these challenges and graduating, you know, you know…at a point where I knew friends who had challenges, some had to drop out, …some had to defer, but to see myself go through even more than what people had dropped out in the beginning and still be able to make it, hey, it was a victory. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 348-352)

Thus, as Yaw reflected back and recognized that at the end of his own journey through grief, economic challenges, and hours of work and school, he was able to reach his goal and graduate. As such, his graduation was a great moment of victory that celebrated how far he had come in the past two years.

After graduation, Yaw doing his optional practical training (OPT) with a software company. He explained that he joined this company because he is not ready to go home to Ghana, and he does not want to stay here illegally. Consequently, he had to find a company to do his OPT with, even if it meant moving away from the chemistry field and into the IT field. Although Yaw once perceived IT as something to stay away from because he felt it might be someday related to the end of the world, he has since shifted
his perspective of IT. He revealed that he felt he needed to learn more about technology because he feels he should not live an ignorant life in a world where technology is such an integral part of life. Finally, he discussed that he likes the IT field because it is a high-paying field. It is fitting that Yaw chose another high-paying field like IT to go into because he reveals that he is still seeking the best for himself.

He is also currently preparing to go into ministry through self-preparation, though he is contemplating taking a seminary course online. Because he wants to focus on going into ministry, he explained that he currently has no plans to pursue a Ph.D.

**Summary of Chapter Four**

Each of these participants’ narratives contains different experiences. Thus, these short versions of their narratives reveal the diversity within this community. Even within some of their shared experiences, the solutions they did or did not find led each participant down a different path and towards different experiences. My hope is that these stories largely speak for themselves in that they move whoever reads them to realize that there are things that can be done to improve future Ghanaian students’ experiences. In the next chapter, some of the commonalities of the participants’ experiences will be explored in order to uncover some solutions to making Ghanaian international students’ experiences more positive. With that, implications will be provided.
CHAPTER FIVE

EXPLORATION OF THEMES EXTRACTED FROM PARTICIPANTS’ NARRATIVES

Concluding Thoughts on my Narrative Journey

One Sunday morning, I had the opportunity to give my testimony at a church about how I believe God helped me overcome financial challenges. I took the opportunity to give that testimony because all the attendees were Africans, and I felt there might be some other students there who might be going through the same thing I had that semester as I tried to pay for my fees. After I gave my testimony and took my seat, a girl from a West African country went up after me. She thanked me for sharing my story and explained, “I am trying to find a way to pay my fees, but I believe God will make a way for me as He did for you.” Two weeks later, my husband received a call from his cousin informing him that the same girl from the church had given another testimony. She was able to get scholarships and funding for her fees that semester.

Although I was extremely elated for her, that young woman’s challenges made me realize that the financial challenges that shaped my and my participants’ educational experiences are a rampant problem that cross states, races, and nationalities; therefore, it is important that all those working in higher education institutions be aware of such experiences.

Introduction

After conducting interviews with the four participants in order to answer the research question “What are the experiences of Ghanaian international students prior to, during, and after their time studying in a U.S. university?” the data was analyzed and the following themes were found: Experiencing Others’ Ignorance about Ghana and Africa,
Influence of Experts in Communities of Practice, Challenges with Accent, and Financial Challenges.

**Necessity of Discussion of Themes**

Although there is diversity within each of the participants’ narratives, as was seen in Chapter Four, there were also common themes that came out of the participants’ interviews. Despite the fact that there are only four participants, and their experiences cannot be essentialized or generalized, it is worth looking into the themes that came out of the interviews. By looking at these themes, researchers can see what may need to be investigated in the future with a larger population.

**Privileging of Certain Themes**

Although this chapter focuses on four themes, it is important to note that there are other themes within the data that could be discussed. However, I specifically chose to focus on these themes for this study because they are topics that I felt the participants really stressed within their interviews about their experiences. Therefore, although there are other themes that can be looked at in future research, the themes within this chapter are those themes that, from the participants’ tones within the interviews as well as the frequency of how much they brought them up, the participants really emphasized within their experiences.

**Theme 1: Experiencing Others’ Ignorance about Ghana and Africa**

An experience shared by all four of the participants was related to others’, usually Americans, unfamiliarity with Ghana or Africa. It is important to note that not all Americans are ignorant about Ghana or Africa. Therefore, this theme is not meant to essentialize Americans as ignorant about other countries. However, it is being included
because the participants discussed several experiences related to some Americans’ unawareness about their country. They typically experienced that ignorance through questions that were asked of them. Yaw described these questions:

the questions that everybody kept asking me, like how did you get here, did you walk, did you swim. I was like, come on, how can these people think like, there was sometimes I would tell them, “Can you walk from here to Pittsburgh?” They said no, “So, how do you expect me to walk from Africa to America?” And even professors were asking me that question. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 187-191)

Like Yaw, Kwesi also described questions that he was asked, saying, “I had a couple of friends in church, too, and you have a couple of people in church asking you things like how close did you live with lions? And then elephants…” (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 805-807). He gave an intriguing description of Americans’ ignorance by saying, “Yeah they don’t know anything. They think the whole world spends dollar” (Kwesi, August 2013, line 432). This statement was largely related to the idea that some Americans do not know about life outside of the U.S. to the point that they might believe that all other countries use American currency. Maame also described coming against Americans’ ignorance about her country. She said:

…they feel like oh we don’t even understand English, they think…I don’t even know how they see it. One girl even had the nerve to ask me if we live on trees, if we had a cellphone, if we had a computer. And like I talk to my parents on Skype, so if I don’t have a computer, how am I supposed to talk with them on Skype? And she’s like, “Oh really, you guys actually have computers in Africa?” I’m like “Africa is just like America.” (Maame, August 2013, lines 195-200)
Like Maame, Kwesi, Yaw, and Selasie, Keim (2008) also revealed in the preface of his book that, while teaching courses about Africa, he realized that many of his students’ perceptions of Africa were based on stereotypes. He explained, “Over the years that I have been teaching Africa survey courses, I have found that students’ ability to approach the continent is deeply influenced by American stereotypes about Africa” (Keim, 2008, page). Thus, Keim (2008) also established that many Americans know very little about the continent of Africa, and that even what they know is often viewed through lenses influenced by stereotypes.

**Educating Others About Africa**

Along with her feelings about Americans’ perceptions about Africa, Maame’s statement also reveals that she felt the need to educate that friend about Africa by telling the friend that Africa is the same as America. This position as an educator about Africa also came out in Yaw and Selasie’s interviews. Yaw described how, through his graduate assistantship, he would try to educate the students who told him they heard Africans slept on trees. “I seized the moment to explain to them that no, whatever they watched on TV was not…what was going on, and we even had to watch some videos about Africa, and most of them were very surprised” (Yaw, June 2013, lines 389-392). Interestingly, Yaw used the media, through videos, to fight what students had seen through the media about Africa. Selasie provided reasoning behind wanting to educate others in the face of ignorance about his country instead of reacting by getting mad at them. He said:

I came to the realization that most people didn’t know much about the country and all they saw on TV were these stereotypes about Africa and all that, so…some actually asked those questions, not to get offensive, but they asked it
out of not knowing what went on out there in Africa. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 656-660)

What can be seen in both Yaw and Selasie’s comments is that, along with educating about Africa, they both felt that the source of misinformation about Africa was the media.

**The Media’s Influence on Others’ Perceptions of Africa**

The idea that the media focuses on the negative aspects of Africa is supported by Kalyango and Onyebadi (2012), who studied the frequency of coverage of Africa as well as the types of coverage (i.e., whether they focus more on conflicts and crises). They found that the networks showed less of Africa than other areas of the world, and that most of what was covered about Africa was related to conflicts and crises. With so little coverage about Africa as well as with what coverage there is focused on problems in Africa, it is no wonder that the participants had to confront so much ignorance about their country and continent.

Yaw pointed out that shows on television stations like the Discovery Channel also play a role in Americans’ perceptions of Africa. He described a conversation in which he explained this to a friend:

I said “Listen here, the Discovery Channel does a good job by capturing the wildlife environment in Africa, but I think that it doesn’t present the true situation on the ground. Because when you go to Kenya and you go to a suburb in Mombasa where there’s a lot of farming, animal farming going on, they don’t live in good houses. No problem about that. But you went to Nairobi; you slept in a 5-star hotel. Why don’t you show all this? (Yaw, August 2013, lines 391-396)

From Yaw’s quote, it is clear that he believes that the Discovery channel shows a one-sided perspective of Africa, focusing on the animals or the rural aspects of the continent...
and leaving out images of the hotels and infrastructure. Yaw’s opinions about the Discovery Channel is reminiscent of Wainaina’s (2005) satirical piece, *How to Write About Africa*, in which he described writing for readers’ expectations and perceptions of Africa.

Wainaina satirically wrote:

> Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress. (p. 10)

Both Wainaina (2005) and Yaw ridicule the media for showing a one-sided view of Africa that mainly includes the rural, traditional, and impoverished facets of the continent. As a result of such media coverage, the parts of Africa that the participants were familiar with, such as the western clothes and five-star hotels that Yaw discussed or the technologically-advanced society that Maame described, were largely unknown to many of their American colleagues.

**The Media's Influence on Participants’ Expectations of America**

The media did not just play a role in Americans’ perceptions of Africa, however. It also impacted Yaw and Selasie’s expectations about America. Yaw described that they did not show the rural or impoverished places of America. He expounded:

> They show all the places in America, like…Washington DC, California, Beverly Hills area, you know. I never knew how it was until I went to Detroit downtown. And I said, “Ooo why don’t they show these places?” Why don’t they show these places but they come to Africa and show the swamps, they show these dirty
places and well literally we have those bad places in America, too, so it would be
nice to show those places too…”(Yaw, August 2013, lines 419-423)

From Yaw’s quote, it is clear that he wanted there to be a more balanced image of
America in the Ghanaian media as well, in which the impoverished and “bad places”
were shown along with places like Beverly Hills. Yaw’s point is supported by Kogen
(2012) who compared the American media’s portrayal of hunger in the U.S. as compared
to its coverage of hunger in Africa. Intriguingly, hunger in Africa was often portrayed as
an inevitable, on-going problem with no solution while American hunger coverage was
often portrayed as a temporary problem that could be resolved (Kogen, 2012). For this
finding, Kogen’s study reinforces the idea that the way America is portrayed, including
problems in America, is different from how Africa and African countries’ problems are
portrayed. Consequently, America is typically viewed as an advanced society with few
major problems as compared to where the participants are coming from.

Like Yaw, Selasie’s expectations of the U.S. were also impacted by the media.
Specifically, the school websites he looked at raised his expectations of what school life
would be like in the U.S. He explained:

I think those expectations actually comes from reading from the school websites,
like, back home in Ghana, when you hear about schools in Ghana, you don’t think
about somebody coming to school in America and not being able to pay for their
fees or even struggling to get a job to survive, you know. So all you think about
is oh, going to school and having the peace of mind to study your books and come
out with flying colors and graduate and start to find a better job and start taking
care of whoever you needed to take care of. So actually the expectations were really high. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 282-288)

Selasie makes a good point that the forms of media that shape perceptions are far-reaching, even including school websites. For Selasie, those school websites only showed the positive sides of studying and going to school. Therefore, he did not feel adequately prepared for the challenging parts of going to school in the U.S. This could be related to Fischer’s (2012) findings that students had high expectations before arriving in the U.S., but were disappointed when they had experiences they did not anticipate, such as experiences with racism. It would be worth investigating other Ghanaian populations in order to see if other Ghanaian international students experience such unanticipated experiences as well.

**Theme 2: Influence of Experts in Communities of Practice**

The media was not the only place where participants gathered knowledge and expectations regarding studying in the U.S. Often times they relied on those around them who had prior experience to immigrating or studying abroad to give them advice.

Because all of my participants immigrated to a new country as international students, a common theme in their narratives was that they were considered on the peripheral of the communities of practice related to immigrating and being a Ghanaian international student. As Wenger (1998) pointed out, communities of practice are everywhere. Therefore, although it could be argued that the Ghanaians in my study were in communities, not communities of practice, I would argue that they were in communities of practice in which experts guided them, as novices, throughout their immigration journeys.
The experts’ guidance was particularly important because it is through this process that newcomers are able to become a part of the community of practice. As Wenger (1998) mentioned, “…the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice” (p. 6). For my participants, it was precisely within these communities of practices that they were able to transform from being newcomers engaged in peripheral participation to being expert Ghanaian international students who fully participated in that community. Lave and Wenger (1991) defined peripheral participation by stating:

By [legitimate peripheral participation] we mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practices and that the master of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. (p. 29)

Therefore, in the context of this study, my participants found themselves as newcomers in many communities of practices, from those related to immigration to those related to being an international student. Their goal was to become a legitimate participant, coming out from the peripheral into the inner circle of that community. In other words, they worked towards becoming experts themselves by first listening to the experts of the communities who could teach them skills they needed, such as talking points for an immigration interview or how to cook Ghanaian food in America.

For the purposes of this study, experts are those who have been in the community of practice longer and are able to guide the newcomers. Lesser and Storck (2001) provided a good representation of what an expert’s role in a community of practice is. In their research, the experts were those within a community of practice who guided the
novices or newcomers by answering their questions and guiding them to resources, including other experts who could help them with specific subject matter. An example within the narratives of an expert-newcomer relationship would be in Kwesi’s narrative when his roommates, the experts in the community, tried to get him a job, which is considered a resource.

Considering that they provide guidance and resources, communities of practice are important to the students’ experiences because they often provide the students with knowledge about the system. For example, after talking to Kwesi about his struggles related to the education system in the U.S., such as having homework every night, I asked him if anyone had informed him about the system. Kwesi responded, “No I didn’t know anything about the system. Nothing at all” (Kwesi, August 2014, line 191). Perhaps if someone had warned Kwesi, he would have been more prepared for the amount of work he had in the first semester.

**Knowledge Gained from Experts in the Immigration Process**

Before coming to the U.S., each participant had to pass through the immigration process. Pointers about how to pass through the immigration system more easily often came from people who already had the knowledge. For example, it was Selasie’s friends who had gone through the immigration process previously that influenced him to choose a less-popular major, human resource management, instead of IT in order to obtain a visa. When asked how he knew to choose a less popular major, he explained, “I have friends who were called to the embassy for interviews and they were refused visas” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 59-60). Therefore, he gathered knowledge about what not to do from
his friends’ experiences as people who had failed to pass through the immigration process.

Similarly, Kwesi explained how he was denied a visa because he did not know the talking points. He described,

I applied twice. The first time, I was refused the visa because I didn’t know the talking points. That’s how they call it. They say you have to look the counselor in the eye, you know, little tidbits…to get you through. (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 299-301)

Kwesi’s use of “they” is indicative of those who already knew how to pass through the immigration interview. During his first attempt in the immigration interview, Kwesi felt he was denied because he, as a peripheral participant, was not aware of the talking points that “they” the experts in the immigration process, knew.

Even after obtaining a visa, experts in the community of practice regarding immigrating to the U.S. continued to advise Kwesi. He described, “my friends in Ghana were like, when you get to New York, they will look at your I-20 [F-1 visa document]...” (Kwesi, June 2013, 937-939). The reason they were trying to inform him of the fact that immigration would look at his I-20 once he reached the U.S. airport was that he came to the U.S. late, so the date on his I-20 would have passed. The experts informed him that, “...if your I-20 says 21st August you should be in the U.S., and you are here 31st August…1st September’ Because I left Ghana 31st August, they will tell you…’they will bounce you, that’s what we say’“ (Kwesi, June 2013, 941-943). Therefore, the experts in the immigrating process tried to warn Kwesi that he might not be allowed in the U.S. if his visa was late. Thankfully, he was able to pass through the airport without a problem.
Not all the participants solely took the advice given to them by experts in the communities of practice. Yaw depended on information from the embassy in order to gain more knowledge. He said,

I didn’t just depend solely on whatever people told me. I did research on my own and I think I had friends who were interested in what I was doing. We all had common goals, so we had time to attend seminars at the U.S. embassy. You know, you go to the U.S. embassy, you go to the workshops. (Yaw, August 2013, lines 216-219)

In Yaw’s case, even though he did have experts advising him, he chose to also go to the U.S. embassy and rely on the people presenting the workshops there as experts about immigrating to the U.S.

**Understanding Paying for Education in the U.S.**

Once the students arrived in the U.S., after going through immigration, they had to figure out how they would pay for their education. In Maame’s case, it was her uncle who acted as an “expert” and advised her about how she would pay for her fees. She explained:

Because I came and I went to my uncle who, like, my daddy talked to him about how I was going to pay, and he was like, it’s not a big deal, I should get in and then we’ll think about that. So, when we came, we thought-I thought maybe I have to pay the fees upfront before I could go to school. I didn’t know that I could pay with the semester, so when the semester ends, so my uncle was like the money that you’re requiring is so huge, so we should relax and figure out things, like how I’m going to pay my fees. (Maame, June 2013, lines 159-165)
In this quote, we can see that Maame was a peripheral participant who was unsure of the payment process in U.S. higher education, since she initially thought she had to pay the fees upfront. As a result, she was depending on her uncle, who she considered an expert on the American system, to guide her through the system, since he had already studied and was living in the U.S. It was not until she called WPU that she realized that her uncle may not understand the repercussions of deferring a semester. She described,

So, I had to call WPU and tell them “This is the problem I’m having, so I have to defer my plans for a semester.“ And they are like, since I’m here on F-1 visa, it requires me to start school right away because I came here to go to school, so if I’m not going, and I’m skipping a semester, and I’m not sick, or, it’s not like a true emergency, then I’ll be out of status. So I was out of status for that semester. And-so I had to reapply, everything, all over again. (Maame, June 2013, lines 165-170)

From Maame’s quote, it is clear that the expert at the university was the one who provided Maame with accurate information about what would happen if she did not go to school right away. She decided to follow her uncle’s advice, however, and defer the first semester until she could come up with a financial plan.

Maame was not the only participant who received and followed advice that led her to become out-of-status. Selasie’s choices regarding when and how to start school were also influenced by experts. He described what those experts told him:

[I] kept asking people like “okay, how am I going to like, how is the school system like out here?” and some of the advices I got weren’t that good. People were saying “Oh, there’s no way you’re going to pay for the fees and all that, and
it was kind of shocking to me because that was my goal. I thought when you get here you can work and like go to school at the same time. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 139-143)

When discussing who the experts were that gave him such information, he said “there was actually one guy who was a student of WPU, who had come to WPU, and he was actually on vacation, he was in New York, so I got to talk to him about WPU too” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 77-79). What that previous student from WPU told him was: he kind of told me that there was no way I could like go to the school, like, it was, WPU was actually in a remote location and there were no jobs around that area, and it was going to be difficult combining school with work. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 85-87)

Since this expert had actually been to the WPU campus and studied as a student, Selasie attached a lot of faith to what he said. He also listened to others who similarly warned him about the challenges of paying for school. Reflecting back, Selasie seemed to believe that those experts’ advices were fairly accurate, as he said, “I think some of them had actually gone through what I was about to go through” (Selasie, August 2013, line 95). However, it is worth questioning whether Selasie went through those challenges because he was guided by those experts towards a path leading to experiences similar to their own.

It appears as though Yaw’s solutions to his financial challenges were also influenced by experts who had already received scholarships to pay for their education.

He described the advice that those friends provided him when he said:
my friends actually told me that, normally, after your first semester, you then get,…, so it was like go out there, make sure you have fun for the first semester,…go study as hard as you can, get a good GPA, and go to wherever you want to and you’ll get it. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 143-146)

Those friends were experts in understanding how to obtain such financial resources because they had both gone through similar circumstances. Yaw explained,

I think I know one got a scholarship from WPU, and he brought it right from Ghana. He was given the full tuition. And another one who didn’t get it, his situation was just like mine, but after the first semester, he was given a scholarship, so listening to the two, I realized it was going to work either way.

Either you don’t get it in your first semester then you work hard to get it in your second semester (Yaw, August 2014, lines 278-283)

Fortunately for Yaw, he was able to obtain a graduate assistantship his second semester after taking the advice of his friends and working hard during his first semester.

Unlike Yaw, who had to wait until his second semester to receive his graduate assistantship, Kwesi received his scholarship while in Ghana. However, he still needed money to supplement his stipend. It was his roommate, who was an expert in getting a job on campus, who initially brought up the idea of Kwesi taking on a second job. Kwesi explicated, “so my roommate wanted to get me [a job], but I told him I already had 20 hours, so I can’t do fosters because that’s what the book says. But second semester I went there and it was fine” (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 376-378). Interestingly, Kwesi did not initially trust what the “expert” his roommate, told him regarding working on campus. Instead, he considered “the book” as the expert and followed the rules about
working only 20 hours. However, during his second semester, Kwesi came to trust that expert and realized that the expert was right; he did not experience any negative repercussions for working more than the 20 hours.

**Understanding Living in America**

When Ghanaians come to campus, they need to learn how to navigate in their daily lives. This means that they need to find out where to find food that they would normally cook and how to cook it. They also need to uncover how to cope with the American culture and American education system. Kwesi relied on his expert-Ghanaian friends to help him. He mentioned, “Yeah, so I call him [a friend] a lot, and especially when I want to prepare Ghanaian food, I go like ‘What should I do?’” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 686-687). He then went into further detail about why he needed an expert in cooking Ghanaian food in America to advise him in his cooking. He said it was,

… because the ingredients we have in Ghana and the ones here…they are similar, but sometimes you have to either boil it for more minutes or less minutes yeah so I call him and then ask him “What should I buy? Where would I get the cheap ones?” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 689-692)

Similarly, Kwesi also needed advice from his roommates when it came to coping with American educational practices because he was not used to students being expected to talk in class. He described how it was his roommates who informed him that students are usually expected to talk in class in the U.S. when he said:
…I remember when I would go back to the room, I would tell my roommates “I didn’t talk today, I was just an observant” and they’re like “Yeah, …that’s how it is here” and I was like “Okay…let’s see how it goes.” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 384-387)

Therefore, it was Kwesi’s roommates who educated him of American classroom practices.

Unlike Kwesi, who received a lot of knowledge from his friends and roommates about how to cope with daily challenges in America, Selasie described how living with an American family helped him. He said:

living with an American family, it kind of helped a lot because they were from the culture, and they kind of knew the culture better, and they kind of knew their way around the system. I wouldn’t say their way around the system, but they kind of knew what to do and what not to do, and just kind of blending in with them was an eye opener. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 190-194)

Therefore, it can be inferred that Selasie saw the Americans he lived with as “experts” who could inform him about U.S. culture as well as the U.S. system. Even his use of “blending in” suggests that Selasie felt that, in order to be a legitimate participant in the American society, he needed to try to be more like that American family.

**Influencing Academic Choices**

Choices regarding where and what to study were also strongly influenced by perceived “experts” who knew what was lucrative in the fields and where to best get an education. For Maame, it was again her uncle who provided her with knowledge that the nursing field would be easier to find a job in than the business field. She explained:
…when I went to California, he showed me a lot of people who had graduated from business who they still haven’t gotten a job, so they are just getting by doing odd jobs, so he’s like, if I need a job security, then nursing is what I should go into (Maame, August 2013, lines 336-338)

It is important to note that Maame’s uncle had a vested interest in her obtaining a job right away because she needed to be able to repay her student loans, for which he had cosigned. This, along with his position as an expert, could have further influenced her willingness to take his advice and change from an entrepreneurship major to a nursing major.

For Kwesi and Yaw, it was “experts” who influenced their decision to study in the U.S., as opposed to another country. Kwesi narrated:

I thought of the US because everybody was like the US, and the second most popular language in the US is Spanish, and then I also had friends here who also studied Spanish out here, some are in Ohio University. (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 74-76)

The people that Kwesi described as “everybody” are the experts who gave him knowledge about the popularity of Spanish in the U.S. His friends who were studying in Ohio University similarly influenced his decision to come to the U.S. However, perhaps the people who would be considered most “expert” by Kwesi, his professors, were the ones who informed him that the U.S. would be a good place to study. He explained:
and also my professors, most of them studied here, my professors in the Spanish
department. Most of them did their graduate study and doctoral studies in the
U.S., so they told me the U.S. is a better place to cast your net. (Kwesi, August
2013, lines 88-90)

Therefore, Kwesi took into consideration the advice of all the “experts” who had
knowledge about where it was best to obtain a Spanish degree before choosing to come to
the U.S.

Similar to Kwesi, Yaw was also advised by someone who had experience
studying and living in the place where he wanted to study. Yaw mentioned that it was his
uncle, who lived in the U.K., who cautioned him against studying in the U.K., even
though it was Yaw’s dream to study there. He said:

But I had an uncle who studied in the U.K., who lives in the U.K., and he was
telling me about the situation in the U.K., and he was like, “hey, for me, I would
best tell you to go the United States because when I talk to my friends in the
United States, what they tell me and what I’m doing here in the U.K., I think the
United States would be a little better for you than you coming to the U.K. (Yaw,
August 2013, lines 204-208)

Like Maame, Yaw’s uncle was also helping him to fund his education. Therefore,
considering that he was an “expert” in the area of studying living in the U.K. as well as a
financial supporter, Yaw took his advice and chose to study in the U.S. instead.

From each of the participants’ narratives, it is clear that, when it came to making
decisions about immigrating, becoming acclimated to the U.S. and making academic
choices, each of the participants relied on the knowledge of those who had embarked on
similar journeys. By relying on those experts, they hoped to eventually become experts themselves in the future.

**Theme 3: Accent and Identity**

As mentioned in the literature review, Wang (2007) found that English proficiency was the most difficult part of studying in the United States for most of the participants. However, as mentioned before, it is important to gauge if and how language is a challenge for Ghanaian international students, since English is the official language in Ghana (CIA World Factbook, n.d.). As a result of English’s place within the society, most Ghanaians are at least bilingual in that most Ghanaians grow up speaking English along with one or more of the local languages of Ghana. Some Ghanaians even consider their English language proficiency as equal to other languages that they speak. Maame expressed this whenever she described finding herself in an ESL writing class. She did not understand how she ended up in the class because, as she explained to the professor, “…even though I don’t speak English like the way other people speak, that is my first language” (Maame, June 2013, lines 373-374). Therefore, because she grew up speaking English, Maame considered English as one of her first languages. Moreover, Maame felt she needed to explain to the professor that she should not be in the class.

Perhaps Maame’s account sheds light on why participants were frustrated by their accents not being understood or by not understanding others’ accents. Selasie provided an account of not being prepared for challenges regarding different English accents. He said:
I always [thought] that…English, as in English, was normal English, like British English, and like English, when you speak English, no matter how you speak it, with an accent or something, people are supposed to understand you, and I had difficulty, like, even understanding some of the professors in the class because they spoke with a different accent, and it was really difficult to understand what the people were saying. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 300-305)

This was particularly interesting because one of the reasons Selasie chose to study in the U.S. instead of European schools was because he “…actually took into consideration…in the U.S. they spoke English but in some of those European schools, they…were not in English speaking countries and that was also a factor” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 62-64).

Selasie was not the only participant to struggle with accent in the classroom. Maame and Kwesi both provided accounts in which students could not understand them. Kwesi discussed his experience trying to give a presentation on the monitor model. However, because he emphasized the “t” sound in monitor, the teacher could not understand him. He described, “so I was like monitor model, and she was like, she kept saying “Huh?” “Monitor Model” She didn’t know what I was saying (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 751-753). Similarly, Maame noticed that her teacher did not understand her responses to questions. She expounded:

I realized whenever I raised my hand to answer a question, they’ll be like “What? What? What?” Like they don’t understand what I’m saying. And sometimes I’ll say that the professor is embarrassed to tell me “Oh I didn’t hear what you said, can you repeat it?” And so when I’m done, they’ll all clap and I’ll sit down, and the professor will ask the same question, so I’m like, then I have to be quiet in
class, so most of the class if I’m not required to say something or do a presentation, then I’m just silent in class. (Maame, August 2013, lines 149-154)

What is interesting from Maame’s narrated experience is that because of her teacher’s inability to understand her, she felt that she should be silent in the class. Like Maame, Yaw also felt silenced in his class by his teacher’s inability to understand his accent.

because you talk even professors find it unclear to hear what you’re saying, so it was… I sit in the class,…even if I have a question, I can’t ask the question, so the only way that you can…there was only one professor from Korea that understood my accent. And the only way that you could talk to professors was through email, and I needed a face-to-face talk about some things…somebody to explain some things, but this accent was a barrier. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 243-248)

From Yaw’s description of his classroom experiences, it can be seen that he was silenced in that he could not talk to most of the professors directly. He felt that his only way to communicate with most of them was through email. Yaw also pointed out that the accent was a barrier when he needed to get more information about a topic.

What is interesting is that Yaw, Selasie, and Kwesi described either changing their accent or trying to change their accent in order to make it more understandable to more Americans. For example, Yaw stated,

I kind of settled in well in my second semester, you know, I started having a little bit American accent, so people could hear me better this time second semester almost. I was kind of learning the accent, trying to throw away my British accent to learn the American accent. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 265-268)
Sadly, Yaw felt that he needed to throw away his accent in order to have an accent that would serve him better in the U.S. Like Yaw, Kwesi also tried to change his accent. He explained, “but now I also try to cluster my, you know, my English. I don’t pronounce the “t” every time” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 756-757).

For Selasie, his transformation regarding accent related to both how he could speak and listen to certain American accents. He explained, “Well, I would say…understanding the people, like I got to understand the language better, and I was also able to express myself better for people to understand me and understand my accent” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 207-209). Selasie felt that it was his time living with an American that most improved his accent challenges. He said, “I think it helped living with an American family because they spoke to me in their accent” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 410-411).

Looking at all of the participants’ descriptions of their challenges related to accent, it is clear that each of them encountered those challenges in the classroom. The fact that the students encountered challenges with accent that actually caused them to be quiet in class is related to Yeh and Inose’s (2003) study. Their sample of 359 international students from Asia, Central/Latin America, and Africa, and their findings revealed that “English language fluency was a significant predictor of acculturative distress” (p. 23). Yeh and Inose (2003) alluded that this was a result of higher English fluency contributing to better interactions with majority group members. Thus, they explained that higher English fluency would help their students speak and participate more in class. As in Yeh and Inose’s study, Yaw and Maame’s narratives also revealed that their lack of American English fluency caused them to refrain from participating. In
order to cope with the accent challenges, Yaw and Kwesi felt the need to change their accents, while Selasie described a natural improvement in his accent challenges after living with an American family. Thus, although there is a difference in the types of challenges that the participants experienced related to language, in that they did not struggle with the language itself, but rather issues related to speaking a form of Ghanaian English instead of an American form of English, they were still impacted by the challenges related to accent, to the point that two actually felt the need to be silent in class.

**Theme 4: Financial Challenges**

Economic shifts and challenges were a major theme within all of the participants’ narratives. As was seen in Chapter Four, it was because of finances that Selasie felt the need to go to Texas to work, leading to his arrest in Louisiana and subsequent hardships in his first semester. For financial reasons, all the participants felt the need to work in order to pay for their fees as well as their daily needs, and two participants were forced to halt their education because they could no longer pay for their fees. Thus, it can be concluded that finances related to funding an education abroad weighed heavily on the participants and influenced their experiences.

Selasie described the challenge of meeting even his daily needs as he said:

I wasn’t working [in the first semester], and all the money that I actually had was going into rent, and sometimes, like I said, buying some of the books and making a compromise as to what to do and what not to do and trying to study at the same time was really tough to do, so it was, it was really difficult. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 339-343)
From this quote, it is clear that the financial stress Selasie experienced interfered with his study time, as he was focused on trying to find a way to budget his education. Kwesi echoed this notion when he stated, “…you can’t study when you are thinking about how to get the fees…” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 1183-1185).

Although Kwesi counted himself as fortunate because he had a graduate assistantship that covered his tuition, he also pointed out that the financial challenges of Ghanaian students is something that is very difficult and needs to change. Kwesi said:

I’m speaking for my Ghanaians now, my friends …the major thing that I think would help is like the fees,…they should increase the scholarships given to international students, or Ghanaian students, let me speak for Ghanaians now. It would be a great thing or like reduce the fees ‘cause it’s expensive when you look at the fees domestic students pay and the fees international students pay, the difference is that big, and when you don’t have any support from the school, like in my case, it’s very stressful. (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 1169-1176)

Further supporting the relationship between financial burden and the ability to focus on school, Selasie mentioned, “…just paying my fees and all that, kind of, how do you call it, released some sort of stress on me so I was able to approach people more, and, like you said, I was tutoring people in class, so that kind of gave me a different perspective. ” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 223-226). Thus, for Selasie, just paying the fees improved his experiences because he did not feel so consumed by the financial stress.

**Family Support**

Interestingly, two of the participants, Kwesi and Maame, described a phenomenon in which students or relatives will agree to support their relatives studying abroad for the
sake of getting the student approved for a visa. However, they will have no real intention of paying. Maame explained, “like in Ghana when you went for that interview, you can just take any bogus one and like financial statement and they will not even know the difference” (Maame, June 2013, lines 838-840). Thus, Maame noted that students will often provide inaccurate financial statements in order to pass through immigration.

Kwesi, however, noted that students’ relatives are often the ones who will agree to fund the student’s education when really they cannot.

And then what happens is my uncle promised to support me, but then they will just give you the statement and then when you are here they leave you. And then you can’t, I mean you can’t blame them because at least they did their best giving you the statement, and they needed it so, (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 539-542)

From Kwesi’s perspective, this is simply the relatives’ way of helping, by giving the statement so they can obtain a visa, even if they cannot follow through with financially supporting the student.

Despite this phenomenon, most of my participants did find some financial support from family or friends. Problems occurred when there was an economic shift in that participant’s relative’s financial circumstances. This occurred in Yaw’s case.

Initially, Yaw’s financial plan consisted of his mother uncle paying for his first semester and his mother paying for his second semester. However, Yaw explained why this did not pan out:

one of my uncles in London paid my first semester tuition, but I don’t know. I think my first semester or my first year was a series of tragedies for my family, and I think my mom had promised me to also pay for the second semester…so
that the first year would be catered for, so that when I get the part-time scholarship, whatever I work, wherever I am for my work, I use that to give up for the remaining, but you know the death came in and…that money didn’t come forth. When my uncle also paid the first semester, he also lost his job in London. So, it was like, it was just the first semester that was catered for. The rest…there was no plan to cover it, so I had to have a [backup] plan myself. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 326-334)

Thus, his mother’s death prevented her from paying for his second semester, and a shift in his uncle’s finances kept his uncle from assisting him more financially.

Like Yaw, Maame’s uncle was her main financial supporter. From his own experiences, he felt that Maame’s best option was to get a student loan. She explained:

he used the student loan, so he thought maybe he could just cosign it, then I could work my way up, go to school, find a job, then I would be able to pay on my own. And he was doing it for awhile and then his credit got messed up, so when he cosigned for me, they couldn’t approve it, so that was it. (Maame, August 2013, lines 48-51)

Consequently, after his credit score went down, he could no longer support her.

While Maame’s uncle was helping her financially, she was very concerned about being a burden on her uncle. Therefore, when she could, she tried to support herself. This resulted in her making some financial decisions regarding what she could or could not afford. She described:

I realized the little money that I had was for me ‘cause the first semester, I wasn’t working on campus, and I didn’t want to be a burden on my uncle or anybody, so
the little money that I had with me, I had to save it, so I’m like some of these things, unless I really, really need to buy this textbook, I’m not gonna buy it because I’m not getting any financial help. (Maame, June 2013, lines 325-329)

As a result, Maame could not buy all the textbooks required in her courses because she did not want to ask for more money from her uncle or anyone else, and she was not working. Maame also chose to cut costs by moving off campus. She stated, “I was living on campus,… and I’m like, I’m just gonna cut out the cost, so I was living outside campus” (Maame, June 2013, lines 578-579). Moving enabled her to cut out her meal plan as well because she could cook her own meals.

In both Maame and Yaw’s cases, because their uncles were supporting them, they took their uncles’ advices very seriously. For example, Yaw informed me,

So, you know [my uncle] was like a mentor to me, so I had to follow more of his advice and he was the one paying for my application fee, so it was like, since it wasn’t my money, all I had to do was to do study, I will just follow whatever he says (Yaw, August 2013, lines 208-211)

Thus, because it was his uncle who was paying for his education, he chose to study in the U.S. instead of the U.K.

As in Yaw and Maame’s case, Selasie also had an uncle who was willing, but later unable to pay for his fees because of a shift in finances. He explained:

I had a sponsor, who was my uncle, and when I got out here, because of he got hit in some kind of financial and he couldn’t afford to pay for the fees anymore. So that was how my problem started. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 108-110)
As a result, Selasie’s financial support largely came from friends and family inside the U.S. For example when he needed money to post bail, his friends and family rallied together to pay. He explained that the court “actually set a bond for 7500 whiles I go on my immigration hearing and all that, so my family and friends, they organized and paid that money, and I was actually released. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 166-168). His friends also helped him whenever he needed financial help to pay for his fees and return to school. He explained,

Actually, when I came to WPU, I met some friends, I actually had a girlfriend and I actually talked to her about it, and she was actually willing to help, so that is how…she actually came up with some money and we added it to it, and we had to pay for the fees. And that is how I returned. (Selasie, June 2013, lines 385-388)

As a result, it is clear that Selasie’s the financial support Selasie received came from friends in the U.S.

Kwesi’s case was a bit special in that he did not need proof of much financial support to immigration because “I had 20% 20-hour graduate assistantship to come here, so I didn’t really have to present a big amount of financial [support], “ (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 536-537). However, even when he did need a little extra money, he did not feel comfortable requesting some from home because the currency in Ghana, the Ghanaian cedi, is double the American dollar. For that reason, and because his family is supporting his siblings’ education, Kwesi explained that he would not want to ask his family for money.

I’ve been here about 8 months, I’ve not received a penny from Ghana. I mean, it…to me it makes no sense to receiving money from Ghana because the dollar is
times two in Ghana, and I have siblings my parents are catering for, so it makes no sense to-to send, like, double the money, if I’m to pay $100 here, for Ghana, it’s 200 Ghana cedis. So, they can’t, they can’t be sending you that money, and the perception there is that (speaks Twi) or he is in America. (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 1194-1200)

The perception that Kwesi draws on at the end of this quote, that “he is in America” (June 2013, line 1200), is a perception that America is a prosperous country; therefore, those who come here, even as students, are in better financial circumstances than those in Ghana.

Essandoh (1995) supported what Kwesi said in that he pointed out that family members in the students’ home countries often expect to be financially supported by the students, not the other way around. Sam, Boateng, and Oppong-Boakye (2013) supported this by explaining that many Africans who migrate send support to people both related and unrelated to them through remittances. Therefore, due to the perception that America and everyone therein is prosperous, many Ghanaians cannot ask for money from home and are rather subject to requests for money from home.

It is interesting to note that Maame, Selasie, and Yaw were initially supposed to receive money from home, but because of extenuating circumstances, such as death, job loss, and bad credit, their relatives could not support them throughout their education. This may bring into question Ofori-Attah’s (1995) finding that many Ghanaian international students come from affluent homes. Although it may be true that they come from affluent homes, Ofori-Attah’s (1995) finding is misleading because shifts in capital, including economic capital, can occur at any time (Park, 2013). Therefore, Ghanaian
international students should not be assumed to be economically well-situated simply because they are studying abroad. Quite the contrary, as these participants have revealed, faculty and staff should be aware that their students may be under economic distress.

**Working Outside of Visa Restrictions**

The participants in this study needed to find solutions to their economic struggles. Just as “[m]any students try to hold back the tide of debt by working” (Garcia, Lardner, & Zeldin, 2010, p. 175), the participants viewed working the only solution to their financial problems. As a result, each of the participants worked more than their restricted 20 hours at some point during their education (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Number of Hours Participants Worked Per Week*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Approx. Hours Worked Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yaw</strong></td>
<td>Graduate Assistantship: 20 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job 1: 30 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job 2: 20 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>60 hours per week total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kwesi</strong></td>
<td>Graduate Assistantship: 20 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job 1: 16 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>36 hours per week total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selasie</strong></td>
<td>Summer Job: 60 hours a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>60 hours per week total (summer only)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maame</strong></td>
<td>Job: 30-35 hours/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>30-35 hours per week total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The WPU school website explains that F-1 and J-1 students may work a maximum of twenty hours a week when school is in session. However, during vacations, they may work more hours, assuming they are planning to register for the following semester. Although working more than 20 hours a week is considered illegal, the participants explained that they felt they needed to work in order to fund their education. For example, when Selasie arrived in the U.S., he was surprised to learn from a friend that international students were not free to work anywhere they wanted. He said, “I didn’t know, like, as an international student you weren’t allowed to like work and all that” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 143-144). Even after uncovering that he was not supposed to work, Selasie felt that working was a necessity. He explained, “it wasn’t legal, but it was something that I had felt I needed to do to survive” (Selasie, June 2013, lines 355-256).

Yaw and Kwesi also felt they needed to work, even though they both had graduate assistantships. Yaw explained, “even the part-time scholarship [graduate assistantship] I got…it was still not enough, and it was a point where I wasn’t getting any support back home. So, I had to work hard, you know” (Yaw, June 2013, lines 288-290). Like Yaw, Kwesi also felt that working was necessary in order to meet his daily needs. He explained:

I had to take them to be able to pay my bills because you pay telephone bills and then you pay rent and then you have to eat, and then I couldn’t do that with the GA alone. The stipend from the GA can’t take care of that alone, so I had to take on jobs to be able to pay my rent and then eat and then buy my clothes and all of that. (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 557-561)
Interestingly, Kwesi revealed a bit of confusion regarding the idea of whether he could or could not work more than twenty hours. After I pointed out that international students were only supposed to work 20 hours he explained:

…that’s what I thought, so my roommate wanted to get me [a job], but I told him I already had 20 hours, so I can’t do [the job] because that’s what the book says. But second semester I went there and it was fine (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 375-378)

He was unsure why he was able to work more than 20 hours, but he said that it might be because “[The employer] give you like 10 or 16 hours, but most people call off, so all those hours you get, it’s not your hours. Like, it’s from people who have called off” (Kwesi, August 2013, lines 383-385). Therefore, Kwesi felt that the hours were not *his* because they were originally scheduled for someone else.

Unlike Kwesi, Maame appeared very certain about the visa restrictions regarding her work. She said, “yeah, international students were only supposed to work like 20 hours a week. At first I was taking up shifts all over, I was working like between 30-35” (Maame, June 2013, lines 570-571). However, she explained that her supervisors would try to keep her at 20 hours, unless they needed her to work. She said:

… sometimes they told me to cut it down because they knew that we’re not supposed to like do 20, more than 20 hours, but people kept calling off, and they also needed people, so they are like, “okay, if I wanna work, fine.” (Maame, June 2013, lines 573-575)
Although Maame worked outside of her restricted 20 hours, she described wishing that she did not have to work so much because she felt she was missing out on her studies.

She described:

I come working and I see people holding their books, going up and down, I’ll be like…Even though I’m getting money, I feel like people here are learning and I’m just there getting money. That wasn’t my main focus of coming here. My main focus was to learn. So, I felt like I was missing out on something. (Maame, June 2013, lines 559-562)

Just as Maame felt that working took away from her focus on her studies, Yaw also felt that working took away from his ability to do his best in school. He said:

although I planned to give out my best, the circumstances did not make me really give out my best because I took most of the greater part of my hours working on campus, the greater part of it working, you know. (Yaw, June 2013, lines 291-293)

Selasie also did not feel comfortable working, especially since it was outside of his visa restrictions. He revealed how relieved he felt when he could finally work legally when he said:

it was a relief, you know? Like being able to work for anybody I wanted to work for and being able to like move around or drive around without the fear of being caught or yeah being stopped by the cops or anything. It was a big relief. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 261-264)

Considering Selasie’s quote, it can be inferred from his relief that he did not like the position or experience of working outside of his visa’s restrictions.
According to WPU’s Office of International Education, in economic hardship, students do have the option to apply to the Department of Homeland Security for a work permit in order to be able to work more than their student visas allow. However, Maame pointed out that this is not always an easy solution to the problem. She explained how she tried to apply for a work permit after her uncle’s credit prevented her from obtaining another loan:

I went to the international student, who handles our cases, and I told her my problem, and she’s like, the only solution is that I should apply for work permit, so I can be able to work and pay my fees off. So, I applied, but I was denied because they said I didn’t have, I couldn’t prove that I couldn’t pay my fees. So, they denied me. (Maame, June 2013, lines 192-196)

Thus, Maame’s only option, which was the work permit, was denied because she could not prove her inability to pay her fees, which is frustrating considering the fact that she truly could not pay her fees and had no way to continue without working more. Therefore, Maame was forced to drop out of school.

Looking at the financial struggles as well as the solutions that the participants found, it is clear that the financial challenges of Ghanaian students as well as other international student populations is something that needs studied further in order to understand the scope of the problem. For the purposes of this study, it seems telling that each of the participants’ experiences were so mired with financial struggles to the point that each of them felt the need to work outside of their visa restrictions.
Future Research Direction

Since this thesis privileged certain themes that came from the research, it is important to note other themes within this study that could be looked at in future research. One theme that should be coded for in future research regarding this study is how one comes to power when one is powerless. Each of the participants described experiences when they were marginalized and powerless. However, in many of those experiences, the participants gained some power. For instance, in Maame’s narrative, she described how she felt the need to stay silent in the class because of her accent. However, when it came to a group project, she was able to fight for her right to create and participate in the presentation, and after she presented, she was complimented by both her partner and her professor. I use this small portion of Maame’s narrative to demonstrate that this theme is a powerful one that should be looked at in future research.

Additionally, it would also be interesting to look at the disillusionment that the participants experienced both with the school as well as with the United States as a whole. Although this was touched upon in the sub-theme The Media’s Influence on Participants’ Expectations of America, it would be worth delving further into the participants’ experiences of disillusionment.

Finally, since this is a narrative inquiry, much of the analysis within this chapter is descriptive rather than interpretive because people typically describe their experiences in a narrative rather than interpret them. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct a thorough interpretive analysis regarding what can be gleaned from the research related to the community that these participants belong to. Such research could better answer questions like: What does this research tell us about the Ghanaian community as a whole?
Implications

Given that there were only four participants in this study, I am reluctant to generalize and make implications for the entire Ghanaian international student population. However, I see the need to discuss how the current study results can help academic and international advisement communities think about expanding this line of research. The implications of this study may largely impact several groups of people within higher education institutions, including teachers, international student officers, and admissions officers. Although one rash implication that can be drawn is that Ghanaian international students are a high-risk group of students who should not be so freely given visas because of how these participants worked outside of their visa restrictions, I hope that the implications that will truly be drawn from this research are that we need to understand and be sensitive to what our students are going through. Furthermore, greater emphasis needs to be placed on finding solutions to students’ financial challenges.

Recommendations for Teachers

Although it is impractical to believe that teachers can know every challenge or trauma related to their students’ lives, it is important that teachers at least attempt to uncover some of these challenges. Even if that is not possible, it would be good for teachers to give their students the benefit of the doubt when teaching them, being aware that they may be going through problems that prevent them from, for example, purchasing a textbook or keeping up in class. Such situations should be dealt with delicately, with the teacher being open to communicating with the student about the students’ life.
Additionally, teachers and advisors should be trained to the sensitive issues related to international students’ experiences, particularly those from countries that less is typically known about, like Ghana. For instance, in this study, all four participants were surprised that their professors viewed their English as non-standard. If those teachers were more aware of Ghana’s background in English, perhaps it would bridge the misunderstandings and misconceptions related to the students’ English language abilities.

What is more, teachers could also improve their understanding of international students’ journeys as a whole by researching the immigration process and restrictions. This would prevent what happened to Selasie when he explained that he did not blame his professor for not being more understanding, since his professor had no idea what was going on. Although such understanding might not change a student’s struggle through the immigration, the understanding nature of a professor could encourage and ease some of the student’s stress. In Kwesi’s case, it was his professor who encouraged him to get another visa interview when he was denied a visa his first time. For him, the support of that advisor offered him so much support that he has kept many of the emails from that professor so he could encourage himself with them later.

In terms of the international student officers, it is clear that their work is extremely difficult. To have so many students who are struggling without any real financial solutions is no doubt a challenge that should not be underestimated. From my own experience with an international student officer, I know that it is just as heartbreaking for her to see her students have to drop out as it is for the students themselves. However, there are recommendations that can be drawn from this study in order to improve the students’ awareness of what life will be like in the U.S.
Recommendations for Continuous Recruitment of International Students

For International Student Offices

Since my participants pointed out that the financial statement is not taken very seriously in their country, it is important that anyone who communicates with international students regarding the immigration process emphasize the need to have a very sound financial plan. Students need to be adequately warned about the difficulty in obtaining financial resources from within the U.S.

Similarly, there is a need to educate students about visa restrictions. Ghanaian international students need to understand that not going to school can have serious implications, leaving them out of status, which can be a criminal offense, as was seen in Selasie’s narrative when he was arrested.

Finally, it would be great if teachers could be educated about international students’ challenges through workshops either provided by the Office of International Education or another group. Although professor are very busy, it is important that they be knowledgeable of some of the challenges international students go through.

For Admissions Recruiters

Offices of International Education cannot be solely responsible for preparing students for their educational experiences in U.S. higher education institutions. Recruitment offices and their recruitment practices must also be evaluated in order to see how they can provide potential students with a more balanced picture of what to expect from the institution. Although it is understandable that schools want to recruit as many students as they can, more importance should not be placed on reaching a certain number
of recruits. Rather, the experiences of students must come to the forefront because, as Yaw pointed out, often times the alumni are the best recruitment strategy.

Along with studying and improving students’ experiences, the website would be a very good place to begin adequately preparing students for the challenges of living in the U.S. As Selasie pointed out, when he went to school websites, he only thought of people enjoying their studies. He did not imagine students struggling to pay their fees. Thus, the website, although a way to recruit students, also needs to be a place to educate students about the realities of studying in the U.S. This would be an opportunity to prepare students for other aspects of their education that the students might not expect, such as language challenges or confrontations with students who might not know much about their countries. By using the website as a tool to educate students, hopefully they will begin to rely on that knowledge more than those of experts in the communities of practice who may give them wrong or misleading information, such as in Maame and Selasie’s situations in which both were encouraged to defer a semester.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that it only looked at the narrative journeys of four participants. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, considering how poignant the narratives were as well as the common themes that arose even from just these four participants, it would be worth conducting more studies regarding Ghanaian international students’ experiences in order to see if these results may be true on a larger scale.
Final Thoughts: What Can Be Learned About Ghanaian Students?

I am not Ghanaian by blood. I can barely make a good pot of jollof rice. However, through the community I am in as well as through this research, I see certain attributes regarding this community of Ghanaians that may help educators understand some of the ideals that may be shared by other Ghanaians within the larger Ghanaian community. For instance, the titles given to the participants’ narratives, business-oriented, seeking the best, even in the midst of tragedy, family driven, and teacher, are not necessarily features that only apply to the individual participants. Rather, after looking at the data, I found them to actually be attributes that make up some of this population’s value system.

In terms of being business-oriented, Maame, for instance, showed that she was business-oriented in that she not only wanted to open a business, but she also switched majors because she felt that a nursing major would be more profitable than a business major. Likewise, all four participants sought out sound advice in order to make the best business decisions possible related to where to go to school, how to pay for school, and what to go into after school. Similarly, and perhaps related to being business-oriented, all the participants also sought the best for themselves, even if it meant sacrificing a dream for a time, in order to obtain success. For example, it could be said that the participants’ very choice to come to school in the United States was driven by a desire to have the best and a belief that the U.S. could provide the best education. Also because of that desire to obtain the best, Maame postponed her dream of being a restaurateur in order to go into a field where she could have more financial stability. Likewise, Yaw chose to go into IT because it was a lucrative field at the time in the U.S. as compared to chemistry.
Therefore, the participants were spurred by a desire to have the best, and that desire often caused them to look at their decisions from a business perspective, looking at the outcomes related to the sacrifices.

The participants’ value in family and community is also seen throughout each participant’s narrative. Related to the focus on family, Yaw described how Ghanaians generally want to make their parents proud. He expressed, “I think the whole thing about some of these things is the prestige, you know, for your mom or your dad to be proud, like ‘Hey, my son or my daughter is doing something in school’” (Yaw, August 2013, lines 102-105). Thus, he explained that Ghanaians are focused on bringing pride to their families. Maame and Selasie revealed how their view of the community as collectivist influences their expectations of others in that they both expected those around them to be more willing to share their books. They both had an expectation that the students would share their books because, perhaps, in their community, members shared resources more willingly. In Kwesi’s case, he often set up his stories by saying “I would tell my roommates” (Kwesi, June 2013, line 385) or “I kept telling my roommates” (Kwesi, June 2013, lines 433, 1003). Noting that Kwesi set up so many of his stories this way is important because it shows that he felt they were key players in the stories, even though their only role was listening to him. Thus, their support was clearly important to him. This example also shows how the Ghanaian ideal of society as familial and collectivist is perhaps connected to the theme Influence of Experts in Communities of Practice. In other words, it is because they rely so heavily on one another and because they seek advice in personal business decisions that the communities of practice are so prominent within their stories. Taking Maame as an example, it was a combination of not wanting
to cause problems in her family paired with her belief that her uncle knew the system that she allowed him to influence her academic decisions so much.

Additionally, all of the participants placed an emphasis on educating people, particularly about Africa. Even in the classroom, Kwesi was not the only one who was a teacher, although he was the only one preparing to be a teacher. Selasie led a study group while Yaw used his influence as a graduate assistant in the chemistry lab to teach the students about Africa. Selasie’s words demonstrate Ghanaians’ value on sharing knowledge when he said “everybody has to be educated, you know, you don’t have to leave people to be ignorant” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 352-353). He further emphasized this when he said, “They say lack of knowledge, my people perish. So without knowledge the people will perish, so without knowledge there, if this generation does not have knowledge, the next generation is going to suffer for it” (Selasie, August 2013, lines 398-401). Yaw described the same sentiment when he said, “I felt that you don’t have to make people die in their ignorance.” (Yaw, August 2013, line 621). The way Selasie and Yaw use the ideas of ignorance and knowledge show how knowledge is almost a sacred attribute in the Ghanaian communities they come from. Interestingly, Selasie used a proverb “for lack of knowledge, my people perish” in order to make this point. This further supports that knowledge is such a valued attribute within the Ghanaian community that they even incorporate it within their language, by, for example, using proverbs in their speech or taking time to educate people.

Finally, there are two additional values that I saw strongly in the participants’ shared experiential narratives that are not emphasized elsewhere within this thesis, and these are the value of being responsible and the value of their religion. Regarding
responsibility, both Yaw and Selasie brought up their surprise that American students
drink and smoke.

So, we normally associated people who are drunk, like drunkards, like to people
who don’t make it life, like wayward people, like vagabonds. Those are the
people you associate with alcohol. But if you want to associate students with
alcohol in Ghana, it’s fine, but it’s in moderation. But the amount of alcohol that
people consumed was kind of shocking to me. (Selasie, August 2013, lines 320-
324)

When Selasie says that they associate people who drink with wayward people, he reveals
that he sees drinking as an activity of the irresponsible or of those who lack seriousness
and direction in life. Similarly, Yaw mentioned, “a lot of cultural shock was that I saw
young people, my age, and they were publically smoking, it was like, it was a shock to
me because where I come from it wasn’t like that” (Yaw, June 2013, lines 183-185).

From what Yaw explained, young people would not want to smoke publically because it
was considered an irresponsible activity for young people, and since many college aged
people still stay with their families and they know their families would not approve of
such behavior, they do not participate in smoking or drinking in public. Therefore, these
quotes do not just point out a culture shock, but they reveal a little about what Ghanaians
view as responsible activity as well as the importance of being responsible. Maame also
made a statement that revealed this mentality. She said of her time going off on her own,
“so I had to start all over and watch myself so I don’t get into trouble. Don’t mess up
with the wrong crowd and I wanted to focus on why I was here, that was for school”
(Maame, August 2013, lines 112-114). Although she is explaining that she wanted to
stay out of trouble in order to fulfill her purpose of going to school, Maame’s statement is rooted in the same belief that it is important to be responsible, particularly as a student. Therefore, these participants showed that they viewed their time as students as a time to be serious and responsible rather than a time to experiment with new things or meet new people.

Another deep-seated value of this community of Ghanaians was also their deep-rooted faith in God. Although not necessarily explicit in their experiences, their faith as a foundation for their value system was very clear in statements they would make. For example, Selasie’s use of the proverb “for lack of knowledge, my people perish” comes from the Bible. Thus, at least in that situation, his way of think was deeply rooted in a religious text. Similarly, during his interview, Kwesi explained to me “The world says fortunately, but we say by the grace of God” (Kwesi, June 2013, line 79). His statement emphasized that he did not see whatever happened to him as luck of the draw, but rather he viewed it as God-ordained. Yaw also brought up this idea of God being in control of the circumstances of his mother’s passing. He explained, “I came to a point to understand that there are things we know that God knows more and what God knows, we don’t know” (Yaw, August 2013, lines 448-449). Therefore, although he was extremely devastated by his mother’s death, he put his trust in his belief that God knew why his mom had to pass away at that time. Maame also described how she believed God was in control of whatever happened to her in that she believed that if she helped people, then “I know God will also help me out” (Maame, August 2013, line 130). Maame’s religion also drove her to make certain decisions. She explained, “always my dad is like, you have to put God first and everything that you do, you have to ask yourself, would God do
it this way? If your answer is no, then you’re not doing the right thing” (Maame, August 2013, lines 446-448). Likewise, Yaw explained that, although he knows people will be disappointed that he decided not to go straight into his Ph.D., he felt “I’ve gotten to a point where I feel God has done a lot for me. It’s time to also give back to God” (Yaw, August 2013, lines 672-674). This shows that a large reason behind his choice was related to his faith. Therefore, it can be seen that religion is a very influential factor in Ghanaians’ lives. It dictates not only big decisions, like whether to go into a Ph.D., or daily decisions, like how to treat people, but also small, detailed decisions, like whether to say “by God’s grace” or “fortunately.”

Although it could be said that ideals like faith, valuing knowledge, being responsible, being family-focused, business-oriented, and hard-working are values that many communities share, not just Ghanaians, I would argue that the degree to which these attributes are focused on in many Ghanaian communities is very particular to this community. In my interactions with these participants as well as in my interactions with other Ghanaians, I have seen how many sentences Ghanaians speak can go back to one or more of these foundational values.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To Whom It May Concern:

You are invited to be a participant as part of a research project I am conducting as a master’s student at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The following information is given to you so that you may make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any questions about what is written, please feel free to email me at zhzp@iup.edu.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the journeys of Ghanaian international students in the U.S. As a participant, you would take part in two thirty (30) to ninety (90) minute interviews. The questions in the interviews will relate to your experiences leading up to, during, and after being in a United States higher education institution. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you will receive no monetary compensation for participating. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, at which time all information pertaining to you will be immediately destroyed. You can also choose not to answer questions or to stop the interview at any time as well as ask to take breaks or resume at a more convenient time during the interviews.

If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. Your identity in this research will remain anonymous through a pseudonym of your choice. Should you not want to choose a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement on the following page.

Principal Investigator
Jocelyn Amevuvor
M.A. Student
Department of English, TESOL
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Leonard Hall
Indiana, PA 15701
zhzp@iup.edu

Co-Investigator
Dr. Gloria Park
Professor
Department of English, TESOL
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Leonard Hall
Indiana, PA 15701
Gloria.park@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730).
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:
I have read and understand the information on the form, and I consent to volunteer to be a participant in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

Name (please print): ______________________________________________________

Signature: ______________________________________________________________

Date: ____________________ Phone where you can be reached: ______________

Best days and times to reach you: _________________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, and have answered any questions that have been raised.

Date: ________________ Investigator’s signature: _______________________________

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APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL FORM

April 19, 2013

Jocelyn Amevuvor
288 South Stewart Street
Blairsville, PA 15717

Dear Ms. Amevuvor:

Your proposed research project, "Is Education Priceless?: The Ways Self-funded Ghanaians in U.S. Higher Education Journey Through Economic Challenges," (Log No. 13-206) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of April 18, 2013 to April 18, 2014.

It is also important for you to note that IUP adheres strictly to Federal Policy that requires you to notify the IRB promptly regarding:

1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented);
2. any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects, and
3. any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

Should you need to continue your research beyond April 18, 2014 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683.

This letter indicates the IRB’s approval of your protocol. IRB approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University policies, including, but not limited to, policies regarding program enrollment, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:jeb

Cc: Dr. Gloria Park, Thesis Advisor
    Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary
APPENDIX C

IRB MODIFICATION APPROVAL

May 24, 2013

Jocelyn Amevuor
288 South Stewart Street
Bilarsville, PA 15717

Dear Ms. Amevuor:

Your proposed modifications to your previously approved research project have been reviewed by the IRB and are approved as an expedited review for the period of May 24, 2013 to April 18, 2014. We are making special note that your project title has changed from "Is Education Priceless? The Ways Self-funded Ghanaians in U.S. Higher Education Journey through Economic Challenges" to "There is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight." A qualitative study of the experiences of Ghanaian international students in U.S. higher education. Your Log Number will stay the same (Log No. 13-206). You should be careful to use your new title and persisting Log Number in future correspondence related to the project.

I will report the approval of your changes to the Board.

It is also important for you to note that IUP adheres strictly to Federal Policy that requires you to notify the IRB promptly regarding:

1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented),
2. any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects, and
3. any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

Should you need to continue your research beyond April 18, 2014 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:eb

Cc: Dr. Gloria Park, Thesis Advisor
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW 1

Basic Demographic Information
   1) Gender
   2) Age Range
   3) Educational Background in Ghana
   4) Year they came to the U.S.

Past Space
What made you come to the U.S.?

Can you tell me a story about your first experiences in the U.S.?

Can you tell me about one of your first experiences or your first impressions at your university?

What were some of your experiences in your first semester?

Did you have any other memorable experiences from your first year?

What are some of the most memorable experiences you had while you were studying in the U.S.?

What were some of your challenges when studying in the U.S.?

Can you tell me about some of your victories when studying in the U.S.?

Can you tell me about something that happened in one of your classes that you remember?

Present Space
Where are you in your educational trajectory?

Future Space
Is there anything that you think would have made your experience in U.S. higher education easier or better?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW 2

After the first interviews are transcribed, I will create specific interview questions for each participant based on their previous responses and ask them in the second interview.
# APPENDIX F

## THEMES TABLES FOR FIRST TRANSCRIPTS/FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS FOR SECOND INTERVIEWS

### Kwesi Themes Table 1/Follow-up Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #s</th>
<th>Transcription Phrases</th>
<th>Potential Themes</th>
<th>Follow-up Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56-57</td>
<td>Took French, Spanish, and Psychology</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>What was your specific major?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-86</td>
<td>“I kind of fell in love with [Spanish]”</td>
<td>Transformative experience</td>
<td>What moments made you fall in love with it? Did you love it before the trip?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131-133</td>
<td>Option to either work as a TA or out in the field, so he chose to be a TA.</td>
<td>National Service/Understanding background</td>
<td>Why did you choose to work in the university instead of working in the field?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-156 -160-161</td>
<td>“Yeah, so the US cause it’s where everybody wants to come” -Looking for a place where he can get opportunities after learning where the economy is strong.</td>
<td>Background experiences/Continuity of Experiences</td>
<td>-What experience made you feel that everybody wanted to come here? Or why do you think everyone wants to come here? What is that perception about the US? -Where do you suppose that perception of the strong economy and job opportunities comes from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>“…it’d be a nice way to come to the US.”</td>
<td>Clarification of when he wanted to study here.</td>
<td>Had you been wanting and planning to travel to the US before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222-223</td>
<td>Looked at the courses offered in US institutions, then applied.</td>
<td>Background/Expectations</td>
<td>What courses were you looking for in particular? Does your program meet your desired coursework?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>283-284</td>
<td>Cousin who is in doctorate program was explaining to him</td>
<td>Social interaction/Expert in COP</td>
<td>Did he help you once you arrived here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Question/Comment</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Follow-up Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>328</td>
<td>Travel experiences in the US very different from in Cuba.</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>In what ways? Why was it so much more difficult studying here than in Cuba?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>362-363</td>
<td>The challenge of having to read every week and having homework, which they didn’t have in Ghana.</td>
<td>Expectations/Culture shock in school</td>
<td>Did anyone warn you about the amount of work you would have to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>450-452</td>
<td>“It’s a Ghana thing, but we are trying to change it before we enter into professional life”</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Would you say professional life in Ghana is different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>534</td>
<td>Having more teaching experiences</td>
<td>Transformative experience (in teaching methods)</td>
<td>Are you teaching experiences also changed with the context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>571-582</td>
<td>Professor welcomed him</td>
<td>Social interaction/Faculty support</td>
<td>Why do you think being welcomed impacted you so much?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>593-594</td>
<td>Had to type 15-20 pages</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>What were your writing experiences in Ghana? (was it in Spanish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>653</td>
<td>“I’m now used to the pace”</td>
<td>Acclimation/Transformative journey</td>
<td>What do you think helped you get used to it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>664-665</td>
<td>When he stayed with a Ghanaian girl, he was on his feet alone</td>
<td>Social interaction/support</td>
<td>The Ghanaian girl didn’t offer you support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>675-676</td>
<td>“I was ready to live on my own now, so it was really cool”</td>
<td>Transformative Experience</td>
<td>Can you tell me more about your transition/how you changed, what you learned that helped you be successful on your own in the second semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>708</td>
<td>Combined working at</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>You worked while on a full-time scholarship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>717</td>
<td>“I did it” (balanced work, school, church, friends, etc.)</td>
<td>Transformative experiences</td>
<td>How do you think you got to the point where you could balance all of that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>775</td>
<td>Has plans to teach here</td>
<td>Perception of US?</td>
<td>Why here? Why not teach in Ghana?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>784-786 804-805</td>
<td>“You know American students, they don’t know what happens outside the walls of America”/people asking him questions about lions and that</td>
<td>Cultural perceptions about Africa/Media(?)</td>
<td>Why do you think there is a lack of knowledge about other countries/about Africa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>878</td>
<td>Practice teaching was stressful.</td>
<td>Motivation and/or Epistemology</td>
<td>Do you think the deadlines and presentations were also stressful because you had a high expectation on yourself, so you pressured yourself to do well? If so, where do you think that comes from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>Brings up time again</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>You bring up the issue of time several times. Why do you think the time made such an impact on you? Why did the time feel so different in the US than other places you have been?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1039</td>
<td>“When I go back to the university, I will…” copy the system</td>
<td>Continuity of experiences</td>
<td>What would you take back to Ghana from the system here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2054-1055</td>
<td>Told them he studied psychology and French, but not</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>Why could you tell them you were studying French and not Spanish?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Clarification/Background</td>
<td>Why choose applied linguistics instead of literature track?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have literature track and applied linguistics, and he chose applied linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>1125-1126</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking at schools in Canada and US</td>
<td>Perception of US</td>
<td>Why US or Canada as opposed to other countries in the world?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1150</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains that it makes no sense for him to take money from people in Ghana because they also need it.</td>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Who was your financial supporter on your financial statement? Do you feel as though they can’t really support you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1191-1197</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Helping friends to conjugate verbs.</td>
<td>Epistemology?</td>
<td>You seem to have a real teacher’s spirit, like caring for students, motivating them, helping friends learn Spanish…where do you think that comes from?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-Mentioning trying to motivating students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-1081-1082 -1098-1102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Transformative experiences</td>
<td>What do you think caused such a transition/transformation from semester 1 to semester 2?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major transformation from semester 1 to semester 2 in terms of balancing everything, making friends, feeling more relaxed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Line #s</td>
<td>Transcription Phrases</td>
<td>Potential Themes</td>
<td>Follow-up Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>99-100</td>
<td>Wanted to open own restaurant one day/took home economics major in secondary school</td>
<td>Epistemological perspective</td>
<td>What do you think made you want to open your own restaurant? Where did that passion come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>Taught food and nutrition for national service</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Why did you choose that for your national service? Did that experience influence you at all to want to teach or to combine the restaurant with food and nutrition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159-162</td>
<td>Uncle told her she should come to US, then think about paying fees.</td>
<td>Social Interaction/Experts in COP</td>
<td>How do you think his experience influenced that advice or belief that it wasn’t a bit deal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179-180</td>
<td>Solution was that uncle was going to co-sign</td>
<td>Understanding background/Experts in COP</td>
<td>Why not do that during the first semester instead of deferring?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>“That’s when I experienced America.”</td>
<td>Experiences/Culture shock</td>
<td>How would you describe your experiencing America? What does that mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>321-322</td>
<td>In Ghana treat everyone like family, but in America, it is very “me me me”</td>
<td>(Lack of) Social interaction</td>
<td>How did that affect your experiences? Can you tell me a little more about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>330-336</td>
<td>Borrowing textbooks, but friends wouldn’t be willing to share</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>Like you said, Ghana is much more of a collectivist society where everyone kind of leans on one another. Do you think this textbook situation would have been different in Ghana?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>361-363</td>
<td>Asking friend from Japan what class to register for.</td>
<td>Social Interaction/Expert in COP</td>
<td>How did you connect with Maki and the other international students? Do you think that having friends like that impacted your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>373-374</td>
<td>“and I’m like, even though I don’t speak English like the way other people speak, that is my first language.”</td>
<td>English Experiences</td>
<td>Were there other instances where you felt you had to kind of show that you are a legitimate English speaker?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>382-386</td>
<td>“…so I’m even happy I took that class because I might not even knew I had passion for writing poems and that.”</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>How did poetry impact your experiences? Like, do you think that the poetry gave you an outlet to express your stress or a way to keep/record your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>427-428</td>
<td>She could associate with Ghanaians,</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>How was that a relief? How did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>437-453</td>
<td>Thinking they are like family, she tries to tell her Ghanaian friend to walk away from a bad relationship, which ends up alienating her from the group. Then, it's just her, her husband, and her baby.</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>You mentioned before that Ghanaians view each other like family, but do you think that the Ghanaians in that group had a different view about Ghanaian relationships? How was that transition going back from that bigger community to just being you, your husband, and your baby?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>490-492</td>
<td>Uncle said she might not get a job unless she goes into nursing</td>
<td>Social Interaction/Expert in COP</td>
<td>What experiences do you think made your uncle feel that way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>505</td>
<td>She will do what she likes (nursing) even though it isn’t what she is passionate about.</td>
<td>Epistemological Perspective</td>
<td>Why do you think that passion isn’t there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>612-614</td>
<td>New roommate “had an ability to make me laugh and forget about my worries.”</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>Would you say that she became that family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>636</td>
<td>“I was always on the Dean’s list”</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>What do you think kept you going? Kept you motivated to be self-sufficient, working, doing well in school, etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>677-679</td>
<td>Married with a baby now</td>
<td>Transformative Experience</td>
<td>How was that transition for you, from a...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>723-724</td>
<td>Something offensive to her might not be offensive to others</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Like what? How did you learn that it wasn’t offensive to others? What strategies did you learn to deal with those situations, since you are now supervisor?</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>733-735</td>
<td>“It’s real hard, especially, I don’t meant to be racist, but like, the African Americans, it’s like taking it to another level”</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>Why do you think it is hard for to interact with African Americans? What experiences with African Americans made you feel that way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>852-854</td>
<td>“if I didn’t have my boyfriend at that time, who’s my husband now, if I didn’t, and I was out of status, and I couldn’t work on campus, I couldn’t do anything”</td>
<td>Social interaction/support</td>
<td>How would you say having your husband throughout the process has impacted your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(No specific Lines)</td>
<td>Ghanaians being like family/wanting that family interaction</td>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>You bring up the idea of family a lot, and I know that you are very caring and very family-oriented. Where do you think that comes from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line #s</td>
<td>Transcription Phrases</td>
<td>Potential Themes</td>
<td>Follow-up Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Went to national institute of info. Technology &amp; took courses there</td>
<td>National Service</td>
<td>Did you have to do a national service because you went to a national institute?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>My major in H.S. was business</td>
<td>Major Selection/Epistemology</td>
<td>I know you are very business oriented, so where do you think that comes from? For example, why business in secondary school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-37</td>
<td>Talking about why he didn’t go into IT in high school, because his high school didn’t have that focus.</td>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Where do you think your interest in IT comes from/when did you become interested in it? And why not go into a technical high school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>Immigration office take into consideration the major you choose</td>
<td>Immigration Experiences</td>
<td>What experiences in your life taught you that or provided you with that knowledge? How did you gain that knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-99</td>
<td>Most people were into IT</td>
<td>Understanding background.</td>
<td>What led you to believe that IT was so popular at that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105-108</td>
<td>It is difficult obtaining a visa, especially from a third world country.</td>
<td>Immigration experiences</td>
<td>What experiences taught you that? Why do you</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>136</strong></td>
<td>I was in New York.</td>
<td>Understanding background</td>
<td>Did you have accommodation set up there before you came? Like, how did that accommodation come about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>143-145</strong></td>
<td>People kept telling him that there is no way to pay the fees.</td>
<td>Social interaction/experts in COP</td>
<td>What do you think the experiences of those people were that they would tell you that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>143-144</strong></td>
<td>Asking people about the system/about the fees.</td>
<td>Understanding background/Immigration Experiences</td>
<td>Did you have a financial plan before coming? Like, for the financial statement for the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>186-187</strong></td>
<td>All I needed to do to get back into status was go to school, etc.</td>
<td>Understanding background</td>
<td>Did you have to reapply to the school? If so, why not reapply for an IT program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>216-220</strong></td>
<td>Spent time in Texas, going back to Louisiana, going to PA</td>
<td>Experiences continuity.</td>
<td>So, you spent time in N.Y., Louisiana, and Texas. How did your experiences in those places impact your experiences in PA?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>226-227</strong></td>
<td>I didn’t work in Texas</td>
<td>Understanding background</td>
<td>Were you still worried about how to pay the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>307-308</td>
<td>Going from Indiana to Louisiana for my immigration hearing…</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>Did you have to miss class for that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>366-368</td>
<td>I wasn’t scared per se, but I see the cops and sometimes get scared</td>
<td>Continuity of experiences</td>
<td>You mentioned you weren’t scared of being caught working, but that you did have some fear of cops. What do you think was the source of that fear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>410</td>
<td>It helped living with an American family</td>
<td>Transitioning/transformative experience, journey</td>
<td>Can you tell me more about your experiences living with the American family. It had to be a difficult or different experience moving from living with Ghanaians to living with Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>417-426</td>
<td>Better concentration in class, not involved in immigration stuff, it was a relief. Some classes were even enjoyable. Tutoring classmates.</td>
<td>Transformative experience/journey</td>
<td>There’s a real transition from the first semester to the second semester. You describe it was being better and feeling relieved, and even enjoying some classes. What do you think really made that change and how did you change from that first semester to the second</td>
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<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td>The best option was to get married to have a good status in the U.S.</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>What made you want to stay in the U.S. instead of maybe going back home to continue your education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>484-489</td>
<td>I was able to work legally for any employer, became permanent resident.</td>
<td>Transformative experience</td>
<td>How was that transition from being a student on an F-1 visa to being a working husband and permanent resident? How do you think that changed/effect you and your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>557-561</td>
<td>Sometimes we (Ghanaians) shared our challenges and what we expected during our time on campus.</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>What did you expect during your time on campus and what do you think gave you those expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>620-621</td>
<td>Most of the classes I wanted to take were already taken.</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>Did you get to school late in your second semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>647-648</td>
<td>A bunch of drunk people who were supposed to be students</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Why was this so shocking? Do students in Ghana not drink? Or were you expecting American students to be different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>653-657 714</td>
<td>-Taking IT courses on his own -It looks like I’m leaning towards IT</td>
<td>Transformative experience/transition</td>
<td>What brought you back to IT, transitioned you from the business field?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>689</td>
<td>He became a tool for Advocating/Continuity of</td>
<td></td>
<td>What motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating people about Africa.</td>
<td>Experience (if experiences inspired him to advocate)</td>
<td>You to be that educational tool? Like, you could have just let them stay in their ignorance or you could have lied, but you chose to educate. Why?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>815</td>
<td>It’s been a learning experience</td>
<td>What were some of the things you learned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>817-820</td>
<td>I hope this kind of experience creates awareness about those coming from a new country/culture.</td>
<td>Advocating/Continuity of experience (if experiences inspired him to advocate) What makes you want to show this awareness? How do you think you will do that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>689 &amp; 817-820</td>
<td>Desire to educate</td>
<td>Epistemological view</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You bring up that you want to educate people or create awareness for people. Knowing you, I know that, in many areas of your life, you want to impact knowledge into people. Where do you think that desire comes from?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Yaw Themes Table 1/Follow-up Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #s</th>
<th>Transcription Phrases</th>
<th>Potential Themes</th>
<th>Follow-up Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87-93</td>
<td>Wanted to do pharmacy, but resorted to chemistry.</td>
<td>(Secondary) Academic focus/Epistemology</td>
<td>What do you think initially made you interested in Chemistry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110-113</td>
<td>Performed his national service in a gold mining company</td>
<td>Background/National service</td>
<td>Why the gold mining company? Did you have another option or was it assigned to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127-136</td>
<td>Choosing the best schools</td>
<td>Motivation behind school selection/Epistemology</td>
<td>Why focus on the best? Where does that come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131-132</td>
<td>Choosing the US because he thought it had better opportunities</td>
<td>Motivation behind school selection</td>
<td>Where did that belief and knowledge come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Better deals in other countries, but still chose US</td>
<td>Motivation behind school selection/Epistemology</td>
<td>What better deals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143-145</td>
<td>Friends advising him about getting a scholarship</td>
<td>Support network</td>
<td>Tell me about these friends academic experiences in the U.S. How do you think their experiences influenced what they advised you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176-179</td>
<td>Well-planned structure of the university</td>
<td>Infrastructure enabling them to do things they couldn’t otherwise do/Experiences</td>
<td>What did the well-planned/well-structured infrastructure allow you to experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184-185</td>
<td>Young people publically smoking/where I come from, it wasn’t like that</td>
<td>Culture shock/Media (tied into next question)</td>
<td>Tell me a little bit more about what you mean by it wasn’t like that. What do you think was the source of the shock regarding people smoking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192-193</td>
<td>They watch on TV was deceiving them a lot…</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>(Connecting to above question, too) One of the great points you bring up is the role of the media in the perceptions/expectations. How do you think that played a role in your experiences/expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-</td>
<td>Mom’s passing nearly</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>What do you think kept you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td>took him off his plans</td>
<td>going through all of that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>224-228</td>
<td>Despite mom’s passing, “I kind of had a nice experience of how the US ed. Was diff. from back home”</td>
<td>Experiences: How difference between Ghana/US influenced experiences</td>
<td>In the midst of loss and challenge in US, you stated that the US education system was different from what it was back home in Ghana and that it was a nice experience. Could you elaborate on this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>262-270</td>
<td>Partial scholarship/nice project/A little bit of Amer. Accent/it was fun</td>
<td>Experiences: Transformative Experiences/Journey</td>
<td>Important part of transcript. Not sure if I have a question about it because he unknowingly covered it pretty well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278-279</td>
<td>From the culture, take the good stuff he wanted for himself</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>What was the good stuff that you wanted to take?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206-310 351-353</td>
<td>-Working 60 hours a week -Going through more than others who had dropped out, and still keeping on</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>What kept you going?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>355-358</td>
<td>Some discouraged me</td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>Why do you think some discouraged you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>274-277</td>
<td>Professor, over time, accepted that he was African, but he was good.</td>
<td>Social interaction/Faculty support</td>
<td>Was there a time when you felt she or other professors didn’t accept you being African?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>387-391</td>
<td>I seized the moment to explain to them that, no, whatever they watched on TV was not the real…</td>
<td>Media/Motivation</td>
<td>What do you think motivated you to teach them and advocate for a better picture of Africa? Was there a particular experience that made you think that you needed to show them the more balanced picture of Africa/Ghana?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>411</td>
<td>“I’m at my peak now”</td>
<td>Present space</td>
<td>Peak in terms of education or….because you are really smart, so I know you can go really far in terms of work, education, ministry, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>431</td>
<td>OPT</td>
<td>Present Space</td>
<td>Are you planning towards any of that now?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>437</td>
<td>WPU lacks a lot of research</td>
<td>Improving experiences for others</td>
<td>Where are you doing your OPT?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>443-447</td>
<td>Needing better funding like Harvard and Princeton have</td>
<td>Perceptions (media?)</td>
<td>In terms of research, what would you add? What in your experiences make you say they need more research?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Where do you think that belief is coming from that they have better funding?</td>
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</tbody>
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### APPENDIX G

**THEMES TABLES FOR SECOND TRANSCRIPTIONS**

**Kwesi Themes Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #s</th>
<th>Phrases</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Explained that in his university, they drop classes as they go, so he had to complete 1 year of Spanish before dropping it.</td>
<td>Spanish major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-28</td>
<td>Spanish professors made the class interesting in order to motivate the students, since most did not see a need to study Spanish. They also graded a bit easier.</td>
<td>Spanish interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-33</td>
<td>“another critical moment was when I had a scholarship to go to Cuba. And then I was like wow why waste four years of Spanish, so I thought it would be a good thing to continue with.”</td>
<td>Spanish interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-49</td>
<td>Because there aren’t a lot of Spanish-field options in Ghana, “I thought being in the school, staying in the school would give me an opportunity to practice the language to keep the language because after school I had already decided to move onto graduate studies in Spanish. So I felt being within the university community would be a plus for me to keep the language and gain a little bit of teaching experience before I go further with Spanish”</td>
<td>Nat’l Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-56</td>
<td>Explained that national service just puts people anywhere, so if he hadn’t been a TA, he could have been put in a bank or somewhere that his Spanish would be left unused.</td>
<td>Nat’l Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-78</td>
<td>“so it would be logical to do it in a Spanish speaking country. And maybe Spain or Cuba, but Spain was facing an economic crisis, so Spain was out. And then I, I thought of the US because everybody was like the US, and the second most popular language in the US is Spanish, and then I also had friends here who also studied Spanish out here, some are in Ohio University. So I was like, okay then, let me try the US since Spanish is the second most popular language and they offer scholarships for graduate study. So, that was why I chose the US.”</td>
<td>Reason for choosing WPU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>The media showed him that Spain was in crisis.</td>
<td>Media Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-90</td>
<td>“also my professors, most of them studied here, my professors in the Spanish department. Most of them did their graduate study and doctoral studies in the US, so they told me the US is a better place to cast your net.”</td>
<td>Expert Influence</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>93; 95</td>
<td>Didn’t think of coming to US before; didn’t know anything about US. Never dreamt of the US.</td>
<td>Perception of US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104-108</td>
<td>He only wanted Spanish linguistics, so he looked only for that on university websites.</td>
<td>Reason for choosing WPU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113-115</td>
<td>“Because I feel like I love the language more than the literature. To me the literature is like a leisure time activity. That’s how I see it. And then I feel the language itself it’s more passionate to me than the literature.”</td>
<td>Reason for choosing linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117-119</td>
<td>“Of the language, yeah, the structure of the language, how to teach the language, yeah, instead of, I prefer that over reading what people have written and interpreting it.”</td>
<td>Reason for choosing linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121-122</td>
<td>“immediately after my undergrad studies, I developed a desire to teach Spanish.”</td>
<td>Desire to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128-129</td>
<td>“I feel in Ghana, that’s what I see people using Spanish for, teach, yeah, so that was what guided my, yeah, choice.”</td>
<td>Desire to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131-132</td>
<td>Most interpreters/ translators in Ghana interpret /translate in French or English, not Spanish.</td>
<td>Desire to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140-141</td>
<td>Mom is a teacher, so he thinks the genes are in him.</td>
<td>Family influence Desire to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150-151; 157</td>
<td>Hasn’t talked to his cousin since he came because he knows the stress of doctoral studies, doesn’t want to bother him. Cousin is in Illinois, not WPU</td>
<td>Clarification about Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168-170; 176</td>
<td>“In Cuba it was a government scholarship, so the government fed us and then the government gave us stipend, the Ghana government, so there was a lot to spend, so we-I didn’t really have to look for money or try to make it on my own. And then Cuba too we went in a group, so it was me and my classmates, so there was always something to do” It was like living in Ghana.</td>
<td>Cuba Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180-182</td>
<td>“We are with Ghanaians there and like being taken care of by your parents cause the government gives you money, you have enough money for clothes, foods, and everything and you just have to pick your books and go to class and read.”</td>
<td>Cuba Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189; 191</td>
<td>No one warned him about the amount of work he would have to do. He didn’t know anything about the system.</td>
<td>(lack of) Expert influence (knowledge) America School System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>194-196</td>
<td>Wonders if the system is tough or if grad school is just tough both in US and Ghana</td>
<td>America School System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-201; 208-210</td>
<td>Writing assignment was 15-20 pages in English. Typed. Compare that to pen and paper in Ghana. Also, in</td>
<td>Class experience</td>
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<td>Text</td>
<td>Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>“But mostly what we do is written. And we usually don’t get assignments because of the numbers because you have 800 students”</td>
<td>Ghana school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217-218</td>
<td>In Ghana, “Yeah, and even after the exams, you don’t see your grades, like I was telling you, until the next semester.”</td>
<td>Ghana school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>226-231</td>
<td>Believes he will try to use a similar teaching style in Ghana as in the US (more student centered), but also says that there might be resistance to this, so he needs a doctorate for people to take his ways seriously.</td>
<td>Teaching techniques to take back Transformation in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>234-239</td>
<td>“the teaching style here is very different, especially in my department, like how to teach language. Because in Ghana what we do is like teach the grammar, so maybe we take the verb and then we conjugate and then it’s like teacher-centered, like the teacher gives you everything. But over here, the students talk, like they will let the student talk, and then the student comes with his own ideas and then you guide the student to the correct path or”</td>
<td>America school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ghana School System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transformation in Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>244; 241-242</td>
<td>Tries to practice student-centered approach to teaching because he says it is a good thing. He thinks it is a better approach, especially to learning a language.</td>
<td>Transformation in Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248-253</td>
<td>“because sometimes you teach something and the students don’t get it and you are so worried, you don’t understand why the students don’t get it. But I’ve learned here that there are stages. Sometimes the students won’t get it, the students will get it later and then yeah sometimes I used to get so frustrated and worried like “That’s all I have to tell you. You have to know this” but now I’ve learned that no, it’s not always the case. It’s not automatic, so yeah I’m shaping my teaching skills.”</td>
<td>Transformation in Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264-269</td>
<td>Discusses how in Ghana the students can be late, but in the U.S., the students are always on time if not early.</td>
<td>Culture Shock/Difference America School System Ghana School System Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276-277</td>
<td>Students in Ghana tend to go to class late, but here they tend to go on time.</td>
<td>Culture Shock/Difference America School System Ghana School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“for the teachers and the workers yeah it’s the same here they are always punctual. It’s just that for the students there is a difference. The students here are on time but the students in Ghana are sometimes late and then but they are not always on time.”

“that was a big, can I say, booster, that was a big plus, to feel welcomed, it’s just like being welcomed at home because I felt that if I had come and like nobody really gave me attention and then because I was new here, it would have been tough because I had to cope with that and then studies too, but I had, when I received the warm welcome from him and then he guided me like go here, do this, do this, you have to do this, I felt like it lessened my burden, like, there was someone I could lean on in times of difficulties.”

Girl roommate was “only Ghanaian by name” because she grew up in America. The two of them were not close or even friends.

Wasn’t friends with the Ghanaian girl. It was just “Ghanaian living with an American”

“Okay one, when I came I was living with the guys and we were like three living together in regency, so it was kind of hard because I had not lived with in such a small apartment with so many people. Yeah, so you had to wake up and then, I spent most of the time in the office, yeah, and then sometimes I had to cook and then take it to the office, yeah, so that I could eat and then stay up late in the night. So I was really motivated to save money so next semester I could move and get my own apartment, which is why when they graduated, I moved to the girl, so I had my own room and then I was doing things on my own.”

“Yeah, because I was not used to the rhythm. I knew how things go on here after the first semester and then the five weeks of vacation, luckily I travelled to Missouri, I had this friend in Missouri, so I was relaxed, I was at home for the 5 weeks, so I had time to relax and strategize for the upcoming semester. Yeah. I think I would, because I knew how the first semester went and I knew the rhythm, the second semester I was ready to face it, yeah.”
<table>
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<th>Text</th>
<th>Relevant Topic</th>
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</table>
| 350-354 | “it was very different than the first semester, because the first semester, like I told you, I had to meet the deadline, come back right from Ghana, school had already started, yeah, but this time, the second semester, I had a five week break, to prepare, relax, and then I had a feel of what to expect. So all those things, I was really prepared for it.” | Transformation in second semester  
Importance of preparation |
| 365-367 | “so 20 hours, basically it was Monday to Thursday, 1-5 from Monday to Thursdays and then Mondays and Thursdays I had 10-12 Noon, so I did foster’s Friday, Saturday, Sunday.” | Finances  
Work |
| 373-374; 376-379 | Worked 36 hours (more than allowed), but didn’t get in trouble. “Yeah I don’t know how they do that because yeah initially, yeah, that’s what I thought, so my roommate wanted to get me foster’s, but I told him I already had 20 hours, so I can’t do fosters because that’s what the book says. But second semester I went there and it was fine.” | Work  
Finances  
Visa |
| 384-386 | “then what happens in Foster’s is mostly they give you like 10 or 16 hours, but most people call off, so all those hours you get, it’s not your hours. Like, it’s from people who have called off.” | Work |
| 394-396 | “I know my schedule for work and then I know what time to spend with friends and then I know my time for church, so I was kind of prepared. I had time to kind of schedule everything. Fortunately.” | Transformation in second semester |
| 402-408 | Wants to teach after graduating because “Firstly because with a master’s degree, I can’t teach in Ghana, in the university in Ghana, because in Ghana, Spanish master’s degree, you have limited opportunity, most of very few private schools teach Spanish and they already have staff teaching Spanish. And in the university you would need doctorate to teach university, and it’s only one university in Ghana that teaches Spanish. So I feel over here I have brighter opportunities and more chances. Yeah ‘cause some states teach Spanish right from Kindergarten until high school, so yeah.” | Future Space  
Desire to teach in US |
| 410 | “One university among ten regions in Ghana teaches Spanish” | Desire to teach in US |
| 413-414 | “I planned to go back with a doctorate degree, so if I don’t get a teaching position here, I would apply to a doctorate school” | Future Space |
| 424-431; 433 | “I think if I had lived here, I would have been the same because, I mean, there’s nothing to worry about. Unlike we who are in the third world country or the second world country, where we want to learn what is going on | Perception of America (related to Africa) |
in the first world countries and opportunities to go there, but if you are in the first world country, why should you be worried about what goes on in the third world country? Unless you want to be in the peace corps or maybe you have that humanitarian heart to go help, so I feel very few people know about Africa and I think those are those with those kinds of people with those kinds of hearts, but on the whole, it’s just America and the dollar.” “They think the whole world spends the dollar”

<p>| 440-442 | “and then I think you also have to do that to remain on the top because it’s a competitive world, so you always have to try to be on the top and bring others down, so” | Perception of America (related to Africa) |
| 451-456 | “first of all it was stressful, yeah, that’s true, but when I came I wanted to go back because it was too much stress for me. I never encountered so much stress, but my friends were like, this is what we all go through, so you have to, and then you are even lucky, you have an assistantship. So, you don’t have to complain. So sometimes when I’m in my bed, I think about those things that they tell me and I’m like, okay, then, I think I have to put in more effort” | Social Support Motivation Expert Influence |
| 459-461 | Thought his own situation is not stressful. Said his friends told him “But yours is not even stressful. I don’t have to complain that I’m going through stress and all of that so I gave it my best and like okay then, I have to make good use of it.” | Social Support Motivation Expert Influence |
| 467 | Owes his friends a lot for telling him that his situation is not that bad. | Social Support Motivation Expert Influence |
| 473-480 | “I think it’s cultural, yeah, it’s part of the, you grow up with it and then you have to, as you go along you have to try and make, like attend appointment on time but I would, when I was growing up, I was always late, so I think it’s a family thing. Yeah because I remember as a young boy, when we have to go for programs, she’ll tell you one week to the time you won’t go. You’re not going. And then the Saturday to the time, she’ll tell you you can go, and then you have to rush everything, and I think it stayed with me, but trying to change it with work and school here in the US, I think I’m getting better at it here.” | Family Influence Culture Shock/Difference Time |
| 487-488 | “No, Cuba was worse than Ghana. Yeah, Cuba, yeah, when it comes to time, they are very later than Ghanaians. And yeah it’s also a Spanish thing to be very late” | Cuba Experience Time |</p>
<table>
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<th>Page</th>
<th>Content</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>Feels he is getting better at making it to appointments/classes on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>505-511</td>
<td>“the teaching skills, and then the especially the rapport between the teachers and the students. We don’t have that in Ghana. And then I think that’s because of the numbers, but I think even with the numbers, there can be a way even if you can meet the students in groups and then give them feedback on their performance. I think it helps because it helped me a lot here, having to meet my professor and then he telling you “Okay, you did this right. You have to do this” which we don’t have in Ghana. It’s you and then your books yeah.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>520-523</td>
<td>“it all boils down to opportunities. Like after school I feel if I’m to study in Canada, I feel opportunities there are brighter. And then it all goes back to my professors back in Ghana, because that’s where they studied, so I think, yeah that’s what I’m looking at. That’s why my scope is a bit narrowed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>525-527; 529</td>
<td>“Yeah and because it’s Spanish, I feel it being the second language here in the US and then it being the third in Canada, I feel it would be a good thing to learn it there and get opportunities there, since it’s, it's very high in demand in these two countries.” Compared to Spain where they already speak Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>537-538</td>
<td>“I had 20% 20-hour graduate assistantship to come here, so I didn’t really have to present a big amount of financial”</td>
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<tr>
<td>540-543</td>
<td>“And then what happens is my uncle promised to support me, but then they will just give you the statement and then when you are here they leave you. And then you can’t, I mean you can’t blame them because at least they did their best giving you the statement, and they needed it so”</td>
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<tr>
<td>545</td>
<td>Says the worst thing is the exchange rate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>547-548</td>
<td>“they have family and they have people they are supporting and taking care of in Ghana, and then if you had to, and the perception there is everything is here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>550-553</td>
<td>“So it would be weird telling them to send you money. Yeah, but I believe that when it is very tough and then you ask them, they will give you, but now there’s no need to ask them since I’m trying to survive and make it on my own. So when it gets very tough and I can’t do it, I will ask them and then I believe they will send it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>558-562</td>
<td>“I had to take them to be able to pay my bills because you pay telephone bills and then you pay rent and then”</td>
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</table>
you have to eat and then I couldn’t do that with the GA alone. The stipend from the GA can’t take care of that alone, so I had to take on jobs to be able to pay my rent and then eat and then buy my clothes and all of that.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>564-565</th>
<th>Had to find money to pay the fees because GA only covers tuition.</th>
<th>Finances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>571; 573</td>
<td>“my mom teaches, so I think I got that from her” Genetically.</td>
<td>Family Influence Desire to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>575; 579</td>
<td>He was also always growing up by his mother’s side and spent more time with her than with his dad.</td>
<td>Family Influence Desire to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>586-587</td>
<td>“No her style is different, very different from mine. Yeah I guess because times have changed. Because she uses the cane and she is very strict.”</td>
<td>Family Influence (only so far)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-605</td>
<td>“we, international students, especially Ghanaians, we all come here because of opportunities because my mates in Ghana, like those I completed the undergraduate with, they are still at home. When I say they are still at jobs, they don’t have jobs now, so the basic reason for why we come here is for opportunities. That’s why we-the perception that we get. But when we come here, we realize that it’s not what we expected, and then we strive to make it and then.”</td>
<td>Perception of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>608-610</td>
<td>“People who come here and go back to Ghana, that’s what they say, and then people who are here, don’t want to give people back home the perception that life is hard here, with Facebook and all of that, they put nice pictures and nice stuff.”</td>
<td>Perception of America Expert Influence (on perception)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>613-619</td>
<td>“you never know whose star might shine, so you don’t tell someone here is stressful. So let him come. Maybe his star will shine. So that’s another perception people have. Which is why, and yeah, judging from my own experience, when I told my cousin I wanted to come here, it was like life is hard, he was telling me, but when you are there, the perception that you will get is that okay you are here, you don’t want me to come. This is what I think of the US. You know, so it’s a funny game, but.”</td>
<td>Perception of America Expert Influence (on perception)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines #s</td>
<td>Transcript Phrases</td>
<td>Themes</td>
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<tr>
<td>9-12; 14-15; 19-20</td>
<td>Dreamed of owning a restaurant since she was a little girl because her uncle had a big building that she imagined making into a restaurant and hotel.</td>
<td>Restaurant dream Family Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-30</td>
<td>In Ghana, national service is about who you know. If you don’t know someone in a high place, then you go where gov’t puts you.</td>
<td>Nat’l service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-40</td>
<td>She was impacted by the national service because the girls in the village were trying to better their lives even though they didn’t have much. Thought if those girls who come from nothing can have a vision, then she should be able to put her mind to it and do what she wants.</td>
<td>Nat’l Service Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-49</td>
<td>Believes uncle used a student loan when he came, so he probably thought she could just co-sign it, she could work her way up, go to school, find a job, and pay for it.</td>
<td>Expert Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-62</td>
<td>She thinks her uncle was uncomfortable cosigning because it put his social security at risk. But he later realized he needed to honor his promise to her that he would help her.</td>
<td>Family Influence Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-66; 68-70; 73-77</td>
<td>Uncle made her sign a letter stating she would pay back the loan. She signed because she already knew that she would pay him back.</td>
<td>Family Influence Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>“I’m almost happy that his credit got messed up and I wasn’t able to continue because I’ve come to realize that I’m paying double what I got.”</td>
<td>Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-92</td>
<td>“I took two semesters, and I think it was the first semester I took $8,000. And the second semester I took, the first semester, because I was living on campus, I took $10,000, and the second semester, I took $8,000 and now I’m supposed to pay like $38,000” She thought because she was paying more than the minimum monthly payment, she would pay it off more quickly, but she found out it would take 20 years.</td>
<td>Finances Present Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102-104</td>
<td>“and I’m planning on going to school next year I can go to school because my status will have changed then and I can pay less, and I will try to work hard and get a scholarship so I don’t have to pay anything. “</td>
<td>Future Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110-114</td>
<td>“Initially I was kind of I don’t know, now I’m comfortable with everything, but initially it was kind of tough because I have left everything that I knew and I was out of my comfort zone, so I had to start all over and watch myself so I don’t get into trouble. Don’t mess up</td>
<td>Class experience</td>
</tr>
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</table>
114-122 “it wasn’t easy though because back home in Ghana, if you’re taking a class, and your friends are taking the same class, you can share the books and all those kinds of stuff, so I was kind of working on a limited budget, so I was like, since my classmates will be taken their textbook to work on an assignment, then I will be like, Oh when you’re done can I use it, and they’ll be like oh okay. And they’ll be like come for it on Sunday when they know the test is due on Monday. They’ll be like come come for it on Sunday wait for me in the library and you’ll wait and wait and wait and wait and they wouldn’t come. And that’s when I realized like Americans are a little bit like selfish. They’re not like selfless.”

126-130 “Initially, I was kind of like, okay if you guys are going to treat me that way, if you find something difficult, then I’ll not also help you, but I also realized that when someone was having trouble with an assignment and I helped them, I was even learning more because I remembered everything all over again. So I said, it’s not good to pay evil with evil, so I’ll just help these people out and I know God will also help me out.”

134-137; 139-141; 144-145 “Yeah back home in Ghana they don’t care. They’ll just be like yeah you can come and we’ll all do the assignment together or something, but those people if they’re not really friends with them, then they’ll see you just as classmates, it’s like a different ballgame.” “In Ghana they’ll be like, Oh you can come for it I don’t care. I will try to do my assignment today and you can come for it, they’ll try to work with you, but here they’ll be like oh no.” “In Ghana, you will meet someone for the first time and you guys will behave like you’ve been friends like forever.”

149-154 “I realized whenever I raised my hand to answer a question, they’ll be like what what what? Like they don’t understand what I’m saying. And sometimes I’ll say that the professor is embarrassed to tell me oh I didn’t hear what you said, can you repeat it? And so when I’m done, they’ll all clap and I’ll sit down, and the professor will ask the same question so I’m like, then I have to be quiet in class, so most of the class if I’m not required to say something or do a presentation, (then I’m?) just silent in class.”

162-181 “I had one example, I don’t know if it fits the answer,
though, but one of our literature classes we had to do a presentation and it was like two people will have to do this presentation, so when I contacted, like we were supposed to contact me like two months ahead, like the whole semester everyone had to do it. So this guy never contacted me, and I didn’t even know the guy, so I went to the professor and he called the guy so I met him finally and the professor gave us material that we had present on, so when I realized that the way I was talking wasn’t the way he was talking he was like “OH don’t worry, I will do everything. I’ll just do a print out and I’ll tell you where you have to present and I’ll also highlight where I have to present” and I’m like “If you show me and I go back to class and people ask me questions after the presentation, how am I supposed to answer questions if I have no idea how this came about?” And he’s like, you don’t have to do anything, so I’m like okay. You do your research and I’ll do my research and let’s meet and go over and take the best points out of it. So he was like okay, I kept emailing this guy, he never replied, so a day before the presentation, finally I spoke to him and he’s like let’s meet at the library, so we met at the library and he brought his print out and I also brought my print out. And we started going over, and when he started reading mine he was like, oh my gosh this is a great piece, wow. And he was like, I’m even embarrassed to bring mine because I never did the research on it, I just did the points that the professor said and I highlighted it, so we got to use yours, so he’s like, we got to use yours, so I’m like, okay, then let’s use mine.” “So, he highlighted what he was going to use and I highlighted what I was going to use and we did the presentation in class. And I realized after the presentation, I asked if anyone had any questions, and everyone was like quiet. And after that first presentation, they started asking him questions from my side and because he didn’t write the paper, he didn’t know all of the answers, so I ended up answering all the questions, so after that the professor was like “Wow, you really did well” and I’m like “thank you” So that was a nice day.”

“I don’t blame them because it’s kind of the images on tv that they see about Africa, they feel like oh we don’t even understand English, they think…I don’t even know how they see it. One girl even had the nerve to ask me if we live on trees, if we had a cellphone if we had a computer. And like I talk to my parents on Skype, so if I
<table>
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<th>Page</th>
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<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>“I think most of them, they don’t take time to educate themselves about other cultures and other countries, so they feel like whatever they see on the news or on the media, that’s what sticks and they go with it. Because someone asked me the other day if I went to Oprah’s school, and I was like “And where is Oprah’s school” and I was like “What country in Africa?” And she was like “Oh, I think it’s South Africa” And then I’m like “You think it’s South Africa. Do you think South Africa is like a state or a county or a city?” And she’s like “Oh so what is it?” I’m like “It’s a country” and she’s like “Oh really, so you don’t know anyone from South Africa?” I’m like “I come from a different country” And I’m like “Do you know anyone from another county or another city in Pennsylvania?” And she’s like “Oh no, how am I supposed to know anyone? Philadelphia is big” and I’m like “If Philly is big, then how about Africa. Africa is made up of different countries, so I don’t even know people from Ghana from another city” She was like “Oh really?” I’m like “Yes, really.” Haha.”</td>
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<td>202-214</td>
<td>“My opinion is that I think a lot of Americans think the world revolves around America, so if they are in here, they don’t have to learn about any country because it’s like everybody is so concerned about America, everyone is trying to learn about America, so why should people bother learning about us? Especially if they don’t have like African friends or other nationality friends, they don’t believe in educating themselves unless they have friends from other nationals than they’ll be curious and start asking questions and educating themselves unless they watch everything on TV and think whatever they see on TV is like true.”</td>
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<td>218-225</td>
<td>Met Japanese friend at airport because a lot of international students were waiting at the airport, so they tried to make conversation. Japanese friend told her she is her first friend at WPU. Mingled with other international students at the orientation, and since they were the only ones there since the school wasn’t open, she got to know some international students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>230-232; 236-238</td>
<td>International friends impacted her experiences because “I feel like they really understood my situation and I understood theirs. And they kind of were my first friends”</td>
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because they were ready to be my friends than the Americans were ready to be my friends and we could all relate and we could share our experiences”

| 256-258 | Knowing Ghanaians was relief because “It made me feel like home even though Indiana wasn’t like home-home, it felt like home to me because I could talk to people in my native language, relate to them, we can share stories and everything.” | Social Network |

| 263-266; 269-270 | Later, feelings about Ghanaians changed: “I felt like most of them would smile at your face like they’re supposed to be your friend, but when it comes to something serious like they should stick up for you, that’s when they don’t. But I don’t really have negative views about them, but I’m just conscious now who I call my friend and who I call an acquaintance.” “I opened my whole heart feeling like I’m helping these people or just one person and it like turned on me and I was the bad person, so I’m like, okay” | Social Network |

| 275-278; 280 | “But whenever I hear like whenever WPU is on spring break or summer vacation, I was like oh my gosh, I would have been on spring break by now (if I would have) waited or something. That’s what I keep thinking when I hear, oh this person graduated, this person graduated, I’ll be like, oh my gosh” “But apart from that, I’m good.” | Present Space |

| 286-292 | About friend from Malaysia: “Yes. I’m very happy I took her in around that time because she ended up being a friend to me more than those who I thought were my friends, and we were just helping each other, supporting each other emotionally. She was a shoulder for me to cry on and I was also a shoulder for her to cry on, and up until now, when she needs something or she needs words of encouragement, she will text me and say “Maame I need to talk to you” and I’ll talk to her and things might not go back to normal, but at least it’s going to make her a little bit happy.” | Social Support |

| 298-302 | When asked how transition into working mom and wife, she said “it’s been real difficult but, I keep telling my husband I don’t know how we made it but we’ve been able to do it so far and everything is going on (softly?) and just lately as she keeps growing, the job keeps increasing, so she’s all over, and we have to be managing it, working with each other’s schedules, making everything works, so. (can’t hear) be a mother, go to school, and all that” | Transition into Motherhood/wife |

| 304-306 | “My main concern is how I’m going to get through it. I” | Future Space |
know I’m going to get through it, but I don’t know how I’m going to get through it. We’re trying to see if any member of the family can come here to help us with the baby.”

| 313-317 | “In the beginning, I’ve never been pregnant, so my first three months it was like hell to me. I had to go to work, full time job, come back home and be a wife and everything and sometimes my husband helps me out, and if you know Ghanaian men as I do they make you do most of the stuff. So I had to come back home and be a fulltime wife too.” | Transition into Motherhood/wife |

| 327-329 | “now I realize that every time that I’m kind of depressed, that’s when I write poetry a lot. So whatever I’m feeling, I’ll just write it down. Oh it’s like a kind of like a shoulder on which I cry on and pour my heart out, so I’m happy I took that class” | Poetry Influence Class Experience |

| 336-349 | “Okay, when I went to California, he showed me a lot of people who had graduated from business who they still haven’t gotten a job so they are just getting by doing odd jobs, so he’s like, if I need a job security, then nursing is what I should go into. And I also remember that someone told me I could go straight to do my masters with my associate’s degree. All I gotta do is take a little bit of classes to be able to get all the credit that is needed to graduate and I’ll go and do my masters in hospitality management. So when I went to talk to the head of the department, I realized like oh hold one sec. Yeah I’m back. Yes, she was talking she was like a lot of people get a job, but the way this country is right now, she can’t make me feel strong and like not everyone gets a job, though most of them do. And I was like, (let me go into) what is going to make me get a job soon. And I realized two of the girls that were working, remember I used to work at (Alma’s?) two of the girls I was working with had a degree, but they couldn’t get a job, so they were working at Chik-Fil-A for awhile whiles they were looking for other jobs, so that made me more confused and I’m like maybe I made the right choice by switching.” | Expert Influence |

| 356-359 | “I think what kept me motivated was like I’m doing all this just to get by to get through school so that I don’t have to do this kind of job when I’m done schooling, I’ll have the job security, I can do whatever I want to do, I can raise my children the way I want to raise them.” | Motivation Family-Oriented (epistemology) |

| 389-393 | About how she learned strategies in school: “Like in school I kind of worked with different people and dealt | What she gained from school |
with different people and met with different people, so I kind of knew how to juggle with difficult customers and nice costumers, difficult workers and nice workers, I kind of know what to say. I study you and know what to say and what not to say to you. What will get you worked up and what will not get you worked up. I try to work with.”

401-402; 412-413
Experiences with African Americans: “Because I feel like, at work they will be like at work I always call them bipolar. They’ll be smiling one time and little things will make them flip.” “And they have a lot of anger in them and little things will just make them explode.” Experience with Af. Americans

430-434
About husband: “He was a rock that was holding me because I feel like whenever I needed someone…there are certain things you can’t tell, like a friend but I felt like I could talk to him and he will understand what I’m going through and everything. So it kind of helped because I knew also every time things will be falling apart, I still have someone who is holding me together.” Social Network Family Support

440-448
About where family/caring-oriented came from: “I think it comes from my parents because I always grew up with a lot of cousins who were staying with us, friends who were staying with us, and if you don’t even know, I feel like they are my brothers or they are my sisters but they were just cousins or friends who needed a place to stay, and my parents always treated them like they’ll treat their own children, so it was like when we don’t really give you the family breakdown, you’ll feel like, oh I have a lot of siblings, but that wasn’t so, but I feel like I got I from them. And always my dad is like, you have to put God first and everything that you do, you have to ask yourself, would God do it this way? If your answer is no, then you’re not doing the right thing, so I always felt like” Family Influence

473-474
Wants to go into respiratory therapy Future Space

481-486
About respiratory therapy: “I have no idea how I got interested in that but I knew I think I was going to talk to my dean of student one day of the department and whiles I was waiting on her, I was in the lobby and I was kind of reading stuff in the nursing department and I saw something that was like respiratory therapy was there, so I was reading about it, and I’m like oh then this is something that I’m going look up into, so I looked it up a little bit, and I was like Oh this is kind of cool and interesting.” Future Space
### Selasie Themes Table 2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #s</th>
<th>Transcript Phrases</th>
<th>Potential Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Didn’t do national service</td>
<td>National service</td>
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<tr>
<td>17-22</td>
<td>Being business oriented comes from being from a third world country where it’s always a struggle and you have to to be smart. “every step you make, you have to apply some kind of economics to it to make sure that you’re doing the right thing and you’re getting the benefits out of it” (22-22)</td>
<td>Business minded/epistemology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>After he got out of high school, he took care of his cousin’s internet café business. Started learning IT on his own</td>
<td>IT interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>36-37</td>
<td>Why he couldn’t choose IT for major/why he felt that it was popular: “we live in an IT age” where you have to be abreast with technology</td>
<td>Major-choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-42</td>
<td>Why he felt IT was popular: After people graduate HS, they usually are just sitting at home, so they enroll for classes, like computer classes, and develop and interest in.</td>
<td>Major-choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-52</td>
<td>“there were so many schools in Ghana studying information technology, and there was not enough like institutions that were teaching human resource management, I thought I had a better chance when I went for my interview”</td>
<td>Major-choice/immigration influence</td>
</tr>
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<td>59-62</td>
<td>“I have friends who were called to the embassy for interviews and they were refused visas, so, and sometimes you also go on the internet and you look at like sample questions that they ask during the interviews, and that is how I got my information from.</td>
<td>Immigration influence/experts in CoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-70</td>
<td>Harder to get visas from third world country because believes people have a perception that they won’t want to go back to their countries since there is nothing better there.</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>75-77</td>
<td>Since school hadn’t started, he contacted friends in NYC who he could live with</td>
<td>Background</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>One guy he lived with in NY went to WPU.</td>
<td>CoP</td>
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<tr>
<td>85-87</td>
<td>“Well, I think the first thing, he kind of told me that there was no way I could like go to the school, like, it was, WPU was actually in a remote location and there were no jobs around that area, and it was going to be difficult combining school with work.”</td>
<td>CoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95-99</td>
<td>“I think some of them had actually gone through what I was about to go through…. they were</td>
<td>CoP/foreshadowing of what could happen</td>
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<td>Line</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>108-111</td>
<td>“I had a sponsor, who was my uncle, and when I got out here, because of he got hit in some kind of financial and he couldn’t afford to pay for the fees anymore. So that was how my problem started. He actually wanted to pay for my tuition.” (found out right after he got here; line 113)</td>
<td>Economic shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131-138</td>
<td>“living in New York it’s like where I was living it was like a battlefield where there was, it was just a one bedroom apartment with about eight guys in the room, and it was really difficult, you know, you were sharing actually one bedroom apartment with eight guys, and you go to work and come back and the place is all like crowded and there’s no room to do anything, and all you have to do is just go to sleep, and wake up the next morning and go to work. So, it was kind of tough, you know, it made me stronger. It actually made me stronger, so, with that experience, bringing that experience to Pennsylvania, it kind of like made me stronger”</td>
<td>Living in NY/Background experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141-142</td>
<td>Had a nice and normal life in Texas.</td>
<td>Background experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Missed classes when going back for hearing.</td>
<td>Immigration experiences/class experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153-155</td>
<td>One professor was understanding about him missing classes, the rest didn’t have a clue what he was going through, which made it more difficult on him.</td>
<td>Professors support/lack of/not understanding</td>
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<td>156-160</td>
<td>One professor was not understanding when he told him he couldn’t buy the book and the he would share the book with somebody. He refused. “he didn’t like the idea or he didn’t like the idea that I was behind classes and he didn’t even know what I was going through, so that was tough”</td>
<td>Professors lack of support/not understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>166-167</td>
<td>Told one professor what was happening, but it didn’t make a difference. Says “he didn’t understand it and I don’t blame him because he didn’t have a clue as to what I was talking about”</td>
<td>Professor’s lack of understanding</td>
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<td>174-176</td>
<td>Not scared of cops, just that when he saw a cop, he would get flashbacks to what happened in Louisiana experience</td>
<td>Louisiana experience</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Difference between living with Ghanaians and living with Americans/theme in Ghanaian empathy</td>
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<td>187-194, the difference was that the Ghanaians were actually going through the same problem that I was going through, like, in a different way. So, they kind of sympathized with me, but they didn’t have a clue or they didn’t have a solution to my problem, but living with an American family, it kind of helped a lot because they were from the culture, and they kind of knew the culture better, and they kind of knew their way around the system. I wouldn’t say their way around the system, but they kind of knew what to do and what not to do, and just kind of blending in with them was an eye opener.”</td>
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<td>207-209, Well, I would say like understanding the people, like I got to understand the language better, and I was also able to express myself better for people to understand me and understand my accent or whatever it is</td>
<td>Feeling that he changed his accent</td>
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<td>219-226 Attributes it to what was going on in his mind the first semester (decisions and solutions) and then once he got the answer, it relieved stressed, so he was able to approach people more and tutor people, which gave him a different perspective.</td>
<td>Transformation from first to second semester</td>
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<td>228-230 “I felt empowered because at least some of my problems were solved and somebody else needed something, and I had the power to help them, so, I think I would say I felt empowered.”</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
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<td>243-250 “Before I came out here, I was working at the airport, and after high school, I actually stayed home for three years before getting this job. So, there was no way I was guaranteed my job back when I went back. Like, I wasn’t guaranteed a job, so it was either I did something to survive out here or I had to go back where I had to start from like scratch. And in that situation, it wasn’t going to be easy for me, especially when I come out here and I couldn’t graduate from school. If I had graduated from school, that would be different, but without the degree it was going to be difficult getting a job back in Ghana.”</td>
<td>Why he couldn’t go home</td>
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<td>261-265 Felt relieved when he could work or drive around without the fear of being caught or stopped by cops.</td>
<td>Transformative journey</td>
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<tr>
<td>268-269 Being married added to responsibility because he had a wife to take care.</td>
<td>Transformative journey</td>
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<tr>
<td>282-283</td>
<td>Expectations come from reading the school website</td>
<td>Media impacting perception of US/expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>282-288</td>
<td>You don’t hear about somebody not being able to pay their fees in Ghana or struggling to survive. “all you think about is oh, going to school and having the peace of mind to study your books and come out with flying colors and graduate and start to find a better job and start taking care of whoever you needed to take care of.” (285-288)</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>288-294</td>
<td>Thought he might be able to get a scholarship to pay for fees or get a campus job’ looked forward to socializing with people from different cultures and countries. “It was something that actually you were looking forward to” (291-293) but “And yeah those actually raise your expectations, but when you get out here, it’s a different situation altogether. A different playing field altogether.” (293-294)</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
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<td>297-298</td>
<td>Believes expectations came more from media and reading school websites than from others.</td>
<td>Influence of media</td>
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<td>304-307</td>
<td>Came late second semester because he was struggling to pay fees. Made it last minute.</td>
<td>Finances</td>
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<td>317-324</td>
<td>In Ghana, think of college student as responsible and someone who was able to get into college. So associate drunk people with wayward people, vagabonds, people who don’t make it in life. Students can drink in Ghana, but in moderation. The amount of alcohol that people consumed was shocking to him.</td>
<td>Culture shock</td>
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<td>328</td>
<td>What transitioned him into IT: “I think it has to do with my instincts and what drives me”</td>
<td>IT/Business</td>
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<td>329-337</td>
<td>“I believe in life everybody has to take a business class because business is an everyday situation.” Involved in buying something in walmart, etc. Still reads books about business because it is an everyday life thing.</td>
<td>Epistemological perspective</td>
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<td>337-340</td>
<td>“But with IT, I look at the market right now, and I look at like jobs and where I think I’m going to make it and where I’m going to find an easy job, and that is where I lean towards, and sometimes it leans towards business and sometimes it leans towards IT. “</td>
<td>IT is a business decision</td>
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<td>352-258</td>
<td>“life everybody has to be educated, you know, you don’t have to leave people to be ignorant or you don’t allow people to be brainwashed by what</td>
<td>Educating people</td>
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they see in the media or what they see as truth, so anytime I get the opportunity I try to make people aware that hey that’s not what it is, and also in America, like, in Africa, like living in Ghana, I had some stereotypes and some beliefs that I thought oh like we always assume that in America, there are no poor people out here. Like, it’s all nice, and it’s not the case, you know.”

| 360-364 | If he tries to educate people in Africa about America, they might think that he doesn’t want them to come over, so he is lying to them. | Perception back home (noted by Kwesi) |
| 369-372 | He has become more patient because he realizes that what works in one culture might not work in another. | What he learned |
| 377-381 | “reason why I wanted to share that experience is like there are so many things I don’t understand, like when you say somebody is from a developing country or somebody is from a poor continent, I don’t understand why somebody who is from Africa has to pay like a lot more fees than somebody who is from a developed country. “ | Perception of Africa paired with economic. |
| 388-391 | Believes sharing his story is the first step to raising awareness |  |
### Yaw Themes Table 2

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<tr>
<th>Line #s</th>
<th>Transcript Phrases</th>
<th>Potential Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71-74</td>
<td>Interest in pharmacy came from the economic factor and prestige and pride associated with pharmacists in Ghana. Initially wanted to be a medical doctor, but had a phobia of blood, so he chose pharmacy.</td>
<td>Pharmacy interest</td>
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<td>Wanting the best</td>
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<td>86-87</td>
<td>Fell in love with the stories his friends were telling him about pharmacy.</td>
<td>Experts</td>
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<td>96-105</td>
<td>“I grew up in a family where 90% of my generation were all pharmacists, my cousin’s uncle was a chemist, you know, you are chemist, so that science, our family back in the village was noted for, this is a family of academia that are in science, so I didn’t want to deviate from the family line. If I had, although I was doing a little well in those business though, but I was equally doing well in the science, so I felt like, well, I mean, I have uncles who are taking the path, so I’ll have more tutorial, I’ll have more help when it comes to those to where it might be difficult to catch up to those, so that was, and I think the whole thing about some of these things is the prestige, you know, for your mom or you dad to be proud, like “Hey, my son or my daughter is doing something in school.””</td>
<td>Family influence</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wanting the best</td>
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<td>121-125</td>
<td>His uncle worked in a gold mind and helped him get into the company for his national service.</td>
<td>National Service</td>
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<td>Family Influence</td>
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<td>153-163</td>
<td>Believes his drive and motivation to get the best is inherited from his mom. “She was one of those people who will never give up on herself. She always dreamt big, and no matter how small her beginning was, you will see her get to that point. You know, at a certain time she will say something and I’ll be like “Mom, are you crazy?” But give her a year or two and it will be like. I remember one of the things, she told us that there would be a time when all of us, including her, are going to be in school, and that brought me, when I was in my final year in college, she had gained admission to college, and all of my siblings, as of that time, we were all, some were in high school, and two others were in college, and I was like, come on where did this woman dream, like, anything’s possible, but I think that drive is really something that I inherited from my mom and it’s kept me going.”</td>
<td>Family Influence</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(mom)</td>
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<td>174-175</td>
<td>Believes that if you want something, you should inquire from people who have taken that step ahead of you.</td>
<td>Experts</td>
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<td>176-180</td>
<td>“one thing is the other two countries I mentioned, getting a visa to study in those countries is a very difficult process.</td>
<td>Visa Process influencing</td>
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Especially Canada. So, I felt like if the U.S. is offering equal or better opportunities than Canada, why wait five years, struggle for Canadian visa, whiles maybe I can work hard, go maybe a year or two and get the visa.”

“back home we heard a lot about the American dream where people go to America, come back, and everybody’s like wooo everybody is seeing people come back with their cars, and you’re like, oh my God, I want to be like that. I want to see what is happening there, so all those things, you know, I wouldn’t say that that is the impression they created, okay, but it kind of helped as, you know, the things we saw about the American dream. Everything about America was New York, you see the big, the fancy cars, normally you watch the American movie, coming to America, how beautiful it was, oh man, I want to be in this country. When you compare to other countries, it wasn’t as you know. Let me strike hard on this and get it.”

“I wouldn’t say people gave me that impression. Because I had people who were telling me the truth about living in the U.S., so I wasn’t really overwhelmed or wasn’t expecting too much, but I knew that it had a better platform. It had a better platform as compared to other countries, so I, to a large extent, I would say yes and no, but I was conditioned. You know, I was conditioned to do the best with whatever situation I find myself in. So, I wasn’t so much surprised whether it was. Well, they would tell me America is heaven on earth, every morning you’ll wake up and see money on the floor. You know, those stories, but then, hey that’s not it.”

Dream place to study was UK, but his uncle in the UK told him to go to the US because his uncle talked to friends in the US and thought that studying there sounded better than what he did in the UK, so he was a mentor to him and paying for his application fee, so he felt he should do what he says.

Did his own research. He would go with friends who had common goals to seminars and workshops at the U.S. embassy (i.e. workshop for GRE).

“Some schools in the United States., Canada, will come to Ghana to have these workshops, seminars for students who were interested. And even there were some instances where you had to bring your transcript and other academic things and instantly you will do an interview, you forward them your GPA and other things, you’ll get an instant admission over there. So, they even came to recruit some of these students”

He didn’t try for instant admission because you have to pay more for that. So he just attended workshops to listen and...
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<td>237-239</td>
<td>WPU didn’t go to embassy, but they had a contract with his college, particularly the chemistry department, so students from his college were given a tuition waiver. So, there was a relationship there.</td>
<td>Why WPU</td>
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<td>246</td>
<td>Had better scholarship opportunities from Canada and Australia</td>
<td>Clarification</td>
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<td>250-257</td>
<td>Didn’t go to Canada because of the extreme cold. Australia gave part scholarship where you work fulltime. So he thought the deals were better, but in terms of other factors like weather, he felt US was better.</td>
<td>Why WPU</td>
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<td>267-271</td>
<td>Got admission letter from WPU first, and he needed it to go for his visa. “WPU got theirs on time and I went for it.” (270-271)</td>
<td>Why WPU</td>
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<td>278-283</td>
<td>“I think I know one got a scholarship from WPU, and he brought it right from Ghana. He was given the full tuition. And another one who didn’t get it, his situation was just like mine, but after the first semester, he was given a scholarship, so listening to the two, I realized it was going to work either way. Either you don’t get it in your first semester then you work hard to get it in your second semester, so that is kind of what I would say.”</td>
<td>Expert influence</td>
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<td>295-302</td>
<td>“I also had friends who in the first semester had nothing, but they did extremely well and in the second semester they were rewarded, and I think most of them didn’t get it from the first semester, so looking at the story they were telling me, I thought it would be good to still work hard and follow the same trend as they did. And then they gave me—they said, listen, you have to go to the professors, keep asking, you know, keep going to them talking to them, and I think my research advisor was (can’t understand) and I was always on him, so that’s how.”</td>
<td>Expert influence</td>
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<td>312-317</td>
<td>The well-planned, well-structured infrastructure of the school made him think he was in the right environment. He felt what he was experiencing now wasn’t what he had ever experienced. “But if I could go through it and get to this height, that to me was telling me that this is not a time for relaxing. But it’s a time to work harder to achieve more. I felt like it was just telling me that you haven’t arrived yet. You can still get higher.” (315-317).</td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
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<td>322-340</td>
<td>“I experienced the cultural difference and I saw that it was more of a liberal life style in America where, at a certain age, you can decide what you’re going to do with your life. But back home—not that people don’t smoke back home, but you see adults, okay. It is adults who you see smoking. You’ll hardly see—well, it’s now that the tradition is changing, but what I experienced over 25 years back home is that it is the adults who</td>
<td>Culture Shock</td>
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you’ll see smoking publically or get drunk. And the youth won’t do it publically. The youth maybe will hide and do it, so it was rare to walk on the streets of Accra and see an 18 year old boy smoking. It was rare to see that experience, so when I saw the people, 18, 19, 20, I was like “woo (like whoa)” I was taken aback a little.”

| 347-357 | “The truth is that you’ll have somebody who is at the university who will still be living with the dad and mom. In Ghana, we live with the dad and mom still be led(?) by the dad and mom, so literally you are still under the influence of your parents. You break away from them when you are married or when you are on your own. But as long as you live under their roof, they still tell you what to do and what not to do, so that is why I believe it is a cultural difference where although you are in the university, you are seen as an adult, but you still guided. You are not supposed to take full responsibility or certain decisions all on your own. You still need to be guided because there’s a belief that you haven’t experienced that much, so your parents have experienced better than you have experienced, so you still need to be guided to make the right choices.” |

| 377-384 | “Well, watching tv back home, or when you watch a documentary or you listen to people or somebody will tell you that, well, somebody will ask you a question “Do you sleep on trees?” It was a question I was asked almost everyday by friends, then you ask them “why?” and they’ll tell you “they show us on tv that you people sleep on trees.” And somebody will ask you, “do you put on clothes back home?” I said, “Yes we do.” And I remember there was one embarrassing situation where one of my friends was asked by a professor “Where did you get those clothes from, did you bring them from---“ You know?” |

| 386-389 | “You brought them from Africa or you bought it here” and I was like has there been any situation where it has been reported that someone came to America undressed? And he said no, so I said, “Where do you get all those things from?” and he said “We watch them from the tv” and I said, “Listen, whatever you watch on tv is not true.”” |

| 391-396 | “It’s not true, and it’s like “but we see you chasing lions” I said “Listen here, the Discovery Channel does a good job by capturing the wildlife environment in Africa, but I think that it doesn’t present the true situation on the ground. Because when you go to Kenya and you go to a suburb in Mombasa where there’s a lot of farming, animal farming going on, they don’t live in good houses. No problem about that. But you went to Nairobi, you slept in a 5-star hotel, why don’t you show all this?” |
| 398-403 | “You claim you sleep on trees. Okay fine. Where did you sleep when you were there? Why don’t you show yourself sleeping on the tree? Demonstrate that yes truly these people sleep on the tree. Don’t show all these things and then you come back and tell all your people that these people sleep on trees, these people eat flies, whiles it’s not true. Whiles we have very good hotels back home. You come there, enjoy our meals, you eat our food and say oh this food is better than the food in America.” | Media influence Ignorance of colleagues about Ghana |
| 404-415 | “I had to deal with the misconceptions that the media was giving. I had to confront and also use the time to educate people. I remember when I was a graduate assistant, there were certain times I had to watch Youtube videos, with my students, to really let them know, you know, somebody would ask you a question, and if you don’t control yourself, you might end up doing something that, so you just look at the person, say “Okay, fine, can we watch this video? Can we do this?” So they go to watch it, they come back and they say “Ah! But that is not how -that is not what they tell us” and you say “Well, you are now seeing it from two other perspectives. You need to tell somebody, too. But I also think that it really helped me to make a lot of friends. I made a lot of friends. Some of them would try to say it unaware, but you just have to take your time, you explain it to them, and I made a lot of friends from that, so” | Media influence Ignorance of colleagues about Ghana Educating about Africa |
| 418-424 | “Well, you know, you were made to believe that America is the land of milk and honey. They show all the places in America, like, how do you call it, uh Washington DC, California, Beverly Hills area, you know, I never knew how it was until I went to Detroit downtown. And I said, “Ooo why don’t they show these places?” (laughs). Why don’t they show these places but they come to Africa and show the swamps, they show these dirty places and well literally we have those bad places in America, too, so it would be nice to show those places” | Perception of America Media Influence |
| 434-439 | “but we have saying, you don’t point to your hometown with your left finger, so you don’t say something bad about your country. So what I learned from it is that it is up to us as Africans to also portray a good image about our country and about our continent to the rest of the America has shown itself well to the rest of the world. And we also need to learn better than them to show ourselves better to the rest of the world.” | Perception of America |
| 434-435 | “Yeah, I was somewhere and I saw people begging on the street and I was like “Woo (whoa)” in America?” | Perception of America |
| 447-457 | “I knew God, and I knew who Jesus Christ was. And I had a relation with my God and I came to a point to understand that there are things we know that God knows more and what God knows, we don’t know. So it kind of kept me going, and at one | Motivation/what kept him going |
point, I nearly packed my bag, you know, I nearly packed my things and said, you know, I can’t take these things any longer. I’ve had enough of it. But that night I prayed honestly, and I felt like life sometimes can be unfair. Life sometimes can be unfair, but giving up doesn’t make you victorious, and I had to encourage myself that if I’m able to withstand the test, tomorrow it can be a testimony to somebody. I can speak better to somebody who is going through the same thing that I have been through. And as long as you experience, you can speak better. And you know, when you do something, you understand it better.”

<p>| 458-461 | “I told everybody I am coming to school. If I pack up, and I go back home tomorrow, what do I show those people? Do I show them the tears? Do I have to tell them that my mom passed away so I couldn’t…I don’t think I’m the only one who lost a mom or who is going to lose a mom.” | Motivation/what kept him going |
| 462-469 | “And then I had this picture that, although I had this picture that, okay, I’m going to work hard, go through, make sure I graduate, and when I come out, I’ll take my photograph, have my thesis, and I’ll dedicate it to her. You know, just to make her proud of me, so and another thing is that my siblings were looking up to me a lot. So, I was like, if I give up, I told myself, I felt like I was the captain now. If I give up, the rest of the crew members are going to sink, so why do I sink them whiles if I want to sink myself, fine, but why do I want to sink them as well? So, you know, sometimes you have to suck things up as a man and keep moving.” | Motivation/what kept him going |
| 476-477 | Planned to dedicate his thesis to his mom and put it at her gravesite. | Motivation/what kept him going |
| 486-497 | “Well, let’s look at it, now, one the grading system in America is very high. And you are expected to get an A or the least is a B in all your courses, so looking at what I was going through, it was pain, but then, I still made up my mind to go for all As in my first semester. So, although I was going through pain, I was still striving to have success, you know, I was still striving to get the As. I wanted the As, not the Bs. I didn’t know what was going to happen that first semester, so I was like, I want to get the As. And it was the pain, you know, alright, but I still kept on moving forward, kept on doing my assignments, kept on going to lectures amidst the difficult, and you know, the grading system was tough, high and I thought how can I get an A? The last time I got a 90 (laughs), (mumbles) is it possible for people to get 90? (laughs). People said they do it all the time, so if they do then I think I’m not a stranger in that world. I can do it so that I’m not an exception to that rule.” | Motivation/what kept him going American System Wanting the best |</p>
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<td>503-510</td>
<td>“Back home, our parents have a lot of influence or control over us. But in this system, it’s more like you give your child a chance to do whatever they want. And I feel that it’s the best in the sense that it kind of boosts the child’s confidence. I was telling some friends some time ago that our parents are over-protective, and it made us a little bit timid along the line. So you realize that, look at the way these little white and black kids talk a lot of us don’t have that confidence, and so I’m struggling towards confidence and I don’t think it will be better for my children in the same spot.”</td>
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<td>511-517</td>
<td>“but I feel that the people here are, I wouldn’t say they are more loving, okay, but you’ll see a husband and a wife, and they are always holding hands, walking together, it’s not like, you don’t see that back home, okay, back home it’s the man taking the lead, the woman with the children, so back home the children are always glued to their mom more than their dad, but I feel like when the mom and the dad are united, it’s a sure thing the children can move through, so it’s also one thing feel”</td>
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<td>517-523</td>
<td>“church-wise, I feel like, should I go into my future? Should I go into my destined career? Uh, one thing that people need to avoid is condemnation. We always have to give hope to people. Regardless of consideration, you know, we talk about you know some Americans, they can’t help you, but they don’t write you off. But sometimes back home, you do a little bit, and you are defined by that one thing you have done. If you are not careful, it follows you even to your grave. They will only recognize you by that bad thing you did, so I think that is it.”</td>
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<td>529-536</td>
<td>When asked why people might discourage him: “one must be done by sight and one must be done by heart. You know, you feel like, the rich must continue to be rich and the poor must continue to be poor. So, if you come from a family that is noted to be rich, then you step out of that shell, you’ll hardly have people urging you on. You’ll hear stories like, your dad, he tried it, it didn’t work, your uncle tried it, it didn’t work, what makes you think that? But I always thank God that I didn’t listen to a lot of people, but I listened to my inner voice, you know? With this I’ve grown to understand that we are different, we are unique in every way. The mere fact that my dad failed is not not a guarantee that I’m going to fail.”</td>
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<td>540-545</td>
<td>“Maybe he failed I can fail, but at least if I failed, I made an improvement, and I expect my son to also improve upon that failure to get to that point. And finances. People will also fail you because they not that, like, okay, I was brilliant, fine, I was brilliant, but then you don’t have the financial powers to sustain you, so you might get choked up in that environment because I told them that, ’Listen, money is good, but wisdom is more”</td>
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there was one good friend, and we used to say, man, let us think about going to school. Let us not be happy with whatever job we are doing. Let us think of furthering our education, and she was like, no, we can’t, we don’t have money. Well, one day we were there and I just told her “Well, I think that for years we are not going to see each other” and she was like “What?” And I’m like “I’m leaving” “Where?” I said “I’m going to the States” “To do what” “I’m going to school” “Are you serious?” Yeah, I remember where I was working, when I went to tell them that I quit the job, my boss looked at me and said, “You are lying, you got a new job” and I said “I’m going to the US” He said “You are lying!” I said “Oh, so you don’t believe me?” and I showed him my plane ticket, and he looked at me and he was like he couldn’t believe it and I’m like, well, that is it. So, everybody was shocked to hear that, but at the end of the day, if you have a dream, you live your dream.”

“Well, you know, when you are from that part of the world, you are a little bit marginalized in that people feel you can’t do it, you don’t have what it takes to do it. But then you have to prove to them that you have what it takes to do it.”

Professor was monitoring his progress, and he hardly went to her for help even though other students kept going. He wanted to try to figure his problems out for himself, unless he couldn’t get it. Says “She was always expecting to see me in her office” (591). She encouraged him to keep doing what he was doing and to go to a different college to get PhD or scholarships. She was willing to write recommendation letters.

“so I think there was one or two instances when I was really challenged, and I went to her, and that is when she told me, she was kind of surprised because she sees me quietly in class, sometimes she doesn’t know how I’m able to do it.”

Thinks maybe because she knew that he was going through a lot with his mom’s passing that she thought it might be too much for him. So, she was willing to provide extra help. But didn’t turn out how she expected because he didn’t need her help too much.

She told him there was another Ghanaian in a different class with the same name, and he got an A, so she mandated Yaw to get an A, too, which motivated him.

Believes you shouldn’t let people die in their ignorance
you people sleep on trees.” It’s going to be a bad reputation, so I felt that every situation that I found myself in was an opportunity. Like I said, we need to market Africa well to the rest of the world. So, I felt that it was an opportunity for me to showcase the work of Africa to the rest of the world, and it doesn’t, everybody has a way of seeing the world. Some they came from the classroom, some on the community level, but I always felt like these were people who were young, who were growing up and it was better for them to have the right mindset. You know, when you are an adult, sometimes, you see when you are believing something for 20-30 years, it’s quite difficult to change, but let’s say you get people who are young, if you can make the change at that early age, it goes a long way. It has a larger impact than somebody who is in their 60s or 70s because when a person is in their 60s or 70s, the person is not desiring to travel. But when you put that thing in them, at that young age, then there’s a desire, “No, Yaw told me something, I want to go and see.”

| 664-670 | Knows people are disappointed that he isn’t going for PhD, but he asks if PhD will enhance his ministry. Thinks that in six or five years of PhD, he could rather use that time to prepare for ministry. | Ministry-Future plans |
| 682-685 | When asked why not go to ministry school, he asks if Jesus or Paul or Peter went to ministry school. He believes in self-preparation. | Ministry-Future Plans |
| 691-696 | To prepare for ministry, he prays, reads, and listens to people and mentors. He listens to their experiences. He is looking for a free Bible class or he will work hard to get money and get a formal certification. | Ministry-Future plans |
| 702-716 | About being called to ministry: “I was working one night, I think I’d gone to study, and I was going back home, back to my dormitory, and a young girl approached me, I didn’t know her, I didn’t even know her anywhere, and she looked at me right in my face, and she kind of gave me quite a prophecy, and at the time I was like, “Uh (scoff), where does this girl know me? Is she talking to me or somebody behind me? “You know? So I didn’t take it that serious, but the call came again, it came two or three successions(?) and uh but I remember at a young age, you know, at a young age when we were growing up as kids, I would gather the kids in the neighborhood, I would go grab my, we had a book, called my book of Bible stories, you know, kind of people, I always wanted to teach them the word of God although I didn’t know what I was doing. We’ll gather in the evenings, we’ll dance, sing, then when it’s time for preaching, they’ll look for somebody to preach, and it’s like, I would preach, but I didn’t know how to preach, and I’ll run to my | Ministry |
room, go pick my Bible, I didn’t know what to read anyway, so it was, you know, and it kept coming, you know, even when I came to the united States, God kept reminding me about his prophecies (?promises?) and at a time I said, no, I have to get serious”

719-723 “what made me pay a serious attention to it was I remember one time my auntie went for a meeting and I wasn’t in the meeting, and somebody, a man of God gave a prophetic word about me there, and I was like, I wasn’t in the meeting, but what is going on, so then I felt like it’s better if I give to what’s coming, and see what is coming.”

Ministry

729-732 Now works for a software company that works on projects with different companies that want their software.

Present space

736-742 “I want to go back home, but not now, so and I don’t want to be an illegal, so, I just wanted to find a way, so one of the things that motivated me to do this IT, I don’t know, but I felt like there was a need to study more about technology, you know, when I was growing up, I had this funny feeling that the world was going to come to an end, and IT is one of those things that is going to crash the world, so I didn’t want to study a lot with computer, but I feel like my perception has changed. You can’t, even if the world is coming-you can’t be living an ignorant life.”

Present space

744-752 Says IT is a high paying industry, and now he can learn more about IT and the American system

Present space

Wanting the best

765-778 Says WPU doesn’t do a lot of research in science field. Hard to find a professor to work with as research advisor. Less research, the less funds that come in, which drives students away. Would give WPU 1 out of 10 in research in sciences. Says we shouldn’t leave it to the Harvards or John Hopkins to make great discoveries because it would serve our school better.

WPU research

770-771 Research gains funds which is important because “because at the end of the day I’m going to study to help the school and the school should also help me financially enjoy my stay on campus”

WPU Research

790-792; 798 Perception of Princeton and Harvard comes from the alumni, the product of those schools. Believes “it’s not too late. We can still change things” (798)

WPU perception