Felt with the Heart: A Domestic Student’s Journey with International Students

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Felt with the Heart

A Domestic Student’s Journey with International Students

By
Jethna S. Korecki

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Robert Troyer
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

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Abstract

No matter the country of destination, international students are well documented for their extra challenges they face as university students. Over the years both successful students and challenged students have been studied as to why they struggle. This Honors thesis is meant to document the perspective of a domestic student who lived and worked with mostly undergraduate international students for over three years.
**Introduction**

One might wonder why I, a student studying criminal justice, am writing an ethnographic paper on international students. I started at Western Oregon University (WOU) in the Fall of 2013 where I was planning to earn my Criminal Justice degree and work in the law enforcement field. Never in my wildest dreams could I have ever imagined where I am today. Now I am graduating with my major along with two minors and two certificates in very different areas. Over time my focus of study shifted from crime analysis to working with people who are learning English as an additional language (L2 learners).

Indeed, my original intentions for working with international students were to make friends and connections as well as learn about the world we live in. I never expected that it would change my life and become a large part of who I am now. In my three and a half years with international students, I have had the privilege to go places and meet people that without higher education, I would have never met.

The students I spent the most time with are Chinese. There are several reasons for that: during my time at WOU, most of the international students here have come from China. These students also tend to stay at least a year at WOU, if not two or more, thus I have been able to keep in face to face contact with them longer. While I have worked with international students from various countries most of my contacts are with Chinese students. This factor combined with my Chinese L2 means that much of my observations will be on Chinese international students.
Disclaimer

None of my experiences in this thesis is to define any group of international students. Just as no one person can be representative of their culture, no interaction whether positive or negative should define all or even some international students or the culture they come from. My own interaction with international students is precious to me and has changed over time. The way students approach me now is completely different from 2014 where I had to systematically find connections with Chinese international students. Now international students sometimes come to me or are more approachable because I have a network and a reputation of being the nice American (foreign in Chinese perspective) girl who knows and likes Chinese culture. It is important to remember that one point in time, one interaction with an individual should never define a whole group of people as situations change. It is not my goal to have people read this and reinforce any kind of stereotype, rather my goal is to contribute a drop to the ocean of knowledge about international students.

Structure of the thesis

This is not a typical thesis or research paper as it has a unique design and structure that includes many pages of personal experience and observations arranged in chronological order. As this is also an academic work, other studies and research are woven into the narrative and embedded as textboxes. Towards the end of the thesis there will be more research along with programs Western offers.
Personal Background

I am from the countryside in southern Oregon where I attended a small high school of eighty-nine students. During my time there it surprisingly had a few international students as well. Thus, my personal history with international students started in high school. During my junior year my mom hosted international students for several months, providing a place to say and food to eat. Over the course of a school year, we had four students, two students living with us at any point in time. In the end of their stays at my house the international students moved out to other homes saying that they were dissatisfied with the living arrangements. I could not understand why - the house was nice, the surrounding area was beautiful, food was tasty, and sometimes we even went shopping. It was an environment that I was completely used to. I was hurt and could not comprehend why they would leave. It was an experience that left me feeling bitter and unenthusiastic to interact with international students.

Despite my resentment, I made a friend with a Bolivian exchange student during my senior year of high school. He sparked my interest in other cultures as well as my interest in English grammar. His first language was Spanish, yet he understood and could explain parts of English grammar to me. As a native speaker, I was shocked that I could be schooled by an L2 speaker. However, I could not be frustrated with his teasing of my lack of English knowledge - Sergio’s warm and open personality was contagious. He spoke with the same ease with the teachers as he did to popular students and quiet students such as myself. He remains the nicest social butterfly that I have ever met. He taught me that foreigners are neither
antisocial nor scary to talk to. He was the first person who made me question my own knowledge of English grammar. Sergio was my first international friend. After we graduated from high school I was saddened by our parting of ways, yet I know that if we are in the same area we will meet again.

During my Junior and Senior years of high school I also discovered something called “Korean Drama.” I found the romantic stories to be unpredictable, frustrating, and downright heartbreaking. While watching the first episode of City Hunter I struggled to distinguish the faces of all the old men. I daresay that at the time many of the Korean faces looked alike. However, by the time I completed the series of City Hunter (about twenty hours) I was able to watch the first episode again, identify each character and easily tell them apart. As a result of watching City Hunter, I was introduced to and fell in love with the South Korean lead actor: Lee Min-ho or rather his character: Lee Yoon-sung.
WOU where Everything is New

Fall 2013 to Winter 2014

I started attending Western Oregon University as a freshman right out of high school. It was a big change for me as I went from a graduating class of twenty-one in a rural town of one hundred and fifty to a dorm hall of thirty students in a town of nine thousand. My hallmates were, like me, in the honors program and subsequently doubled as classmates. It was like high school again, as everyone living in my hall and attending honors classes were Americans who spoke English as a first language, but I would wake up in the morning and know that I was surrounded by a population of students larger than my hometown. Without the confines of home, I could eat what I wanted, sleep when I wanted, and be around the people I wanted to be with.

As time went on, I dropped my habit of watching Korean Dramas, either due to my focus on homework or perhaps I simply could not handle the heartbreak anymore; however, my exposure to anything international did not end because my American friends introduced me to Japanese anime. I quickly discovered that I much preferred watching it with subtitles and hearing the original language instead of dubbed in English.

For the first six months of university life, I did not make meaningful contact with any international students, like my friendship with Sergio. I only saw international students in passing. Once while out on a university-led hike I met a couple of friendly Korean girls. Even though they were friendly, I did not go out of my way to encounter any international students until Spring Term.
Spring 2014

Wanting to try new things I made decisions that spring that have forever changed my life. I tried a new dance class and I joined another program at school. The dance class was actually a Tai Chi class that I took to learn some martial arts. I also joined Conversation Partners, a program designed to connect American (local/domestic) students with international students.

The Tai Chi class was taught by a visiting scholar from China, Hu Fang. A visiting scholar is a teacher from another university comes to WOU to study for a time period of anywhere from a few weeks to a year. First learning Tai Chi from her father at the age of six, Hu was an incredibly young-looking master of Tai Chi. Her class was one that first introduced me to Chinese culture and piqued my early interest in the culture. Our Tai Chi routine was set to the first Chinese music that I listened to outside of an American Chinese restaurant. I still know the song and artist of the music she used: in English the name is Celadon Porcelain (青花瓷) by Jay Chou. Outside of regular class, Hu also taught an informal class on fan Tai Chi. I was part of this class of five students and our final performance was in the Informal Spring Dance Concert. From Hu, I learned my first word in Chinese: “er.” To English ears sounds like the pirate “arr!” but in pinyin it is spelled “er” (er), meaning “two.” She made Chinese culture alive and real to me. Previously my only ideas about China were a vague geographic memory of Asia, fortune cookies, and “Made in China” labels.
There were several factors leading to my decision to join Conversation Partners. Life in the dorm started to have a lot of drama as friends (both hallmates and classmates) were diverging; some were moving out, others were fighting, and a few wanted alone time with their significant other. Suddenly I didn’t have as many people to talk to or watch anime with. One day, I was talking to the Honors Graduate Student Worker about the situation. She suggested that I go out and meet people. I was a little hesitant, after all, it’s fall term not spring term when people make friends. Amy did not just make a suggestion; she gave me a way to meet new people.

“Conversation Partners,” she said as she handed me the information paper, “sign up and try it!”

“Oh, I’ll try it!” I replied suddenly cheering up.

“Just email them and they will help you sign up.”

That is exactly what I did. A few days later I emailed the shortest email address on campus (cp@wou.edu), giving the program some information about myself; giving details about who I was, where I was from, and my interests. I was surprised when I was contacted by the program director, Dr. Troyer, who wanted to meet in person. We met and I was surprised when he guessed I was from the Midwest. It seems that either in our conversation or our email exchange that I used some words or phrases that have Midwestern origin. His guess was close as my mother is from the Midwest and I would speak to my family who are born and raised in the Midwest. Perhaps what he had heard in my use of language was something that I had learned from my mother.
In week two or three of the term, I met my conversation partner at the welcome party, a small gathering of about twenty people. All of us participated in several icebreakers, introductions, and games. I met the Korean girls again, the ones that I had met earlier in the year during the hike. It seemed so strange that I had lived so close to them, only two floors down and in a different wing of the same dorm building, yet my life had been so removed.

My first conversation partner was a Japanese exchange student in his final term at WOU, who was confident and appeared to be comfortable with life in Monmouth. For someone like me who was new to working with international students, “Utah” was a perfect fit. He was friendly and open and had previously had conversation partners before. He paid no mind that many of his American friends would call his name Utah. He let me follow him in areas of his life here on campus that otherwise on my own I may not have visited.

Utah was part of the International Club, an organization that I had heard about before but did not want to go by myself. Thus with his invitation I attended International Night, a performance night put on by the international club highlighting performances from other cultures. With this event I was hooked, and I wanted to be a part of that club. Perhaps it was the Tyco drumming performance, the Chinese Opera Face Change, or the Polynesian guys performing the Haka.

During later meetings with Utah I was able to meet and see students who lived in the International Hall of the dorm. The environment was such a positive one that even after nine months of people living together they were still getting along, and this impressed me so much that I decided to live there the next year. It was a
huge decision for me at the time because as an Honor’s student I wanted to keep living in the hall, yet at the same time I felt the urge to go and meet new people. Utah also taught me the most important dining skill that I learned after the age of ten. I had tried to use chopsticks on my own when my family would dine in Chinese restaurants with limited success. Mostly I would simply resolve to stabbing the mar far chicken and eat with triumph. From Utah I learned the delicate strength it takes to pick up items with chopsticks and the control that is required in order to eat. Fighting hand cramps and poor control of my food, I struggled for several meals before I could accomplish eating with chopsticks with some proficiency where I could pick up solid non-slippery items. Even after three years of eating meals with chopsticks multiple times a week, I still eat rice noodles and chicken legs at a slower rate than my Japanese and Chinese friends, otherwise I can typically keep up with my friends when we eat together.

**Summer 2014**

I returned home for the summer where I worked in the kitchen of a local fast food restaurant. There I had no face-to-face contact with international students or foreigners. Towards the end of summer I was excited as my urge to go someplace new won over the urge to stay in familiar territory. Around late August I received my roommate information from the housing office. Based on her name, I suspected that she was from Japan, and I excitedly contacted her via email. I was not afraid to live with an international student as I had convinced myself that my college experience would be better than when I was in high school. Then in early
September I was given an unexpected chance to work as a Peer Mentor, a type student leader in the dorm. Due to this opportunity I was able to head back to campus on September 7th for training, several weeks before the start of Fall Term.
New Friends!

Fall 2014

Peer Mentors is a team of about thirty experienced WOU students with a program goal to help freshman students adjust to life at WOU. Being a mentor entails a yearlong commitment of at least fifty hours per term, but one of the perks of this job is that we were all given a scholarship. All of the mentors were assigned one hall per person that we would work with for the rest of the school year. Living on campus I could only mentor students who were living in a different building; thus, I was given an all-freshman hall in the Heritage dorm. There I was responsible for getting to know the students and helping them within my powers as a mentor. I would spend at least three hours a week in the hall, sometimes a little more as we would talk and hang out. Within the Peer Mentor program meetings our team would design and plan programs for the halls we worked in as well as campus wide events. At that time the Peer Mentor program had students working in all of the halls that contained freshman students.

By arriving early I was able to meet other students who also arrived early. Athletes come to campus early to start practice and I quickly learned that international students also come early. The first student I met was a Japanese junior named Hitoshi, we surprised each other because I was not expecting to see anyone else aside from RA and athletes for another week, and he was equally surprised as me. Our first interaction is as humorous as it was a good lesson for me. During our first conversation he asked if I was a Yankee. This took me back, because when I think of the meaning of Yankee, I think of carpetbaggers, New York State, and
baseball. None of which category I have any special connection or relation to. I asked him to clarify, and he asked me if I was a delinquent.

Now more confused, I responded, “I’m a criminal justice student, I want to work for police. I can’t be a delinquent.”

“Why do you have a knife then?” inquired Hitoshi, drawing back further into the couch where he was already seated.

I froze, suddenly aware that my casual habit of opening and closing my 3 inch pocketknife with one hand could be scary to someone. The knife had been a gift from a friend who was a Criminal Justice student as well. He had given it to me so that I could use it in self-defense if the case ever arose. The sound of its repeated clicking from opening and closing had always annoyed my mom, but I thought it looked cool. In my mind it was a tool, not something that I would ever use to bring harm to someone, nor was it my intention to scare anyone. Trying to make the situation a little less uncomfortable, I asked if he had ever had a pocket knife.

“No! I’m not a Yankee.” Stated an incredulous Hitoshi.

In the end our encounter ended with humor, as it was the first time my delinquency had ever been questioned and Hitoshi handled the situation with humor. I found that humor seems to be one of his specialties. Through Fall and Winter Term, I would have trouble figuring out his dry sense of humor. Even a few years after our Yankee encounter, we both look back and laugh at the accusations.

About a week after the knife incident, more students moved into the hall. This time it was a Korean and four Chinese students. One of the Chinese boys became a good friend of mine, and two others I got to know pretty well while we
lived together. The first night we all sat together on the couch in the common area talking. During this conversation I dropped my water bottle by accident; Bob picked it up telling me that I should sweep the bottle. I asked him to repeat what he said.

“You need to sweep the bottle” repeated Bob with some hesitancy.

I laughed and poor Bob was left with a genuinely puzzled expression. I explained to him the reason that I laughed because he was so close, saying sweep instead of clean or wash. It is essentially in the same category of words related to cleaning so I understood what he meant after some thought. I then realized that I really liked this adaptive and creative use of language used by L2 speakers.

Most Chinese students will come to the United States with an “English” name. According to my friends many times they had the name given or created when they were young and learning English. Chinese students use their pinyin name at the university, but oftentimes non-Chinese speakers struggle to pronounce the name because of the z, zh, and x as the Chinese pinyin is so different from English. Pinyin zh is pronounced like an English j. Thus the common family name zhou (周) is pronounced much like “Joe,” however when English speakers see this family name they will probably pronounce something like zaou.

Chinese and Japanese have similar patterns in the name system. Family name what Americans usually know as last names are said first and then the given name (first name) is said second. Family comes first and then the individual. For example, my name is Jethna Korecki, but in the Japanese and Chinese tradition I would be Korecki Jethna. I find it easier to ask international students what their given name is and what their family name is, because sometimes they will remember that their last name is first and others will not. I also have a nickname of Jenny, given to me by my parents when I was a baby, because people can have a hard time pronouncing my name due to the /th/ sound. It’s a relatively rare phonological sound in the context of languages around the world.

International students have various methods in choosing the “English” name. For some they choose a famous name, such as Elvis, others choose similar
Rooming together, Jerry and Walker were two other Chinese students that I
got to know well. Both freshmen, they had a habit of playing *League of Legends* on
their laptops. It amazed me that they could play for hours on end on a game.

Yumi my Japanese exchange roommate came a few days after the other
international students. Though we did not become close friends, we got along well
with no problems. The day she came to WOU, I went downstairs to meet her; I was
more than excited to meet her. I enjoyed watching her greet Hitoshi when they first
met. Watching two Japanese meet for the first time was special for me as it was
something I had only previously seen while watching anime. I knew that it was
important and for the first time I was able to see two Japanese people meet for the
first time. It is undoubtedly a formal event as they bowed to each other and used
some formal greetings that are not used outside a first meeting.

Bob, the one who told me to sweep my water bottle, was my first Chinese
friend. From Wuhan he was a 2+2 student studying vocal music. Despite some
setbacks in our relationship, he and I have a very relaxed friendship. About a week
after school started, I reported him for having alcohol in his room which I felt was
my duty to do as a Peer Mentor. He never seemed to be upset with me for that, rather he seemed to understand the situation I had been placed in as a student leader. Bob introduced me to quite a few people over the time that we spent together; via video-chat he even introduced me to his parents. He helped me set up my WeChat account, a Chinese social app that people use much like Facebook, and there he introduced me to his cousin. He was also my first Chinese teacher as he taught me some of the basics of the Chinese language concerning pinyin and the tones and how to say a few words. With Bob I discovered my fascination for Chinese culture as he told me what was going on in his life. I witnessed how he dealt with stress, messy friendships, and tough roommates.

Pinyin is the Romanization of the Chinese language. It is used for computers and language learning because there is no alphabet in the Chinese language as it is a character based language. According to what I learned in my Chinese class, Russian trained Chinese linguists developed pinyin in the 1950’s in order to help foreigners learn the pronunciation in Chinese.

As computers developed, the use of pinyin was very useful. Now when I want to type hello in Chinese, I type in the way it’s pronounced/spelled into a QWERTY keyboard programmed for Chinese language. When I type ni I receive about eighteen character options for that sound starting with the character that is most commonly used. In this case I choose 你. I don’t have to choose the character right after every word I type. I can type the whole phrase “nihao” and the computer will give me several options to choose from. For hello I select the characters 我想. In order to type Chinese, a person has to know how to use the pinyin.

Pinyin for language learning the other aspect of Chinese is that it is a tonal language thus pinyin will reflect the tone. Thus to know how to pronounce hello one must use the correct tones nǐ hǎo both of these tones are the third tone. How important are tones? The easiest example of showing some tones is using ma; first tone mā (妈) means mother, second tone má (嘛) softens a phrase, third tone mǎ (马) meaning horse, fourth tone mà (骂) to scold and finally ma with no tone (吗) is a yes/no question marker.
Bob is a quiet guy who did not converse that much with the others in the hall. He was nice and would occasionally hang out in the dorm, but he preferred to stay in his room and watch English TV shows with Chinese subtitles. I would join him because we were friends and I also enjoyed the same kind of shows. I noticed that Jerry and Walker would do the same thing, preferring to stay in their room where if they were not working on homework, they were playing League of Legends an online computer game in their room, or they were playing online computer games with other international students outside the hall.

If I ever had questions about Chinese culture, Bob was the person I would always go to. He did not have all the answers, but he would do his best to explain. One day I asked him about other people’s personality. We both had some mutual friends who were also Chinese international students. I asked him if our friend was the same person in Chinese as he was when he spoke English. I was shocked by Bob’s response.

“Actually, that person is really funny in Chinese, but cannot make anyone laugh while speaking English,” Bob pauses slightly and continues, “He also says a lot of bad words in Chinese and is kinda rude.”

“No way!” I was completely surprised.

Our friend was a person that when speaking English was a polite, nice, and soft spoken kind of guy, otherwise he didn’t say much.

Why was this friend so quiet when speaking English and then have such a different personality in Chinese? Bonny Peirce wrote a couple thoughts on this very subject in her 1995 article Social Identity, Investment and Language Learning. Her work resonates a bit with what I have seen with some students.
During that Fall Term of 2014 I continued volunteering as Conversation Partner. My new partner was a senior who was from China. I did not see him all that often as Rocky lived off campus and was often studying hard for the GMAT. He showed me that there are more international students who live off campus than live on campus. Many of the Chinese students come as “transfers” and are not required to live on campus. Despite our limited interaction Rocky was the spark that set off my connections with Chinese students. He introduced me to his roommate, Yao a small town girl like me. Yao in turn introduced me to an off campus international

She suggests that when language learners choose to talk or not to talk, they are balancing their identity and power relationships in the moment of the conversation. They may choose to talk because in that moment the investment of speaking is deemed to be beneficial. Thus when students choose not to talk they may feel that talking will not bring them any benefits. Peirce found that the women that she worked with in her study had a difficult time talking to people of “particular symbolic or material investment” people who have a kind of power over the language learner. For the women it was the customer, the boss, the doctor, or other proficient users of English. Peirce was clear in the fact that these women were highly motivated learners of English, but there were certain situations that they would not talk. One woman wrote in her journal that she felt uncomfortable talking to native speakers because she felt inferior and another woman felt that she was an illegitimate speaker (Peirce, 1995).

I did not meet students who voiced these kinds of feelings, but I do know that sometimes they were uncomfortable talking to people who held a position of power over them such as professors and resident assistants. The other aspect of this is how one is able to express themselves in their L2. For myself when I speak Chinese, emotionally I am the same person as when I speak English, but I am unable to express myself in the same way. I end up feeling more frustrated and unable to say what is on my heart. I have no doubt that international students who speak L2 English feel the same way.
organization. While I only really often saw her during Fall Term, I always felt a special kind of kinship with her.

My second conversation partner took me to Sing Fey or as they call it, “xing hui” (星辉) a local Chinese restaurant where I learned that they have a second menu featuring authentic dishes. I was shocked and excited to try new and “exotic” food. As we ate I was appalled at the awful table manners I was seeing, but after some thought and multiple meals with continued observation I discovered a pattern.

The thing that had me so appalled was that my Chinese friends would spit bones from the food onto the side of the plate or even on the table itself. Yet what I found amazing was that these bones would be perfectly clean, no meat, no cartilage, not even joints would remain. Absolutely nothing from meat that could not be chewed was wasted. I specify meat because there are exceptions to this rule of eating everything, flavoring spices is one. Generally no one eats star anise, slices of ginger, bay leaves, or dried chili peppers that are added for flavor. The other reason that spitting bones out on the table is acceptable is simply because there are bones in the food. Americans avoid eating food with bones, and when there are bones we usually use our hands to eat around the bone or use a fork and knife. However, when eating with chopsticks it is not possible to cut anything, and there are no sharp objects on the table when eating. Thus I could imagine the shock Chinese students have when they see Americans eating meat such as a chicken leg and wasting what remains. For many of them, their parents taught them to eat the rest of the cartilage and joints.
I also learned that Chinese dining has many different items to eat. Some are seasonal and some are regional. What Americans typically encounter at many Chinese restaurants is only a small portion of the dishes found in Chinese cuisine. Entire books could be written on the history and variety of dishes in Chinese food. I always encourage people to try new dishes when they can or better yet, meet with friends from China and have them order. During my time at WOU I have eaten taro, lotus root, pork intestine, chicken feet, roasted duck, and many kinds of noodles. All of this food is really tasty; part of the trick to enjoy new food is to copy the table manners of those who are eating it. It is nearly impossible to enjoy chicken feet by eating it in the manner of European dining style; it is much easier to eat when eating it in the Chinese style.

In America, food is important. We care about the way it looks and the way it tastes. However the Chinese culture of food dictates that the food must be fresh and it is best enjoyed with friends. Dinner is usually prepared by one person or paid for by one person in a dinner party. Oftentimes when I go into the house of Chinese students or scholars I am treated as a guest. I’m expected to sit back and enjoy the company and the food. Deep inside I struggle because at home I was expected to help when people have a party, and everyone brings something so that the burden of the party is not solely carried by the host. Chinese dining unlike American dining as it has many round tables. This allows everyone to have a chance to see and talk to each other, but most importantly the food is on a rotating centerpiece. There is no need to pass large, hot, and heavy dishes around the table.
Yao asked me if I had ever heard of Friday Night on the Farm. She said she was interested in going but was a little nervous about going by herself. She was surprised when I told her that I had no idea what she was talking about, so she showed me the email. The email was specifically for International students and I felt that I might not be welcome. I told her this but she insisted in asking me to go with her as her friend and guest, so I relented and agreed to go.

Friday Night on the Farm is an off-campus event, part of a group called International Students Inc, (ISI). It is a group of Christians, who want to provide an opportunity for international students to enter an American home, eat homemade American food, have fun, and practice English. They also give talks about American culture and what Christians believe. Each Friday there was a mixture of about twenty to fifty students and scholars. I was warmly welcomed even though I was an American student, and they were excited that I came with an international student. It was such a warm and welcoming place that I continued to go for the rest of my time in college.

Through this off campus group, I felt like my contact with international students exploded. I met scholars who came from other universities and studied the American education system (also some observers not connected to WOU), graduate students and more. In this program I met people I would have never met otherwise. Many of these students lived off campus and had majors I never had classes with. I met Marry and Nancy, a pair of graduate students who lived together. Some of the nicest girls I met during my sophomore year, they changed my opinion of Chinese girls, which was influenced by one Chinese girl in my hall who never came out of her
room except to go to class, or if she was not in her room in or class, she was on her way to fly to Minnesota for the weekend to meet with her boyfriend. I had also met some of Bob’s classmates from the same Chinese university. They never seemed eager to talk, and they only hung out with other Chinese students. Nancy and Marry turned that opinion around and gave me the basis of my current philosophy.

For Thanksgiving I invited Bob and Yumi to my house. They both came and it was the first time I had university friends go to my house. They both enjoyed themselves and my mom was very welcoming. Bob was teased about eating so much apple pie. My family learned that in China and Japan people don’t make apple pie because houses generally do not have ovens. That night my mom and I tried to figure out if we could make an apple pie on the stovetop. The project met with dismal failure and a lot of laughs.

Later that night as we played games, I learned two more words in Chinese. As Bob was playing cards and was losing to me I said “boo-hoo” as a taunt for him to cry. He looked up shocked and asked me if I had just spoken Chinese. I responded with a negative, and I asked him why he had asked that.

“Well,” he paused, “in Chinese “’bù kū’ [不哭] means ‘don’t cry’”.

It was amazing. In English I meant to say cry, but to Chinese hearing it sounded like don’t cry. Very fitting for the game and the situation.

On Friday we went shopping in the small city of Roseburg, where there were not very many sales, but the crowds were enough to drive my mom and I crazy. Bob and Yumi were not bothered by the number of people. After a little shopping we went to the county jail where a family friend at the time worked. He had offered to
give all of us a tour of the place. I had visited it before and there were no surprises for me. Yumi kept an unreadable face, but looked at everything while giving an impassive “hmmm.” Bob was wide eyed and looked a little nervous. When we visited the women’s section of the jail, Bob was given all the attention by the female inmates. Bob stood out for multiple reasons: no uniform, tall, and Asian. According to American Fact Finder of the US Census Data, in 2010, the Asian population of Douglas County was one percent. Needless to say, with Bob’s shy blushing and the women telling us not to get in trouble, we quickly moved on to another section.

On the way back to campus as I was driving, I almost cried because I was so touched for having them come to my house for Thanksgiving. It was one of the best Thanksgivings I have ever had. The end of Fall Term was bittersweet. Bob, my buddy and advisor of Chinese language and culture, was moving out. I felt that with him moving off campus he would be so far away. Even with the bad news, Christmas break was approaching and I had already made some exciting plans.

Winter Break 2014

Christmas Break was fun for me and I was excited by the fact that Yumi was coming to my house for half of that time. On the first day she tried to pronounce a friend’s name, Lorren, but it proved to be difficult and after about five failed attempts she never called his name again. The whole time she figured out so many ways to get his attention that I could never kept track of how she did it.
**Winter 2015**

Winter Break all too soon came to an end. I was faced with the reality that Bob moved out and his empty room stood as a reminder that he was gone. I regretted the amount of time I had spent playing Skyrim on another friend’s X-Box. The other reality was that Yumi was going to return to Japan at the end of the term because her exchange was only for two terms.

Bob seemed distant in reality it was not far, but Bob didn’t return to the dorm for visiting all that often. I would visit the place he lived at occasionally and I met all of his Chinese roommates, yet it wasn’t the same. When I did visit it was usually with the intent to practice the song that I was planning to sing for Chinese New Year.

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Yumi’s struggle with r and l is normal for Japanese L1 speakers of English. I first learned about this when I tried to say Hitoshi’s real name, I struggled to say it because Japanese r is not pronounced the same way as English. What is happening? The reason that she struggled with Lorren is due to the fact that Japanese does not have the distinct sounds, phonemes, /r/ and /l/. They have a similar sound, but it’s between an /r/ and /l/. Complicating the matter, /l/ and /r/ are both liquid sounds that are voiced; thus, when she attempted to say Lorren /lorən/ it came out as lollen /lɔlən/ or rorren /rɔrən/.

This struggle is not the result of her ethnicity. Rather it is due to the age at which she started to learn English. My Linguistics 410 class on the Theory of Foreign Language Acquisition discussed this very topic. When an infant is learning their first language they first learn the sounds that exist in their language and ignore other sounds as they get older. This time period of learning the sounds of the language ends around the age of four (Ellis, 2015, p. 27). Thus after the age of about four years old, a child learning a second language is likely going to have an accent in the L2, when compared to a child who starts to learn an L2 at an earlier age.
I was the secretary for the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) where our club of five were planning the Chinese New Year celebration at WOU. I was the only American in this club; I was originally part of this club mainly to fulfill the numbers required for a campus club organization. For Chinese New Year however, we also needed performances so I decided to try something new and fight my stage fright. Bob ended up being my vocal coach for the song; he was studying vocal music and as a native Chinese speaker could help me with pronunciation. In the process of learning the song I learned how to pronounce most of the Chinese language with the use of pinyin.

I think my performance was a near disaster, something that I never want to repeat. I learned quite a bit about performance work however; songs are not as easy as they seem, get the recorded music ahead of time, and practice! Practice! Practice! I practiced many times with the recorded singer, but then only twenty-four hours before my performance we went to look for a recording of the music without the singer. It sounded okay, but the song was a little different. Between stage-fright and a few hurried practices with a new song, my actual performance was dismal in my opinion. I forgot an entire verse, but managed to repeat the verse I could remember. I figured out after the fact why the song sounded a little different, a slight change in tempo was enough to throw off my timing. I wasn’t so discouraged that I would not perform again; I simply decided not to sing to recorded music again.

Miko was another Japanese exchange student who I met at International Club. Like me she also lived in the dorms but she lived in the dorms above me. She and I decided to do a performance at International Night. This time it would be
different she would play piano and I would sing the song in Japanese. We started practicing in the middle of Winter Term and would meet at least twice a week.

In January, I met Nova while going to Friday Night on the Farm. He knew some of my other friends that I had met earlier that academic year. He was a well established business student who seemed to have figured out how to live in the US. Perhaps he was able to get some advice from family who lived in Texas, or he had already solved the major issues that new students often have when they first come to the US. He had a car, license, apartment, and often drove to the Chinese store in Beaverton to buy the food he wanted. Nova was unlike some of the other students I met; he worked on campus and was completely comfortable talking to Americans. He and some of my other upperclassmen friends got together one day and made homemade dumplings by hand. He was a gentleman; if he knew I was going to walk outside alone at night, he would take steps to either walk with me or drive me to where I was going.

**Spring Break 2015**

I went home during the break, but I actually returned in the middle of the week for one day to have lunch with my friend Joe and his roommate Lucy. I had met Joe while he was working in Valsetz, WOU’s campus dining hall. When I first met him I was astounded that a Chinese guy could be so tall! Joe is very tall, towering at 6’6,” over 2 meters. He gets this reaction to his height pretty often, and he explained that people from northern China tend to be taller than those from southern China.
Most of the immigrants who came to the US in the late 19th Century and most of the 20th Century were from southern China.

At his apartment I tried a new food that I’d never had the opportunity to try while living on campus. Hot Pot is a traditional meal in China. The closest description I can provide is that it is like a soup version of Thanksgiving; there is so much food! The pot is kept in the middle of the table on a small burner, simmering with the spiced soup broth, around the pot are all the items to eat such as raw meat and raw vegetables. Then people put in the food they want to eat and while it cooks they talk and tell stories. Then when it’s cooked more food is put in, the process does not end until people are no longer able to eat. Hot pot meals are more than just the food; it’s about being with the people you are with and having fun.

*Spring Term 2015*

Spring Term started with an abrupt surprise as one of my international hallmates, Hitoshi, suddenly transferred to another university. His parents believed that WOU was too small to have a quality degree. He was one of those people in the dorm that everyone enjoyed. His sense of humor and quirky personality were greatly missed. Yumi was also gone as she had returned to Japan to finish her degree. I was now left with a quiet room. My days were filled, however, and I became busier than ever.
During this time I learned the difference between International Students and Exchange Students. All exchange students* are international**, but not all international students are exchange students. An exchange student is someone who comes to WOU for a time of a year or less where they earn credits at WOU and the credits are accepted at their other university. When the exchange students return to their university, they typically have a couple more classes to take at their original university before they graduate. My roommate Yumi was an example of this as she both took classes for two and then completed her degree in Japan where she graduated.

Many Chinese students come to WOU on a 3+1 program or 2+2 program. They are not exchange students because they will not return to their previous university. Rather they have a transfer student status. A 3+1 program is one where a student studies in their first university for three years and then finishes their degree at WOU in one year. 2+2 is much the same way, two years there, two years at WOU. Depending on students' majors, programs, and the agreement between universities, upon graduation most will receive a 'dual degree' from both WOU and their home institutions, but some may receive two bachelor degrees. One of my roommates from the Yellow House told me that she will receive a Law degree from her first university in China and a Criminal Justice degree from WOU. There is one other type of international student, that is the one who starts out as a freshman and they complete all four years at WOU. Joe is one such student, he came to WOU as a freshman. One Chinese girl I met was an exchange student from Germany. She started her degree in Germany as an international student there, came to WOU as an exchange student and then went back to Germany to complete her degree. Even international students at WOU can go study abroad to a third country.

There are two types of student visas to study in the United States. The difference is found with the kind of student. Exchange students, who are not degree seeking and in the United States for a year or less, are on J-1 visas. J-1 visas are known as Exchange visitors, this also includes scholars who come to the United States to learn. Students who come to complete their education and receive a degree, the ones who come for a year or more, are given F-1 student visas. F-1 visas include the students who come to the US as freshmen.

*There are some domestic students who go on exchange to another US university. ** Some students at a university are immigrants or in the process of becoming US citizens.
My friendship with Nova grew and we both helped each other with projects. After I expressed my wish to work on campus, he introduced me to the people he worked with in the Physical Plant. In my mind the custodian crew at WOU are the night fairies who secretly make the school nice and clean. Nova and I soon became co-workers, only seeing each other at the beginning and end of the shift which started at 9pm and ended at 1am. I helped him move to an apartment where I learned how much stuff a person can accumulate when they live in one place for a while. One of his roommates who had previously moved out before I met Nova had filled her closet from top to bottom with empty shoeboxes. I presume that she had already taken her shoes home with her.

Mid May, my friend Miko and I performed Tegami by Angela Aki. Miko played the piano and taught me how to sing the song. We practiced the song starting in March for two months. By the time we performed the song at international night I could almost sing the song by memory. We both had a little bit of stage fright but her piano playing was perfect. Even to today this song is one that I will sing to myself when I am alone.

At the end of Spring Term I was asked to be the vice president of CSSA. I agreed because I wanted to see CSSA be a successful club and I knew that the president and another member were graduating. I only knew a couple other members, but I was aware of the fact that some other people had been recruited. The club officially only really needed five people.
*Summer 2015*

Nova went back to China for the summer and I went home to work. Over the course of the summer our friendship started to deteriorate with the distance. Returning home I felt that I was isolated and alone, even when I was working two summer jobs. For the first time I realized why the exchange girls who had stayed a while with my mom and I during high school moved out: isolation and high expectations. Life at home was one where I was expected to take summer classes, work for money, and work on the farm. I had few friends to reach out to and the remaining spare time was spent buried playing *Skyrim* a computer game. I remembered and tried to imagine what it had been like for the girls to go from a life where they went shopping almost anytime they wanted because they lived in the city and see friends whenever they wanted to a slow lifestyle in the country side where they were asked to work outside. Even for me, the return from college life with a car to a familiar setting was a difficult transition.

Some people think my Mom was joking when she questioned my authenticity as an American. From her expression and the way she talked to me, I knew that she was not making light of her comment. Perhaps she was worried and just wanted to know where my American friends were, but I never got that impression. With the question “Are you even American anymore?” I felt even more isolated. Part of me felt like the same person, but the other part of me felt larger than just Douglas County. I did not have any close friends from high school, nor did I have any close American friends from my freshman year. My close American friends from Sophomore year also went home during the summer and lived many hours away.
The reason they never came to my house was because they went to their own homes for Thanksgiving and Christmas, so the students that came home with me and met my mom were international.

Like anyone who has gone away from home for a while and then returned, international students have a time where they go through reverse culture shock. Everyone knows that going to a new place will be exciting, new, and surprising, what people often don’t account for is the culture shock of returning home. When returning home perhaps students think that they can keep going with their previous life, but as time marches on, situations change and people change (Young, 2014, p. 60). There are many reasons why students will go through reverse culture shock and many feelings that will occur. People may feel like they are alienated, alone, and misunderstood. When people return home, no one minds if they criticize what they saw while they were gone, but to criticize the things at home is frowned upon (Young, 2014, p. 61).

All of this is normal for people who have gone to new places and learned new things, especially for international students. Contrary to expectation, students who adjust the most to living overseas have a harder time returning to home when compared to their counterparts who struggled to adapt to life overseas (Christofi and Thomson, 2007, p. 54). Christofi and Thomson identify three main reasons for conflict with the home culture on the return. First they do not expect culture shock upon return, and they don’t realize the changes that have occurred during the time core value formation and then these changes become apparent when they no longer have the same values of the home culture (2007, p. 54). More interesting though, is the research done by Christofi and Thomson as they interviewed people who lived abroad for a period of time, returned home, but then chose to go back to the country they were abroad at. Participants in the study described their feelings of frustration and lack of connection with their home country, yet missing both countries and their friends in both places (2007, p. 57).

Perhaps when returning home from any life changing experience there remains the feeling of having one foot in both worlds. They also mentioned that things are not as nice as they remembered, the streets smell worse or that things simply didn’t the feel same. People have a habit of remembering the good things and forgetting the bad. All of this leads to reverse culture shock when expectations, spoken or unspoken, are not met.
The summer gave me time to reflect on my experience thus far and I learned several things over the course of the year. My sophomore year was the stepping stone for me as I became surrounded by international students and I made my first friend from China. I came to my conclusion that people are people no matter where you go. Even though we all speak different first languages, people can still understand each other’s struggles, just perhaps not to the same extent as if we share the same first language or cultural background. Some of the international students I met were really nice and friendly, others not so much, yet it’s the same for Americans; I’ve met some people who are really nice, and others definitely are not nice. I suppose the biggest differences are in problem solving and how to handle conflict. I was able to witness how some Chinese approach conflict in ways that are different than what Americans would do, or at least what I would do.

By living so close to the international students in the International Hall I was able to see the lifestyle of the students. The boys introduced me to computer games such as *League of Legends* and *Hearthstone*. It was also during this time that I started to notice that some of the Chinese boys typically spent most of their time outside of class with other Chinese boys playing games. For the Korean boy in my hall, I noticed that he spent time alone playing games. He did not interact with any other Koreans because there were no others attending the WOU at that time. My organized and studious Japanese roommate would watch Japanese pop music videos or talk to her boyfriend in her free time.

As I watched students move out of the hall I kept mental note as to why they were moving out. There were various reasons to move, for Bob it cost too much for
him to live on campus, my roommate’s exchange was for only two terms, and
Hitoshi transferred to another university. I also made the same decision to move out
of the hall as well.

Living off campus was not an easy decision for me. I loved living on campus
where I was surrounded by people and I didn’t have to cook. My mom also
encouraged me to live on campus, however as the saying goes, “money talks.” I paid
approximately $1300 a month to live on campus while sharing the room. Living off
campus could easily be less than $700 depending on the food one eats. The house I
chose to live is known as the Nick House or Yellow House. I originally found it
during the Winter Term when I tried to help Bob find a place to live when he moved
off campus. I hoped for him to live there but it did not work out for him, rather as it
turned out, the house was undergoing a change in leadership and went from a co-ed
living situation to an all-girls house. With eleven bedrooms for students, the house
can hold up to 13 or 14 students. It has two kitchens and a large living room. It was
different in the fact that it is owned by a church rather than an individual or a
business. Thus the leadership of the house is directly controlled by house parents
are responsible for approving renters, manage the repairs on the house, ensure
chores are completed, and make sure the rent is paid on time.

The house parents, Cody and Rachel, allowed me to live there even though I
was an American because I liked working with international students and they
wanted to encourage the use of English in the home. There already were two
American students living there, one on the first floor and one on the second floor,
thus they placed me on the third floor.
Over and over researchers have documented the difficulties international students go through to live off campus. In an article published in 2009, Portland State University had a case involving thirty eight Saudi students who took the new basic English classes, but the students were having difficulty finding housing (Keller, 2009). Poyrazli named the challenge of finding living accommodations to be one of the top three problems students face. Living accommodations was not just limited to the subjects of housing; it also included the means that students support themselves. Unlike domestic students there are many steps that the international student will have to take in order to receive a social security card, learning the transportation system, or driving a car (Poyrazli, 2007).

The difference between living on or off campus can be profound. Students choose to live off campus due to the price difference of living on campus versus the price of living off campus. In Poyrazli’s study, students reported satisfaction with location of campus dorms, but the price was much higher than to live off campus (2007). This was true for myself and Bob as we both liked the dorms but the price was just too high.

Living off campus typically has disturbing patterns in that when students live off campus they usually spend less time with students who come from another place. Or in other words they spend less time interacting with domestic students and practicing their English. In both my observation and according to research, students who live off campus tend to live people from the same language and culture. Likewise, Outhred and Chester noted that the students who live off campus form their own circle of friends who are of a similar culture (2013 p. 320).
Life as a Junior

Fall 2015

 Shortly after I moved in the Yellow House, Fall Term started off with training as I was a Peer Mentor once again. This time I was assigned to mentor the Criminal Justice hall in Ackerman. My hall did not have any international students, but I really enjoyed working with people of the same major. I was not lacking in contact with international students as I attended Friday Night on the Farm, lived in the Yellow House, was vice president of CSSA, and went to International Club.

 CSSA met immediately in the Fall Term to start the process of planning the Chinese New Year. We tried to come up with ways to help the new students, but nothing ever came of it that I know of. Even though I was the vice president, I felt that I was mostly a figurehead to fill the roster for the club. Meetings were held in Chinese, something that did not bother me, but I was frustrated by the fact that no one would stop to explain to me what was going on. The dynamics of this group were different from the year before because I was the only girl in the group, and previously there had been at least one other girl in the club.

 After a couple meetings, one of the quiet guys would listen for a while and then whisper to me a little bit about what was going on during the meeting conversations. This was the start to a new friendship as well as the start of a very interesting time with CSSA.

 The quiet Tong and I soon became friends. One day as we walked to our respective homes after a meeting we found out that we lived right next door to each other. I also learned that we both played League of Legends (LOL). After that, some
nights when we did not have much homework we would stay at our own home to play a game or two of LOL. I would have to stop after about two games because I become so stressed that I could not control my shaking hands. The day we became friends was after I shared some cookies with him that I had baked for my friends. I noticed after that he started to treat me differently than he had before.

Fall Term was also the time that I started thinking about my thesis for the honors program. I did not have much interest in Criminal Justice issues and the thesis could be outside of my field of study so I wanted to help international students. My advisor, Dr. Keulks did not like my general idea of “I want to help international students” as it was unspecific. I was not deterred even though I honestly had no idea what to do.

After a few weeks things in the Yellow House started to become complicated and interesting. All my roommates who moved in after I did were Chinese and it was the first time that I lived and interacted with Chinese girls. Right away I felt like I was back in high school, as there were problems between four of the girls that had previously known each other from their school in China. It seemed that three of them were against one, and I couldn’t understand what they tried to explain to me as it made no comprehensible sense. I chose not to pick a side simply because I honestly had no idea what was going on, I had no wish to get involved in a squabble, and girl they were against was the girl I shared the bathroom with. I personally never had any major issues with my roommate. Yes sometimes she would come back late partying and take a noisy shower at 5 or 6 am; otherwise we simply lived privately in our separate rooms.
Christmas Break 2015

Once again I went home for Christmas. Mom expected me to work and I did. I went back to my summer jobs and academically I continued to work on my thesis ideas where I reached the conclusion that I wanted to start a peer mentor program for international students. It was all uneventful outside that fact that quiet Tong came to visit.

My mom wouldn’t let me bring a friend to the house, but Tong was unwavering in wanting to meet with me. I suspect that he had nothing better to do and knew that I would like to see a friendly face. I was honestly surprised when he drove down and met me after work. I didn’t think he would actually do it because no one from home had come just to visit me at WOU and no one had ever come on their own to visit me in Roseburg. My mom had visited me at WOU, but she always had other reasons to come to the area such as buying baby trees to plant on the farm or on her way to visit other people. Roseburg does not have much for evening attractions, so after work I could only think of showing him Wildlife Safari and then watching America’s Funniest Home Videos. I really like watching that show with international students because people messing up on silly things doesn’t need much translating. As the night grew late I had to go home and we exchanged Christmas gifts. I was really surprised and touched that he came to visit. It remains my best memory of that Christmas Break because no one had ever simply driven the distance to visit me.
Winter 2016

When school started up again, Chinese New Year was the focus of everything. I was in charge of organizing MC’s for the event and I was preparing for my own performance with some of my roommates. Complications arose as I had a new roommate move in and who offered to be an MC. I excitedly accepted her offer because most of the people I had asked had refused and did not want to talk in front of people. Yet when I brought her name to the table at the next CSSA meeting the other officers of the club flat out refused and would not explain why. Turning to Tong, I asked why. He simply said that there was an argument and he didn’t want to get involved.

After the meeting I went straight to Tong and demanded to know why. It took some serious talking before he would even open up on the situation.

He started the explanation with “I don’t want to pick sides and get involved.” He then proceeded to give me the situation. It turned out that another officer had reached out to someone, a male Chinese student, to be an MC. This was a normal frustration for me—no communication as to what was going on. Overall I didn’t mind that someone was also looking for MC’s to help. However the person that had been asked and agreed to help had had a fight with my roommate who also agreed to be an MC. The reason the officers did not want the two who had fought to work together is because of the loss of face.

My American frame of mind was fuming. Why turn down help over a personal matter? The Chinese New Year is an event larger than just two people who had an argument. So what? If the two were willing to work together it should be
okay. But the other officers did not even want to go ask the two if they were willing to work together. Again the idea of loss of face was repeated to me. From what I could learn, my roommate had argued with the boy and slapped him in the face. She lost face because of her anger and the boy lost face for being slapped by a girl. This was my first experience to learn about the Chinese concept of face as well as dealing with patriarchal leadership. I felt my words were hitting a brick wall. In the end I had to go back to my roommate and tell her that the other officers said no to her offer after I, in charge of organizing the MC’s, had already accepted her offer. I felt powerless, shamed, and frustrated with this whole situation.

Chinese face is a complex concept. The idea is one that has lost importance in American culture, but is still very important in Chinese culture. My friends tried to help me understand the idea as there is no direct word translation for the concept from Chinese into English. Conversations with friends have resulted in two very different understandings of the word.

The first meaning of face that I understood and learned might be compared to honor or reputation. Research suggests that this is one meaning for it, as one study that looked at the symbolic meaning of parts of the body, they found that face is closely associated with social honor, self-respect, and position (Tung, 1994, p. 488). Thus in a metaphorical way, it is about the way outsiders look at an individual and how the individual takes steps to ensure that their conceptual face is good, or in English one might say reputation. Hui and Bond, explained, “face reflects how positively a person views himself or herself in an interaction...[the] pride or honor” and “reflects how a person wants to be regarded by others” (2009, p. 125).

Another source described face as a “mechanism Mainland Chinese use to promote loyalty in relationships” (Kwek & Lee, 2015, p. 122). Kwek and Lee continued the explanation that face is related to the importance of harmony in Asian cultures (2015, p. 122). Thus the fight that occurred caused a disharmonious environment for the Chinese students and that the loss of face was a result of the loss of harmony.

One study that I stumbled upon while trying to research face proved to be insightful as to some of my instinctual reaction to by my fellow club
My roommates and I were planning a performance for Chinese New Year as well. It quickly grew from having just three people to a total of six. It proved to be my last vocal performance at WOU as I was too tired from all the work and stress of the performance and planning. I also ended up being an MC for Chinese New Year as there were not enough volunteers accepted to be MCs. I found that being an MC is challenging and requires a good deal of planning if it is to go well. Managing transitions is harder than one expects and it taught me that practice and good communication is very important.

Things outside of CSSA were going well for me. International Club had their annual Ski Trip to Mount Hood and my studies were going well. After Chinese New Year but before the term ended, Tong and I grew to be closer friends and he asked me to start dating. A few days after he asked I said yes, and soon Tong and I started to plan a trip for Spring Break with two people other friends.
Spring Break 2016

Tong, his friend Jason, Jason’s girlfriend Momo and I decided to go on a camping trip to Eastern Oregon. We chose camping because it’s not something international students do very often and we chose Eastern Oregon because we thought it would be a little warmer than the coast. Little did I, a western Oregon person, realize that Eastern Oregon has snow during March and April. Out of the three days we only camped once.

We spent the first night near Smith Rock State Park after we visited the Eastern Oregon Museum. Plans changed as we intended to stay in two tents, one for the boys and one for us girls, but ended up being in one tent because the sleeping bags that I had requested from the school were for incorrect seasons. I asked for four four-season bags, but I received two three season and two one season. Needless to say, the one season bag people slept in the middle. During the night we struggled to sleep because of the haunting howls of coyotes that drifted over our camp. We were not too terribly frightened as we had other campers nearby, but the strange sounds did not let us rest easily.

For the second night of the trip we had planned to camp as well, but between pouring rain and the campsite’s proximity to a riverbank, we moved on and kept driving. That day I drove all the way from Terrebonne to La Grand with stops at the Painted Hills. After a long day of driving, and not liking the camping conditions, the first motel was a haven for us wearied travelers.

After driving further than originally planned, we were within a twenty minute drive from the cabin that I had reserved for our third night at Emigrant
Springs State Heritage Area. That day I had to take my car to a mechanic as a check engine light had come on while I was climbing hills. With the chill in the air and the dusting of snow on the mountains surrounding La Grand, we were glad we took the hotel.

The third night we stayed at the cabin which of the three sleeping arrangements everyone seemed liked the most. It was outdoors, but we had heat, solid walls, and a roof over our heads. The bathroom was within close walking distance and had lights and flush toilets instead of a vault toilet or what I like to call a hole in the ground.

The last day we went into Pendleton and checked out the Pendleton Underground and learned about the experiences of the Chinese railroad workers in Oregon. Not a cheerful history to say in the least. In the haze of history little is remembered about the Chinese immigrants in the early days of Oregon. What remains is memories of discrimination and murder. As much fun as it was to learn about Chinese railroad workers in Oregon it was equally sobering. I felt so disturbed with the history that I felt too uncomfortable to talk about it with my friends. I regret that I didn’t get their perspective on the history. That day we drove back to Monmouth to rest and recover from our little camping adventure.

I was surprised at the number of foreigners that we saw at our stops even though I took my friends to some areas that are not all that well known. I had expected that my friends would be the only international visitors at Painted Hills, but I was incorrect in that assumption.
In the first or second week of Spring Term I found one of my friends in the library. He called me over to help him with his email because he knew I was a Criminal Justice major and I could help him communicate with the police. It turned out that during Spring Break he had been traveling out of state. While he was eating in a restaurant he left his backpack in the car. It was during that time that someone broke into his car and stole his backpack containing $900 cash, an iPad, and his passport. He filed a report with the police about his stolen items.

Fortunately he had an Oregon Driver License which allowed him to prove who he said was. In order to replace his passport he had to obtain a copy of the police report. This is where I became involved in the case. At that time I did not have any linguistics training, but I immediately noticed the tone of his letter, I felt like he was writing in a very demanding voice. I knew that he did not mean to be so rude in his writing. So I changed some of the pragmatics of what he was writing while still maintaining the message he needed to send. This experience did not end with the email however, there were problems with the police report.

In a matter of a couple days he received a copy of the police report, the narrative of the report along with the stolen property was correct, but the most important aspect of the report was that his name was not. His name was spelled wrong. We then wrote another email together to the police notifying them of the mistake. Their response was, “Please call to change the information” along with some clarifying information about the abilities of the records department.
That night we called the police and my friend and I did the talking. I let the operator know that I was just going to give help where needed. Without proof of any ID it would be impossible to change the name on the report. Fortunately my friend had the Oregon Driver License and it allowed the operator to double check the number on the report and look up his name by using the number on the driver’s license. She was then able to correct his name. From there my friend was able to obtain a corrected copy of the report and he did the rest of the paperwork to get his new passport.

From this experience I learned the importance of having a US government issued ID. Previously I thought the only use of a driver license would be for driving. I never considered how an international student might need to prove who they were without a passport. Now when talking to my friends I recommend that they get some kind of ID such as a permit or driver license. If a student can have a (US) state issued ID, in the case that something happens to their passport; it is immensely useful to have another way to prove identity. Of course all students should have copies of all their information.

Usually I help my friends in small ways such as talking on the phone. Students usually want my help with communication especially over the phone as they typically would rather talk to people in person, even if it means they must go out of their way to do so. In this case, it was not possible for my friend to meet members of that particular police department and his only option was to call them to make the change. There have been several cases where I helped students with their telephone conversation with insurance and utility companies. Most of the time
I explain some of the new vocabulary that they encounter in the conversation or repeat what was said in the conversation. During these types of conversation we will be on speakerphone and I will confirm if what I explained was correct with the person we are calling.

With my roommates, I found that they sometimes receive phone calls from debt collectors. This typically scares them because they have no idea what to do. When they come to me I take steps to make sure they are not being scammed. We will listen to the message, look up the company that the person claims to be from on the Better Business Bureau, and find the phone number listed on the website and not from the phone. From there we call the company and so far they are trying to contact someone else and not my roommates.

During Spring term I started working for Valsetz, the dining hall on campus. There I found quite a few international students working because international students attending school can only work on campus, they are not allowed to work off campus to earn money. The only exception to this is international students who have to fulfill a practicum or internship in order to graduate. Students who have graduated can apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). It allows graduated students to work anywhere in the US for one year, provided that they do not go out of country between the time that they graduate and the end OPT.

International students, undergrad or graduate, can work while they are in the United States. The rules are a bit complicated, but can be broken down to three ways of thinking. First is work that can be done as a student, work for graduation (jobs to have in order to fulfill graduation requirements), and work after graduation.
International student, undergrad or graduate, can work while they are in the United States. The rules are a bit complicated, but can be broken down to three ways of thinking. First is work that can be done as a student, work for graduation (jobs to have in order to fulfill graduation requirements), and work after graduation.

International students are only allowed to work only on campus in ways that serve the student population, for example, working in computing services, dining hall, library or another area. They are restricted part time work of up to twenty hours of work each week while school is in session. During breaks, including summer break, they are allowed to work up to forty hours a week. The process of getting the first job on campus, from applying to the first day of work takes some time. Unlike domestic students, international students have to fill out paperwork and receive a social security card and once they receive the SSN they must fill out another form. They also must work with the international office in order to keep their Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) information updated.

In the event of a special hardship, working with an international organization, or from a country with special economic relief status, F-1 students may work off campus up to twenty hours per week during classes, and up to forty hours during break. This requires special paperwork and is only valid for work for one year.

Students who must work in order to graduate, situations such as the Criminal Justice program that requires a four hundred hour practicum, or some kind of internship must have paperwork for Curricular Practical Training (CPT). This is only for students on a F-1 visa, students who intend to graduate from the university. In order to receive CPT, students must be required to have an internship, enroll in a class and have approval from both international office and professors. When all required paperwork is completed the student may work in a paid or unpaid internship on or off campus.

Lastly the work related to graduation (only for F-1 students) is the most complicated as it comes in three types, but all falls under the umbrella of Optional Practical Training or commonly called OPT. It is usually completed off campus for up to 12 months of work. Students must be working in a related field to their degree. In all three types of OPT students must also be full time or approved reduced for the previous nine months.

Students can work before they graduate, called the Pre-Completion OPT, however just like working on campus they have restrictions concerning the
I liked seeing international students work in the dining hall because I knew they would have to interact with others and they got to practice their English. It is also advantageous for international students to work on campus because they are issued a social security number and it’s one less thing for them to worry about later if they try to get a job after graduation. For an international student to get a social security number they must have a job and, aside from rare cases, work at the university is the only way for them to get it.

The end of Spring Term is heralded by International Night. I still contributed, but this time it was a smaller role. When Miko left WOU to return to her own
university in Japan to finish her degree she had given me her yukata that she had worn the year before with the promise that I would wear it for the fashion show. I did and one of the other Japanese exchange students helped me put it on. It is a little bit complicated to wear properly.

At the end of the Spring Term I was surprised to learn that I had been awarded the International Student of the Year by the International office at WOU. They chose me because of my involvement Chinese New Year, International Night, and working with all the international students. They believe anyone who comes into the international office becomes an international student even if they never leave the country. It was a gift and honor to receive that award.

**Summer 2016**

By living in the Yellow House I was able to observe Chinese lifestyle abroad. I’ve discovered several things that are consistent with the Chinese students and I suspect that it reflects what life is like in China. Here in the US almost everyone uses a washer and dryer, but in China they only use the washer. This is evidenced by the fact that many of my roommates do not know the “basic” rule of a dryer, always clean the lint! When I ask my roommates if they know what to do with a dryer they often say know because they don’t have them in China. Rather they tell me, in China you dry your clothes by hanging them to dry.

Dishwashers are generally new to my international roommates as well. There has been a case where someone put dish soap in the dishwasher instead of dishwashing soap. I knew there was a difference as my mom made sure I knew, but
I’d never seen the result of the wrong soap until that night. The dishwasher was about to explode with bubbles from top to bottom. Nothing bad happened and we got a good laugh out of the whole thing, but Rachel and I try to make sure they know how to use them properly.

I have discovered that rice cookers are amazing and should be a necessity for living in the Yellow House. It would be safer if it was that way. There have been multiple times that we have had rice catch on fire because it was left to cook on the stove top and the person who started it had forgotten to set a timer.

Fire alarms are also a safety device that needs to be drilled with new international students. Sometimes little spiders or dust would set off the alarms, but my roommates sometimes don’t leave their room with the alarms are screeching. In fact I’ve even had one roommate manage to sleep through the whole ordeal. We have learned at my house, fire drills and emergency procedures are a must.

I did not return home for the summer for several reasons. One is that I wanted to keep my place at the Yellow House and did not want to move out and back in for just three months. I also I had my Criminal Justice Practicum that would last for a little more than 10 weeks at a local police office. Despite my busy days with the police, summer was quiet. I had heard that Monmouth becomes a ghost town during the summer. For me it was not as bad as it was rumored to be.

The Yellow House became quiet as well. Numbers drop during the summer as students graduate and leave while ether students move out to other places with their friends. For a period I would return home to a big empty house as even Cody and Rachel went away for vacation.
I can imagine that summer in Monmouth for international students would be slow. Outside of 4th of July there are no events in town. The smattering of summer classes barely keeps the university open and even the gym is down to reduced hours. Clubs are not meeting and Friday Night on the Farm also takes a break during the summer. Even I cannot imagine a summer in Monmouth without the ability to drive because the only method of public transportation is the bus that runs five days a week.

Around the end of August I ended my relationship with Tong. Our parting was friendly, and we promised to be friends, but I suppose that’s not truly possible right away. Perhaps time will tell. His parting gift to me was a troy ounce silver coin that he cut in half. He had bought the silver piece a few weeks before we’d met. When he gave one of the halves to me, he shared a story that I had never heard.

“Before Marco Polo left China, he was friends with the emperor. The emperor gave him a gold coin that he cut in half and gave it to him saying, ‘I know you are going to never return to China, but give this to your children. I will give mine to my children. That way if they ever meet they can make the coin whole again.’ Likewise, I give you this silver coin so that perhaps your children and my children can meet.”

After that, in the final weeks of summer, I threw myself into the practicum and greeted September.

September was special as Miko came back to Oregon to visit. She stayed with me for about a week at the Yellow House. During this time Miko went on a three day trip to Mitchell, Oregon with my roommates and I where we stayed at Spoken Hostel where my old American roommate had worked for the summer. We visited Smith
Rock State Park and the John Day Sheep Rock Unit and Painted Hills Unit. Once we returned to Monmouth it was back to reality and the unofficial start of fall term.
Decisions Decisions

Fall 2016

While I enjoyed being a Peer Mentor I chose not to be a Peer Mentor for a third year. I felt that I should not stay in the same position as I had no wish to be a leader for the organization. I was disappointed to see some structural changes to the Peer Mentor program as it lost funding from a scholarship program, at no fault of their own. They could no longer reach out to as many students as they used to on campus. Watching that occur, I realized that for myself, that even when there is a motivated program, if the source of money dries up, there are hard choices to make.

With an additional fifty to sixty free hours on my schedule for the term, I suddenly had time to try some new things. I was invited to participate as volunteer for the international student orientation trip. From research I knew this was a perfect time to meet people. The first two weeks is critical when making friendships in a new place and this is something that I have seen for myself as well. There were so many new students that I honestly could not remember them all. It’s only after a few times of meeting that I am able to remember well, or if I spend a couple hours with them and talk to them in detail. Students liked talking to me about questions concerning police and driving because they knew me as a Criminal Justice or “police” student.

Friendships are vital for making a meaningful study abroad and can make a critical difference for students. Research agrees that “loss and lack of social support in particular have been found to lead to lower academic achievement and negative psychology experiences (Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007, p. 30).” This
sentiment is also echoed in Australia as two thirds of international students reported experiencing isolation and loneliness (Outhred and Chester, 2013, p. 320). In the long run, the hurdle of friendships and integrating with the host culture can be the hardest to overcome. According to Gresham and Clayton, it’s difficult for international students to form relationships with domestic students on a level that is not superficial (2011, p. 364).

Research from Australia, United Kingdom, and United States shows that there is a prevalent problem of the international students not integrating in their host country. A study in the United Kingdom found that some international students returned home after three years without making a UK contact. This study also found that only 33% of international students made a UK friend (Leask and Carroll, 2011, p. 648).

In one study by Warwick (2008) states that 70% of international students had not spoken as much English as they wanted and 40% felt that their spoken English as they wanted and 40% felt that their spoken English did not improve (cited by Leask and Carroll, 2011). The background to this disheartening statistic is that they are often locked into an outsider status where they will not and or cannot engage with the dominate group. International students will meet others and form friendships with others quickly, however after the first couple weeks, the students will stay in their “silo” of friends (Leask and Carroll, 2011).

In fact the research on how international students engage with the host culture tends to be conflicting (Outhred and Chester, 2013, p. 318). But it remains clear that there are several factors that lead to this situation: language barriers, perceived prejudice, and living situation. Incompetency or discomfort with speaking will impact not only studies but also friendships, and learning the local ways of life. These factors all play a role in how international students will work with the domestic students. It seems that international students have a preference to work with their own culture or with other international students of a different culture, but not the domestic students. This is evidenced by how students form groups when they first arrive at the university. Leask and Carroll cite a study in which students were observed riding busses with other students from the same continent, and then as the weeks went on the students had solid friendships with others of the same culture or language. The few students who did not follow this pattern, were the ones who already felt like outsiders with their group (2011, p. 649).
In the first week of school I suddenly decided to go after the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Certificate. Police work while interesting, was not my cup of tea; I heard too many stories of having to go in a building where someone had died, only to be discovered some weeks later, or police having to chase someone as they were high and running naked though grocery stores. I also figured that at this point in my life that the best way for me to travel abroad is to work and this is by teaching. Thus I took my first linguistics class Ling 210.

Ling 210 was one of the hardest and most fascinating classes I’ve had WOU. It explained why Sergio knew more about English grammar than me, why some of my friends struggled with certain sounds. It made me curious and more excited to learn more about the English language and other languages in general.

I was still involved with international club, and that year I would be an officer and work with ASWOU as needed. Over the course of the year, my role as ASWOU representative did not really require me to do much. I decided to opt out of CSSA as there was no people to run the club until later and after such a rough experience I did not feel up to the task again.

Friday night on the Farm started again and for the first time I also had time to join their annual trip to Crater Lake. I volunteered to go as a driver and through this trip I was able to meet a few more people and get to know some others really well. Previously I had met all four of my riders on the international student orientation; two girls and two boys. Both girls’ “English” names were Erica. Erica One was one of my roommates, and Erica Two was the roommate of Leo, one of the boys in my car. The last boy was Conner was a criminal justice student like me. For the entire trip
Leo rode shotgun in my car, giving me some time to get to know him. Little did I know what my friendship with Leo would become. By the end of the trip I considered everyone in my car a friend.

One Saturday in October while I was hiking in Portland with four of my friends, I saw that Leo and his roommate Dave had requested a ride from Portland back to Monmouth. I texted Leo and told him that I would be willing to pick them up, but they would have to wait nearly six hours. My car was already full and I had to first take my friends back to Monmouth. When I got back to Monmouth I asked Leo again if he still needed a ride and he said that he did. So I drove up to the Lloyd Center Mall where they had ended up six hours after taking the ILETS test.

Western Oregon accepts three forms of English proficiency tests for students that come from a non-English speaking country. Admission requirements for students are as follows: a paper TOEFL score of 500, Internet based TOEFL score of 61, or ILETS score of 5.0. (OIED, 2017). In my Linguistics 410 class we learned that these scores are about an intermediate high English proficiency level. This means that students can be expected to be able to give a presentation on a topic.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) both seek to provide English proficiency in the context of world Englishes. While there are some other English tests, these two are the ones used by WOU as well as other universities to determine English proficiency.

According to my friends if students are a little lower than that score they can still attend Western for one term on the basis that they will take the test again and receive the admission score. While I have not been able to verify this for myself, I do know that the scores of these students were not admission level, and after taking the ILETS again and passing they stayed at school.

I was surprised that they were stranded in Portland, after all, how did they even get up there? They told me that they took the van from WOU and they were
dropped off at the test site. I was shocked! I confirmed that they had no return ride to Monmouth. Even if they had managed to get a ride to Salem via the bus they would have still be stuck in Salem. There is no public transportation on the weekend to Monmouth.

Driving in America is a problem for international students, and at Western Oregon University this is no exception. Monmouth and Independence area is two small towns that have grown together forming a combined population as of 2010 of 18214 (American Factfinder). Shopping for food is possible in Independence at the two grocery stores. The closest store from WOU is a 30 minute 1.5 mile walk according to Google maps. There are some transportation options available for students. The Cherriots bus system that serves Dallas to Salem operates 5 days a week with buses that go both directions, however the buses come by only six times a day (cherriots.org). Thus if a shopping trip takes a little too long in Salem, one will have to call for a taxi or a friend. WOU offers Wolf Ride, a van that operates seven days a week 5pm to 12am working in the area of Monmouth and Independence. This program allows students to call the van for a free ride, and is good for any reason except for designated driving. These services undoubtedly help students, especially when they have no car, but it only helps for day-to-day activities. Without a car moving to a new apartment, buying furniture, going on a shopping trip to an Asian food store, or just taking a day to go to the coast, is impossible to do alone.

One of the problems faced by international students is the subject of transportation especially in the cases when the university is in a small or midsized city. As I noted before, WOU is no exception to this situation. Multiple
Then in November I helped Leo in the process of buying his car here in the US. While I have dealt with car related things such as buying insurance for myself and purchased my own car from a private seller, both of these activities I did with help from my family. I had never watched the process of buying a car from a dealership. I found several roadblocks for international students to go out and buy cars. First Leo had trouble going to his car appointments to buy a car. I was going to drive him to Salem, but I hadn’t realized he was on a time schedule and I was late in getting him to the dealership. Someone else bought the car that he wanted to buy. Then when he bought the car the dealership wanted proof of insurance. In order for Leo to get insurance he would have known the car he was getting first. The dealership would not allow him to leave the car for a couple days after he bought it in order to get insurance. Since my car was there and I had current insurance they used the insurance card from my car as “coverage”.

Due to various reasons, it seems that many international students who live off campus buy a car within the first few months. I have never seen international students buying a car on a loan; all of them appear to pay the price of the car in full. Most of the time the students will buy used cars. The part that international students have problems with is not the car itself, rather it’s the driver’s license or insurance issues. If a student buys a car they are legally required to have at least
liability insurance on the car and have a driving license. In Oregon, people who buy insurance must have a license (ORS 375-050-0050). This works for students who have a license in their home country, however herein lies the problem. Students who do not have a license in their home country are not able to buy car insurance. In order to get a license they must pass the driving test, which requires one to have some experience on driving on the road. How does a student get driving experience? They practice driving a friend's car, or they just hit the road with the car they just bought.

The nearest diving school is in Salem, which as discussed earlier is a hard location to reach. Combine the times that students have class with the bus schedule along with the driving school schedule, and it is nearly impossible to manage all three. To this date I have not come across international student who could manage all three time schedules. In fact I have only known one international student who went to driving school, and she had to ask about six different people for help with transportation.

I coached one of my friends how to drive, just starting off with driving around in the parking lot. Jumping the curb and making my car stuck like a turtle on a log ended my driving lesson inspirations. That night I was described as having the strangest laughs, one between stress and relief. Relief that no one was hurt and nothing was visibly damaged, but stressed that my car had jumped up on a three foot wide curb that it could not come off of. One hundred and forty dollars later, my Kia was removed from its seven inch perch and cleared by its doctor that all was
well. In fact the greatest damage was to the curb itself, a one by three inch gash of cement had been freshly removed.

**Christmas Break 2016**

Leo and Dave invited me to go on a trip with them to Seattle. I didn’t want to go alone with two boys as that felt weird to me. Thus we invited one of our other friends, Penny, to go with us. We planned a five day trip to Seattle the first two days would be on the road taking the coastal route to Washington so we could see more than just interstate and fields.

We ventured around Seattle for two and a half days, spending the nights in a hostel near Pike’s Place. We explored the international district, shopping and ate authentic Chinese food with a friend of mine who was on Optional Practical Training (OPT). We were surprised and shocked at the price differences of things, everything felt so much more expensive than things in Oregon. With a sales tax of almost 10% compared to Oregon’s no sales tax even eating cheap food soon became a little expensive. All of us were rather glad that we were going to school in Monmouth and not Seattle. Penny, Leo, and Dave all agreed that the Chinese food in Seattle almost tasted like home, more authentic than what is available in Monmouth.

**Winter 2017**

January started with snow closing campus for several days. The days were busy again as we were putting in our final touches on our performance for Chinese New Year. Once again I had found my way in performing. Leo, Dave, Edwin and I all
choreographed a Chinese kung-fu performance. I went back to my routine of Tai-Chi fan and using the moves I learned I made my own performance. Leo, Dave, and Edwin all showed a little bit of their skills and created a fight. Our performance was so unique that we were invited to perform at University of Oregon (UO) and Oregon State University (OSU) in addition to the performance at WOU. It was a great opportunity to see the other schools and be able to watch the other Chinese New Year celebrations.

The Friday night Chinese New Year performance at WOU was excellent. The scholars choreographed a fantastic fashion show weaving a story for the audience to watch. Our Kung-Fu performance was a crowd pleaser and all the other singers and dancers did a fantastic job. Our audience was a mixture of equal amounts of Chinese and non-Chinese who were clearly there for the performances and good times.

Saturday morning we went to University of Oregon where we arrived at 11 am and waited for our rehearsal time. Several hours passed and we continued to wait. We ate a late lunch and waited more. The rehearsals went on an hour long break, where we took the time to prepare makeup and wait some more. The event was to start at 6:30 and at 6:25 we were told that our performance was cancelled. One person from the UO CSSA apologized and offered us some tickets so that we could get dinner. There was a group of six of us; us four performers, Penny the WOU CSSA president, and our advisor, but they only gave us two tickets. The boys told Penny and I to go eat dinner first. We went in and our tickets were taken and hands stamped. We did not know where to sit at first, but we quickly found a table with a WOU guest name card. With a place to sit and relax, Penny and I sat there. Soon
some other guests arrived at our table where we learned that they were the honored guests of the night, the Consul of Education from the Chinese Embassy in San Francisco. With such guests at the table, both Penny and I felt that it would be too rude to suddenly leave the table after we had eaten. Thus we waited to leave until 9pm when the festivities ended. This is how I ended up meeting the Consul of Education and how I made a business contact with him. Penny also benefited from the encounter as she was added to the group chat of other university CSSA presidents.

While we ate and watched the performances, Penny and I made notes of the differences between WOU and UO’s style of Chinese New Year. It was like a whole different world. Normally the Chinese New Year celebration at UO was held in a room that could hold eight hundred people, but this year due to booking difficulties it was put in a room that could only hold three hundred. Thus the crowds between WOU and UO were about the same size. The audience was markedly different from WOU as most of them in attendance were Chinese. I only saw about five people who were clearly not Chinese decent. The door prizes offered at UO were as expensive as they were impressive including a 56” TV, an Iphone 7, and the grand prize of a trip to Disney World. WOU had prizes as well, but nothing that would cost more than $5.

About midway through the performances, the UO CSSA found another ticket and let the advisor in to eat and watch as well. Our other three members, however, were not so lucky and had to purchase their food and wait outside. It had been a disheartening day waiting the entire time for nothing when all of us had plenty of homework waiting for us at home. On the hour and a half drive home, I could feel
that Leo was very angry, yet he never said a word. Penny was also upset and the other two I think were too tired to care. I suspect that WOU CSSA will be less likely to help UO CSSA with performances in the future, perhaps though, after a few years of leadership change; such strained memories will not remain.

After such a discouraging night we almost did not go to the event at OSU because moral and motivation was low. We arrived a little bit late on Sunday to the rehearsal at OSU. We practiced our routine and the Chinese Association of Oregon State University (CAOSU) said that we were on for performances. The rehearsal crew went on a break to get lunch and some of them invited us to join them, but we were not hungry as we already had a late breakfast. Sitting in the performance hall was enjoyable and the atmosphere at OSU was so bright and encouraging we could not help but feel better.

Held in the LaSells Stewart Center, the stage for our performances was much larger than at WOU (more than three times the size). The audience seating area could hold over one thousand and there was even a backstage with labeled dressing rooms. Everyone was friendly and everyone got food. I was able to say hello to the Consul of Education once again as he had planned to attend OSU’s performance as well. Our performance was good, maybe not quite as well received as when we were our home territory of WOU, and despite some difficulties such as Leo’s pants ripping at some point and not knowing how to space ourselves on such a huge stage, it went surprisingly well. The audience was a good mixture of both Chinese and non-Chinese members. It was truly a joy to work with OSU.
After Chinese New Year, some friends and I got together to celebrate a Chinese friend’s birthday. I then learned some things about Chinese traditions surrounding birthdays. Chinese birthday celebrations are completely opposite of American customs. In China, the birthday person is the host and pays for all the expenses of the meal. Thus when I went to my friend’s birthday party at a restaurant, I did not pay, rather the birthday person paid for everyone. My Chinese friends always seem surprised when they learn for the first time that in America, the birthday person should get everything for free. I usually explain to them that is why there are free drinks at the bar, free coffees at coffee shops, and free desserts at restaurants.

My friend was turning twenty four and she made a comment about having to wear red underwear I had my friend explain what she meant by that; what does being twenty four have to do with red underwear? I learned that there are some superstitions for the twelve year zodiac year. For example, if a person is born in the year of the pig, when the year of the pig starts again twelve years later, people born in the year of the pig should wear red clothing to ward off bad luck and evil. Thus my friend was turning twenty four and it was her animal year again.

Winter Term continued with academics where I worked on one of my last major classes, CJ 327W Research Methods in Criminal Justice along with my other Linguistics classes. I tried to continue doing research on international students outside of my thesis as well. Thus my final paper for CJ 327 was a research paper of my choice where I focused on international students. I originally tried to research crime among international students, but found that in general international
students do not get in much trouble with the law because they do not want to get kicked out of the country or be involved with the police resulting in very little available research. Thus I changed my subject to traffic crime among international students, but then again had to change the subject as there was no public data set that I could find that specifically tracks traffic citations with citizenship. Finally I went after plagiarism.

Over the years I have heard teachers and American students say that international students cheat. I have come across cheating behavior among a few international students and I have also seen cheating among a few American students too. This perception of cheating international students is a blow to the international students who don’t cheat. In American universities, plagiarism is an offence that is just as serious as cheating and falls under the same category of academic dishonesty.

I also initially thought that international students plagiarize more than American students, as L2 speakers of English might not be able to rephrase what they read, and they have deadlines and writing takes a long time. I have watched my friends write essays, and the process is painfully slow. I was in this mindset that international students plagiarize more than local students but according to research that I found, international students don’t commit more plagiarism than domestic students; they are simply more likely to be caught because they cannot cover their tracks as easily.
Evidence suggests that the plagiarism rate may be the same between international and domestic students. One particular study in Australia found that it was the local students who committed plagiarism at a higher rate (Maxwell, Curtis & Vardanega, 2006). Why the stereotype that international students especially Asian students cheat exist? In a paper by Ehrich, Howard, Mu, & Bokosmaty, they reported that studies have shown that Chinese students have a more permissive attitude towards plagiarism (2016). Perhaps this is due to culture, perhaps not, however research suggests the latter. Ehrich at el. continued, arguing that one aspect of Chinese education systems is that students are required to memorize texts (2016). This would result in little practice for paraphrasing. Another reason is put forward by Beasly, is that with lower level English writing plagiarism is more easily identified in instances when there is clear copying and pasting (2016). Finally one of the methods used in language teaching noted by Amsberry, is to take a text and change it by substituting key word yet keeping the structure of the grammar. This is very similar to a type of plagiarism called “Patchwriting.” In this situation plagiarism can arise from “a lack of familiarity with academic writing” (2009). Amsberry finds that in fact many international students have little experience with research writing and the work concerning citation that it entails (2009).

Spring Break 2017

Spring Break allowed another trip with my friends, Leo, Dave, and Penny. This time we headed south for a relaxing cabin near Gold Beach. This also turned into an adventure for several reasons. First there was no flush toilet, which normally would not be a problem for me because it had been described as a composting toilet, which works similar to a normal toilet and is possible to buy online. This is what I had imagined, I was not prepared for the five gallon paint bucket set inside a wooden frame and topped with a toilet seat. How to dispose of the waste? Just carry the bucket to compost pile for the chickens to scratch through.
How we all didn’t get hepatitis or some other sickness from this toilet disposal method I’ll never know. Then when we went hiking on the beach we found two dead whales; a small one about twelve feet long, and a larger one about thirty feet long, both with a horrid unforgettable stench. Leo, Dave, and I hiked to a waterfall that fell from the cliff directly into the ocean. After that hike we returned to Penny who is truly a Chinese hostess in that she had cooked a feast of about six different dishes. The four of us also drove down to California to look at the redwoods. Despite a terrible toilet tribulations, our trip was good for all of us as it was nice to get away from the familiar sights, breathe salt air, and not worry about classes.

*Spring 2017*

Spring Term started and I hit the ground running with a second job and a second practicum. Outside of academic life I was busy: I participated in competitions with the World Cube Association with Leo. Since December, Leo had been teaching me how to solve the Rubik’s Cube and play competitively. Then in April Leo and I started dating.

As for work I already had a job working in the dining hall where I would clean dishes or serve food. My second job gave me a challenge as I was to tutor English at the English Tutoring Center. Every night in the library I would wait for international students to make an appointment or walk in. Most of the time I ended up doing homework for my Linguistics classes, but oftentimes Leo would also visit asking for help with reading. He would ask really hard questions and my skills at that time were not ready for that. As they say however, a beginner has to start
somewhere. In the long run, it worked out that I was not very busy at the English Tutoring Center; I was still taking linguistics classes and I did not yet understand how to analyze or teach grammar to language learners.

My second practicum was to fulfill the required element of the TEFL certificate, and I used this time to my advantage; the more practice and observation the better. Between my two jobs and my 10 credits of class I was able to put in a little over 60 hours at the English Language and Culture Institute (ELCI). I learned that teaching English will be no easy task and to be the best kind of teacher I can be, I need to learn more, practice more, and teach more.

I really enjoyed my time with ELCI I was able to shadow all three teachers and observe the different teaching styles. I also prepared two lessons and taught them as well as tutored a student and help students in class with understanding the materials. ELCI is a school next to WOU and has teachers who are WOU alumni, but the school itself is not associated with WOU. It takes in students of all ages, but most students were between the ages of 15 to 28. The students are from everywhere, some from Saudi Arabia, China, Korea, Japan, Brazil, and more. Some students are high school students, others were former WOU students who did not pass the ILETS with a 5.0, and others were spouses of international students at WOU. Some students stay for only a couple months and others stay for a year. This creates an ever-changing dynamic at the school. Even with classes no larger than fifteen students (which is the maximum recommendation for languages classes), teachers have to consider the L1 influence that will occur with the student’s learning, the
motivation of the student studying, and the amount of time that the student will be
there.

Whole books, courses, and even graduate degree programs have been
written, created and taught on the topic of L2 acquisition. To sum it up, anyone
can learn a second language, no matter the age, aptitude, or native language.
How someone learns a language? The literal answer is that it’s complicated and
that there are different ways of learning for different people. It’s a process that
takes time, effort, and practice. Some methods of teaching and learning work
better than other ways, but there is no one teaching method that works
perfectly. The textbook used in my Linguistics 410 class on this subject was
*Understanding Second Language Acquisition* by Rod Ellis.
New Language New Skills

Summer 2017

After all my research on international students and watching them struggle with language use in a foreign country I decided that if I go to teach abroad, I would learn the language of my destination. Since the start of my pursuit for the TEFL Certificate, I have wanted to go teach in China. After talking to several people who have gone to college in China and after working at ELCI I decided to take Chinese language classes. I did not want to be the average foreigner in China teaching English who cannot not say anything outside of hello and thank you.

It was a big step for me because the Spanish I learned in high school was not a positive experience. During my time in high school, they used Rosetta Stone to teach Spanish. I know Rosetta Stone works for some people, probably because they are self-motivated and really want to learn, but I did not have that attitude in high school. At WOU I did not have any foreign language requirements because I was receiving a Bachelor of Science. I specifically avoided learning a second language because I always felt that learning another language would be very difficult.

I felt encouraged by my Chinese friends as I already knew some pronunciation and for the most part I understood how to use pinyin. I was motivated by knowing that I would actually use and need the language. I did not want to always depend on a translator, because someone might not be around when I need them to be. I also wanted to learn more about Chinese grammar if I was going to teach English grammar to Chinese speakers. My final reason for learning Chinese was so that I have a chance to get my masters of teaching foreign languages at UO.
The first requirement for that program is that students have to have taken one year of a foreign language at a college level or speak a second language.

Thus when I learned that UO offers first year Chinese in an accelerated class over the summer and I jumped at the chance. Nine months and 15 credits of classes was compressed into nine weeks.

Summer Term I actually had three different teachers, one for each term of three weeks. I really enjoyed all of my teachers and their different teaching methods. All three of my teachers were linguistically trained, experienced, and native speakers of Mandarin Chinese. All my teachers were fine with using English in the classroom, but if there were words we knew how to use in Chinese it was encouraged that we would speak Chinese. These classes also gave students the option to learn traditional or simplified characters. While learning both is encouraged in a normal school year, it was recommended that we would choose one to learn because of the amount of time it takes to learn both. Due to the fact that I want to go to China, over Taiwan, I chose to learn Simplified Chinese characters.

My first term teacher was the normal first year Chinese teacher who was born and raised on Taiwan, but her parents were from mainland China. Her accent is not purely a Taiwan Chinese accent. She knows how to make her classes fun and comfortable for students. She liked to make lots of jokes, and yet she was good at keeping the class in focus. The first three weeks there was seven of us in the class. Everyone except me already had studied and could use an L2. Two students had already studied Japanese and they were very good at character writing. The other five of us struggled in that regard.
The next section, Chinese 102 was taught by a teacher who normally taught three and four hundred level Chinese class. Our class was reduced to four as one classmate already made plans for his summer, and two others couldn’t take the time off work or afford the class. The four of us who remained were the two who could speak Japanese and a guy from the Netherlands. We became good friends because the class was suddenly extremely difficult. Every night we needed to write five to ten sentences and study twenty new words. The homework load was impossible to finish. Every morning I would get up at 5:45am hit the road no later than 6:20 in order to park and get to class at 7:45. Then class would start at 8am and end around 11:20. From there I would study in the library with the others, drive home, nap, work on homework, get food, work on homework, and go to bed at midnight. At the end of the three weeks, our teacher told us that students don’t normally have to write sentences for homework until the second or third year of Chinese.

For the third term of Chinese, the four of us remained, but we had two new people in the class. One guy had not passed Chinese 103 during the Spring Term, and the other guy was linguistics major who needed to take Chinese 103 to finish the requirements of his degree. The last teacher was the teacher who normally taught second year Chinese. She did not push us so hard on vocabulary, but preferred to make sure that we really understood the grammatical concepts. In fact, she was incredible at explaining the grammar and how to use it.

Having only three weeks with a teacher is hard on my heart. Just as we were getting into a rhythm and having a rapport with the teacher, it was time to move on. Changing teachers is really hard; I would rather have consistency in my language
learning; however, I was able to learn from various teaching styles. I actually enjoyed the second term and the brutal homework load as I saw my Chinese proficiency increase. The teacher also did a great job of pushing us and keeping us motivated. The class dynamics of teacher and classmate was the best one I have ever experienced, as all of us were motivated and really wanted to learn Chinese.

By the end of the nine weeks, I can confidently say that Chinese is my second language in progress. The Spanish I learned from high school classes is dwarfed by my ability in Chinese. After taking so many linguistics classes I was able to apply some of the things I had learned to my own language learning. Not only that, I left with a better understanding of what international students go through when they are working in their L2. Learning a second language started to open up my world and it will take me to new places. It was one of the best investments I have ever made.

In the beginning of September, Leo and I went to San Francisco in order to get my Visa to go to China. The process of getting a visa from China is one of two ways, go in person and apply, or hire someone to go in person in your stead. For something so important to me, I wanted the experience of doing it myself and seeing what it’s like to go an embassy and get a visa. According to Leo, the process in America to get a visa to go to China is a lot easier than going to America from China. Once my visa was approved I purchased my tickets to fly to China. I plan to go there and see what it is like to be in China and be prepared for when I go there for a longer time and teach English.
**Fall 2017**

Fall Term started with taking eight credits. While four are required to complete the TEFL, I took an extra grammar class because I did not feel confident with my skills at the time. Once again I helped with new international student orientation where I was able to meet about 110 or 120 of the new students. It’s a bigger number of new student compared to the previous year.

Leo was in the first generation of students from his university. He took it upon himself to reach out to the second generation and help them as they need. Thus when they needed rides to the store or to Dallas to get furniture he was there. If they needed suggestions from class I saw him give some suggestions such as talking to the professor after class or going to the English Tutoring Center. It was such an inspiring thing for me to watch. What he was doing was exactly what kind of mentoring I wanted to see at WOU.

Over the years I had been with the program of Conversation Partners on and off. This fall once again I had partners, this time from two different countries, Japan and China. It was fascinating to be able to talk and this time knowing exactly what they were struggling with when they were talking. Certain sounds are hard depending on the first language of the speaker and some grammatical patterns simply don’t exist in their first language.

My time at the English Tutoring Center was busier than before. Leo did not drop in like he used to and my schedule was usually booked by his younger classmates who needed help with homework or just practice speaking. I felt more
confident in tutoring grammar for students studying for the GRE. Even though I was graduating, I never slowed down in working with international students.
Let's Talk about WOU

How many international students are there in the US? According to the Institute of International Education in the 2016-2017 school year international students made up 5% of all university level students in the United States or a little over a million. The proportion of international students varies from university to university, as 22% of the 1,078,822 students were at twenty five institutions. With 32.5% of the international student population Chinese students are by far the most common country of origin. India takes second place with 17% of international students in the United States. Korea and Saudi Arabia take third and four places with 5.4% and 4.9% (2017).

Western Oregon University international student population has some similarities to the national averages, however there are some notable differences. For the Fall of 2017, WOU had a total of 292 international students, 253 or 86% of these students were undergraduate. Of these undergraduate students, 155 or 61% were from China, 64 or 25% were from Saudi Arabia, 15 or almost 6% of the students were from Japan. There remained a total of 19 students from thirteen other countries. Most notably is that WOU did not have any students in the undergraduate level from India and only one student from South Korea.

As for graduate students there were only 39 for the Fall of 2017. The numbers generally follow the undergraduate pattern of most students being from China followed by Saudi Arabia; 29 or 74% of the students from China, and 4 or 10% from Saudi Arabia with six students from six different countries (Troyer, 2017).
For Western to have such a large Saudi population, it would seem strange that I have not at least met some Saudi students. It a bit of an sensitive subject for me because have I made a few acquaintances, but the relationships became uncomfortable. I have met a few women as conversation partners, but after the term was finished we didn’t continue talking. I have met some Saudi men with one who I became friends.

After reflecting on the situations I think it was a problem of cultural differences. First is the fact that I struggle with barriers within myself, I was six years old when 9/11 occurred, and since that point in my life, I was told about the Middle East and the conflict that is going on over there. When I would meet Saudi students, all these fears were echoing in my head and I struggled to relax. I know this does not help me make connections with Saudi international students because I voiced these fears to my friend. I didn’t want to lie to him. He looked hurt when I told him this, but he wanted to prove my fears wrong. He also said that he knew that I was scared of him when he first met me because he could feel it. After that first meeting he admitted that did not want to hang out with me. However we kept bumping into each other with mutual friends and eventually I started talking to him more and more.

We become closer friends but sometimes I struggled with how close he would be to me. At the time I was not a person who liked to be physically close to other people. My friend would talk to me, something that in Saudi Arabia he could never do as men are not really allowed to talk to women who are not part of the family. Thus I think he reverted treating me to the way he would treat his guy
friends as he would in Saudi Arabia. I talked to him about how close he would be and the way he would touch my shoulders. He said he would try to be more physically distant but I still can’t forget his expression that he was really hurt by that comment. He looked like I had rejected his friendship. A few months later he transferred to another university and we did not keep in close contact after that.

The Saudi women that I have met are usually married whose husbands are at WOU. Sometimes they are the student, but most of the time they are not. It seems that most of them who are studying at WOU also had a brother or a father who was with them in the US. Though my short acquaintances with some Saudi’s I have learned a bit about their culture, I just haven’t had any comfortable long lasting friendships. Part of me is still hesitant when it comes to Saudi culture.

I have learned that being honest with international students is hard, because one sometimes has to confront the parts of themselves that they do not like. It bothers me that I am able to connect with one culture more easily than to another. Honesty is important in all relationships, but for international students its especially important. Being honest allows people to have a greater understanding and being allows for the building of trust. Sometimes international students will do or say something that is inappropriate in the US, if people stay silent, how are they to know what they have done is incorrect? If someone is afraid of something, how can the other person help if no one voices their fears? Honesty with gentleness and kindness is my first goal when I work with international students.
University Support for International Students

Friendships

As noted by Poyrazli and Grahame ten years ago, the United States today hosts the highest numbers of international students (2007, p. 28). While international students are not a new phenomenon to the United States there are concerns of acculturative stress. Acculturative stress is associated with the stress one has while assimilating to a new culture, particularly the dominate culture. According to Poyrazli and Grahame, the amount of acculturative stress varies by country of origin. A study by Yeh and Inose (2003) showed that stress varied especially along racial and cultural lines (cited by Poyrazli, 2007). This stress can be reduced though the building of positive relationships (2007, p 31).

The Penn State University-Harrisburg Campus did an interview study of international students and their experience to adjusting to campus. In this study, students asked for help some one who had similar experiences to themselves, preferably someone of the same culture. This study reinforced what other studies have found. Very few of these international students had many American friends, the friendships they did have rode the lines of their ethnicity. It was noted that the German students were complimented for the accents, while Asian students had troublesome accents. When it came to academics, some students struggled taking notes fast enough and were afraid to speak because of their accents. This study had many findings that covers the realms of health services, academic advising, housing, transportation, as well as mentoring. In this case students wished for one of two types of mentoring; one where they are paired with an experienced student of the
same country or an American student who they would meet a few hours every couple of weeks so they could become familiar with American culture (Poyrazli and Grahame, 41). For more academic research on this subject please refer to page 54.

Thus one of the goals of a university is to increase interaction between international students and the domestic community. In this case the community is the domestic students, faculty, and any other person that lives in the area. Outhred and Chester quoted Furnham and Bochner “If sojourners are carefully introduced into a new society by close, sympathetic host-culture friends, the evidence indicates that they may encounter fewer problems than if they are left to fend for themselves”. This is furthered by the mention that the “problems experienced by international students…may stem from a lack of necessary local knowledge and skills” (2013, p. 314).

At this time, WOU has several cultural clubs such as Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA), International Club, as well as some other common interest clubs. All of these clubs are student-run, thus the leadership as well as club events can vary from year to year. In 2015 for example there was an active Saudi Club but with waning student interest the Saudi club was not meeting in the Fall of 2017. With renewed student interest however, it can become active again.

Through the housing office, WOU fosters relationships between domestic and international students. For example, students who are freshmen are for the most part required to live on campus their first year. This however only catches international students who come to WOU as freshmen. Most exchange students are required to live on campus, but that requirement seems to be something that is
worked out between WOU and the other university. All of the Japanese exchange students I have met were required to live on campus; however I have met students on exchange from other countries who lived off campus. Some transfer programs may require students to live on campus as well, for example, the students that I met in the Fall of 2017 from Tianhua Normal College (China) were told to live on campus.

As for the students who live off campus, they of course will meet domestic students in class, but they might not form a meaningful relationship. They, along with any other international student, are welcome to participate in Conversation Partners, a program offered out of the Office of International Student Academic Support. This program as mentioned earlier, will pair up a domestic student with one or two international students, where they can talk about cultural differences, go out and eat or practice speaking. The goal is to make connections, understanding, and relationships.

**Academics**

There is a great deal of literature about the transition that international students face. One of the biggest challenges is the difference of academic culture. The U.S. classroom is noted to be of a different style from other countries. Practices that may not exist in other educational systems are classroom discussion and the habit of questioning the teachers (Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007 p. 30). The academic practices of the school that students attend can also make a difference. Outhred and Chester are writing from the viewpoint of an Australian University, however their
The typology of learning climates can apply many schools. Schools have control over the challenge and support dynamic. Challenge is about how mentally stimulating the learning environment is. Support includes aspects of student inclusion with community as well as how the learning environment assists in learning (2013, p. 317). How school design classes and support international students will make a difference.

Outhred and Chester found that local students are concerned about the English proficiency of their peers. They found that despite university services for English tutoring, international students get help after they are failing classes and not before (318). Confidence in the ability to communicate will also affect students and their willingness to go out and seek social interactions. In the end it can also lead to students not being satisfied with their experience. Leask and Carroll found a study by Warwick (2008) in which over two thirds of international students had not spoken as much as much English as they had wanted to, and then almost half of the international students felt that their English did not improve (2011, p. 649).

International students also struggle with friendships with domestic students. It is not known as to the exact reason this happens, there are perceptions of prejudice. It seems that English proficiency has an impact. Tensions between domestic and international students often stem from English proficiency during classes that have group-work (Outhred and Chester, 2013, p. 318). Students also face being in the minority both linguistically as well as culturally. In this situation it is possible for them to be “locked into the status of outsider” resulting with them not wanting or able to interact with the majority. These sentiments are not only shared
by domestic students but also by university faculty (Leask and Carroll, 2011, p. 648). Domestic students have described international classmates as “actively resisting participation in class...no desire to mix with local students (Leask and Carroll, 2011, p. 649).”

In response to academic struggles, Western Oregon University has the Office of International Student Academic Support. This office is all about helping the international student stay at WOU, though advising, technology support, and specialized instruction. Most of the international students who come to WOU will also take the First Year Experience class and learn about the resources available on campus such as the English Tutoring Center or the Writing Center, how to get help with advising, how to find and talk to the professors during office hours, meeting domestic students though Conversation Partners and using the library.

Off-Campus Life

For off campus students on subjects outside of academics or friendships; life in America can be challenging. As discussed earlier, transportation is an issue that I have seen occur multiple times. Outside of Wolf Ride, there is little support for international Students at WOU. Sometimes there will be shopping trips to Salem, or at the end or beginning of the term there will be rides to the airport or the train station. This is an area that WOU could implement a class.

If the university offered driving classes, I suspect a good number of international students would take them; especially if classes could be offered in fall term when most of the new students arrive, or winter term after they realize they
might need to get a car. Classes of this type would not only benefit international students, but there are a few domestic students who have never learned to drive. With the local high school in Independence even the local families might also use this type of education.

In areas such as counseling and health, the school offers the Health and Counseling Center as well as the Health and Wellness Center. The Health and Counseling Center is free for students to use if they have a minor injury or need some health assistance. There is also mental health services such as counseling offered for students as well. Whether or not international students use these services often or when they need to is not really known.

The Health and Wellness Center is the gym that offers a swimming pool, climbing wall, indoor basketball courts, exercise equipment as well as an indoor track. They offer free cycling classes and yoga classes in addition to the equipment.
Evolution of the Thesis

I started this thesis project by simply wanting to find ways to help international students. However that idea was not detailed enough in order to write a thesis. In the second stage of developing my thesis idea, I looked at how I could make a change by creating a program for international students, specifically a peer mentor program for international students. Peer Mentors, the program I had worked with for two years, was focused on helping freshman students who lived on campus. I wanted to create my program focusing on international students regardless of their living arrangement.

Yet again I changed my focus as I was hit by the reality of time and money. I planned to graduate and leave WOU; I would not be able to watch this program grow. The people who I would leave it with are busy already, and there is no spare money for a program. I had already worked with various cultural clubs as a student and I watched the struggle to recruit new members and have new programs and events. The way I wanted to help and mentor students would be beyond the scope of the university. As a Peer Mentor there were certain rules I had to abide by. With the Peer Mentor program, I was not allowed to drive those who I mentored. It was a combination of insurance and liability complications.

The ways that I have helped students are beyond what a student worker would be allowed to do. I have walked in places that no university worker could ever go without careful planning with students. I have gone to the hospital with students, explained medical terminology, helped pay medical and utility bills and driven them to airports, shopping centers, and more. All these things can be done
with the university, but there are many certifications and weeks of preplanning that
go into this type of activity. Life happens quickly, and sometimes people need to hop
in the car and drive at a moments’ notice.

Thus my focus changed again. I started asking questions such as what are the
current resources on campus? How are they serving students? Is there anything that
the university is missing that students could really use and that could receive
funding? While this is a possible route for a thesis, I wanted to leave a document that
people could look back on and use in the future. Programs change, disappear, and
start up in less than the course of a year. I watched Peer Mentors, a great program,
lose funding and shrink as a result, it’s still a good program, but it does not have the
power it once had.

Thus when I saw an opportunity to work on a thesis focusing on my
experience and my story, I took it because I wanted to work on a project that would
reflect my passion, and not a project that I had to create in order to graduate.
Conclusion

Even after three and a half years of observing and being with international students on their journey at the small midsized university of Western Oregon University in the United States, there are still struggles that I have not seen or gone through myself, but exist with international students. I have never taken content classes in a foreign language, nor have I lived abroad going months or years without seeing family. What I do know is that I have a lot of respect for the international students who struggle because they are pushing themselves to learn, to speak, to go out of their comfort zone. Students who live off campus have to learn how to navigate life with less support than most domestic students as they must work on getting housing and transportation without a lot of help.

I have learned that misunderstandings and mistakes will occur with any relationship and when people do not share the same first language it is going to occur more frequently, thus patience is necessary. People also have different expectations for each other because of our different cultural backgrounds and being honest with these expectations builds trust, even if it means that sometimes one must be emotionally vulnerable. Being open minded helps us understand differences in cultures as people sometimes struggle with something that another person would not struggle with. In the end, people are people, and no matter where you go, there will always be nice people and not so nice people.
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