Doctoral Students' Socialization in their Academic Disciplines

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Abstract

The purpose of this comparative study is to explore the major factors affecting domestic and internationall studnets in a gradute program in a U.S. university. More specificaly, the research question is focusing on the differences between domestic and international population groups within a graduate program, using the domestic respondents as the baseline for the process of acclimating into an academic graduate program. The pilot study used quantitative strategy and the survey was sent to international and domestic students. The survey consisted of a total of 42 items, consisting of multiple choice, likert scale questions, and open responses. The results are related to the ideas of access to information, expertise/power relations, classroom socialization, language socialization, and gender.

Keywords: Language socialization, Classroom socialization, Expertise/Power Relations, doctoral program, international students

1. Introduction

With the collapse of time and space and innovations in technology, globalization has created greater mobility and access to information. In 2007, about 2.8 million international students were "mobile", 1 million more than in 1999. In other words, every year, there is an annual increase of 4.6 increase of mobile tertiary students (UNESCO 2009). Out of the numerous populations of students, 20 percent of the internationally mobile student population is enrolled in the United States (ACE 2009). Due to the demographic changes within the United States, researchers are interested in better understanding the dilemmas, choices, and challenges of various populations while in an academic institution.

Current literature on academic socialization within the U.S. context focuses on the experiences of minority students or of International students; however, there is a lack of literature that examines whether the environment of the program or if the linguistic and cultural factors causes a greater effect on academic socialization. This comparison is particularly important in the context of graduate programs where the issue of institutional transition may be just as important and play a greater role than the linguistic and cultural background. Doctoral students are expected to be active participants in their academic communities, and acculturate into the world of academia by building and producing academic knowledge, and social relationships. Therefore, the rigors and expectations applied onto all doctoral students may be the triggers in the difficulties transitioning into the academic world. And perhaps, linguistic or cultural differences may only exacerbate the difficulties in academic socialization. To better understand the similarities and differences in the academic socialization process, the study explores the question: *how are the experiences between U.S. and international students in their academic socialization process within a graduate program?*

The research question is focused on the differences between domestic and international population groups within a graduate program, using the domestic respondents as the baseline for the process of acclimating into an academic graduate program. In this way, if were to find distinctions between the domestic and international students, the researcher can speculate the effects are based on culture.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical orientations framing this study are language socialization and academic socialization (Duff, 1995; Ochs, 1988), Community of Practice perspective (COP) and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), Sociocultural theory and neo-Vygotskyan research (Lantolf, 2000), and critical discourse research (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2001). *Language socialization* is the language which college students learned through their interaction with more proficient students in the language and who have more cultural knowledge about the target academic community for the propose of receiving mentoring or learning the appropriate uses of the language, ideologies, values, and identities of community members (Duff, in press). The language socialization research is significant in studying the complex process of the students' academic socialization in oral, written, and online discourses. The community-based theoretical perspective is significant in this study which describes using the language to mediate the social interaction in the academic practice (e.g., Bizzell, 1992; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1998). During the dynamic process of academic socialization, the students gain competence and membership in their new academic communities, which imposes the need to understand the *Community of Practice perspective (COP)* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This view indicates that learning is a socially constructed process that the students experience with the peers and instructors while participating in the academic community — a process called *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP). The *Sociocultural theory* and *Neo-Vygotskyan research* describes learning as a social process that plays a significant role in the development of students' cognition. The *critical discourse analysis* approach helps in analyzing the students' academic discourse critically in regard to their responses in the open ended question in the survey. This approach view language as a way which students interact socially with more experienced members in their academic communities.

The main ideas that cumulate the study are the socialization, language socialization and more specifically the academic socialization idea which is a complex and situated process by which college students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds become socialized into new academic communities. The main goal of study is to better understand the college students' perspectives on their socialization experiences, especially on the challenges they faced and currently face, and how they attempt to cope with these challenges. Also, the students' perspectives on the way they negotiate their identity, membership and social power relations in their new academic communities, the influence of language, culture and gender differences, and the mentoring process that facilitate gaining confidence and knowledge.

Morita's (2000) tried to understand graduate students' academic socialization through their presentation in their classroom. This study indicated that nonnative English- speaking students' linguistic, sociocultural and psychological difficulties affect on their engagement in the classroom. The students' lack of confidence, knowledge, social skills and critical thinking challenge their interaction. Negotiating conflicting identities and shifting epistemic stance influence the students' academic performance. The students view themselves as novice or expert in their social interaction in displaying their knowledge. They use of effective support items (handouts, video clips, visual aids) to engage their classmates and facilitate their presentation. Academic discourse se acts as oppressive figure that constrains the students' voices in the academic conversation. (Morita, 2000)

The language socialization theory indicates that people learn ideologies, linguistics, cultural, historical, identity knowledge, use the language appropriately and engage in the new community such as in publications (objectivities and ideologies) and law schools (authority).Duff (in press) argued some misconceptions regarding the academic socialization which expertise is identified by the competency in socialization, and the biggest students' struggle is their academic writing. Students' different prior school experiences, homes and communalities expose feeling of strangeness, conflicts of identity and lack of confidence. Their position as outsider or insider, and capable or incapable affect their socialization. Some instructors do not support the students by providing appropriate feedback and scaffolding. Based on the different need of workplace, medical students socialize to practice writing medical reports rather than academic writing only (Duff, in press).

Barnawi(2009) used community of practice (COP) theory to investigate the negotiation of two Saudi students in their first year Master degree of their identities, competence, and membership and power relations in their new academic communities. Language can be a form of building the students' social identity as viewing themselves as competent and recognized members and have their positions in the new academic context.

The students express their identity as less competent by relating to their difficulties in reading the required materials, understanding the academic language, constructing their own arguments, and feeling stressed in discussion.

One of the students tried to find Arabic versions for his reading materials in order to negotiate his competence to be a legitimate member in his classroom. The reason behind being the students silent are taking time to comprehend the American classroom culture , instructor's teaching methods , their roles in the classroom.

Gardner (2010) conducted a study to understand the disciplinary context and culture impact on the doctoral students' socialization and attrition at one institution in regard to three phases which are admission, candidacy examination and the dissertation-job phase. He interviewed 60 doctoral students at 6 disciplines during winter and spring semesters. The students discussed some issues in regard to their socialization experiences which are support, transition, ambiguity and self-direction. Freedom to do whatever the students want in Communication department and learning how to do research independently in engendering department are examples of self-direction. Therefore, the need for supportive faculty- students mentoring relationships, clear expectation for students ,clear graduate school guidelines , continuous orientation sessions. The socialization experiences of graduate students cannot be generalized for other students (Gardner, 2010).

3. Method

A survey was conducted through email using the Qualtrics survey system. The survey was sent to 19 students in a graduate level adult education se as well as 13 Humphrey Fellows. From the 22 respondents, 11 responses were returned, giving me a 50% response rate. The following figure (Figure 1) is a demographic breakdown of the respondents.

Figure 1. Demographics of Respondents

ID	Region	Gender (Tot=7 f/4 m)	Yrs in U.S.	Yr. in Program	Work Experience
1	Other	Female	NA	1	YES
2	S. America	Male	1	6	YES
3	U.S. (W)	Male	NA	1	YES
4	U.S. (NE)	Female	NA	2	YES
5	Asia	Female	3	2	YES
6	Africa	Male	5	2	YES
7	Ukraine	Female	1	6	YES
8	U.S. (NE)	Female	NA	1	YES
9	Asia	Female	2	NA	NA
10	U.S. (W)	Male	NA	1	YES
11	Panama	Female	1	6	YES

The survey consisted of a total of 42 items, consisting of multiple choice, likert scale questions, and open responses. The multiple choice questions ask to choose as many of the choices given. The likert scale questions are based on a 5-point system, from 1 being "Strongly Disagree", 3 as "Neither disagree or agree", and 5 being "Strongly agree". The open responses were given to lay out options for respondents' own experiences. These survey items were constructed to cover themes found from the findings from literature. Aside from demographic information, the researcher asked respondents on their access to information, academic socialization, language socialization, expertise/power relations, gender, and classroom socialization.

General questions ask respondent about their general feelings on their perception of which two populations have more difficulty in acclimating to a graduate school. These questions were asked to differentiate whether the issue of academic socialization is an issue of minority or of an international population issue.

3.1 Access to Information

Access to information entails questions pertaining to who and where the respondents gain information from during specific phases of their doctoral program. Through
Responses, The researcher can segment whether there are similar patterns between U.S. and international students when deciding who or where they will go at specific moments.

3.2 Expertise/Power Relations

Power relations and Expertise can come hand in hand and are dependent usually on one another. Often, the person with greater expertise has greater power over another. Therefore, expertise and power relations were examined through two measures; one is with knowledge, and the other, on explicit, socially constructed hierarchical systems. Knowledge test items deal with the ideas of Expertise. The researcher focuses on the perception respondents have concerning two factors: lack of clarity, and lack of knowledge. The researcher chose lack of clarity because this may affect both populations. Regardless of where a student is from, the ability to speak clearly may be a hindrance. Then the researcher examined the idea of expert knowledge, both related to the topic, and to language proficiency.

3.3 Classroom Socialization

Questions related to classroom socialization ask students about their comfort level and their expectations with class work. Specifically, in this study, the researcher examined whether there are specific target populations or their loyalty to a membership group affects their decision making on who they work with in classroom activities.

3.4 Language Socialization

Using the survey items, the researcher attempted to investigate the effects and perception of language proficiency in the English language or with the use of academic language.

3.5 Gender

The survey items pertaining to gender ask respondents to gauge their perceptions on gender relations in the classroom.

Four issues arose from the data collection. The first limitation is the lack of data collected. The reason for the small sample size was the availability of time the survey was allowed open. Secondly, a couple of the respondents chose not to answer some of the questions, leaving a bit of missing data. Third, after the data collection, the researcher realized that the data could be potentially biased; for example, there were twice as many females as there are men. Lastly, there were few reliability measures in creating the survey apart from multiple revisions and expert consultation.

Therefore, as the researcher analyzed data, the researcher took into consideration these shortcomings and came to the conclusion that given restraints, descriptive statistics may be the only form of legitimate analysis. Furthermore, in order to gauge if there were differences created, I believed that those within the likert scale that held differences of at least 0.9-1 was legitimate in stating that there would be a difference between domestic and international students.

## *4. Results and Discussion*

4.1 Access to Information

Access to information is thought to derive from different areas—who and where the information is derived from. Both will assist in helping to differentiate how the respondent, depending on their student status (domestic or international), initiates in their process of finding information on the program. This may assist in determining whether the process of gaining information will be the same for both domestic and international students.

Therefore, as to the question of who respondents obtained information, respondents were first asked to choose as many as applies from the 7 choices given—academic adviser; colleagues from the same ethnic group or region; colleagues of other ethnic groups or regions; alumni from the same ethnic group or region; alumni of other ethnic groups or regions; a professor; and other. Each of these choices was also asked pertaining every phase in a doctoral program-admissions, course work, candidacy, and dissertation[1].

Results indicate that during the admissions process (Figure 2), international students did not have as many resources as did domestic students in who they can go to for information. While there appears to be a more varied distribution in which domestic students went to for information, international students mainly went to alumni of the same ethnic or regional group, and their academic adviser. However, it is important to note that similarly for both groups, a large proportion of the person(s) they received information from was their academic adviser, whether it was past or present advisers.
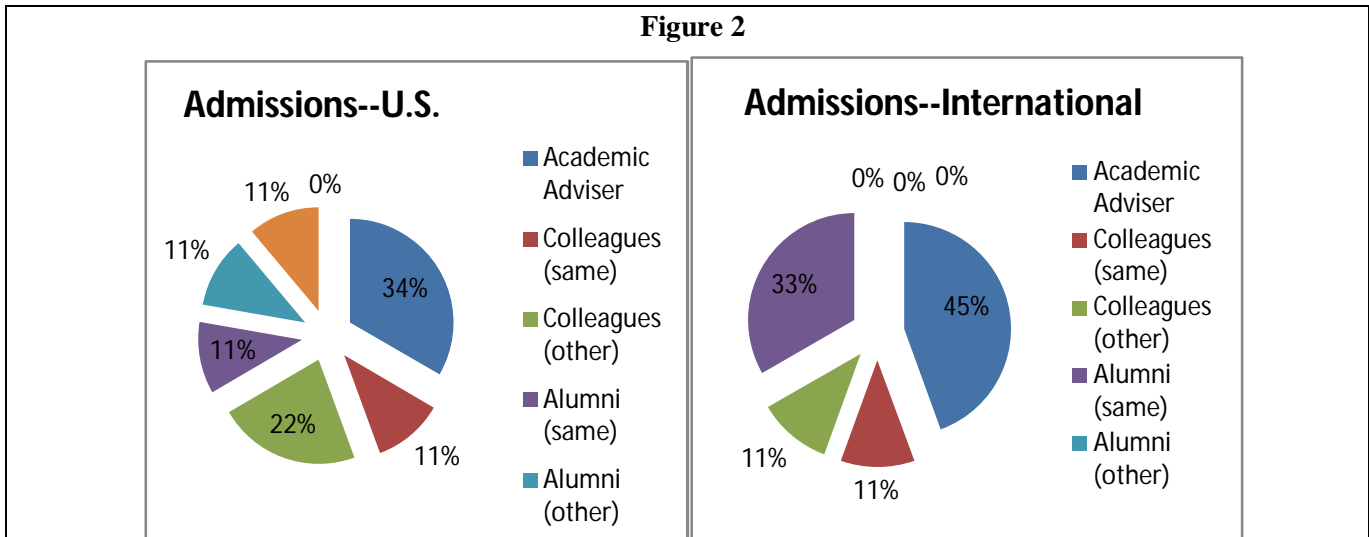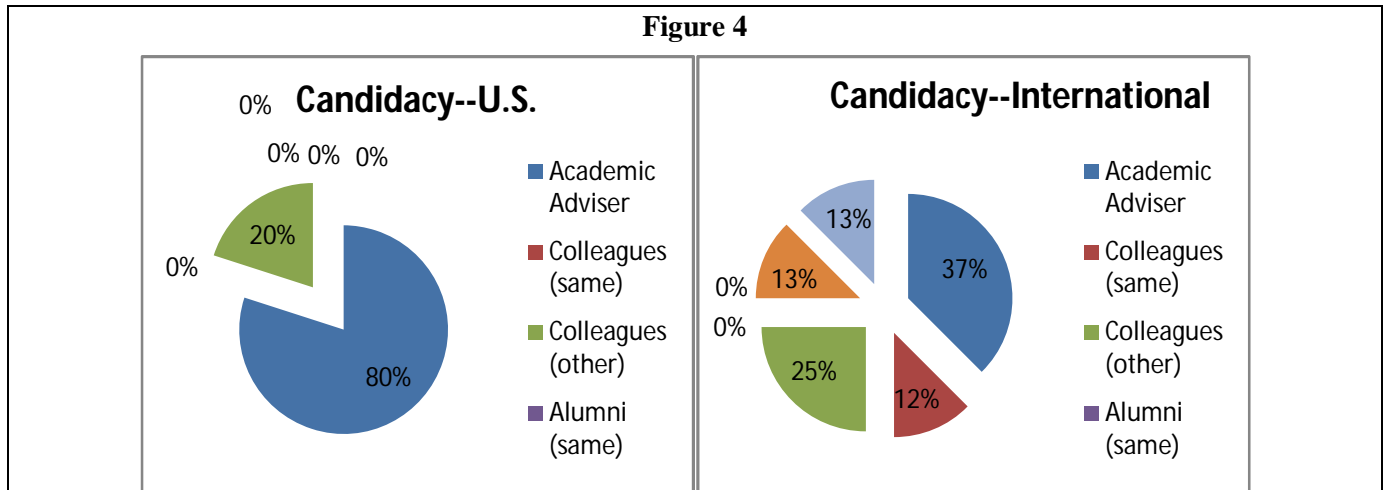
Figure 2

In examining the difference between their course work (Figure 3), the opposite effect appears to happen than that of the admission process. While U.S. students mainly went to their academic adviser and colleagues of other regions and ethnic groups, international students went to various resources to obtain information. Interestingly, both groups did not go to alumni of other regions or ethnic groups.
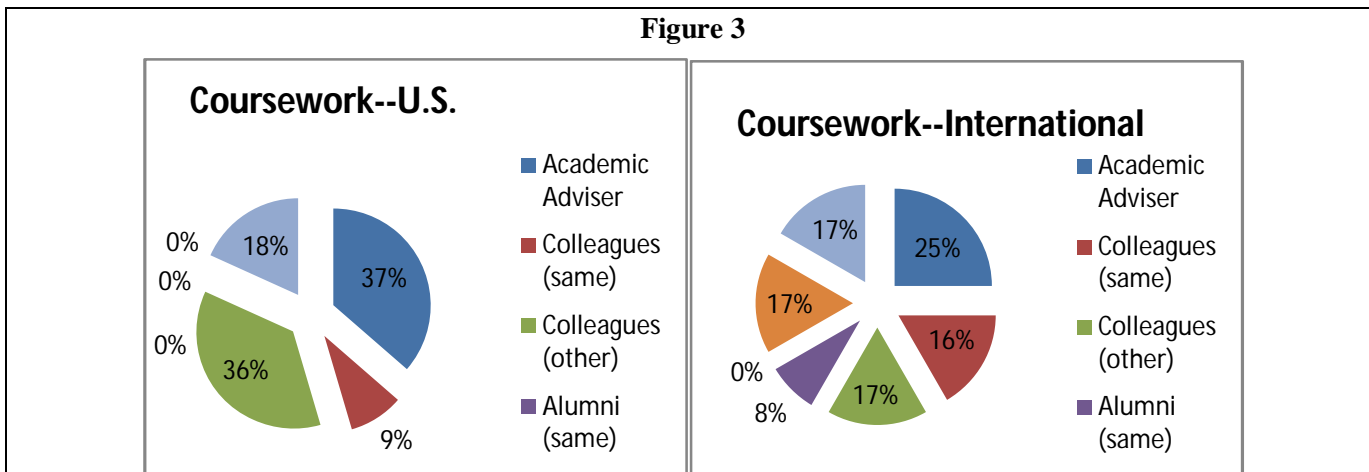
Figure 3

Lastly, the information on who domestic and international students went to for their candidacy, was of great interest (Figure 4). While U.S. students went mainly to their academic adviser, again, international went to various people for resources.
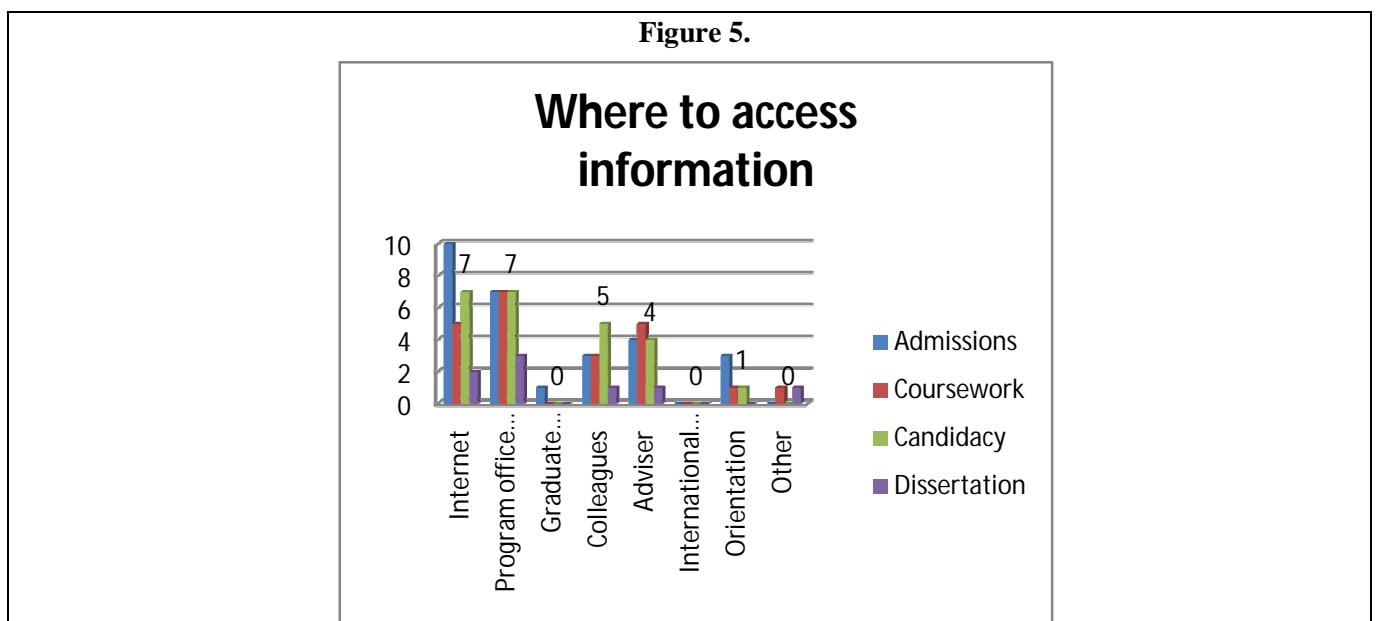
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[1] Due to the lack of data to assess the differences between international and domestic students pertaining to their dissertation process, its results were taken out from this initial analysis.

Figure 4

Candidacy--U.S.

- Academic Adviser
- Colleagues (same)
- Colleagues (other)
- Alumni (same)

0% 0% 0% 0% 0% 20% 80%

Candidacy--International

- Academic Adviser
- Colleagues (same)
- Colleagues (other)
- Alumni (same)

13% 37% 0% 13% 0% 25% 12%

From the results, what I can infer that international students, when given more options not constrained from space (location), went to a greater variety of people as resources on information. The opposite effect occurred with domestic students. While domestic students first obtained information from a variety of sources, as they progressed in the program, they went to fewer resources or persons to gather their information.

As for where information is best assessed, a comparison was problematic due to missing data (Figure 5). However, the researcher can attempt to better understand students by looking at, where, as an aggregated group, information is gathered. What I find that information in general gathered from the internet and from the program office staff. Although this may not necessarily explicate the differences between where domestic and international students access information, the researcher can see the value of new technological innovations and a sector of the HEI that isn't emphasized—the program office and those working within.

Open response questions were also asked concerning how students sought information pertaining to problems or help needed. Both groups had similar responses. It appears as though when both entered into the institution, when it came to questions or problems occurring while in the program, majority sought out the academic adviser and program office staff.

Figure 5.

Where to access information

10
8
7   7
6
5
4   4
2   1
0   0   0   0

Internet | Program office... | Graduate... | Colleagues | Adviser | International... | Orientation | Other

- Admissions
- Coursework
- Candidacy
- Dissertation

General Comparison

Test items were used to assess the respondent's opinion on whether the greater difficulty lies on smaller target populations than for the majority groups when it comes to acculturating into an academic environment. In other words, to differentiate between two commonly looked at sub-populations within the body of literature—minority and international students—test items specifically asked which group in comparison to their counterpart (White majority and domestic students) had a more difficult time transitioning into an academic environment. Using a likert scale[2], two questions were asked to better understand this relationship (see Appendix A). The researcher finds that although U.S. students and International students held similar agreements in perception to minority, and with no difference, ranging from slightly disagree to neither disagree to agree. However, taking into consideration the perception of whether international students have a more difficult time than domestic students, U.S. students and international students differed. While U.S. students disagreed slightly, International students agree that international students have a more difficult time socializing into an academic environment than domestic students. The results indicate that although all students in general in a doctoral program believe that there are no difficulties with academic socialization between minority students and majority students, international students perceive themselves to have a harder time than domestic students. Counter, domestic students believe that they are on level ground with academic socialization in terms of difficulty to that of international students.

4.2 Expertise/Power Relations

The first section of power relations focuses on the lack of clarity and of knowledge, skills that are expected in immersing oneself in an academic community (See Appendix B). In the results, the perception focusing on language knowledge appears to be the only factor that differed. While domestic students did not differ in their opinion, international students disagreed in that one's intelligence is not to be judged by the measure of their use of the English language. The second section examines whether there is a difference in perception of social hierarchy. The results have vast differences in agreement, in particular when it comes to student-professor relationships. While domestic students agree that the teacher is the expert in the classroom, international students disagree with this statement. Similarly, in relation to peer-peer learning, international students agree more that students can learn just as much from the professors. In other contexts, domestic and international students do not significantly differ in their perceptions on the social hierarchical make up between peers based on different student experiences whether in the same program or past experiences. These results are a bit alarming being that the social hierarchy systems outside of the U.S. are much more defined and have a stricter structure.

Classroom Socialization

Two different types of questions were asked to obtain information on classroom socialization—likert scales and a multiple choice. In terms of comfort level of activities, the biggest difference in the type of classroom activity that students were most comfortable with, U.S. and international students answered similarly, with the exception of small group discussions (see Appendix E). In the results, domestic students felt much more comfortable at participating in small group discussions than international students. I speculate this to agree with the literature review because in large groups, students have a choice to be vocal or not, but in small groups, speaking is necessary and requires those who do not feel comfortable with spontaneous speech to speak. With expectations of class work activities, students also differed (see Appendix D). While domestic students have a good idea of the professor's expectations in classrooms, international students have a more difficult time understanding the classroom expectations required in classroom activities. Lastly, the researcher also asks students whether their identity within a specific membership group affects their choices on who they work with (see Appendix F). In these cases, however, U.S. and international students had similar feelings. All students felt that their choice of group formation, their ethnic or regional identity did not affect students' decision making skills. The respondents all agreed that they did not choose to work with students based on cultural backgrounds.

4.3 Language Socialization

Using the survey items, the researcher attempted to investigate the effects of language proficiency in the English language or with use of academic language on the socialization process (see Appendix G).

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[2] The likert scale is based on a five point system (1—Strongly Disagree; 2—Disagree; 3—Neither disagree or agree; 4—Agree; 5—Strongly Agree)

Students, both domestic and international alike, did not see language proficiency as a deterrent in classroom participation, nor did they find any differences in their ease in the use of academic language used in class. One thing that they differed in is how comfortable or familiar students were in using academic jargon in the classroom. While domestic students did not agree or disagree with their comfort level in using academic terminology, international students agreed that they were comfortable with using it. This also lends support to the idea that perhaps, when using academic jargon in place of spontaneous speech, international students feel more comfortable.

4.4 Gender

Results from survey items asking for the perception on gender, there appeared to be no differences in perception (see Appendix H). Both international and domestic student issues in perceptions agreed that men did not play a greater role than women in the class. However, I cannot take these results lightly being that there was a skew in data, with an overwhelming number of respondents being women.

Lastly, an open ended response was asked of each respondent pertaining to any other concerns to the program. Both target groups had similar concerns of age and time. Both found that their age, or entering into the graduate school at a later age, made their socialization process more difficult.

These findings help us in better understanding the differences in the academic socialization process of differing population groups. I find that there may be subtle differences that may gear me towards further research development. For example, I may want to better understand how the gender or the social hierarchal system may change the ideas of academic socialization.

5. Conclusion and Future Research

In this study, the data collected can only adequately speak on the difference between domestic versus international students in their experiences on academic socialization. However, this study can act as a platform for future research. For example, I have potential to look into ethnic group differences to examine whether ethnic differences among different domestic and international groups have different experiences or struggles in the academic socialization process. Another angle that can be used is to further examine gender differences. Lastly, researchers can also study whether difference in the entrance and prior work experience of respondents may have an effect on the ability to acclimate to a doctoral program.

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Appendices:

Appendix A. Results from general comparison on academic socialization

Minority students have a more difficult time socializing into an academic environment than majority students		
	U.S.	International
Mean	2.5	3.28
Difference		0.68

International Students have a more difficult time socializing into an academic environment than native students		
	U.S.	International
Mean	2.75	3.86
Difference		**1.11**

Appendix B. Results from Power Relations—Knowledge

Lack of Clarity		
I feel that colleagues will judge me when I try to express my ideas in class		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.14	2.5
I am more inclined to listen to a student who is able to clearly express his/her opinions or argument.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.5	3.75

Knowledge		
In my class, I speak more freely when we discuss topics about my region.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.29	3.28
I measure a student's intelligence or expertise in the topic by how well they use the English language.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3	2

Appendix C. Results from Power Relations—Social Hierarchy

Explicit Social Hierarchy		
The teacher is the expert in the class.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.71	2
I can learn just as much from my classmates as from my professor.		
	U.S.	International
	3.29	4.25
A student who is in their dissertation process is more of an expert than one in their first year in the class		
	U.S.	International
	3.43	2.75
A student who has worked full time as a professional in the field, or in a related field, has more expertise than a person who came straight from an undergraduate/master's degree.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.71	4.25

Appendix D. Results from General Classroom Socialization

I understand the expectations of assignments of my professor in the courses I take		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.7	2.5
Difference		1.2

Appendix E. Results from Comfort Level at various classroom activities

I am most Comfortable at doing:		
	U.S.	International
Large Group Disc	2	2
Small Group Disc	3	0
Written Assignments	1	1
Reading Assignments	0	0
Presentations	1	1
Other	0	0

Appendix F. Results from Classroom Socialization—Identity

Classroom Socialization—Identity		
I feel more comfortable working with international students than with other students in class		
	U.S.	International
Mean	2.71	2.5
I feel more comfortable working with U.S. Students than with other students in class.		
	U.S.	International
	2.71	2.5
I feel more comfortable working with students from the same region I am from than with other students.		
	U.S.	International
	2.71	2.5
In class, I work on projects with those with the same ethnic background.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	1.86	2

Appendix G. Results from language socialization

Language Socialization		
I am comfortable using academic language in my class		
	U.S.	International
Mean	3.71	4
I am familiar with the academic terminology spoken in class.		
	U.S.	International
	3	4
I believe that academic language should be used in class.		
	U.S.	International
	3.86	3.5
In class, my language proficiency prevents me from speaking with others in class.		
	U.S.	International
	2.71	1.75
In class, my language proficiency prevents me from participating in classroom discussions.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	2.71	1.75

Appendix H. Results from Gender

Gender		
I feel more comfortable working with the same gender.		
	U.S.	International
Mean	2.33	1.75
I feel that males are more validated in class than females.		
	U.S.	International
	2.57	1.75
I feel that males are more outspoken in class.		
	U.S.	International
	2.57	1.75