# VIETNAMESE AMERICAN STUDENTS' RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION (PWI)

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Charlotte

2018

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# ABSTRACT

NHU NGUYEN. Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement experiences at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). (Under the direction of DR. JAE HOON LIM)

Prior studies on student engagement in U.S. higher education focused mainly on the experiences of Black and White students (Meyer, 2014). Southeast Asian American students also face challenges regarding engagement on campus. Due to the influence of the Model Minority Myth, which leads faculty and administration to believe that Southeast Asian students need less academic and social support than other groups of students, Asian American students face unique challenges in campus engagement (Lee, Duesbery, Han, Thupten, Her, & Pang, 2017). This student population is also undergoing racial identity development while at school, which is believed to be an important factor influencing student engagement (Bingham & Okagaki, 2002). This phenomenological study explored the Vietnamese American students' racial/ethinic identity development and academic/social engagement patterns at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) located in the Southeastern U.S. Based on in-depth, repeated interviews with eight Vietnamese American students, this study showed significant variations in the students' racial/ethnic identities which were intricately related to their socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration circumstances, and the length of time in the U.S. educational system. While the impact of the Model Minority Myth (MMM) was a common ideological undercurrent found in all participants, their varied academic and social engagement patterns as college students were intrinsically related to the particular stage of their racial/ethnic identity development.

# ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the people who are always beside me, giving never-ending support and encouragement for the completion of this work. First, I want to give special thanks to all of my family members: my honored parents, my beloved husband and two sons, my sweet sister and two brothers, as well as their families who have inspired me to reach this milestone on my learning journey in the United States.

I would also like to extend my great admiration to my advisor, Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, for her patience, dedication to my success, and expertise in delivering well-informed feedback and pushing me towards my goals. Her model and inspiration have influenced my professional goals to be an inspiring teacher and to help students make a difference. I further send my appreciation to my dissertation committee for their support, interest, and guidance throughout the process: Dr. Sandra Dika for her expertise in the research topic of student engagement, Dr. Lisa Merriweather for her wisdom about critical thinking regarding social justice for minority students, and Dr. Lan Quach Kolano for providing more insight into the Model Minority Myth associated with Southeast Asian Americans in U.S. higher education. A special thank you to my former advisor, Dr. Brenda McMahon, who passed away but left a place in my heart. Her passion and encouragement led me to investigate this research topic through a social justice lens.

Another special thanks goes to the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the professors, particularly Dr. Claudia Flowers, Department Chair, and Dr. Robert Algozzine, who provided me with knowledge, experiences, and conference opportunities to refine my study and make it

possible to complete this project. I also send my appreciation to Dr. Cathy Howell, Ed.D., Graduate Program Director and Professor who gave me valuable advice on my work, and to Dr. Lisa Russell-Pinson who not only provided expert help with academic writing, but she was also a source of emotional support and encouragement that enabled me to finish this study. I also want to extend my thanks to my supportive friends - Dr. Leahy, Dr. Allen, Neda, Kiran, April, Christa, and Ngoc Vo - for their friendship and support through my up and down moments in this process.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the eight student participants for managing their busy schedules so they could participate in the interviews. Their experiences provided me great insight into how important it is to be critical Vietnamese American students on a diverse college campus and in an ethnic community, how to increase recognition of their ethnicity on campus and among fellow students, and how to make their voices heard. I respect and appreciate their thoughtful reflections and passion to make this study take shape.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

# LIST OF FIGURES

# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, educators, administrators, and researchers have given great attention to student engagement, as it is known to promote both the quality of student learning and institutional effectiveness (Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2009; Trowler, 2010). Student engagement is also considered a key to student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005); therefore, a solid understanding of the "what, how, and why" of student engagement is required for any educator who aspires to promote their students' success. Student engagement is also an important factor that contributes to an institution's reputation. According to Kuh et al. (2005), student engagement comprises two major elements that ultimately lead to student success. The first element is the time and effort that students invest into their studies and other activities for their academic success and professional development. The second component lies in the ways that the university provides students with learning opportunities and the services and facilitates that the university provides to get students involved on campus for better academic and social progress. The more students engage in their learning, the better outcomes they achieve (Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich, 2010), and the longer they stay in higher education (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Trowler (2010) added a third element, institutional reputation, into the concept of student engagement. The author explained that when students are more engaged in their studies, they naturally produce better learning outcomes, which positively impacts the institutions' reputation. Therefore, it is imperative for all stakeholders to recognize the importance of student engagement and to provide effective and efficient educational services that benefit both their students and the institution.

However, not all students have the same opportunities to be fully and productively engaged on campus (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012). This inequality has been a problem, especially with underserved racial and ethnic minority students in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012; Furr & Elling, 2002; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). Some subgroups of Asian Americans comprise these underserved students in U.S. higher education (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Yeh, 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2002). During the past four decades, the number of Asian students in U.S. higher educational institutions has soared from two percent in 1976 to seven percent in 2015, compared to a relatively moderate increase in other student populations, such as the steady rise of Black students from ten percent to fourteen percent in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Based on one of the most recent statistics from the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, sixty-five percent of Asian students between 18 and 24 years old enrolled in either a two-year or four-year institution of higher education (2014); this trend is expected to rise in the coming years (Museus, 2014). While Asian Americans have diverse school experiences due to their varied ethnic cultures and unique immigration histories (Lee & Zane, 1998; McEwen, Maekawa-Kodama, Alvarez, Lee, & Liang, 2002), this group has been largely viewed as homogeneous (Lee & Zane, 1998), which leads to their invisibility on college campuses (Literte, 2010). Several studies on Asian American students reported that this student population faced ethnic identity challenges during their college years (Literte, 2010; Renn, 2012). Racial minority students' struggles with their own cultural identity and heritage can influence their school engagement (Perry, 2008). While Asian American students are largely described as a uniformly successful group, there is a scarcity of

studies on Asian American students within the field of higher education's most prestigious journal (Museus, 2009). In particular, studies on how some underserved Asian American groups, such as Vietnamese American students, struggle to succeed in U.S. higher education has not been well documented in the existing literature. Acknowledging the underachievement of college students among diverse minority Asian American subgroups, there is a need to investigate challenges that underserved Asian subgroup minority students might face on PWI college campuses.

Several scholars interested in student engagement and success developed benchmarks to measure the quality of academic activities, learning environment, and student outcomes on college campuses (Coates, 2007; Kuh, 2001). Since 2000, the researchers have collaborated with other educators and administrators on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which measured different levels of student engagement on college campuses and the effectiveness of institutional teaching practices. NSSE was updated in 2013 with four engagement themes, organizing within ten engagement indicators. Through this NSSE survey, a large amount of quantitative data were collected to assess best practices for student engagement in undergraduate education nationwide and to further inform interventions for improving the quality of college education (Kuh & Pascarella, 2004). However, some scholars (Campbell & Cabrera, 2011; LaNasa, et al., 2009; Gordon, et al., 2008; Porter, 2011) have reported that the NSSE benchmarks did not hold validity and reliability as accurate measures of student engagement at their own institutions. When NSSE benchmarks did not accurately measure student engagement due to substantial errors among its questionnaire items (Kuh, 2003), it was difficult for institutional researchers and policymakers to provide

adequate interventions and effective strategies that will help improve undergraduates' engagement experiences.

Another possible way to adequately understand student engagement may be the use of qualitative measures that are more effective in exploring the contextualized experiences of students on campus. The previous qualitative research that explored student experiences produced a highly useful and insightful understanding of student engagement (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Quaye, & Baxter-Magolda, 2007; Slocum & Rhoads, 2009). Such qualitative studies appear to be effective in investigating minority students' experiences (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Quaye, & Baxter-Magolda, 2007), which otherwise were invisible or distorted through the use of quantitative survey methods. For example, Quaye and Poon (2008) found issues with engaging racial ethnic minority students, including Asian Americans, in PWIs. Vietnamese American students may be one of the underserved groups in many PWIs. Thus, Vietnamese American students may suffer from lower academic achievement and low rates of engagement due to several internal and external issues, such as their confusion about their own ethnic identity development, little sense of belonging, or a lack of guidance to navigate through learning resources and student services on campus (Han & Lee, 2011). All of these issues may hinder this population's academic success and overall social development.

Vietnamese American students, among Asian minority groups, arrived in the United States during various historical periods, for different reasons, and under differing conditions (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). Given these experiences, Vietnamese American students are likely to have diverse levels of engagement in U.S. higher education, and even within themselves. However, policymakers and practitioners in U.S. colleges and

universities impacted by the MMM assumes academic overachievement of Asian American students in U.S. higher education (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Johnson, Kim, & Lee, 2016). This has led to slow acknowledgement of significant differences among multiple subgroups of Asian students and the varying engagement levels of individual subgroups on campus (Musseus & Kiang, 2008). For instance, Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004) report that U.S. colleges and universities ignored minority Asian students when seeking to improve the experiences of its underserved minority students, because these institutions assumed that Asian students did not have any challenges on campus. Therefore, Asian students rarely received adequate academic support compared to their White counterparts (Lee et al, 2017; Suzuki, 2002). More importantly, Museus and Kiang (2009) projected that Asians have been one of the fastest growing racial groups in the nation and would comprise ten percent of American residents by 2050. As the Asian American population in U.S. higher education increases, faculty, staff, and administrators need to be cognizant of the diversity and challenges of these students and discover a way to effectively respond to their needs. It is expected that universities have an ethical responsibility to serve all students, including Vietnamese American students, to foster meaningful academic and social development.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Asian Americans are not homogeneous (Lee & Zane, 1998), but in the minds of the U.S. public, educators, and policy makers, Asian Americans have been portrayed as one monolithic group, often characterized as superior academic achievers (Bankston III, Caldas, & Zhou, 1997; Lee, 1996). The failure to recognize intra-group differences is problematic because college students from different Asian

subgroups hold their unique traditional ethnic values and expectations, as well as their own unique challenges (Hartlep, 2013). Therefore, they present different layers of college experiences and academic success. Rather than being encouraged to preserve each ethnic group's unique cultural heritage and experiences, diverse sub-groups of Asian minorities have been forced to assimilate with each other; therefore, their multiple voices have been silenced (Lee, 1996, 2001).

The success of some Asian American students in the previous decades created myths and stereotypes that all Asians are "smart," "model minorities," or "mathematically inclined" (Kawaguchi, 2003; Lum, 2009; Museus, 2008a; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, & Day, 2009; Zhao & Qui, 2009). Some policy makers used this myth to ignore the varied needs of Asian American students and limit the opportunities for educational reforms and specific programs for Asian ethnic minority students to achieve academic success (Kawaguchi, 2003). However, the model minority is a myth considering a great number of Asian American ethnic groups are still struggling to gain access to U.S. higher education (Lee et al., 2017).

Even when being offered admission to U.S. colleges and universities, due to the impact of the MMM, Asian American students are an invisible minority on campuses (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Osajima, 1995). Noticeably, Asian Americans, including Southeast Asian American students, face more cultural and social alienation and exclusion, leading to more challenges in pursuing their academic goals than their White peers at PWIs (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). In particular, Southeast Asian students are the most vulnerable group of students on college campuses as they are overshadowed by the MMM and become invisible in U.S. higher education

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Several studies on Southeast Asian American students have reported that this student population encountered numerous challenges to their success in U.S. colleges and universities (Ngo, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007, Yeh, 2002). This bleak reality can be explained by the fact that, in spite of the various experiences Southeast Asian American students have brought to college, their challenges and adverse experiences have not been efficiently recognized and effectively addressed (Lee et al., 2017). One of the challenges faced by Southeast Asian American students is related to U.S. college expectations rooted in the MMM. The MMM presumes that Southeast Asian American students do not have to deal with any intellectual issues because they are academic overachievers (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Another challenge is related to the low socioeconomic status (SES) of many of Southeast Asian American students. The low SES of Southeast Asian American families might hinder these students' opportunities to expand their academic and social engagement on college campuses (Hune & Chan, 1997; Hune, 2002). Together, both the MMM and low SES family status keep preventing Southeast Asian American students from enacting full academic and social engagement. Beyond the influence of the MMM and low SES backgrounds, Bingham and Okagaki (2012) also found the significant role of ethnicity in student on-campus engagement experiences. They suggest that lack of academic and social engagement on campuses has likely led to additional challenges in students' ethnic identity development (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012). Therefore, racial/ethnic identity development should be considered a critical task given to Southeast Asian American students since their ethnic identity development is likely to be

intertwined with their social and academic engagement experiences on campus and vice versa.

It is possible that Southeast Asian American students find it difficult to gain recognition of their racial/ethnic identity as they encounter numerous challenges in their academic and social engagement on campus. Scholars have long confirmed that Southeast Asian American students are often unable to express their needs and receive adequate services on campus (Lee et al., 2017; Suzuki, 2002). Despite growing research evidence that indicates an inevitable link between college students' racial/ethnic identity development and on-campus engagement experiences, empirical studies on minority students' racial/ethnic identity development in relation to their campus engagement have been limited (Museus & Kiang, 2009). In particular, research on Southeast Asian American students' racial/ethnic identity and their on-campus engagement on U.S. college campuses is very sparse and this topic needs more scholarly attention.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and their academic/social engagement at a PWI located in the Southeast of the United States. This study further examines the major challenges, strategies of engagement, and suggestions from students that they believe would improve their engagement on the PWI campus.

## 1.3 Research Questions

Four research questions for this study are:

RQ 1: How do Vietnamese American students develop their racial/ethnic identity as well as academic and social engagement on a PWI college campus?

RQ 2: What challenges do Vietnamese American students face in their quest for social and academic integration in a PWI college campus?

RQ 3: What are Vietnamese American students' academic and social engagement practices and coping strategies when responding to challenges on a PWI college campus?

RQ 4: What do Vietnamese American students believe to be essential to improving their academic and social integration on campuses in the United States?

## 1.4 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Study

Racial/ ethnic identity development is one of the emergent theories/ models that direct this study. Among several prominent models of racial identity development, such as Ferdman and Gallagos' (2001) model of Latina and Latino ethno-racial orientations and Horse's (2001) model of Indian racial identity, Kim (1981, 2012) also proposed a model explaining five sequential stages of Asian American identity development. This model starts with the lowest level of "ethnic awareness," moving through the stages of "White identification", "awakening to political consciousness", "redirection to Asian American consciousness", and the highest stage of "incorporation". The last stage is achieved by Asian American students who are proud, confident, and positive about their Asian American identity. While the first stage of "ethnic awareness" focuses on students' discovery of their own ethnic heritage, the second stage of "White identification" refers to a period when Asian American students try to assimilate with and identify as Whites in order to avoid criticism of differences. In this stage, Asian American students tend to place a higher value on the dominant White culture and try to escape from their own cultural heritage and/or social affiliation. The third stage of "awakening to political consciousness" refers to students' increased awareness of racist society when they were

denied access to the power of Whiteness and notice Whites treating them differently and unfairly. The fourth stage of "redirection to Asian American consciousness" is characterized by their pride in one's racial identity and conscious identification with other Asian Americans. Asian American students who have reached the last stage, "incorporation," maintain their own heritage on campus with a positive self-concept. However, this strenuous process of Asian students' identity development, which often occurs during their college years, is not well known among many institutional agents in higher education. For that reason, it may be difficult for university staff and faculty members to properly understand the nature of the challenges faced by many Asian American students. Rather than blaming students for not proactively engaging on campus, faculty, administrators, and staff members in higher education need to understand that Asian American students are at various developmental levels of their racial ethnic identity, which can affect their interest, readiness, and needs on campus (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

While Kim's model (1981, 2012) offers an important insight about Asian Americans' racial identity development, the MMM provides a critical understanding about how the larger cultural context in which Asian American students interact with all stakeholders and it shapes their college experiences of engagement, which ultimately influences their learning outcomes and development. The model minority discourse is a myth created in the dominant culture based on the success of students from several Asian subgroups in the U.S. education system in previous decades. The American media, as well as many politicians use the "success" stories of Asians to generalize and paint the entire Asian group as the model minority (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). By labeling

all Asians as over-achievers, educators and policy makers fail to recognize the diversity of Southeast Asian American students in U.S. higher education (Wang, 2007; Wing 2007). Unfortunately, many stakeholders in higher education accept this myth and neglect their responsibility to provide adequate support or assistance for the underserved Southeast Asian minority students, perpetuating educational inequity in higher education.

Student engagement is another important key concept that guided this study. The conceptual framework for this study is based on an integration of Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and Kuh's (2009) and Coates's (2007) conceptual engagement theories. These researchers support a similar idea that the more involved students are on campus, the better learning outcomes they will achieve, and the better reputation the institutions will gain. Additionally, Tinto (1993), an interactional theorist, links student engagement to student retention and academic success and argues that students would persist in their programs and remain at the institution if they are able to adopt and adapt to the norms and expectations of their academic institutions.

As mentioned previously, Asian American students are facing challenges in PWIs in terms of ethnic identity development and student engagement in their development process (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Harper and Quaye (2009) identified five obstacles racial/ ethnic minority students struggle to overcome to become engaged on college campuses: "(1) racial identity development, (2) being one of few racial/ ethnic minority students, (3) lack of the same-race/ethnicity faculty, (4) curricular content, and (5) culturally responsive pedagogy" (p. 159).They also argue that student racial identity development is concurrent with students' engagement process (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Therefore, students at various stages of racial identity development respond differently to

learning materials and classroom discussion and exhibit varied types and levels of academic/social engagement (Harper & Quaye, 2009). However, not all stakeholders understand that student racial identity development influences their engagement strategies, as well as academic and social integration on PWI campuses (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

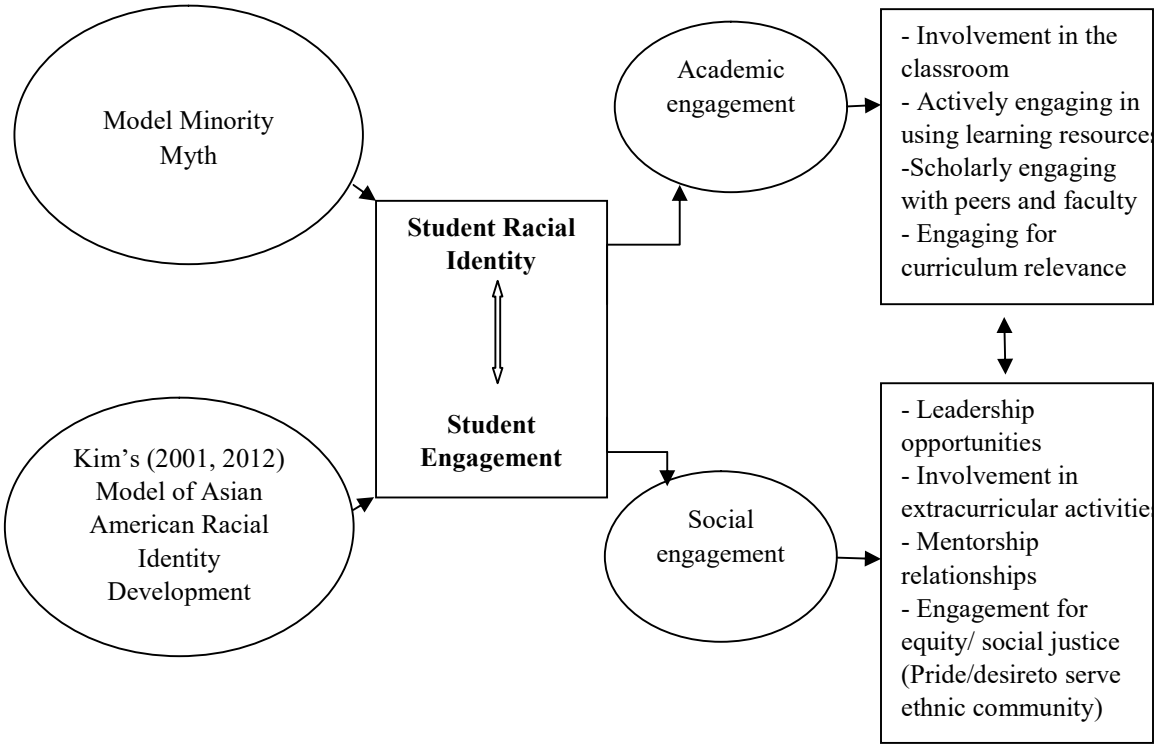


FIGURE 1: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Study

## 1.5 Research Design

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a branch of phenomenological research which aims to understand people's shared life experiences within a specific socio-cultural context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), was selected to inform this study. In particular, IPA was appropriate for this study based on the very purpose of the study-- examining the intricate and complex dynamics between

participants' racial identity and their campus engagement practices. Located in the Southeast of the United States, this institution was classified as a PWI by examining student body statistics. The phenomenological study design is the most suitable for this qualitative inquiry because it allowed the researcher to conduct a holistic analysis of student racial/ethnic identities and engagement experiences on campus, and then observe the intricate relationship between the two (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). Based on the guidelines of phenomenological research (e.g., Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014), this study used an in-depth interview method with eight Vietnamese American college students who met the selecton criteria explained below.

### 1.5.1 Participant Selection and Data Collection

This research included eight Vietnamese American students who were enrolled in a 4-year-university in a large Southeastern metropolitan area. This institution is classified as a PWI by the student body statistics provided by the fact book data. This fact book indicates that fifty seven (57)percent of students were White, while six percent of students were Asian, sixteen (16) percent African Americans, and eight percent Hispanic. The participants were recruited through the reseacher's personal connections since she, through her volunteer work, has built a rich and trusting relationship with many Vietnamese American families and students around the area. One of the organizations involved was the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) at the university where the research took place, which had over 100 members. The data collection started after an IRBIS approval had been granted.

All interviews took place on the campus or in another quiet place that was convenient to both the interviewee and researcher. All interviews were recorded for transcription accuracy. Notes were also taken by the researcher during the process of the interviews as needed. As explained in the Informed Consent form, each transcribed verbatim interview transcript was sent back to the student to check its acuracy and to obtain further clarification if needed.The interview data were analyzed using the general guidelines of the interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

This study presents significant scholarly value and practical implications. First, there is a scarcity of research studies on Vietnamese American students' ethnic identity development and campus engagement/integration on a U.S. college campus. Therefore, this research provides needed insight about their experiences in U.S. higher education. Informed by the extensive review of existing literature on Southeast Asian American college students, this study provides a timely analysis on how Vietnamese American students develop their racial/ethnic identities and campus engagement strategies, which illuminates major hurdles in their academic and social integration on many PWI college campuses nation-wide. In particular, this study examines Vietnamese students' varied academic and social engagement patterns which are intricately related to their unique culture and immigration history, as well as the status of their racial/ethnic identity development during their college years. Outcomes of this research greatly benefits the entire Vietnamese American community, including Vietnamese students and parents, as

well as informs university faculty and staff by offering a greater understanding of Vietnamese American college students.

In terms of practical implications and tangible benefits for Vietnamese American college students, this research challenges the MMM in U.S. higher education and encourages Asian American students to take action to counteract the negative influences of this myth on their academic pursuits. By doing so, Vietnamese American students can better negotiate or work with all stakeholders on campus, gain adequate support as needed, and develop their competency and skills that would ultimatley lead to their desired outcomes. Given the dismal understanding of Vietnamese Americans' academic and social struggles, institutional agents might hold lower expectations about Vietnamese American students resulting in micro-aggressions that Vietnamese Americans would face in their future jobs. Therefore, it is very important for all stakeholders to carefully consider what is appropriate, effective, and efficient when initiating timely interventions for Southeast Asian American students. With proper support, Vietnamese American college students would be able to navigate campus resources effectively, achieve their academic goals and expand productive social networks essential to their comprehensive development.

Practically, this study strongly encourages Vietnamese American students to maintain their positive racial /ethnic identity on campus and gain more insight about what it means to be a Vietnamese American student in U.S. higher education. Internalizing these critical insights, Vietnamese American college students will be more motivated to confirm and enrich their racial ethnic identity leading to strong commitment to academic and social engagement on campus.

This study also has implications for U.S. higher education professionals who work in campus organizations. Ultimately, the outcomes of this study would serve as a call for American educators, administrators, and university faculty/staff to be cognizant of the status and needs of Vietnamese American students so that they can better serve this group by fostering students' academic and social development during their college years. Inevitably, this study would raise a social justice-related concern by illuminating unfair treatment of Vietnamese American students based on the MMM prevalent across U.S. colleges and universities. In other words, the outcome of this study informs many stakeholders on college campuses of the troubled experiences of racial minority students and could help them gain a better understanding of this student population.

## 1.7 Limitations of the Study

While this study would offer several worthy insights about Vietnamese American students on a U.S. college campus by providing a better understanding of their engagement practices, there are several limitations to note. The first limitation is the small sample size of the participants, who were enrolled in a 4-year-university located in the Southeastern United States. This could result in the lack of geographical diversity in the sample and the outcomes of this study were limited within the geographical and associated social and cultural contexts of that region. For instance, California and Texas are the two states which have the highest population of Vietnamese Americans, Vietnamese American college students living in these states might have different experiences of academic and social engagement on campus due to better opportunities for interacting with peers, faculty, and staff of the same ethnicity. Furthermore, the diversity of the sample was limited in terms of immigration experiences and ages. This study targeted Vietnamese American college students who spent at least 3 years of their K-12

education in the U.S. school system. Vietnamese American students who came to the U.S. as college students have totally different experiences from those who have been in the U.S. for at least 3 years of K-12 schools. Their U.S. immigration status and the critical time of developing their ethnic identity could influence the ways Southeast Asian American students interpret their engagement experiences on college campuses. Therefore, this study included only those who spent at least 3 years of their K-12 schooling in the United States, and this participant recruitment might result in the lack of diversity in the study sample.

The second critical limitation of this study was using a single data collection method, in-depth interviews with participants. The interview protocol was constructed purposefully to explore how the participants developed their racial/ ethnic identity, engaged academically and socially on a PWI campus, their challenges in campus engagement, their coping strategies to be more engaged on a PWI campus, and the suggestions that they believed would improve academic and social integration on PWI campuses. However, the single mode of interview data collection might have some missing points when the participants did not fully describe their academic and social engagement, their engagement strategies, as well as their racial/ethnic development on a PWI campus. In order to address this limitation, the researcher scheduled several follow-up interviews after having shared the participant's' transcribed interviews. The researcher also conducted several informal observations in their student organizations and events, even though these observations were not considered a formal data set. However, these opportunities informed the researcher about the participants, as well as their engagement

experiences. The researcher also conducted member check-ins with the participants, shared initial findings, and sought their input about the emergent themes.

The third limitation of the study was related to the use of Kim's (1981) model of Asian American identity development to examine the phenomenon of Vietnamese American students' racial identity development and campus engagement. While Kim's model was one of very first theoretical models explaining Asian American racial identity development, some scholars have critiqued it as an outdated model (Chae & Larres, 2010). These scholars are concerned about the historical contexts of immigration, the role of original culture, and the interconnectedness of multiple facets of identity to define a Southeast Asian American identity model. It should be noted that Kim's (1981) model was found to be insufficient to describe Vietnamese Americans' experiences of racial/ethnic identity development in some states like California or Texas states; instead, Museus, Vue, Nguyen, and Yeung's (2013) model of Southeast Asian American identity presented a better conceptual fit for explaining the experiences of Southeast Asian immigrant students including Vietnamese Americans. It is reasonable to expect that Vietnamese American students, who are concentrated and benefit from a higher level of visibility and voice in some states, such as California or Texas, would have a different approach/journey in their racial/ethnic identity development. It is very important to acknowledge that Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity is not static and is always changing depending on varied community and campus racial environments, individual assumptions, mutual influence when interacting with other Vietnamese Americans and interracial interactions with the peers of other racial and cultural backgrounds on campus.

Last but not least, due to the small sample size and geographical limitations of the study, transferability of this study is significantly limited. Furthermore, several categories inductively emerged and possible relationships across those categories were not sufficiently interrogated and failed to generate robust conclusions. For example, diverse immigration contexts or pathways could have impacted how participating students perceived their racial/ethnic identity as well as their pride of being Vietnamese American students on a PWI college campus. Yet, the researcher was not able to recruit diverse Vietnamese American students who came to the U.S. as immigrants or refugees and experienced varied immigrant pathways that might have shaped their racial identity development.

# CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Asian Americans in the United States

The Asian American population is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups and has become increasingly visible in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, the Asian American population grew forty three (43) percent since the previous census, four times faster than the growth rate of the total population. Despite often being considered a single, homogeneous group, the population labeled Asian American in the U.S. is a diverse group with different customs, ethnic and immigration histories (Museus, 2014). Based on immigration patterns and trends, there are four distinct Asian American groups in the U.S., defined by the time of their arrival in the country (Hune, 2002). The present Asian American population is composed of individuals who arrived in the U.S. in three different stages. The first group arrived between 1760 and 1790. They were followed by two larger waves of immigration. The first and second immigration waves started in the second half of the nineteenth century and lasted until after the 1965 Immigration Act. The very first Asian immigrant groups were Filipino seamen who left the Spanish trade ships to settle in Louisiana in the mid-1760s. There were also Asian Indians arriving in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania as slaves or to take jobs as household servants of sea captains in the 1790s (Hune, 2002; Okihiro, 1994).

The first of the large waves of Asian American immigration was from the second half of nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. These immigrants arrived in the U.S. mainland and Hawaii to develop the western states (Hune, 2002). While the majority of immigrants from China, Korea, Japan, Philippines, and Asian India were laborers, a

few became small business owners in the western states. These Asian American immigrants suffered considerable racial discrimination, economic exploitation, and immigration limits. It became worse during World War II when Japanese immigrants and their children had to join the armed forces or be sent to internment camps (Chan, 1991). It should be noted that the third generation of these immigrants, with educational opportunities in the 1960s-1970s, transformed U.S. higher education with demands for access and equity in admissions, ethnic studies programs, and recruitment of minority faculty (Hune, 2002; Wei, 2010).

The second large wave of Asian American immigrants were also from China, Korea, Japan, Philippines, and Asian India (Hune, 2002). They came to the U.S. after the 1965 Immigration Act which ended previously mandated limits on Asian immigration. This Act facilitated family reunions and helped supplement professional gaps in the U.S. which experienced a short supply of some specialized workers, such as doctors, scientists, high-tech professionals, and nurses (Hune, 2002).

Another group of new Asian Americans entering the nation were refugees from Southeast Asian countries impacted by U.S. military operations. They were Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians who immigrated under the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, the 1980 Refugee Act, and the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act (Hune, 2002). While some had privileged backgrounds and made a relatively easy adjustment in the new land, many of these immigrants had to start their new lives with serious wounds from war and trauma (Chan, 1991). Although the most recent immigrants coming to the U.S. benefited from some improved social policies, such as the elimination of racial discrimination or the initiative of affirmative action policies, Asian Americans

are still victims of racial violence and hate crimes in the U.S. (Abelmann & Abelmann, 2009; Umemoto, 2000).

Post-1965 immigrants have significantly changed the U.S. and Asian American demographics. New Asian Americans present a more heterogeneous mix in Asian subgroups, representing various national origins, ethnicities, languages, religions, and socioeconomic classes (Hune, 2002). The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau has identified twenty-five distinct Asian American subgroups, and the largest ten subgroups are described as: Chinese (22 percent), Filipino (20 percent), Asian Indian (18 percent), Vietnamese (10 percent), Korean (10 percent), Japanese (8 percent), Pakistani (2 percent), Cambodian (2 percent), Hmong (2 percent), and Thai (1 percent) Americans. Alternatively, these twenty-five Asian American sub-groups, based on the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, are subdivided into three different racial terms of East Asian Americans, South Asian Americans, and Southeast Asian Americans. East Asian Americans include: Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Mongolian Americans, Taiwanese Americans, and Tibetan Americans; South Asian Americans are: Bangladeshi Americans, Bhutanese Americans, Indian Americans, Nepalese Americans, Pakistani Americans, and Sri Lankan Americans; Southeast Asian Americans comprise of Burmese Americans, Cambodian Americans, Filipino Americans, Hmong Americans, Indonesian Americans, Laotian Americans, Malaysian Americans, Mien Americans, Singaporean Americans, Thai Americans, and Vietnamese Americans. Each individual subgroup arriving at the U.S. brought in different cultural values and beliefs that affect how they navigate in their new land. In education particularly, there is limited study on Asian students' experiences in U.S. colleges and universities, as well as how unique stories of

Asians of diverse ethnic backgrounds shape and influence academic outcomes (Sahu, 2012).

From the previous records, Hsia (1988) and Wang (2007) state that the earlier Asian immigrants coming to the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century accepted any jobs offered to them and tried to assimilate into American society. American politicians and the U.S. population did not acknowledge new Asian immigrants and saw them as simply "different." Asian immigrant groups, such as Japanese, Korean, and Filipino, were often viewed as "forever foreigners" who could never become Americans and "could not be trusted because of their ethnic background" (Wang, 2007, p.79). One of the major political backlashes against Asian immigrants was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was enacted after several decades of political controversies. Fearing the growing number of Chinese workers and their cultural influence in some states, this legislation blocked the further influx of Chinese immigrants. Due to this legislation, other Asian groups, people from Japanese and the Philippines, started arriving in the U.S. and replaced many Chinese workers. This Asian immigration pattern lasted until the 1924 National Origin Act, prohibiting all immigrants from Asia, except for Filipinos (Hsia, 1988). Asian immigrants suffered numerous inequities, including the most basic human rights like marriage and land ownership, and even native-born Asian American children were rejected by public schools (Wang, 2007). It was not until the 1960s that two laws, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965, opened the door for Asians to have equal access to resources with their mainstream counterparts. This Act of 1965 also allowed Southeast Asians who were forced to leave their home countries, to have a chance to settle in the U.S. Vietnamese immigrants were among the groups who

came in this last wave (Ogbu & Gibson, 1991). The number of Vietnamese immigrants also significantly increased after the Vietnam War ended in 1975.

Vietnamese Americans are the target participants to be investigated in this study. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Vietnamese Americans were the fourth largest Asian group in the United States. They settled in the United Stated in five waves of immigration. The first wave of around 200,000 refugees or immigrants occurred after the Vietnam War ended in 1975.They were from the higher economic class, including Vietnamese government officials, members of the Catholic Church, and successful businesspersons (Centrie, 2004; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston III, 1998). The second wave of immigrants from Vietnam began in 1980 and included immigrants called "Boat People." Most of this immigrant group was from lower economic classes and included fishermen, South Vietnamese soldiers, and factory workers, who tried to escape from their tough reality and find a safer place to live (Centrie, 2004). They accepted many risks, such as drowning, rape, violence, and starvation on the sea, to flee from Vietnam on crowded boats. These horrible incidents affected how they experienced their new lives in the United States, impacting both themselves and their children who were born in the U.S.

The third wave of immigration in 1979 called the Orderly Departure Program (O.D.P.) was part of one of the U.S. humanitarian programs, which offered Vietnamese people safe arrival in the new land. More than 200,000 Vietnamese entered the United States under this program (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998). The fourth wave of immigrants was children of Vietnamese women and American soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War under the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988 (Zhou & Bankston III,

1998). According to Pham (2003), over 25,000 Amerasian children and their family members came to the United States during this period. The last wave of immigration included more than 70,000 Vietnamese people coming to the U.S. under the Humanitarian Operation (H.O.) of 1989. This program offered political prisoners and their families opportunities to settle in the U.S., compensating for their military service for the U.S. government and difficult times spent in the Communist reeducation camps after the war.

Apart from the immigrant waves of Vietnamese people explained above, the most recent Vietnamese immigrants are people holding the legal immigrant status as Vietnamese Americans, through sponsorships by their close relatives or because of their lengthy employment or business in the U.S. These different immigration stories partly determine how individual subgroups of Asian Americans shape their personal views and worldviews regarding their personal and social identities in the United States. These facts reveal a colorful picture of a diverse Asian American population in American society.

## 2.2 The Model Minority Myth (MMM)

### 2.2.1 The Emergence of the MMM

The term ‘model minority’ was first coined by William Petersen in an article of the *New York Times Magazine* in 1966, when the author extolled Japanese Americans’ efforts to be successful in the U.S. and their assimilation into mainstream society (Lee et al., 2017). This term was also used in *U.S. News and World Report* to describe Chinese Americans and their hard work and diligence in building distinctive and thriving China-towns even when facing colossal racial discrimination (Osajima, 2008). According to Osajima (2008), the image of “success” of Asian Americans was evident in two

socioeconomic and educational areas of the nation that people believed to be true. In the socioeconomic field, Asian Americans appeared to be able to boost their incomes, hold high salary employment, and had low rates of crime and mental illness. In addition, Asian American students were assumed to closely hold Asian values and traditions of filial respect and respect for authority, industriousness, compliance, and a willingness to learn that led them to high educational achievement and high status occupations (Li, 2005; Suzuki, 2002). Taken together, the MMM is a stereotype rooted in the 19th century perception that Asian Americans are forever foreigners and linked to a modern belief that Asian Americans, as "model minorities," have attained economic and academic success due to hard work, and devotion to traditional cultural values (Lee, Xiong, Pheng, & Vang, 2017). Accordingly, the MMM influences the ways Asian Americans have shaped their own experiences and identities in the U.S. over the last 50 years (Lee et al., 2017).

Back to U.S. history, the MMM stemmed from the 1960s when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965 came into practice. A great number of immigrants from China, Korea, India, and the Philippines reached the U.S. under these laws, and many of them were admitted as legal U.S. citizens after they had finished graduate programs at U.S. universities (Suzuki, 2002; Wang, 2007). During the past three decades research studies have shown that Asians achieved different levels of success in the U.S., depending on their varied socioeconomic class, Asian ethnicity, and citizenship status (Baum & Flores, 2011; Empleo, 2009; Wing, 2007, Wang, 2007; Woo, 1994). In addition, Bankston III et al. (1997) reported that Asian students gained higher academic achievement in comparison to their peers of other races in U.S. higher education. These achievements led the dominant culture to characterize the entire Asian population as

smart (Hsia, 1988). The majority of the dominant culture labeled all Asians as the model minority (Lee, 1996; Museus, 2008b; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, Tawa, & Day, 2009; Wang, 2007; Wing, 2007; Zhao & Qiu, 2009).

### 2.2.2 The Model Minority in Social Media

Since Petersen's article about 'model minority' in 1966, images of Asian Americans via the MMM were increasingly embedded into the American consciousness through social media, such as television, magazines, and movies. For instance, several movies about Asian Americans, who were portrayed as being persistent or hard-working, reinforced this image of the Asian American model minority. The underlying assumption was that Asian Americans successfully achieved upward social mobility for their families since they were provided equal opportunities for prosperity and success in the U.S. According to Lee (1996), U.S. media and politicians focused on the "success" stories of Asians to silence African Americans and to prove that the U.S. is the model nation for all groups to make their American dreams come true. Critically, the dominant group used the MMM as a political block, differentiating Whites, Asians, and other people of color so that Asian Americans were placed in a more complicated position of racial bias and prejudice (Wing, 2007).

In addition, there was a distinction made between Asian American males and females (Zhang, 2010). Asian women were portrayed as either silent or as ruthless dragon ladies. Asian men were depicted to be culturally indifferent, martial artists, or isolated (Lee & Joon, 2005). Gradually, this image of Asian men has transformed into today's picture, that Asian men are intelligent, successful "model minorities" (Suzuki, 2002).

However, the portrait of the universal MMM left negative effects on the lives of typical Asians living in the U.S. Compared to other racial groups, Asian Americans were most likely to be identified as academically successful, but at the same time more likely to be denied recognition of their ethnicity by their peers. They have also been viewed as passive individuals lacking social skills and connections (Zhang, 2010).

### 2.2.3 Model Minority Myth in U.S. Higher Education

The MMM is a prevalent ideology in U.S. schools, where parents, teachers, and peers have placed high expectations on Asian American students, causing stress and school alienation in these students, resulting in their academic decline. Similarly, in U.S. higher education, the academic success of some Asian American students reinforced the MMM and makes the majority of Asian Americans invisible in U.S. colleges and universities (Kumashiro, 2008; Lee et al., 2017; Museus & Kiang, 2009). In this light, the MMM is associated with the notion that "Asian Americans achieve universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success" (Museus & Kiang, 2009, p.6). Therefore, according to Museus and Kiang (2009), there is a need to deconstruct five major misconceptions regarding Asian and Pacific American students in higher education: (1) Asian Americans are all the same; (2) Asian Americans are not really racial/ethnic minorities; (3) Asian Americans do not encounter major challenges because of their race; (4) Asian Americans do not seek or require resources and support; and (5) college completion is equivalent to success.

These five misconceptions, which grew out of the MMM, have veiled diverse experiences within the Asian American population and obscured the social, psychological, and intellectual challenges faced by many Asian American students. For

instance, Lorenzo, Frost, and Reinherz (2000) found that Asian American college students experienced depression and anxiety at a significantly higher level than their White peers. This student population also suffered more social isolation, exclusion, and less satisfaction with social support than their non-Asian American peers (Lorenzo, Frost, & Reinherz, 2000). However, educational research on Asian Americans, partly due to the MMM, has failed to recognize the disparities among subgroups of Asian Americans (Hsia, 1988; Wang, 2007; Wing, 2007). For example, Asian Indian American students in the U.S. have been reported to have higher rates of high school graduation and obtaining bachelor's degrees compared to other Asian American subgroups such as Cambodians and Hmong (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Remani, 2010; Yoo, Burrola, & Steger, 2010). In addition, many Asian American students who are also English as a Second Language (ESL) students are likely to delay their high school graduation by at least one year due to their lower English proficiency (Suzuki, 2002). Sadly, some schools provided them with ESL support but did not adequately recognize the fact that these students were also suffering from the unwelcoming and prejudiced attitudes from staff who ignored the students' challenges and needs (Suzuki, 2002). Asian American ESL students were considered academic underachievers while at the same time all Asians were believed to be successful in their educational pursuits. Asian American students often did not receive proper instructional support and encouragement to pursue majors that required English language skills. Instead, they were advised to choose STEM majors that might not maximize students' intellectual development in higher education (Lee et al., 2017). More importantly, categorizing all Asians as one group who "made it", the MMM rejects the

Despite its seemingly glowing image and positive portrayal of Asian Americans, the MMM has created many negative consequences. For instance, Asian American scholars have critically analyzed court cases where the dominant group uses the MMM as a tool to reject proposed policies or programs that would support the educational and occupational progress of Asian Americans (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). In addition, some research clearly indicates that Asian Americans suffer from cultural pressure as they deal with the high expectations imposed upon them due to the MMM. The MMM potentially prevents Asian American students from developing their willingness and desire to holistically engage in higher education experiences (Museus, 2008a). As a result, there is an urgent need for educators, researchers, and practitioners to critically examine the MMM, which has often caused significant misconceptions about Asian American students (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

Asians have faced persistent injustice and inequality for more than 100 years, until some subgroups finally achieved partial success in the late 1960s (Hsia, 1988; Wang, 2007). Ironically, Asian students' entering U.S. higher education after World War II were replacing European students on campus (Wang, 2007). The dominant cultural ideology buried the voices of Asians under the American "meritocratic" structure which demanded that all minorities stay silent and just work hard(er) to achieve success. The implicit assumption under the MMM is that model minorities know their place within the system and do not challenge the dominant ideology and existing socio-cultural system.

Paradoxically, while the MMM seems to have provided more opportunities for Asians to achieve success in U.S. higher education, this stereotype has also worked against them (Takagi, 1998; Wang, 2007). Takagi (1998) averred that many selective

colleges and universities in the U.S. limited Asian students' access to their institutions. This started in the late 1980s when the dominant population saw that Asians were more prepared for college compared to their counterparts of other races. College admissions officers often favored Whites when establishing criteria for college admission (Takagi, 1998). Despite Asian students' academic achievement, such as standardized test scores, college admission officers looked at Asian students' weakness in physical fields where they could not outperform students of other racial backgrounds (Wang, 2007). In particular, college admissions officers used sports achievement criteria to limit the college access of Asian students because this population was known to be well prepared in academics but less well rounded in extracurricular and sports activities. Increasing emphasis on extra-curricular and sports leadership in the college admission process reflected the dominant group's concern about Asian students' "too much success" and their intent to limit such students' access to higher education (Wang, 2007). Takagi explained this phenomenon from a historical point of view, noting that White students felt anxious and at a disadvantage when competing with Asian students for college admission. Whites' anxiety clearly showed nineteenth century racist stereotypes when Asians were portrayed as super-diligent students or "hordes" of "unfair competition" (Takagi, 1998, p.60).

### 2.2.4 Southeast Asian Americans and the MMM

Southeast Asian Americans were comprised of refugees from various countries (e.g., Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). In this study, Southeast Asian Americans are defined as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao Americans. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Vietnamese Americans were the largest number of Southeast Asian

Americans, with a total approximately of 1.73 million. Nearly half of Vietnamese Americans settled in California while significant numbers were in Texas, Washington, Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Florida. Other sizable ethnic groups of Southeast Asian Americans were Cambodian (276,000), Lao (232,000), and Hmong (260,000) (U.S. Census, 2010). These Southeast Asian Americans had different experiences and achievements regarding educational opportunities, professional success, English proficiency, and transferable skills in the new land (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Ever since the Civil Rights era, Asian Americans in general were viewed as model minorities, who have accomplished economic and academic success in the U.S. through their hard work, Southeast Asian Americans have been positioned both within and outside of this discourse of academic success (Ngo, 2006). According to Ngo (2006), Southeast Asian Americans were often considered to be the model minority like other Asian American groups, yet they are also portrayed as high school dropouts and welfare dependents. Lee (2001) explained the complexities and contradictions in Southeast Asian American students' educational experiences, which in turn made them want to conform to the model minority myth. This contradictory representation of Southeast Asian Americans is still grounded in the assumptions that all Asian American students are problem-free, so those who are struggling in school must be lazy or unworthy and do not deserve further assistance (Um, 2003).

Considering the impact of the MMM, some educators and researchers have suggested that teachers and school administrators should be informed of the reality that different groups of Asian students possess unique cultures, histories, and immigration circumstances which shape their school experiences and development (Hartlep, 2013;

Lam, 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Lam's (2015) study on Southeast Asian Americans, particularly Vietnamese Americans, found that poverty and the unfavorable sociopolitical circumstances experienced by this Southeast Asian refugee immigrant group caused an added challenge to their acculturation process. This, in turn, negatively affected the identity development of some youths in this community, who showed a sharp contrast to the MMM that is widely circulated in their school and community contexts.

Critically, Southeast Asian American scholars have continued challenging the MMM which has been used as a political tool to silence responsibilities of racial injustices and to mask the struggles encountered by Southeast Asian American communities (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005; Li, 2009; Ngo, 2006). One approach that scholars have used to challenge the validity of the MMM is to focus on research evidence in terms of ethnically disaggregated data that reveals the discrepancy among diverse subgroups of Southeast Asian American students. For instance, while some scholars (e.g., Lee & Kumashiro, 2005; Walker-Moffat, 1995) have emphasized Southeast Asian American students' lower academic outcomes and their low SES to dispel the MMM which is not in consonance with this student population, other scholars continue to critique the permanent power of the MMM which frames Southeast Asian American experiences, identities, and engagement (Lee et al, 2017).

More specifically, while some scholars pointed out that the model minority was a myth when highlighting the realities of academic underachievement and failures of Southeast Asian American students in U.S. schools and colleges (Lee et al., 2017; Museus, 2009), other researchers dismantled the MMM by examining differences among ethnic subgroups in terms of success, struggles, and educational experiences of Southeast

Asian American students (Ngo & Lee, 2007). It is also important to note that gender issues in Southeast Asian American families was also a salient factor, adding more challenges to female students who wanted to pursue further U.S. education (Conchas, 2006; Li, 2009; Pataray-Ching, Kitt-Hinrichs, & Nguyen, 2006). Conchas (2006) found that Vietnamese male students had more educational opportunities than female students. While there was a paucity of research on Vietnamese Americans' gender issues compared to Hmong Americans, some research revealed the increased enrollment of Vietnamese American females which reflected a change in gender roles in the U.S. (Robbins, 2004). Beyond the given challenges of gender, Vietnamese American females suffered from the model minority myth, leading them to profound social isolation and psychological problems in U.S. schools and colleges (Li, 2009).

## 2.3 Asian Americans in U.S. Higher Education

### 2.3.1 Asian Americans in Education

Asians who arrived in the U.S. under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965 attended U.S. higher education in greater numbers than other racial minorities (Wang, 2007). While Asian American students' high academic achievement drew admiration from other groups, this image also caused a sense of fear that the Asian students may take over the classrooms and raise test score expectation, leading to a new form of "White flight"; therefore, Asian Americans have been classified outside the frame of normalcy (Hwang, 2005, p.1).

The model minority and forever-foreigner images were apparent in research on Asian Americans in U.S. higher education (Lee, 2006; Suzuki, 2002). Both Lee (2006) and Suzuki (2002) discussed how these representations both challenged and were

interrelated with each other, leaving Asian Americans in a vulnerable racial position, being excluded by both the Whites and other racial minorities, and being put in a position of racial conflict with other minorities. In the Black/White binary discourse, Asian Americans faced more challenges to situate themselves on campuses in comparison to Whites and Blacks (Sahu, 2012; Wing, 2007). As a result of being neither Black nor White, Asian Americans have become more invisible and their voices as a racial minority have rarely been heard in U.S. higher education. Scholars in the fields of history (Takaki, 1998), English (Lowe, 2000), anthropology (Manalansan, 2000), sociology (Kim, 1999), Tuan, 1998), and law (Ancheta, 2000; Wu, 1995) have critically examined the complexities of Asian American experiences and challenged the ways that the public has falsely portrayed them (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Significantly, Lowe (2000) emphasized that Asian Americans were a heterogeneous and hybrid group who could never be categorized as one simple label. Lowe's (2000) research pointed out the intersectionality of multiple socio-cultural factors, such as ethnicity, language, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status that influence Asian American experiences, reinforces the idea that a monolithic depiction of Asian Americans as one group is far from reality.

### 2.3.2 Research on Asian American College Students

Among approximately fifty minority ethnic subgroups living in the U.S., Asian American college students are a highly diverse group in higher education. Their racial/ethnic identity development and campus experiences also greatly vary due to differences in their ethnic cultural heritages, the diversity of immigration pathways, and other social and cultural influences (Gin, Ho, Martinez, Murakami, & Wu, 2017; Ing & Victorino, 2016; Lee, 2006; Suzuki, 2002). Furthermore, families' socioeconomic

backgrounds and each student's social/academic disposition also create significant variations in Asian American students' campus experiences (Kao, 2004). Two studies, Lee (2015) and Lee and Zhou (2015), found that different opportunities to engage in culturally relevant learning experiences and availability of support systems also yielded meaningful differences in students' learning outcomes. Based on the wide range of factors that affect Asian American student's cultural identity and higher education experiences, scholars have acknowledged that there is no single explanation but great complexity and variations (Lee, 2006).

Generally, high achievement is one of the typical terminologies associated with Asian Americans in higher education research, as this minority group is viewed as exemplars of individual effort and hard work as immigrants (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007; Sue, & Okazaki, 2009). However, there has been a growing trend in research to deconstruct these representations and explore the complicated, intersectional realities of Asian American college students and faculty.

Many educational researchers critically examined the representation of Asian Americans in U.S. higher education (e.g., Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010; Nakanishi & Yamano, 2014). Some of these studies mentioned the controversy over the college admissions policies in 1980s when elite universities, such as Yale, Princeton, Stanford, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of California at Berkeley, had a quota on Asian Americans (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Some educational activists fought to ensure fair admission policies for Asian Americans in response to the quota system. Consequently, Nakanishi (1989) and Wang (1988) reported the statistical disparity in the admission decisions of these elite institutions; as a result, admission policies for Asian

American applicants offered by some universities reflected positive changes, seeing growing rates of Asian American enrollment at those institutions.

Despite the college admission controversy, the image of Asian Americans as a model minority that separated them from other racial minority groups and as a foreign threat taking over college campuses was still prevalent in the discourse of Asian American overrepresentation. This implied that the number of Asian Americans in higher education should be limited because they did not contribute to a diverse campus due to their alleged homogeneity (Lee, 2006). Gradually, Asian Americans were no longer seen as "minority" among underserved groups in U.S. higher education (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007).

Nguyen, Lee, and Pak (2007) described how Asian American college students struggled to prove that they were still a minority but invisible, and their academic and student services needs were completely ignored. Inkelas (2003) also reported that the Asian American population was treated as "diversity's missing minority", leading to their feeling of being marginalized. In this light, universities' admissions policies did not offer underrepresented minority assistance or majority heritage benefits to Asian Americans.

Several studies of Asian Americans, including Southeast Asian American students, pinpointed persistent barriers which challenged the widespread image of Asian American model minority students enrolled at elite universities (Ng, et al., 2007). One of the reasons explaining why Southeast Asian American students showed lower academic performance in some studies is related to their financial hardships, which interfered with their ability to focus on academic goals (Baum & Flores, 2011; Empleo, 2009; Wang, 2007).These studies revealed that Southeast Asian American students were more likely to

work part-time, had lower retention rates than White students, and experienced frustrations with the language barrier, family obligations, and anti-Asian racism (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Apart from lower academic performance, Lew, Chang, and Wang (2005) also mentioned that Asian American students in community colleges expressed their dissatisfaction with faculty, discrimination, and a lack of Asian American faculty representation.

Research on Asian Americans in student affairs has been growing recently but existing literature has not yet deeply explored the reasons why Asian Americans students could not achieve "full equality and participation" in U.S. higher education (Suzuki, 2002, p.24). Some scholars examined university policies and student services to see how they affected Asian American students (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). The MMM has been frequently discussed in the light of its impact on effective services for Asian American students. Liang and Sedlacek's (2003) study found that student affairs practitioners held positive, yet stereotypical attitudes toward Asian American students, seeing them as nonthreatening, technically competent, and hard working. Rather than being more culturally sensitive, the practitioners overlooked differences of Asian American students in regard to family obligations or academic pressures.

In order to better understand Asian American students and their challenges during their college years, several researchers explored Asian American student identity development theories and related the theories to students' psychological struggles. Kawaguchi (2003), Alvarez (2002), and McEwen et al., (2002) proposed identity development models for Asian American students, while cautioning that Asian Americans were diverse, and that this population may be at different stages of developing

their racial identity. As a whole, a better understanding of Asian students' identity development may help student affairs practitioners with identifying and providing the most appropriate services to this student group.

In reality, Asian Americans are diverse (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Several studies examining Asian American college students' choices revealed various racial/ethnic disparities among subgroups. Song and Glick (2004) found that Southeast Asians, including Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians, belonging to families earning less than $24,999 a year, could not go to selective colleges in the U.S. While larger proportions of Koreans attended selective colleges, Filipinos and Southeast Asians were more likely to choose a college because it was close to home, and they expressed more financial concerns than did the other groups (Lee, 2006). Along with Japanese students, Filipinos and Southeast Asians also were twice as likely to apply to only one campus, whereas Chinese and Koreans in the sample were likely to apply to five or more colleges. Intersectional approaches can go beyond a superficial examination of racial or ethnic differences. For example, socioeconomic status affects groups differently. Accordingly, Teranishi et al. (2004) found that Chinese students had the highest rates of attending private colleges, but only those at the highest socioeconomic levels.

### 2.4 Theories of Student Involvement, Student Engagement, and Integration

The key theories that explain college students' academic success are concerned with student involvement, student engagement, and integration. Scholars in higher education generally agree that college students' academic engagement and social integration on campus shape their overall college experience and result in positive (or negative) outcomes in their personal and professional development.

### 2.4.1 Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

Astin's (1999) theory describes the importance of student involvement on campus as a significant factor contributing to students' academic outcomes, personal growth, and institutional success. Astin (1999) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p.518). Hence, highly involved students are not only committed to academic work but also spend time to actively interact with faculty members and peers on campus.

Inspired by Astin's theory of student involvement, many researchers recently examined the benefits of student involvement in extra-curricular activities on campus, and how involvement could lead to student learning and personal development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that persistence at college and educational attainment were maximized when "…students develop close on-campus friendships, participate frequently in college-sponsored activities, and perceive their college to be concerned about them individually…" (p. 599). Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) findings indicated that students who were more involved in the classroom (e.g., active interactions with faculty) maximized their psychosocial adjustment and maturity.

### 2.4.2 Student Engagement

#### 2.4.2.1 Concept of Student Engagement

Initially influenced by the theory of involvement (Astin, 1999), and indicators of "good practice" in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), the concept of student engagement involves two key components. The first component focuses on the amount of time and effort that students devote to their studies and other activities on

campus, resulting in positive personal and educational outcomes. The second component explains how institutions of higher education create and allocate human and other resources to facilitate student learning and support services, encouraging students to participate in these services for their own benefit (Kuh, 2001).

The concept of student engagement has been defined slightly differently by other scholars. Kuh (2009) originally defined student engagement using the three factors of students' time, effort, and desired outcome of college, whereas Coates (2007) describes engagement as "a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience" (p.7). Based on Kuh and Coates' extensive work on student engagement and other scholars' later contributions, Trowler (2010) synthesizes that "Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution" (p.5). Given that, Trowler's (2010) definition seems to overlap with Astin's (1999) idea about student involvement, indicating that the more students are involved in academic and social aspects of their college experiences, the more they will learn and develop.

Coates (2007) further developed five critical dimensions in student engagement: (a) active and collaborative learning (b) participation in challenging academic activities, (c) formative communication with academic staff, (d) involvement in enriching educational experiences, and (e) feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities. Coates (2007) also added that students might undertake various types of

individual engagement, including intense, independent, collaborative, and passive. Students enact these types of engagement when "they tend to see teaching staff as approachable and to see their learning environment as responsive, supportive, and challenging" (Coates, 2007, p. 132-133). The independent style of student engagement "is characterized by a more academically and less socially orientated approach to study" while collaborative engagement "tends to favor the social aspects of university life and work, as opposed to the more purely cognitive or individualistic forms of interaction"(Coates, 2007, p. 133). Students' passive engagement is found when their participation is limited in activities that support productive learning (Coates, 2007, p. 134).

High levels of student engagement refer to a wide range of educational practices and conditions, including purposeful student-faculty contact and active and collaborative learning. It should be noted that inclusive and affirming institutional environments are also known as a critical element in explaining student engagement. In general, students at private colleges were found to be more engaged compared to their counterparts at public institutions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hu & Kuh, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

#### 2.4.2.2 Student Engagement Dimensions

Synthesizing the previous research on student engagement, Trowler (2010) distinguishes three distinct dimensions of engagement that students demonstrate on campus, including individual student learning, structure and process, and identity. Individual student learning is comprised of six elements: (a) student attention to learning, (b) student interest in learning, (c) student involvement in learning, (d) student active

participation in learning, (e) student-centeredness, and (f) delivery and assessment of learning.

The structure and process dimension of student engagement refers to multiple roles that students take in campus governance, the student feedback process, and other related matters. Their multiple roles included: (a) student membership in committees or panels to prevent the need for formal consultation with students, (b) an observer role on a committee, (c) a delegate role as a representative on a committee, (d) a trustee role as a full member of a committee, and (e) integrated and articulated students representation at course, department, and faculty levels. The identity dimension in student engagement addresses the issues of an individual student's sense of belonging and other concerns about how to engage specific groups of students to express and represent their identity.

#### 2.4.2.3 Purpose of Student Engagement

Trowler (2010) mentioned that one of the goals of student engagement is a diverse perspective, which serves three purposes: it improves learning, there is institutional benefit, and it contributes to equality on campus. In addition to the purpose of improving learning, Coates (2005) also highlighted institutional benefits as an important purpose of student engagement since

> "Student engagement data provides a means for determining the productivity of university education … (T)imely data on student engagement could be used diagnostically to fine tune for the management of student learning and also to provide information for making summative judgments about such productivity" (p.32)

Krause (2005) raised a critical point that challenged the current discourse about student engagement. The author stressed that some subgroups of students, such as those

from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and foreign students, perceived the purpose and practices of campus engagement negatively:

> the need to challenge old paradigms which depict engagement solely in positive terms … International students … they spend more time on campus and in class than their domestic peers. They engage in online study far more than domestic students … Nevertheless, they are having difficulty engaging with study and learning and are feeling overwhelmed by all they have to do …To understand engagement is to understand that for some it is a battle when they encounter teaching practices which are foreign to them, procedures which are difficult to understand, and a "language" which is alien. Some students actively engage with the battle and lose – what do we do for them? (Krause, 2005, p10)

Apart from previous studies that exclusively examined the relationship between student engagement and traditional college-aged, domestic students' intellectual and social development (Chikering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2006) explored how deeply international students engaged in learning and educational practices, and how their practices differed from those of students of the dominant race. These researchers observed activities designed for both international students and their domestic counterparts and reported differing levels of engagement between the two groups.

Handelsman et al., (2005) and Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) stated that engaged students were good learners and that effective teaching stimulates and sustains student engagement. Skinner and Belmont (1993) also found a reciprocal relationship between student engagement and teacher involvement and reported that students' attention, interest, optimism, and passion for their learning were motivated and supported by teachers. The important role of the student-teacher relationship, especially interpersonal involvement, in optimizing student motivation is a repeated theme in educational research. Both Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) and Meyer (2014) found that

students exhibited higher levels of engagement and learning if faculty members used active and collaborative learning techniques, encouraged students to share experiences, emphasized higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interacted with students, challenged students academically, and valued enriching educational experiences.

### 2.4.3 Tinto's Theory of Integration

Tinto's (1993) theory of integration is essential for researchers and educational administrators to acknowledge in order to have a better understanding of how students develop while attending college. Tinto's (1993) theory of integration explains that when students become involved in academic and social activities on campus, they are more likely to stay in that institution longer. Additionally, students become integrated into a college by enhancing social networks and participating in campus activities, and these students are more likely to remain on campus compared to those who are campus commuters. In other words, Tinto (1993) defined integration as students' social and academic link to campus. Social integration is also about student interactions with peers, faculty members, and administrators, as well as participation in extracurricular activities. What Tinto (1993) proposed is well aligned with Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement since Astin also indicated that the more involved students are on campus, both inside and outside of the classroom, the more likely they are to succeed in college.

In education research, three concepts of involvement, engagement, and integration are employed interchangeably (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie's (2009) study distinguished the three concepts, and examined how each of them overlapped, providing a unique contribution to understanding college student success. According to these researchers, Tinto's (1993) integration theory was

"more sociological than involvement and engagement" when Tinto highlighted higher student retention and shifted the responsibility from individual students to issues caused by the institution (Wolf-Wendel, & Ward, 2009, p.418). What Tinto called integration could be interpreted as a "sense of belonging" since integration is comprised of "a reciprocal relationship between the student and the campus" (Wolf-Wendel, & Ward, 2009, p.425). Similarly, Stage and Hossler (2000) described integration as an originator that ignited student involvement and engagement. According to Stage and Hossler (2000) and Wolf-Wendel, and Ward (2009), students enjoyed comfort on campus, leading to more involvement and engagement. In contrast, Kuh (2001) suggested that, "you become integrated through involvement and engagement, by devoting effort to things that promote positive outcomes" (p.12). He further explained, "You don't get integrated academically or socially unless you do something. Integration is an outcome." (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p.419). Kuh's (2001) conception of the term integration seemed to align more closely to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of student identity development in that integration was understood as a critical act of connecting students' active involvement in educationally purposeful and extra-curricular activities in order to enhance student learning and intellectual development within institutional environments. However, Tinto's (1993) perception of integration appeared more divergent when Tinto "described involvement and engagement as behaviors and integration as a state or a perception of fit[ness]"or "sense of belonging" (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p.419, p. 425).

A sense of belonging is another factor mediating the relationship between social class and engagement. This link was confirmed empirically with Martin's (2012),

Ostrover's (2003), Stuber's (2009), and Walpole's (2003) studies. Empirical research on minority college students clearly found a relationship between social class and student engagement/involvement. Martin (2012) conducted a study at highly selective private universities, reporting the differences in levels of involvement among students from different social classes. The students from the upper class had extensive involvement on campus, while those from middle- and lower-classes had less involvement. The lower socioeconomic students could not participate in social activities because they were working part-time jobs. Martin's findings were well aligned with Walpole's (2003) research result that students from low-income families were less involved, were more likely to work part-time during college, and were less likely to attend graduate school.

Stuber's (2009) findings also confirmed that upper class students had more opportunities at their disposal before and during college to promote their involvement in multiple activities, such as study abroad, Greek life, and internships. The core differences between the upper-class and working-class students was that the former entered college holding the assumption that involvement was essential and helpful, while the latter did not recognize extra-curricular activities as beneficial. Instead, they concentrated on a higher GPA and working hard as the pathway to a promising future.

Together with Stuber (2009), Ostrove (2003) examined the relationship between social class background and sense of belonging experienced by women at Smith and Radcliffe colleges, elite institutions in the United States. Ostrove (2003) found that women with lower socio-economic status experienced feelings of isolation and appeared less academically prepared compared with their higher SES counterparts. These participants admitted that their lower- and working-social class status influenced their

college experiences. In a later study, Ostrove and Long (2007) also confirmed the impacts of SES on students' sense of belonging. More importantly, their study revealed that students' sense of belonging was directly related to their "adjustment to college, quality of experience at college, and academic performance" (Ostrove & Long, 2007, p.381). Additionally, there are some other studies examining Asian American students' sense of belonging (Hsia, 1988; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Samura, 2016). These studies shared similar findings that Asian American students were positioned as different from others and as overrepresented on college campuses; however, this group remained underserved by campus support programs and resources and overlooked by researchers (Hsia, 1988; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Samura, 2016).

Higher education scholars have long been concerned about minority students' engagement on college campuses. Current scholarship highlights the pivotal role of the college environment in facilitating diverse student engagement while individual students also must take their own responsibility to utilize opportunities provided. However, the MMM prevented Asian American students from fully engaging on campus since Asian Americans were believed to be the minority group that did not need further support to find success (Lee, 1996; Museus, 2008a; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, Tawa, & Day, 2009; Takagi, 1998; Wang, 2007; Wing, 2007; Zhao & Qiu, 2009). Consequently, Asian students stayed silent when dealing with their unique struggles and stress, which led to less involvement on campus (Hsia, 1988; Takagi, 1998; Wang, 2007).

## 2.5 Asian American Student Development in U.S. Higher Education

### 2.5.1 Asian American College Student Development

In terms of psychosocial development, Chickering (1969) views identity formation as a prevalent developmental issue which students deal with during their college years. Chickering's (1969) theory of student identity development consists of seven vectors: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) establishing identity, (e) developing purpose, and (f) developing integrity. Although all these vectors are related to each other without any sequential order, they still have a tendency to interact with each other in the student development process. Developing multiple vectors allows individuals to function with greater stability and intellectual complexity; however, individual students may develop these seven vectors at different rates. Discussing the development of students' identity is essential for scholars to better understand how minority students develop their identity on a diverse campus.

Asian American students have been profiled as smart, quiet, and industrious - or immigrants with language barriers and science majors (McEwen et al., 2002). Few scholars, practitioners, and educational administrators recognize Asian Americans as a distinct student population in U.S. higher education. Despite the increasing Asian American population in higher education, the lack of discussion and research on this student population makes it more challenging to provide culturally effective services to these students. Therefore, the literature on Asian Americans could not provide a relevant theory or sufficient empirical research for student affairs professionals to develop or initiate effective services for these underserved students. McEwen et al. (2002) argued

that it was an important and timely requirement for scholars and practitioners to address critical yet basic questions related to Asian American college students. They recommended that scholarship and practices should focus on examining of how race and culture influence Asian American student development, what role demographic heterogeneity played in the initiative of services to Asian American students, and what resources were available for student affairs professionals seeking to design programs, workshops, and trainings for both students and professional development programs (McEwen et al., 2002).

The student population in higher education is not only the largest ever but also appears to be "the most racially and ethnically diverse in the United States" (DeBard, 2004, p. 33). According to the data from the National Center for Education Statistics (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010), between 1976 and 2008, all racial and ethnic groups increased significantly in U.S. higher education, and Asian Americans were one of three minorities with the sharpest growth (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010). The national statistics also confirm that students from different racial and ethnic groups enrolled in different sectors within higher education, including 2-year, 4-year, private, for-profit, and elite institutions (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010).

The higher enrollment rate of Asian Americans in U.S. higher education reflects their demographic trends and academic achievement, but this population lacks adequate attention from the stakeholders of higher education and the general public (Hune, 2002). In particular, "Asian American educational attainment is generally high, but national data are misleading" (Hune, 2002, p.16). In western regions, the Asian American population appeared high, but educational attainment rates looked lower than those of Whites (Hune,

2002). Additionally, although high academic achievement was unequal across Asian American subgroups and within each group, Asian American students expected to enroll and complete college more than other racial and ethnic groups. As a result, they spent more study hours in advanced courses at the pre-college level in order to survive unfairly competitive college admission process (Hune, 2002).

### 2.5.2 Identity Development of Asian American Students

Better understanding of individual student's development during college years would help practitioners provide adequate services for all students. Also, the fact that Asian American students are rapidly growing in numbers at U.S. higher education institutions demands a scholarly inquiry into theories of Asian American student development. McEwen et al., (2002) argued that Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory could not sufficiently describe the psychosocial development of Asian American students due to racial and cultural influences. Therefore, they proposed another model of psychosocial development that was expected to reflect the experiences and development of Asian American students more effectively (McEwen et al., 2002).

Maekawa-Kodama et al.'s (2002) model was comprised of seven factors: (a) identity, (b) purpose, (c) competency, (d) emotions, (e) inter-dependence versus independence, (f) relations, and (g) integrity. The seven factors of this model overlapped in some ways with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors, yet each is distinguished from the other by ethnic and cultural influence.

#### 2.5.2.1 Identity

Identity was the core concept of the Maekawa-Kodama et al.'s (2002) model to understand the process of Asian American student development in U.S. higher education.

It described the increasing complexity of Asian American students' development due to the impact of their various cultures. Erikson (1968) defined identity development as a comparison "between one's own sense of self and external feedback" (in Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002, p. 49). Asian Americans reported that they encountered a sense of otherness and stereotypes, such as, martial arts experts, smart students, or exotic women (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002; Mok, 1998). These stereotypes needed to be eliminated when they did not fit with Asian Americans' self-identity; worse, these conflicting images caused numerous problems for Asian Americans when they were concerned about how others perceived them, but also about how they recognized themselves and built up their own ethnic identity (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002).

#### 2.5.2.2 Purpose

Academic achievement was one of the great purposes of Asian Americans in the U.S. Asian Americans believed that higher academic achievements helped them raise their economic status, resulting in economic success and higher social status in America (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002). Therefore, Asian Americans tended to decide their college major and career early on as they hoped to have well-paid jobs, earning better social respect and financial security for their family (Leung, Ivey, & Suzuki, 1994). The health care fields, sciences, business, and engineering are typical majors that Asian American students were more likely to choose because of their family's expectations rather than their own interests (Lee, 1996; Hune & Chan, 1997).

#### 2.5.2.3 Competency

One vector regarding competency of Chickering's (1969) theory could be used to describe how Asian American students construct their identity on college campuses.

However, different from what Chickering mentioned in his theory regarding an overall identity development, Asian American students primarily developed intellectual competency rather than physical and mental, and interpersonal competency (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002). This point further explained how differently Asian American students focused more on their higher education development. The MMM perceived by Asian Americans may also push them to do well intellectually, leading to more "achievement stress" and pressure on Asian Americans' shoulders (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002, p.51; Yamagata-Noji, 1987).

#### 2.5.2.4 Emotions

Asian cultures and emotional disciplines also impact the ways Asian American students expressed their emotions. Asian Americans deal with guilt (Lee, 1996; Liem, 1997; Uba, 1994). Asian cultural values predispose Asians to place more emphasis or importance on others' emotions than on their own; consequently, feelings of Asian American students may be easily overlooked both by Asian students themselves and by others (Wong & Mock, 1997). Hence, a better understanding of how to express emotions would help Asian American students develop better communication skills. This understanding could improve the ways that Asian American students communicate with stakeholders on campus and how others perceive and value Asian Americans.

#### 2.5.2.5 Interdependence versus Independence

*Individualism* is a core in Western cultures whereas *Collectivism* has been grounded in Asian cultures. In other words, while *Independence* belongs to Western cultures, *Interdependence* characterizes Asian cultures (Triandis, 1995). Immersed in the Confucian philosophy, Asians tend to place family preference over individual identity,

interests, and needs (Lee, 1997). Western notions of independence do not exactly describe relationship among Asian American persons, especially in families (Huang, 1997; Wong & Mock, 1997). For many Asian Americans, independence could take place after they get married rather than during the college years (Wong & Mock, 1997).

#### 2.5.2.6 Relations

Promoting harmonious interpersonal relationships has been important in Asian families and communities. To keep a relationship smooth, Asians valued behaviors that promoted cooperation, non-conflicts between members, and well-respect for the elders (Uba, 1994). In this light, one of the challenges faced by Asian American students is to interact appropriately with faculty and staff, following the given Western cultural beliefs and expectations. Given the hierarchical nature of relationships and respect for elders in many Asian cultures, Asian American students find it hard to approach faculty members to ask questions in person, as they are more concerned about the authority of the faculty. This cultural difference is useful for student affairs staff and faculty to acknowledge so that they better interpret Asian American students' interactions and provide more effective support. It can also help to encourage Asian American students to confidently develop relationships with faculty and staff of diverse cultures (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2002).

#### 2.5.2.7 Integrity

"For Asian Americans, integrity is determined within the context of one's family and community by how individuals represent their families, respect their ancestors, and uphold the family name" (McEwen et al., 2002, p.54). Thus, Asian Americans may try to deal integrity of self versus integrity of family. According to Chickering (1969) and

Chickering and Reisser (1993), adapting and better balancing similarities among culturally diverse behavior and values in operating ethical principles are important to developing integrity. Due to differences between traditional Asian values and those of the dominant society, Asian American students find it difficult to maintain balance and better adapt the Western culture in their behaviors on U.S. campuses.

### 2.5.3 Kim's Asian American Identity Development Model

Originally examining the experiences of Japanese American women, Kim (1981, 2001, 2012) proposed the Asian American racial identity development model (AARID). This model "describes a developmental process that progresses through five stage of perception and relation to one's racial group and the dominant group" (Kim, 2012, p.148-149).

#### 2.5.3.1 Stage 1: Ethnic Awareness

Students in this stage primarily view their identity through their family and community yet not much from schools. For students in predominantly Asian American communities, they start to be aware of their culture and ethnicity, and develop a positive self-concept. However, those who live in predominantly White communities become confused about being Asian American but hold "neutral" view of their identity.

#### 2.5.3.2 Stage 2: White Identification

Students in this stage become more sensitive about the dominant culture's comments on how Asian Americans look different. With a desire to be accepted by the White world, students tend to deny their Asian identity and start to internalize White standards, "especially regarding standards of physical beauty and attractiveness" (Kim, 2001, p.74).

#### 2.5.3.3 Stage 3: Awakening to Social Political Consciousness

In this stage, students become more critical while recognizing how they are treated differently. They realize their negative experiences come from racist social structures. In this stage, "White people become the anti-referent group, people they don't want to be like" (Kim, 2012, p. 147). Asian Americans feel more connected to having a minority group status (Patton et al., 2016).

#### 2.5.3.4 Stage 4: Redirection to Asian American Consciousness

Asian Americans develop beyond the oppressed group label, feel proud of their ethnicity, and critically identify with being an Asian American. In this stage, Asian Americans produce feelings of anger due to historical marginalization in the U.S., and they try to reconcile emotions about their mixed identity as both Asian and American. They also embrace a sense of pride about their ethnic identity in defining what it means to be Asian American in the U.S. population (Patton et al., 2016).

#### 2.5.3.5 Stage 5: Incorporation

Incorporation refers to a strong sense of "confidence in one's Asian American identity" (Kim, 2012, p.148). Keeping a positive self-concept, Asian Americans tend to reach outside of strictly Asian American communities and can successfully connect with other populations. In this stage, they respect and welcome all ethnic differences and can focus on other aspects of their identity for possibly their newly redefined racial identity (Patton et al., 2016).

### 2.5.4 Challenges to Asian American College Students

While Asian American students are well-represented in U.S. higher education (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Remani, 2010; Wang, 2007), significant intra-group variations exist

across several subgroups as well as the complex dynamics of multiple factors shaping their lives and educational experiences. Their inconsistent levels of academic and professional success reflect the significant challenges they face at U.S. higher education institutions and in society at large. The long list of obstacles faced by Asian American students includes, but is not limited to, the difficult process of biracial/multiracial identity development, the negative effects of the MMM, a lack of congruence between cultural and school values, pressure from family expectations and obligation, lower socioeconomic status, and disengaged pedagogical practices (Choi, Rogers, & Werth, 2009; Hsia 1988; Martin, 2012; Phinney, 1990); Takagi 1998, Wang, 2007).

#### 2.5.4.1 Identity

Ethnic identity plays an important role in determining levels of self-esteem and a sense of belonging for ethnic minorities, particularly when minorities are confronted with prejudice and discrimination (Phinney, 1990). Simply put, different levels of ethnic identity have been proven to influence the developmental process of minorities differently (Phinney, 1990). Being viewed as an outsider and a forever-foreigner on college campuses, Asian Americans encounter challenges in defining who they are and how to interact with others, which results in negative impacts on their psychological well-being (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; Johnston-Guerrero & Pizzolato, 2016; Literte, 2010). Some scholars detected the impact of racial identity, ethnic identity, original ethnic values, and race-related stress on Asian American college students (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). Along these lines, Johnston-Guerrero and Pizzolato, (2016) and Literte (2010) also investigated the issue of Asian American students' ethnic identification to address unique and complex challenges faced by this group of students. All these scholars' findings are

congruent with each other that Asian American students experience significant confusion when answering the question of who they are.

In terms of ethnic awareness, Literte (2010) found that Asian Americans faced challenges in identifying their race and ethnicity. Growing up in two different cultures, these students experienced the absence of recognition of their ethnic/racial identity on campus, and perceived their double cultural exposure as both positive and negative. Johnston-Guerrero and Pizzolato (2016) asserted in their study that "Asian Americans were not completely captured with just *race* and *ethnicity*, and so other terms, like *culture,* seemed to become important in full unpacking and capturing their sense of identity" (p.917). In other words, Asian American students critically thought of etymology of *ethnicity* and *race,* which were insufficient for fully describing the depth and complexity of their multidimensional Asian American identity, they did not see themselves as Asians and Americans. Ling (2008) also mentioned the idea of Asian Americans' ethnic identity in relation to their refusal of old labeling and embracing new critical consciousness. Ling observed that the current ethnic identity of underrepresented subgroups of Asian Americans challenges the conventional perception of Asian success, as some people might feel excluded out of the seemingly glowing framework of their ethnic identity.

The issue of having a sense of belonging has been an important topic for scholarly inquiry into Asian American students. Lee and Davis III (2000) conducted research on the salience of the sense of belonging for Asian American students. Their findings showed Asian Americans who had a strong cultural orientation at a predominantly White university were willing to establish themselves on campus but felt marginalized from

both their own ethnic culture and the mainstream culture due to identity confusion. They presented lower competency to socially adjust at the college.

#### 2.5.4.2 Effects of the MMM

The existence of the MMM has produced more challenges than benefits to the Asian population in U.S. higher education. While this myth is widespread and has supported Asians' success in college admissions, this stereotype caused psychological distress to this population as well (Yoo, Burrola, & Steger, 2010). Many researchers found evidence that Asian students believing this myth often suffered psychological trouble for being at odds with their own, their families', and society's expectations. Additionally, being teased by non-Asian peers made them lose their ethnic pride and confidence, resulting in isolation from others. Despite their isolation and academic pressure, Asian students rarely sought help for their psychological and mental health needs. As a result, Asian students were 1.6 times more likely than their White peers to commit suicide (Choi, Rogers, & Worth, 2009).

Under the same light, some Asian Americans strived to work harder in order to be successful at school compared with peers of other races, but they still gained lower academic achievement compared to Whites (Ying et al., 2001). Ying et al.'s (2001) study showed a correlation between a sense of cohesion, physical and psychological well-being, and adjustment in general population (Ying et al., 2001). A sense of cohesion refers to a subjective sense of efficacy and competence (Antonovsky, 1987). However, success in the classroom could not guarantee people's effective functioning in life. In other words, with a high GPA and academic success, Asian American students still had the least racial diversity in their friendships and social networks compared to students

from other racial backgrounds; therefore, they could not further develop their competence (Ying et al., 2001).

Investigating the impact of the MMM stereotype, Choi, Lim, and An (2011) explored the learning experiences of marginalized Korean immigrant students and found that one of the challenges these students faced was teachers' lack of care and disengaging pedagogies. New Korean immigrant students encountered the issues due to the false belief extolled by the MMM that all Asian Americans are academically-oriented, so they do not need additional support. The MMM functions to exclude Asian students from educational discourses and instructional considerations and alienates them from the rest of their peers. All of these consequences deprive Asian American students of the opportunity to expand and enrich their school experiences and apply what they have learned at school to enhance the quality of their social lives (Lee, 2009; Pang, 2006).

#### 2.5.4.3 Lack of Congruence between Cultural and School Values

Lack of congruence between cultural and school values can cause negative effects on students' adaptation to school. For example, findings from Phelan, Davidson, and Yu's study (1996) indicated that students faced difficulty interacting with other cultures which affected their development. Although this study was conducted in a K-12 setting, the same phenomenon could easily occur in higher education if administrators and faculty members are not sensitive enough to cultural values and developmental milestones of their students from minority cultures. Faculty and staff in higher education ought to critically reexamine the validity of the MMM misconception that Asian students do not need further assistance to be successful on college campuses (Hsia, 1988; Wang, 2007).

#### 2.5.4.4 Family Expectations and Intergenerational Concerns

While some differences did exist, Asian cultures also shared a common thread among most subgroups regarding family expectations and intergenerational concerns. A large number of Asian students were stressed and felt intense pressure to meet their family expectations and obligations that demanded they performed well in school (Wing, 2007). However, some Asian American students strived to balance their new found independence with their ongoing family obligations when dealing with conflicts with family members, and financial independence, as well as campus/career choice, and academic achievement/persistence. Asian American students reported that they used both social support and problem-solving strategies to address intergenerational issues. Social supports appeared to be more beneficial and more effective to resolve intergenerational conflicts occurring in the family and ethnic community (Lee, Su, & Yoshida, 2005; Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014).

#### 2.5.4.5 Lower Socioeconomic Status

Despite the splendid picture of successful Asians portrayed in the U.S. mass media, Asian American shave been one of most economically vulnerable minority groups in the United States (Hune & Chan, 1997; Yeh, 2002). Although there are very large and significant socioeconomic differences among Asian American ethnic groups, the entire population of Asian Americans is still categorized as low socioeconomic status in the United States (Aud & Kewal-Ramani, 2010). More importantly, it should be noted that social class is a critical factor that shapes college students' campus involvement as well as their satisfaction (Martin, 2012), resulting in negative effects on developmental outcomes at the end (Kuh et al., 2005). Martin (2012) studied how socioeconomic class

background was related to students' participation in college extracurricular activities and their satisfaction about campus social life. Martin concluded that middle class students spent more time engaging in social and recreational activities, while low socioeconomic class students had to work part-time jobs for college expenses, which limited their involvement in various activities on campus.

Aligned with Astin's (1999) theory of involvement and findings from Martin (2012), it is reasonable to state that Asian American students from lower socioeconomic class face challenges to getting involved and engaged on college campuses. The low level of campus engagement of Asian American students of lower SES backgrounds posed a threat to their developmental outcomes, including their academic performance, cognitive, and social development as college students and young adults (Kuh et al., 2005).

2.5.4.6 Ethnic Attachment, Engagement/Involvement, and Academic Success

It is essential to better understand the factors contributing to college success. Past studies point out the impact of campus engagement, ethnic Identity development, and immigrant-related characteristics on academic achievement. Campus engagement is an important indicator for predicting student success. Apart from campus engagement, retaining one's racial/ethnic identity and cultural values from their country of origin country helps immigrant students better integrate into the dominant society (Arana & Blanchard, 2017). Arana and Blanchard (2017) found that students who were more ethnically loyal were better academic achievers since they were more likely to be involved in using campus resources than other students. Other researchers also concluded that students, who were more attached to their country of origin and strictly held their ethnic traditions, had higher levels of educational attainment than their counterparts

(Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2005). Immigration status and ethnic attachment impacted academic achievement (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). In the same manner, Zhou and Bankston (1998) found that Vietnamese American students who did not engage with Vietnamese culture were lower academic achievers, compared to ones with high ethnic attachment. Lee (2005) reinforced this finding when reporting that 1.5$^{th}$ generation Hmong American students had better campus experiences than their second-generation peers. Inspired by these studies, Bingham and Okagaki (2012) conducted a study in which ethnic minority students with stronger ethnic identity appeared to be more engaged on campus than ones with a weaker ethnic identity.

#### 2.5.4.7 Curricular and Instructional Issues

When studying higher education issues of Asian American students, Justiz (1994) mentioned that curriculum designers in U.S. colleges and universities ought to promote changes to effectively respond to the increasing diversity of U.S. higher education. Justiz also raised the issue of whether traditional instructional practices were still effective in enhancing the full learning potential of Asian American students. Accordingly, Wang (2007) indicated that most colleges and universities in the U.S. did not offer programs on Asian American studies, preventing Asian students from achieving a better understanding and appreciation of their heritage cultures. Consequently, Asian American students had a lower level of confidence about their identity compared with their peers of other ethnicities or races (Choi, Rogers, & Werth, 2009; Hirashima, 2007).

Justiz (1994) also discussed the fact that Western instructional styles in college classes may not be relevant for many Asian students, who were more likely to be quiet learners and rarely shared their experiences with others in public. Rather than using these

types of behaviors of their Asian students a criteria for evaluation, instructors may consider utilizing alternative instructional approaches to respond to their diverse classrooms (e.g., adopting a small group discussion or pair work) and be more aware of those coming from different cultural backgrounds.

Asian American students have faced various challenges in enacting proper social and academic engagement at U.S. colleges and universities due to their complex ethnic identification, the negative impact of the MMM, cultural conflicts, inappropriate curriculum/instructional approaches, and their lower socioeconomic status. Furthermore, their prior negative K-12 school experiences may pose an additional burden as they try to accomplish their full development as college students (Ngo, 2006; Choi, Lim, & An, 2011; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Lee, 1997; Choi & Lim, 2014).

## 2.6 Challenges to Vietnamese American College Students

As minority Asians, Vietnamese American college students have shared similar challenges experienced by other Asian peers on PWI campuses (Choi, Lim, & An, 2011; Hirashima, 2007; Ng & Lee, 2007; Li, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Wing, 2007). These challenges derive from: (a) individual factors, (b) peer factors, (c) family factors, (d) institutional factors, and (e) community and society factors.

### 2.6.1 Individual Factors

Based on the literature on Vietnamese American students, several individual factors, including English language proficiency, new education, and immigration-related issues, have been identified as three prevailing issues, causing more challenges for Vietnamese Americans in U.S. higher education.

#### 2.6.1.1 English Proficiency

Many researchers have pointed out that English proficiency plays an important role for educational success (Cheng, 1995; Waggoner, 1991). Not surprisingly, Vietnamese American students, who have used English as a foreign language, have faced academic challenges in U.S. schools and colleges and universities (Doan, 2011). With limited English proficiency, Vietnamese American students were hesitant to request support services, interact with faculty, and socialize with campus peers (Doan, 2011; Yeh, 2002). Consequently, they became more isolated and less likely to be involved in campus activities.

#### 2.6.1.2 Education

Vietnamese American students who immigrated to the U.S. and received previous education in Vietnam at an early age had more challenges at U.S. schools since they were used to the rules and expectations of their prior educational systems (Doan, 2011; Ha, 2008). Sadly, some Vietnamese American students were upset when American teachers had lower expectations for them since they were placed in ESL classes (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Doan, 2011). Given prior education in their homeland, Vietnamese American students were disadvantaged in the process of making the educational and social transition to U.S. higher education.

#### 2.6.1.3 Immigration-related Issues

Immigration pathways, confusion over ethnic identity and social discrimination have been common immigration-related issues that Vietnamese American students must deal with on U.S. college campuses. In Doan's (2011) study, the student participants recounted negative experiences resulting from their different immigration pathways to the U.S.: Boat People, Humanitarian Operation recipients, and Amerasian Homecoming

participants. These negative experiences and migration stress and traumas influenced their level of transition and adaptation to their new lives in the United States.

Vietnamese American students also felt confused about their ethnic identity when they were surrounded by students from the dominant culture (Doan, 2011; Ha, 2008). On one hand, they found it important to hold on to their language and culture to pass it down to their own children, but on other hand they considered biculturalism, bilingualism, and assimilation to be essential for their survival and social acceptance in the mainstream.

Social discrimination has caused depression and other mental illnesses in Vietnamese American communities (Doan, 2011; Lam, 2007; Ong & Phinney, 2002). Vietnamese American students experienced racism and oppression at schools due to their differences in communication styles, physical appearance, and language, and many of them were suffering verbal, emotional, and physical abuse(Doan, 2011; Ong & Phinney, 2002). Consistent with Ong and Phinney's (2002) finding that Vietnamese students reported higher levels of depression compared with American peers, Lam (2007) confirmed that Vietnamese Americans, who endured a high level of racial discrimination in U.S. institutions, were diagnosed with a reduced sense of coherence and with higher levels of depression and anxiety. Critically, Lam (2007) found that Vietnamese American students who were highly attached to the collective identity of their ethnic group suffered less depression.

Based on past studies, Vietnamese Americans were a mixture of voluntary and involuntary immigrants and their ethnic community reflected the complexity of multiple immigrant groups coming to the U.S. (Doan, 2011; Ha, 2008; Li, 2009). This clearly

distinguished Vietnamese Americans (and other Southeast Asian minorities) from some Asian groups comprised of mostly voluntary immigrants (e.g., Japan, Korea, and China).

### 2.6.2 Peer Factors

Peer factors also contribute stress to Vietnamese American students. Due to some differences in Vietnamese Americans' communication styles, physical appearance, and language, peers of the same and of other ethnicities refused to interact with some Vietnamese American students, and they became further isolated at school. Bankston III, Caldas, and Zhou (1997) conducted a study on the academic achievement of Vietnamese American students and found that Vietnamese American students who had wider and stronger social ties with other Vietnamese peers, outperformed academically. In addition, To (1999) conducted a study exploring the relationship of ethnic identity and self-esteem among Vietnamese American college students. This study showed a significant linear relationship between ethnic identity and self-esteem among Vietnamese college students. More interestingly, Nguyen and Gasman (2015) conducted a study on cultural identity and commitment among Vietnamese American students and their student organizations on campus. They found that participating in student organizations on college campus and directed students towards a more positive educational experiences. More importantly, these student participants found community and solidarity in the VSA on their campus. These students also identified several strategies that encouraged Vietnamese students to commit themselves to the VSA for improving the social and political position for Vietnamese community in the nation. These strategies consisted of: (a) working together to support fellow Vietnamese students and to educate the university community, (b) working with other communities to create a stronger Vietnamese community, and (c) working together to promote a positive and educational environment on campus. Han and

Lee (2011) also studied Vietnamese American development in U.S. higher education and found that the students, who demonstrated higher levels of peer attachment, experienced less depressive symptoms.

### 2.6.3 Family Factors

Sharing some similarities with individual factors, family factors of socioeconomic status, parent education background, and family expectations that were beyond Vietnamese American students' control, caused more challenges to their higher education development.

Li (2009) and Lopez (1991) examined the relationship between type/degree of acculturation, academic achievement, and acculturative stress among Vietnamese college students. In this study, she raised a point that socioeconomic status, family problems, and degree of acculturation had significant impact on the trauma experienced by Vietnamese immigrants. However, Vietnamese American students showed a lack of adequate support obtained from student services in order to fully develop their potential.

Vietnamese American students have distinct campus experiences as a result of their family's immigration history, socio-economic status, and family expectations. The research illustrated that Asian American students in U.S. higher education faced more difficulties than their non-Asian (Doan, 2011).

#### 2.6.3.1 Socioeconomic Status

In some studies on undereducated Asian American youth, researchers identified lower socioeconomic status as element causing students to attain less academic achievement (Waggoner, 1991; Yen, 2002). Accordingly, research on Vietnamese Americans mentioned that they were more likely to live in economically inferior and socially marginal neighborhoods. Therefore, Vietnamese youth were exposed more to the

disadvantaged local community and they could make adjustment and adaption in the nation, leading to poor academic achievement and high rate of school dropout (Doan, 2011; Ha, 2008; Yang, 2004). These researchers found that students from low-income families were at a disadvantage in terms of their studies since they had to work to support their families. They could not keep education as a top priority.

#### 2.6.3.2 Parent Education Background

Parents' educational background was found to be a family risk factor contributing to Vietnamese American students' challenges in the mainstream (Doan, 2011; Yeh, 2002). Many Vietnamese parents came to the U.S. without formal higher education from Vietnam, making them less able to support their children during process of applying to college or making major academic decisions (Doan, 2011; Yen, 2002).

#### 2.6.3.3 Family Expectation

Vietnamese American parents experienced upheaval and trauma in their lives, and therefore they were extremely concerned about their children' academic achievement (Chuong, 1999). In addition, Vietnamese families were likely to view the academic success and future employment of their children as necessary for improving the entire family's living conditions (Phan, 2005). Vietnamese parents considered that a strong family-oriented mindset would help their children gain higher school achievement, leading to honor to the family (Li, 2009; Ng & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). These family expectations led to more stress for Vietnamese American students and hindered their overall development as college students (Phan, 2005). In the same manner, Conchas and Perez (2003) revealed that the Vietnamese American students suffered from the consequences of academic failure in relation to their family's honor. They believed

that their academic failure would disgrace their families, and therefore, they placed more pressure upon themselves to do well at school, leading to mental illness and depression.

#### 2.6.4 Institutional Factors

Inadequate institutional support programs were another factor that prevented Vietnamese American students from more holistic development as college students (Doan, 2011). The student participants in Doan's (2011) study reported that the university did not provide enough opportunities for them to practice ESL learning. They did not have the opportunity to practice English with the varied English users on campus. These students further suggested student affairs professionals create more campus events for them to release stress caused by academic challenges.

#### 2.6.5 Community and Societal Factors

The model minority stereotype and an intra-group socioeconomic gap are two factors which deserve more attention for a better understanding of Vietnamese American student development.

##### 2.6.5.1 Model Minority Stereotype

Like many previous studies, Yang (2011) reconfirmed that Southeast Asian students were largely subscribing to the MMM. However, Conchas and Perez (2003) found that Vietnamese American students who were identified as working industriously and dedicated to school, which the MMM portrayed, faced more academic challenges in higher level critical thinking courses. The researchers concluded that the MMM created an image of students with math competency, but this was a major misrepresentation. Due to this discrepancy caused by the MMM, some student participants ended up struggling with alcohol abuse, drugs, and teenage pregnancy. These students considered it unfair to

label all Asians as academically superior, because this misconception caused academic stakeholder to ignore their need of additional academic assistance.

#### 2.6.5.2 Intra-group Socioeconomic Gap

Literature has documented an intra-group socioeconomic gap among subgroups of Asian Americans which influenced how students in each subgroup developed their personal, social, and academic identities in U.S schools. Immigrant students from wealthy countries in Asia, such as Korea, China, Singapore, and Japan, were financially able to attend top tier universities in the U.S. and achieved impressive learning outcomes. Minority ethnic students from Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, encountered more challenges to their education (Ngo, 2006).

An examination of per-person income from the 2000 U.S. Census revealed a surprising intra-group socioeconomic gap among census respondents from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, compared to the average American respondent. In particular, the average American earned US$21,000 yearly, Vietnamese Americans earned US$15,385, Lao Americans earned US$11,454, and Cambodian Americans US$10,215.

In short, research literature on Vietnamese American students has documented some educational success that they accomplished in U.S. colleges and universities, as well as the existence of tension and obstacles experienced by these students. Identifying underlying reasons for some Vietnamese American students' unhealthy and risky behaviors is extremely urgent and necessary. The existing literature indicates that Vietnamese American students have a significant challenge in developing a healthy and strong ethnic identity due to their complex immigration circumstances, acculturation process, lower socioeconomic status, and other acculturation stress. The arduous process

of their ethnic identity development might have led to risky and regrettable behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse and youth gang membership. It should be noted that Vietnamese college students are not an exception from this difficult process of ethnic identity development even though they have chosen the right path toward productive life. Therefore, research is needed to identify approaches to mitigate some of the barriers in engaging Vietnamese American students on college campuses and to support their positive and holistic development as college students. It is particularly important to collect useful information from these students' own perspectives about what types of supports are most needed and helpful.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter provided a critical review of multiple theories and empirical research studies related to Asian American students in the U.S. Asian Americans are a diverse population and each ethnic subgroup of Asian Americans possesses unique characteristics and experiences due to their different immigration histories and community contexts. Therefore, this literature review chapter started with an overview of Asian Americans' immigration history in the United States and the ways to distinguish among voluntary and involuntary minorities. In the light of the hegemonic ideology used for Asian Americans, the MMM is discussed to clarify the backgrounds of the manufactured myth and its impacts on Asian students' experiences and development in racialized American society.

The second half of this chapter focused on Asian students in higher education and higher education research. Several major theories of student involvement, student engagement, and integration such as proposed by Astin, Kuh, Coates, and Tinto were introduced in order to explain student development in U.S. colleges and universities.

Considering specific characteristics of how Asian American students develop in U.S. higher education, two conceptual models, Kim's Asian American identity development model and McEwen et al.'s (2002) model of psychosocial development, were explained. These two theories reflect the experiences and development of Asian American students more closely and effectively than general theories of student development explained earlier.

The last part of this chapter includes a synthesized review of empirical research that enumerated various challenges that Asian American students face on U.S. college campuses (e.g., ethnic identity confusion, effects of the MMM, lack of congruence between cultural and school values, extreme family expectation and intergenerational concerns, lower socioeconomic class, engagement issues, and curricular and instructional issue). The chapter ended with a conclusion that Vietnamese American students as a subgroup of Asian minorities in the U.S. had very complex immigration history and quite diverse experiences within their own ethnic community. Due to these historical and cultural complexities and differences from other Asian minorities, Vietnamese American students in U.S. higher education face a significant challenge in their adjustment, engagement, and identity development during college years; therefore, more thoughtful exploration about this student population is suggested as a way to properly support this unique group of Asian American students in U.S. higher education.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher describes the research design and methodology of the study. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a branch of phenomenological research which aims to understand people's shared life experiences within a specific socio-cultural context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), was selected to explore the experiences of the student participants. In particular, IPA was appropriate for this study based on the very purpose of the study itself: examining the intricate and complex dynamics between participants' racial identity and their campus engagement practices. Participants' first-hand descriptions and elaborations about their experiences were the primary data for analysis.

First, the researcher explains a rationale for choosing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis for this study. Then, the specific methodological procedures of participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis are described. Finally, several measures are explained in order to assure the quality of the study, including the assessment of potential risks, benefits, and ethical considerations, quality strategies, as well as the researcher's subjectivity statement.

## 3.2 Research Design

### 3.2.1 Qualitative Approach and Rationale

As mentioned earlier, there are several quantitative studies on student engagement in U.S. higher education (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005; Kuh, 2003; Meyer, 2014; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). These studies were largely built on the five benchmarks of the National Survey of Student Assessment (NSSE) (Kuh, 2003) to assess

the effectiveness of undergraduate educational practices of each higher educational institution and the variables of students' ability to engage that could ultimately affect student learning. By collecting information on student engagement, NSSE researchers were able to examine the quality of educational activities, policies, and practices designed by each university to encourage students to take part in these activities for their academic and social development. However, there is a scarcity of studies on the interrelation of the five NSSE benchmarks (Kuh, 2003) to provide sound conclusions about college students' engagement based on quality educational practices and variables of students' engagement abilities. In addition, Campbell and Cabrera (2011), using quantitative research methods, suggested refining the five benchmarks of NSSE (Kuh, 2003) to become more reliable and valid measures. These researchers called in to question the validity of using NSSE benchmarks as a universal tool to evaluate institutional quality and to predict students' learning outcomes in an individual institution of higher education (Campbell & Cabrera, 2011). In addition, the National Survey of Student Engagement, which initially launched in 2000, was updated in 2013 based on several critiques regarding validity and reliability of some question items of the survey. The updated NSSE 2013 refined ten engagement indicators under four engagement themes; including: academic challenges, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment. However, little is known of Southeast Asian Americans, including issues of Vietnamese American students' campus engagement. This study, therefore, aimed to extend the boundary of previous studies primarily based on the quantitatively derived five benchmarks of NSSE (Kuh, 2003). This study further examined Vietnamese American minority students' reflections on their ethnic/racial identity development and their experiences of campus engagement. This

study also encouraged the student participants to critically request efficient and sufficient campus support from all levels of stakeholders to assist them in their academic and social development. According to Creswell (2012), phenomenological qualitative research design is most appropriate for a study like this one because this research seeks student perspectives on their campus environment while they are enrolled on these campuses.

A qualitative approach is an essential way to conduct this study because the understanding of the nature of supportive campus environments is complicated and requires personalized explanations and elaborations (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative approach is typically most useful when the researcher seeks to answer "how" and "what" questions (Creswell, 2012). Furthemore, qualitative research design is most suited when the researcher gathers rich and varied descriptive data. The data provided by the Vietnamese American participants meets this guideline. The data reveals the complex experiences of the students as they interacted with campus support and as they tried to gain better understanding of those experiences.

This study was grounded in an epistemological stance that human nature and culture cannot be fully described through quantifiable means and causal discoveries (Churchill & Wertz, 2001). This is mainly because the core idea of phenomenology explains that humans are immersed in a world of experience in which "the lived" is more important than "the known" (Merleau-Ponty, 2013). In this light, the phenomenological research design was a good choice for this qualitative inquiry, because it achieved understanding of complex processes and phenemona (Conklin, 2007). This study, in particular, included a holistic analysis of engagement experiences of an underserved racial minority group. This study also provides comprehensive views and critical analysis

of each Vietnamese American college student's racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement practices, challenges, and social and academic engagement coping strategies. Based on the guidelines of phenomenological study research (e.g., Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014), this study used an in-depth interview method with the eight Vietnamese American college students who met the selection criteria explained below.

### 3.2.2 Data Collection Procedures

#### 3.2.2.1 Research Site

This research is a phenomenological study conducted in a large public university in a rapidly-growing metropolitan area of the Southeast. The univeristy is an urban co-educational and research institution with a total enrollment of 29,000 students in 2017. The student population is relatively diverse, but it is a predominantly White campus with Caucasian students making up 60 percent of the student population. The remaining 40 percent are racial/ethic minority students, including African American students (17%), Hispanics (7%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (7%) with the remaining students belonging to the international student category or their racial/ethnic identity is unknown.Vietnamese Americans make up a higher percentage of the minority student population at this university than at other higher education institutions in the state. Based on the sizable number of Vietnamese American students enrolled at this insitution, the university was an ideal place to conduct a study exploring Vietnamese American students' racial and ethnic identity development and campus engagegement expeirnces. Second, as an international Ph. D student, the researcher had limited access to other U.S. higher educational institutions outside the state. Finally, the researcher is a member of the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) at the institution. This association was founded in

2007 and has more than 100 student members. This facilitated the researcher to recruit eligible participants purposefully, since these students had friends and relatives currently enrolled who were also invited to participate in the study.

#### 3.2.2.2 Participant Recruitment

Purposeful participant selection, a common sampling method for qualitative research, was used (Creswell, 2012). Potential participants were selected on the basis of their legal status as either U.S. citizens or permanent resident, they were 18 years old or above and were currently enrolled at the Great City University (GCU, a pseudonym). In addition, the eligible participants must have completed at least three years of their K-12 education in the U.S. and must volunteer for this research. Importantly, the researcher selected individuals for the study when the participants showed the eligibility and capacity to clearly understand the given research problem and central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012).

One of the venues for participant recruitment was the VSA on the GCU campus and the researcher's social networks. The VSA was originally established in 1989 but was disbanded. A new VSA was reestablished in 2007, and it encourages members of all majors to contribute their academic competency by collaboratively initiating and participating in activities and events sponsored by the VSA. The four primary VSA purposes are: (a) to promote the Vietnamese culture and tradition to campus peers, (b) to extend relationships with other campus clubs and organizations, (c) to exchange knowledge and support each other intellectually, and (d) to enhance personal and community development. Through the VSA organization, the researcher purposefully invited those who were likely to possess potentially rich experiences with the given

research topic and who could foster a solid argument related to student engagement issues.

Some participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method. This allowed the researcher to recruit additional information-rich potential participants based on the referrals of initial participants. Initial participants were likely to know other potentially good study participants among their acquaintances who met the given selection criteria (Glesne, 2011). The researcher contacted the target participants in person, via phone, or email to ask if they were willing to volunteer to parcipate in this study.

In general, the researcher recruited four VSA students and four Non-VSA students, since the VSA and the Non-VSA students have had different campus experiences due to their diverse immigrant pathways, length of time living in the U.S., number of years for K-12 enrollment, and their on/off-campus residency. While the four VSA students (two males and two females) were born and raised in the U.S., the four Non-VSA students (two males and two females) came to the U.S. at the elementary, junior, or high school level, and likely by different immigrant pathways.

In particularly, Wilson, a Non-VSA student, followed his mom to the U.S. under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) when he was six. He was a freshman in Biology and then transferred to Chemistry as a sophomore. Initially being shy in elementary school, he became more socialized (e.g, joining Christian groups and initiating study groups) after eighteen years living in the U.S. He had more White friends than Vietnamese peers on campus since he felt more comfortable with Whites due to Whites' openness as he perceived. He planned to get married to a White girl in the following year.

Hugo was also a Non-VSA commuter student in Biology as a freshman but who transferred to a Psychology major in the institution. He moved to the U.S when he was a sixth-grader. Like Wilson, Hugo preferred White friends and his girl-friend was also White. He thought White people were more thoughtful and had something interesting for him to learn. Hugo faced a lot of academic challenges initially, but he tried to manage his troubles himself by watching YouTube videos related to academic issues he faced, and he exercised regularly to release stress. He participated in Air Force- Raleigh Transit Center (RTC) and received some support and guidance from RTC; he started joining supplementary instructions/ tutoring/ mentoring at Great City University campus and improved his academic achievement.

Yolanda, a Non-VSA commuter student, transferred to Psychology from Chemistry. Although she arrived in the U.S. as a 7$^{th}$ grader, she did not feel comfortable speaking English in front of White students and preferred working with other minority students on campus, such as Hispanic and other Asian students. Her parents supported her financially when she was a freshman, then she had to work four days per week to earn money for college tuition and fees. She was extremely stressed when she could not find enough time to focus on her studies. Eventually, she did put more priority on her studies by avoiding hanging out with friends. Given that, she did not want to be involved in any romantic relationship when she acknowledged her GPAs influenced her future job and her family's expectations.

Similar to Yolanda, Jenny was another Non-VSA junior student in Finance who was not confident about her English proficiency since she spent only three years in American K-12 school system. She highly valued the dominant standards of physical

appearance, language accent, and academic success. She wished to be able to speak English fluently with an American English accent, based on the Whiteness standard she perceived. Therefore, most of her friends were Whites who she hoped would help her improve her language communication skills and achieve more success.

Different from the Non-VSA students who were born in Vietnam who came to the U.S. at different times and likely by different immigrant pathways, the four VSA students were born and raised in the U.S. Tommy, a senior VSA student in Business was living in White community during elementary school, and he desired to learn more about Vietnamese culture. Entering higher education, he was initially passive in his campus residence hall and on campus, but then became proactive while helping to rebuild the VSA, and participating in many extra-curricular activities and other multicultural organizations. Tommy was very concerned about what Vietnamese American students did on campus and off campus to raise people's awareness about Vietnamese culture. He grew to care about VSA students' contributions to both local the Vietnamese community and the overall reputation of Great City University.

Suzanne, another VSA commuter, was successful as a student body vice president at her high school, but she struggled to be elected as a student president in her program, despite her excellent academic standing and other desirable qualifications for the position. She described herself as independent, proactive, social, open-minded, and determined. She was also a family-oriented and personable person who frequently took care of her younger siblings and happily took care of all at-home chores and tasks when her parents were at work and unavailable. She also worked for her mom to earn money to pay her own college tuition. Given that, she shortlisted in the Dean's list, received grants

and scholarships, and gained many college credits before coming to college. She went to advanced classes and participated in the several professional programs, such as Academy for International Studies and educational groups. She believed that resilience and perseverance would lead individuals to significant growth and a better and productive life.

Julie, a VSA junior student in Biology, enjoyed her participation in on-campus student activities and multicultural organizations. She chose GCU after she graduated from a primarily White high school. She considered her racial identity as an Americanized/ Bicultural person, but most of her friends were other minorities; her close friend was a Mexican girl sharing similar interests with her. Being a GCU undergraduate, Julie lived in a freshman dormitory during the first year and there her friends were almost all Whites. Beginning in her second year, she was able to find and make more Vietnamese friends who were born and raised in the U.S. and who were also interested in learning more about Vietnamese culture. Joining the VSA, Julie enjoyed the opportunities to extend friendships to the members of other student organizations and clubs on campus so that she and other VSA members could effectively promote peers' awareness of Vietnamese culture and advertise the events they hosted. Meanwhile, Julie also actively participated in campus learning support services, such as supplementary instruction.

Last but not least, Dylan, a VSA senior commuter student in Architecture, was one of the most proactive VSA members. He was visibly active in most of the campus activities. He was president of the VSA for two years. Dylan was not only an academically excellent student with a high GPA, but also a thoughtful and creative

individual who was able to initiate many significant events and activities for the VSA and other professional groups on campus like the Architecture Group at GCU and the architecture organization American Institute for Architecture Students (AIAS). Dylan was the first college student in his family who pursued U.S. higher education. He had a plan for a Ph.D. program after graduation. Dylan was always proud of being a Vietnamese American and tried to introduce "the beauty of his ethnic cultures" to peers of other races/ethnicities; he showed multiple stages of racial/ethnic identity development on campus.

The given demographic information of all eight student participants is described in the table below:

Table 1:

*Participant Demographics*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Major | Enrollment | VSA/ Non VSA | On/off campus residency | Years in U.S. | Years in K-12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wilson | M | Biology Chemistry | Senior | Non-VSA | off | 18 | 12 |
| Hugo | M | Biology Psychology | Sophomore | Non-VSA | off | 12 | 7 |
| Yolanda | F | Chemistry Psychology | Senior | Non-VSA | off | 11 | 6 |
| Jenny | F | Finance | Junior | Non-VSA | off | 10 | 3 |
| Tommy | M | Business | Senior | VSA | on | 22 | 12 |
| Suzanne | F | Education | Junior | VSA | off | 21 | 12 |
| Julie | F | Biology | Junior | VSA | on | 21 | 12 |
| Dylan | M | Architecture | Senior | VSA | off | 22 | 12 |

The researcher started data collection in August, 2017 after getting an approval from Great City University's IRB. All of the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, later transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using the guidelines of

phenomenological analysis (Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). All of the eight student participants completed an initial interview, which took 45 minutes to an hour, covering questions regarding the Vietnamese American students' demonstration of racial/ethnic identity development, their experiences with campus engagement, their strategies of engagement, and their needs for support for better engagement on campus. Six of the eight participants were then asked to schedule a short (10-15 minute) follow-up interview to verify their transcripts and answer a few additional questions.

Data were collected through repeated semi-structured interviews. The first interview took between 45 and 60 minutes while the second/ follow-up interview lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. The initial interview protocol included seven subsections: (1) demographic information, including information about the participant's immigration pathway, (2) prior education experiences, (3) enrolment in Great City University, (4) ethnic/racial identity on campus, (5) academic engagement, (6) social engagement, and (7) sense of belonging. Six of the eight student participants were invited to the second semi-structured interview, in which each student was asked about their verbatim transcripts and answered a few additional questions they missed in the first interview (APPENDIX C).

Interviews took place during weekdays either in the Cato College of Education on the GCU campus or other places where participants felt relaxed in a familiar location. The researcher tried to make each interview as open and flexible as possible and to establish rapport with participants. The researcher encouraged participants to thoughtfully reflect on their high-school experiences, their perceptions of their own ethnic identity,

and their current experiences of academic, social, and community engagement as college students.

The interview started after the participants read and signed a consent form (APPENDIX B). The researcher used open-ended questions to elicit the participants' experiences. The open-ended questions allowed the researcher the flexibility to diverge from the planned interview guide when necessary. Therefore, the researcher had a deeper conversation around both pre-determined and emerging topics to further examine the target phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder to make verbatim transcripts later. Notes were taken to document some contextual information during the interview process. The interview protocol included fifty question items targeting the four research questions; however, in the initial interviews the researcher skipped some questions when the previous responses by the participant generated relevant data.

### 3.2.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process started with coding, followed by convergent and divergent thematic analysis, which characterizes a typical phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas; 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014).

#### 3.2.3.1 Initial Open Coding

Based on the guidelines of phenomenological analysis (e.g., Creswell, 2012; Moustakas; 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 2014), the researcher read the entire transcript of each participant's narrative several times to make sense of the whole. Then, the researcher hightlighted some words/phrases/sentences that

stood out initially in the intervew transcripts. The next step was to upload each narrative into Atlas.ti software and to carefully examine meaningful units. Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software was also used to ensure consistency and transparency in the coding process. After uploading,the transcripts, the researcher assigned codes to the participant's quotes that were important and relevant to the study. These codes and code descriptions resulted in the development of a code book. Next, the code structures were categorized into four major themes, seventeen (17) sub-themes, thirty four (34) codes, and fifty five (55) sub-codes as they related to each other and the whole. Finally, the reseacher synthesized all themes to draw research findings from the data.

#### 3.2.3.2 Convergent and Divergent Thematic Analysis

Given the complicated nature of the target phenomenon, racial/ethnic identity development, student engagement, and the desire to understand Vietnamese American undergraduate students' academic and social development as one of the underserved groups in U.S. higher education, an examination of both convergent and divergent themes appeared essential to the interpretation of results. This phenomenological study focused on shared experiences from individual perspectives; therefore, understanding convergent thematic analysis was critical in the data analysis process. However, the divergent thematic analysis process was also facilitating a discussion of unique experiences found in some participants. In this study, divergent thematic analysis also shed light on important findings and added depth to the understanding of Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and their social and academic engagement in higher education (Vagle, 2014).

## 3.3 Risks, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

Any study involving human participants presents some risks. In order to make sure that participants were clearly aware of the potential risks of their participation in the study, the researcher explained the purpose and extent of the research study to them, and then asked the participants to read and sign a student consent form before the interviews started.

### 3.3.1 Potential Risks

One potential risk during the interview process was the possibility of emotional discomfort when the participants were asked to recount their personal experiences. For example, when being asked to recall and to describe their academic failures and challenges when dealing with discrimination on campus, the participants had to re-experience those uncomfortable situations. Therefore, the researcher tried to be sensitive and supportive as she encouraged the participants to fully share their narratives. Another potential risk lied in deductive disclosure contributing to a breach of confidentiality and privacy of the participants because the sample was specific to a small student population at this research site. Therefore, the researcher made sure to use pseudonyms, as well as to eliminate any potentially identifiable information from data collection, analysis, and dissemination procedures.

### 3.3.2 Potential Benefits

There are several potential benefits of this study to Vietnamese American students, to colleges/universities, to Vietnamese American communities, and to the current literature about Vietnamese American students in U.S. higher education. First, the student participants, when being asked to recommend campus support that they thought

they deserved, sharpened their critical thinking skills through thoughtful self-reflection and self-understanding. The research findings will be shared with the participants so that they will have better understanding of their pride about their racial/ethnic identity. The participants will be exposed to a variety of resources and opportunities to share their experiences with stakeholders. Better understanding of the importance of campus engagement will encourage the participants to be more involved in campus for their desired learning outcomes and professional development. By gaining a better understanding about themselves and their college environments, the Vietnamese American students will be able to develop more positive attitudes toward their cultural heritage and ethnic identity. This positive change will help the students recognize their significant role as young Vietnamese Americans in the nation, eliciting higher self-awareness, self-confidence, and ethnic pride. Second, an accurate and more in-depth understanding of Vietnamese American students will help all campus stakeholders appropriately situate and critique the MMM. By doing so, university faculty, staff, and administrators become more sensitive and effective in providing sound educational practices, policies, and student services to support the academic and professional development of this underserved group. Finally, this study contributes to the current literature about Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and their campus engagement on a PWI campus by providing solid empirical evidence that substantiates the continuing academic pursuit and struggles of Vietnamese Americans in U.S. higher education.

### 3.3.3 Ethical Considerations

The researcher was devoted to open, honest, and thoughtful dissemination of the study results. Ezzy (2013) suggested the following principles of ethical consideration. First, the research participants may be hesitant to share personal experiences with an audience but they had the option to withdraw at any time. The researcher was also expected to prioritize the dignity of research participants. These principles were applied when the investigator required the participants to sign consent forms before starting the interviews. The researcher was aware of cultural and personal sensitivity when asking questions that could cause the participants to experience anxiety. The researcher belonged to the same cultural and ethnic community as the participants, yet she was aware of her privilege as a researcher and exercised cultural sensitivity throughout the interview process.

The concern for privacy of the participants was crucial, especially when the researcher collected and analyzed the data. Information that was considered private or sensitive was removed to protect the identity of the participants (Ezzy, 2013). In the findings and discussion sections of this dissertation, reports were written based on the individual's responses, but pseudonyms were always used. It was also important to stress that the researcher's ethical responsibility was not to distort any information provided by the participants, as well as not to add any personal or unfounded bias in the data analysis procedures. Also, in the research process, the researcher declared any possible conflicts of interest, if they emerged, when the participants shared their experiences, challenges, and strategies of engagement.

### 3.3.4 Strategies for Quality

According to Glesne (2011), qualitative inquiry puts the researcher in the role of a research instrument. This means that the researcher's personal and professional experiences and knowledge, often called one's subjectivity, is unavoidable in the research process. As a result, issues of trustworthiness emerged, especially when the researcher analyzed and interpreted data. While many acknowledge that the researcher's subjectivity can influence the validity of qualitative research, several researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2102; Glesne, 2011) stated that as long as researchers undertook proper measures for quality and trustworthiness in their work, qualitative inquiry results were highly valuable and credible. Under this light, the researcher took the necessary steps to follow the guidelines as outlined by Creswell (2012) to ensure the trustworthiness of research results in the current study.

In order to promote the trustworthiness of the outcomes of this research, the researcher used several strategies of quality assurance. First, she provided details about each Vietnamese American student's demographic information to facilitate understanding of the participants' experiences of their racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement as well as the institutional context. This could help Vietnamese American students in other institutions compare and contrast their own experiences and institutional contexts and find ways to improve their own academic and social integration.

The second way to achieve high trustworthiness was the researcher's prolonged engagement with the participants and the research phenomenon under investigation. She had been engaged in the study for two years. Her engagement in the local Vietnamese American community (VSA and SEAC) and with Vietnamese youth in the community

has been extensive. The researcher spent an extensive amount of time engaging in the research process, especially building trust with research participants by sharing the purposes of the research (Creswell, 2012). In particular, the researcher joined the VSA at GCU as a member, participating in regular meetings every two weeks at the Student Union to observe the participants as well as to discuss with them what they did and how they performed and functioned in the VSA. The researcher also kept in contact with the four Non-VSA students once a month for the following year for data collection and analysis to update the progress of their racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement. Third, maintaining subjectivity helped produce stronger validity for qualitative inquiry (Glesne, 2011). The researcher was keenly aware of her subjectivity and made sincere effort not to influence participants' interview responses or shape their thoughts. She closely monitored the possible impact of her preconceptions and subjectivities so that participants' experiences and opinions were not limited or distorted.

Finally, the researcher used member checking (Ezzy, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009) to support the accuracy of transcripts and initial themes emerging from the data analysis. After identifying major themes common across all collected interview transcripts, the participants were invited to a discussion with the researcher on campus (based on the VSA regular meetings and Non-VSA students' schedules) to discuss and negotiate the appropriateness of themes/codes emerging. Furthermore, the researcher sought opportunities to regularly share and critique the emerging themes, sub-themes, codes, and sub-codes with peers, classmates, and supervising faculty to avoid subjective misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the data. The researcher also took systematic steps to ensure the overall quality of data collection and analysis, from the early stages of

creating interview protocols, recording audio files, and developing codes to ensure transcription validity.

## 3.4 Subjectivity Statement

As a university faculty member and an educational researcher, the researcher has been very concerned about how students develop in higher education personally, academically and socially in order for me to effectively serve them. Through an eighteen-year teaching journey as faculty of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) department in the pre-service teacher education program of my home country institution, the researcher had many chances to observe my students' process of growing up. Noticeably, some students achieved success at the university level, leading to more job opportunities and other advantages after graduation, but others did not. Given these observations, the researcher initially implemented several solutions to improve students' learning outcomes, but these solutions did not work as expected due to varied personal and professional dispositions of students, ineffective EFL teaching methodology, and some hurdles inherent in the institutional context. Then the researcher completed master's degree in English Language and Literature Teaching in the Philippines from 2005 to 2006. This program required her not only to study the quality of instructional practices, but also to have a better understanding of how to help students expand their academic, emotional, and social development. Many of the courses the researcher took required open discussions regarding teaching methodologies and other student development concerns.

Her professional development continued, and the researcher arrived at the current campus of U.S. higher education with two kids, seventeen and six years old. Enrolled in

the Educational Leadership doctoral program, the researcher continued to study current theories and research related to student development in U.S. higher education. Consequently, the researcher has become more motivated to work with minority students who are facing challenges on campus, in order to have better understanding of their challenges, their coping strategies, and their suggestions about how to be more successful on a PWI campus. Her teenage son's initial challenges at college motivated her toward this research topic. The researcher has a great passion and commitment to the study of effective practices of student engagement on campus, both academically and socially, in order to help many underserved students enhance their positive campus experiences and learning outcomes.

Dedicated to the study as a mother of an Asian college student, a faculty member of EFL, and an educational leader, the researcher invested more than two years to examine the research phenomenon of Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement experiences on a PWI campus. In particular, the researcher presented her study at several conferences at regional and state levels in the field of education. All of the given feedback from the conferences as well as from the pilot study helped her better refine the research study. For instance, in the pilot study, the researcher recruited six student participants to evaluate quality of the information collected from them throughout the interviews. Consequently, in the dissertation study, the researcher re-used four participants from the pilot study and conducted a follow-up interview with them before recruiting the other four participants. Since the researcher was deeply immersed in the literature related to the research study and she frequently interacted with the participants from early steps of participant

recruitment to data collection and the analysis process, the researcher was able to see what was shown in the data through her own lens, differently from other researchers who may interpret the collected data.

From the pilot study, the researcher gained several insights that explained why these students could not receive high-quality instruction in the academic programs in which they expected to be successful. Some of the participants in her pilot study shared that although they worked hard, they still faced numerous challenges in accomplishing academic and social integration on campus. More importantly, they tried to overcome their troubles by themselves and blamed themselves for their lack of ability or effort, without developing a critical awareness of the some of the underlying reasons behind their situations. The researcher acknowledged that there were very few resources on campus to help these students. Having developed a robust understanding of diversity and implicit discrimination in U.S. higher education, the researcher became more interested in what and how educators, administrators, and student service professionals could do to enhance student success and development among underserved students. Given the great concern about the quality of pre-service teacher education programs in Vietnam, the researcher is more concerned about student development in U.S. higher education. Co

Conducting this study has presented great opportunities for the researcher to learn about several critical theories and models, such as the MMM and Kim's (1981, 2012) model of Asian American ethnic identity development. These theories and models provided her with important insights into why Vietnamese American students struggle silently when they should request more academic support from instructors or TAs in order to effectively address a challenge. These insights have helped understand why

Vietnamese American students could not seek relevant support from stakeholders to accomplish full development. Furthermore, the researcher ironically recognized why several Vietnamese American students tried to assimilate themselves into mainstream White cultural norms and practices and refused to work or associate with other Vietnamese American students on campus. Based on all of these insights from the pilot study, the researcher expected that this study will advocate for this underserved group and help them raise their voices so that they can receive the attention and support they deserve.

Qualitative researchers are expected to critically reflect on their own personal perspectives and subjectivities. Given her deep interest and sincere commitment as a researcher, she intended to add to the quality of this study by building trusting relationships with the participants while ensuring their contributions make this study meaningful and significant. Given the prior experiences and expectations, the researcher is likely to play the role of advocate for Vietnamese American students. Therefore, the interview process targeted the goals of encouraging their critical reflection related to all levels of engagement, challenges, and campus services. In this light, it was inevitable that their participation required openness and reciprocal construction of meaning, which sharpened their critical thinking skills and resulted in a more accurate and deep interpretation of their own narratives. At the same time, the researcher fully understood that her current understanding of Vietnamese American college students and their experiences were limited to some extent, and the researcher tried to remain open to the experiences that contradicted with her own. The researcher was working with both the participants and other experts, such as other doctoral students and the project advisor, and

continued to reexamine her own beliefs and expectations. Given her own commitment to this topic and the critical self-reflections, as well as open sharing of the Vietnamese American students' authentic perspectives, the researcher strongly believes that this study is a meaningful work through which Vietnamese American students' voices are expressed and heard, calling for more positive change on predominantly White college campuses.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction to Chapter 4

Chapter 4 presents major thematic findings derived from repeated in-depth interviews with eight Vietnamese American students attending a PWI in the U.S. Four research questions addressed the following four areas: (1) Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and academic/social identities in the context of a PWI college campus, (2) major challenges in their pursuit of social and academic engagement, (3) their academic and social engagement practices and coping strategies responding to the identified challenges, and (4) suggestions about how to support their academic and social integration on campus.

Not surprisingly, the eight Vietnamese American students participating in this study reported various experiences of academic and social engagement on campus due to their differences in age, immigration status and conditions, family background, and especially their socioeconomic status when they immigrated to the U.S. The initial differences in their varied backgrounds' influenced how they adjusted and adapted to their new lives in a new country, resulting in variations in their racial identities, as well as in their cognitive and social development in the context of U.S. higher education.

This chapter is organized around four major themes, which include 17 sub-themes. Under these 17 sub-themes are 34 basic codes, such as: (1) Racial/ethnic identity development stages, (2) Academic identity of the VSA students, and (3) Social Identity of the VSA students, (4) Working with faculty, and the like. Therefore, the 34 inductive codes are major descriptive findings in this study and they address each of the four research questions. Some examples of the 34 inductive codes are "actively creating

collaborative learning relationships", "dedication to academic success", "participating multicultural organizations", "participating in extra-curricular activities", and "proactively seeking assistance".

## 4.2 Identity Development

Throughout their repeated interviews, the eight Vietnamese American students demonstrated different and unique identities in their racial/ethnic, academic, and social development, which were often related to multiple contextual factors such as the age when they immigrated to the U.S., communication opportunities with other Vietnamese American peers, and their resident status of living on/off campus.

### 4.2.1 Racial/Ethnic Identity

#### 4.2.1.1. Racial/Ethnic Identity Development Stages among All Participants

In response to an interview protocol, "How do you ethnically identify yourself on campus?" (APPENDIX C), all eight student participants identified themselves as Vietnamese Americans at least once during the interview. They also used the alternative terms Vietnamese culture, bi-cultural, Americanized Vietnamese, or not sure to define their ethnicity. While Suzanne stated that, "I consider myself Vietnamese American." Dylan, Jenny, and Yolanda also stated, "I identify myself as a Vietnamese-American person."

Interestingly, three VSA students - Tommy, Suzanne, and Julie- shared similar terms describing their bi-cultural and Vietnamese culture when labeling their ethnicity; however, they preferred the Vietnamese culture term:

> "I was raised traditionally by a Vietnamese family, but I think I'm more of a bicultural person now… I think I'd consider myself very bicultural." (Julie)

"I am able to have a bi-culture." (Suzanne)

"I think more Vietnamese probably." (Julie)

"I am one hundred Vietnamese percent at heart." (Suzanne)

"I am grateful that my friends that accept me as being a Vietnamese." (Tommy)

Julie also recounted that initially on campus she was sometimes confused herself as an Americanized Vietnamese girl, surrounded by White peers in a PW resident hall, "I find myself as a very Americanized Vietnamese person."

In the same manner, two students -Tommy and Hugo- even though they identified themselves as Vietnamese Americans they somehow were not sure about their ethnicity. In other words, they misperceived their ethnicity as a blended intangible, both Vietnamese and the dominant culture.

> I grew up here but my roots is still from Vietnam, I'm still Vietnamese-American. I might be American, but I'm still Vietnamese deep down… And over here most of the members in the VSAs they were born here, and they try to act a certain way to the media tell them how Vietnamese acts and all that stuff. So it's very not Vietnamese like in my opinion, so I don't fit in…VSA students are trying very hard to understand that culture themselves because they don't. And most often time, they try to become something use more Americanized Vietnamese which I don't like because I know how real Vietnamese acts. They don't try to persuade me to act a certain way that Americans think Vietnamese act. (Hugo)

Although all of the eight student participants were explicit in identifying themselves as Vietnamese American students on a U.S. campus, each of them categorized him/herself with different ethnic terms due to their various exposures on the college campus. For instance, their length of time living in the U.S., communication opportunities with same ethnic peers, and resident status of living on/ off campus had an influence on their choices of different terms to describe their

ethnicity. Critically, they encountered certain challenges to identifying their racial identity due to the current cultural influence. They were likely to be kids of mixed parents; they were born and raised in different cultures so that it was hard for them to know exactly which culture they belonged to. While they could not completely fit into the dominant culture, they could not totally identify with authentic Vietnamese culture; they were in the middle, bi-cultural, or Vietnamese Americans. These participants, who had experiences with both U.S. and Vietnamese culture, had trouble identifying completely with either U.S. or Vietnamese culture.

The descriptive information regarding the Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development were classified into 5 groups, aligning with Kim's (1981, 2001) model of Asian American racial development. Given this model, the collected experiences fell under 5 subsequent stages of ethnic awareness: White identification, awakening to social political consciousness, redirection, and incorporation.

In particular, when asked about the ethnic recognition/awareness, all of the eight students were able to connect themselves with at least one of the ethnic terms Vietnamese American, bi-cultural, or the like.

> That is my Vietnamese culture. That is my ethnicity. The way that my mom and dad were grown up in Vietnam and they came here in America. They have very specific ideas of how they want to live their lives. The way they live their lives really causes my life in the similar ways. (Suzanne, VSA member)
>
> I think I'd consider myself very bicultural. (Julie, VSA member)
>
> I am Vietnamese American. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

Clearly, while some students could hold a positive self-concept of their ethnicity as Vietnamese Americans on a college campus, the others were somehow confused but still maintained a "neutral" view of their racial identity. Additionally, some of the VSA

and Non-VSA students exhibited the second stage of Kim's (1981, 2001), White identification in their racial/ethnic identity development on campus.

> I want to show off my culture. But at the same time I said I should try to be like other Whites instead. (Tommy, VSA member)
>
> There were some times I felt like I was ashamed of my culture when I was pretty much younger that I wanted to be an American and fit in. (Suzanne, VSA member)
>
> I like to have a White skin and the blue eyes like the blonde hair, if I can. (Jenny, Non-VSA)

In this stage of adjusting to life on campus, these students demonstrated the different stages of White identification. While the VSA students simply wanted to break their initial loneliness on campus by naturally approaching the dominant students around residence halls and other student areas, the Non-VSA students showed their affiliation with Whites by wanting to emulate the dominant students. This significant difference between VSA and Non-VSA students in the process of racial/ ethnic identity development on a PWI campus will be further elaborated in the next section.

4.2.1.2. Racial/Ethnic Identity Development Variation of VSA and Non-VSA Students

Collectively, four VSA students were born and raised in the U.S., whereas four Non-VSA students were born in Vietnam and immigrated to the U.S. at different ages and under various immigration conditions. Due to their varied lengths of time living in the U.S., the Vietnamese American students indicated distinctive racial/ethnic identity development.

Due to their initial isolation on campus in their freshman year, several of the students interviewed tried to be more involved by reaching out to the dominant students around resident halls and other student areas on campus. In order to feel included on a

PWI campus, these students physically or tangibly assimilate with White campus residents.

> When I first came, most of my friends were White because I met them through my classes and most of the people in my dorm that I live, they were White. (Julie, VSA member)

> I prefer White friends because I think White people are so successful and I want to be one of them. (Jenny, Non-VSA member)

Different from the VSA students, who tried to adjust and identify their ethnicity because they merely wished not to be isolated in the White world, the Non-VSA students embraced the dominant ethnicity as seen through their choices of friendships. Eventually, the Non-VSA students highly valued White students' ideas of beauty, success, communication style, and wealth; therefore, three out of the four Non-VSA students seemed to affiliate more with Whites in the process of their higher education development. According to a Non-VSA student, Jenny, White students were not only perceived as beautiful, intelligent, and hard-working, but also as perfect and standard English speakers and successful academic achievers.

> Most of the people I made friends are White people because they are working, intelligent and they always get their homework done. (Jenny, Non-VSA)

> I haven't dated any Asian girlfriend yet… my girlfriend right now is White American because she is more outgoing and she's more express, she's willing to express her feelings than an Asian girl, I guess… So it's the communication between us … we have good communication. And that's what I think most Asian lacks of so. (Hugo, Non-VSA)

Extensively immersing in the White world, the VSA students preferred to be more connected to peers of the same ethnicity for more solid and broader understanding of their original culture. Some of them were critical about different treatment from the dominant campus structures. This stage was labeled as "social political awakening", a

time when the students became more sensitive about their ethnicity on campus (Kim, 1981, 2001).

> What I faced is discrimination or some kind of stereotypes against me. Anything like that so someone looks into my life they don't see everything I go through but they only see what they think I go through. So that's why I feel like that's all I show is all of my academic life or how I involve in my culture. (Suzanne, VSA member)

> I joined VSA because I wanted to know more about it other than the things that my parents told me, and going to church, and watching "Thieu nhi" on TV... I joined VSA and they're like my second family. (Dylan, VSA member)

> Usually, a lot of people stay in their own group of people around campus … they're all the same ethnicity because it's easier for them to get along and they have the same interests … other than to see a mixed group of people, you don't really see that a lot. (Julie, VSA member)

Compared to the VSA students, the Non-VSA ones did not recognize any campus bias; they simply felt it was easier for them when reaching out to the same ethnic peers:

> I feel more comfortable to talk with Asian students. I am not trying to be racist but I feel more confident to speak with Asian students, even not Vietnamese. Some of my classmates are not Vietnamese but Asians. I come and talk to them. I feel more confident to talk to them than other Black and White students…A Vietnamese student will better explain the problem to me rather Black and White students … we are in the same culture… easy to communicate than with others in different races. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

Noticeably, the longer and deeper their campus engagement was, the VSA student participants further embraced their ethnic culture. As they became more interdependent and collaborative, these peers of the same ethnicity were fostering their academic and social development.

Importantly, while all of four Non-VSA students merely stayed at stage 3 of racial/ethnic identity development, the VSA students, in their great attempts, tried to promote their academic and social achievement, by concurrently confirming their ethnicity campus-wide. Correspondingly, their ethnic identification, throughout their

campus engagement highlighted the purpose of the VSA foundation, as well as its returning back to campus three years ago. Participating in the VSA, these students increased their ethnic pride by broadly reaching out to peers of other ethnicities to critically identify themselves as a mixed-race person of both Asian and American descent. Based on Kim's (1981, 2001) model, this was the fourth stage of redirection to Asian American consciousness, in which the VSA students were not only very open to diverse races but also strongly demonstrated their anger due to campus marginalization.

> Coming to Great City University, it gave me the opportunity to be more connected with my culture, and learn more about it, which is what VSA tries to promote, which is trying to spread awareness of the Vietnamese culture and let people learn more about who we are, and what our culture is about. (Dylan, VSA member)

> … some kind of stereotypes against me … I wasn't able to connect with people in my resident hall … I was in gap of popularity and actual intension. Even when I was most credential, like appropriate candidate for the job but I couldn't have that vote because I could not have many friends on campus in freshman year. (Suzanne, VSA member)

> I just like I guess if a group of students within GCU here in campus go out and did something good. It shows that these GCU students are doing good for the community and also giving the school a good name so that if other Vietnamese student who loves to come to GCU would say, oh, this is strong Vietnamese community and then they can come and join. (Tommy, VSA member)

In this manner, Tommy was concerned with both his ethnic peers and the positive reputation of the institution. His campus engagement definitely reflected his strong and positive sense of being a Vietnamese American and his close relationship with the ethnic group. Together with Tommy, Dylan - a VSA leader - strived to make the Vietnamese American group become meaningful but distinguishable on a diverse campus, through their "incorporation" stage of ethnic identity development (Kim, 1981, 2001).

> I identify myself as a Vietnamese-American that loves diversity within the community …we live in a world where everyone is pretty equal …we should

> experience the diversity …we should have the open-mindedness to accept everything else… if you try to learn something about different cultures, we give some gratitude because we enjoy you taking the time to learn about our culture. We will obviously reciprocate and give them back what they. (Dylan, VSA member)

> I really don't have any differences when I come working with groups. Because I feel like when you do work in groups, you will have different values and different ideas instead of different individual holds the same idea, so that with different values and ideas you can see things in different ways. So you can move to certain goals but in the different ways but the top the same. (Tommy, VSA member)

In the last stage of ethnic identity development, all four VSA students were proactive in reaching out to peers of other races to learn about their cultures, as well as to introduce the beauty of Vietnamese American culture. They all initiated various significant campus activities and events, including Viet Night, Around Vietnam in One Night, Passport to Vietnam, VSA Olympics, VSA Election, Lunar New Year Celebration, Volley ball, Cookout. In particular, most of the given campus cultural events, such as Viet Night or Around Vietnam in One Night, the VSA students desired to introduce the beauty of Vietnamese culture to other campus peers; for instance: Vietnamese traditional food, costumes, festival activities, sports, and music.

Taken together, this section presents the findings related to these student participants' process of developing their racial/ethnic identity in U.S. higher education, based on Kim's (1981, 2001) model. All of the eight students demonstrated the first stage of ethnic awareness, such as Vietnamese American or bi-cultural. However, in the stage of White identification, these students had disparate experiences of assimilation with the dominant students. While VSA students were concerned about the Whites' acceptance, Non-VSA students revealed certain different levels of admiration of privileged group. In addition, while all of the VSA students experienced Kim's (1981, 2001) three stages of

awakening to social political consciousness, redirection, and incorporation in the process of ethnic identity development, only two Non-VSA students displayed stage three of social political awakening and none of them exhibited the last two advanced stages. Furthermore, diversity of racial/ethnic identity development was seen among four Non-VSA students: the students coming to the U.S. during their teenage years, who worked harder academically for their success, showed a stronger desire to be accepted by the dominant culture, compared to the other Non-VSA students.

### 4.2.2 Academic Identity

#### 4.2.2.1 Common Threads in Academic Identity Across All Participants

Hard-working, career-oriented, and smartness were manifested as three common threads in academic identity across all student participants. In describing their experience of academic engagement, all of the eight participants revealed that they worked very hard for their intellectual development on campus:

> I stay up late and wake up early to get everything done and yeah I put more effort in my work. (Jenny, Non-VSA)

> …sometimes I get about, maximum hours of sleep is about four. Sometimes I sleep two hour a night. Sometimes I don't sleep at all. (Dylan, VSA member)

> And I feel like if I never challenge myself, I will never going to be able to accomplish more cause I was gonna do better than I did a day before and so it's a philosophy that I go by to push myself harder and harder each time because I wanna be the best that I can be. (Suzanne, VSA member)

> If they are willing to handle that much without working, just focusing on studies, I think the student will be fine, but with me I have to work and study at the same time in the very hard major, so the first advise is just studying, not working if you take those classes. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

Because of their strong belief that working hard is associated with tangible benefits, these students tried to achieve high GPAs for future job opportunities, demonstrating their career-oriented behavior.

> I have better GPA you have higher chances to get job internship, than lower GPA, it's like GPA high in any major is better to apply for job so I do my best on any major. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

> My parents they wanted something like other Asians, they wanted me to be a doctor or pharmacist, do what you think that make you happy. (Tommy, VSA member)

> …in Psychology they don't have Asians because Asians usually don't take Psychology. They always go for Business or Science because the way the American culture where Asians are supposed to be smart and do Engineering or Science or Business. (Hugo, Non-VSA)

In addition to career-oriented identity, smartness was another academic identity that the eight students indicated in their engagement experience.

One VSA student, Dylan, stated that, "… studying, it came easy to me. School was really easy … my courses now are very lenient." A Non-VSA student, Wilson, appeared confident with his academic abilities, "I just like we can solve for the answer." To further reinforce the idea of smartness as a characteristic of Southeast Asian students, Yolanda proudly declared that:

> I have a friend and he had an award because he had outstanding GPA in his major in that department actually so we are very proud of him. I am glad to see two of them, one in Economic major and one in Engineering department so I am very proud of Asians, especially Southeast Asians. (Yolanda, Non-VSA student)

#### 4.2.2.2 Academic Identity of VSA Students

Self-directed, collaborative learning and competitive academic achievement were the three distinct academic identities of the VSA students. These characteristics

describe the engagement process of the VSA students developing their intellectual competency on a predominantly White campus.

In describing their experience of academic engagement, the Vietnamese American students demonstrated several indicators of self-directed learners, including their readiness to learn, their ability to set learning goals, their dedications to studies, and their evaluation of learning inputs. For instance, Suzanne, a VSA student, expressed her strong commitment that, "I am very self-driven in the way that I want to be a big professional upon," whereas another VSA student, Dylan, admitted taking "all advantages and tried to make my GPA really well." To further engage in his courses, Dylan, also displays his desire to be a self-directed learner when describing teaching quality in one of his courses:

> My professor currently, he's a new professor so his teaching isn't really that advanced. It's very slow paced and very mediocre, so I guess that's why it's not as stressful, but it adds more stress because we don't know what we're doing or what we're supposed to do or what the outcome is. (Dylan)

Not only were the four students self-directed learners, but they also worked collaboratively to keep their learning moving forward. These students, eventually, acknowledged that it was better to foster collaborative learning on a predominantly White campus to achieve their learning goals.

> We have established a really good friendship and relationship with a lot of people through VSA…And if we need a study, then we know that we're there to study and focus really hard …So we have lots of other cultures and races inside of the VSA and so we have bunches of Caucasian, African, American, we have lots of people come and join our study groups whenever they want to. (Suzanne)

Julie, another VSA student, worked collaboratively with the others to solve her "problem in her single class," while Dylan teamed up to promote diversity and

creativity when producing designs in his Architecture course work," We all have different creative minds, like we go through the same process designing, but in the end it looks different. Everything looks completely different." (Dylan)

The VSA students succeeded in competitive academic achievement, compared to Non-VSA students and their counterparts of other ethnicities. Three out of the four VSA students explicitly reported their academic success by mentioning their GPAs and the awards, grants, and scholarships they had received.

> I just think about academic what I am capable of, how I can succeed in this specific environment …I had on chancellor's list all of the semesters … I have grants and scholarships … my GPA is 3,8 GPA …I was nominated for Who's Who among GCU campus, which about 300 people are nominated in and 30 people are chosen… I was nominated into many different academic and success-based sororities, fraternities, and Greek life. (Suzanne)

> When it did come time I applied to five schools, and I got into all of them … I was the number 13th among 117 in my class, so still in the top 10. (Dylan)

#### 4.2.2.3 Academic Identity of Non-VSA students

Compared to the three successful academic identities of the VSA students, the Non-VSA students faced greater challenges in engaging academically on campus, due to their limited English language proficiency, their immigration circumstances, and having had less exposure to an English language environment. Hugo, a Non-VSA student who arrived in the United States as a seventh grader, admitted to seriously struggling to communicate in American English with peers until he was college age, "Language is really bad." Jenny, another Non-VSA student, also complained about her language barrier preventing her from confidently talking with her college classmates:

> It happened in real life like I wasn't enough confident to talk loud with them … reach out to other people to get them help me with my problems … to fix my problem. (Jenny)

> I feel like I can't involve in American culture due to I speak a different language before, and Vietnamese culture influences a lot in me, so I feel like even when I speak to them, I don't feel that much confident. (Yolanda)

It is impossible to deny the important role of language proficiency in the learning process. A learner's limitation in language proficiency not only influences their capabilities to comprehend, absorb, and process provided knowledge, but also impacts their communication for knowledge confirmation and construction. Suffering from limited language proficiency, consequently, the Non-VSA students could not be completely engaged with their counterparts on a predominantly White campus to develop their intellectual competency.

### 4.2.3 Social Identity

#### 4.2.3.1 Common Threads in Social Identity Across All Participants

In describing their experience of social engagement on a predominantly White campus, the eight Vietnamese Americans displayed these four identities: open to diverse races, family-oriented, proactive, and leadership competency.

Referring to their openness to diverse races, seven out of the eight student participants reported that they appreciated the diverse campus promoting their understanding of cultural differences; however, the VSA students had different experiences in engaging with other cultures on campus than the Non-VSA group. For instance, Dylan, a VSA member, described his active engagement in many religious courses on campus because of his desire to broaden his understanding about the religious world:

> We learn how to say the different types of Buddhist figures, and learn about Shinto, and Hinduism, and things like that. We try to interpret what they mean, because it's in a different language and obviously not all of us are Chinese, or Japanese, or Muslim, or anything like that. (Dylan, VSA member)

> I feel so supported by my peers from all races, and it goes for all of the people around me. And there's no one that's better or worst it's just they're there for different reasons and they're all very positive supports for me and so I don't have anything to complain about my friends and my peers because they'll help me not only in a positive way but they've constructed, they could have given me constructive criticism … They are not just there to tell me that I'm smart or that I'm doing a good job, but rather this is what I can do to be better. (Suzanne, VSA member)

In sharing these experiences, the VSA students showed their interest in social engagement due to their interest in diverse social experiences, while the Non-VSA students seemed to be likely to socialize just for academic purposes.

> Because in some courses, it requires so much thinking and understanding that by yourself impossible to do that you need to meet people, a group of different people every week just to study and understand the materials because that not something you figure out your own. (Wilson, Non-VSA)

Critically, when the VSA students were involved in social groups with the dominant peers, the VSA students tended to maintain a cultural balance between being Vietnamese and being American. Conversely, the Non-VSA students had a tendency of more assimilation with Whites. For instance, Suzanne, a VSA student stated, “I feel like I always try to be in the way fits in into the American society while being able to maintain my own Vietnamese culture,” whereas Jenny, a Non-VSA student admitted honestly, “I want to be like White people.”

Interestingly, further elaborating her balanced acculturation, Suzanne stated that “I can take culture from America but as well continue to have a culture within Vietnamese culture as well.” Many times she expressed her strong commitment to her family for maintaining tradition, and this behavior is also popular with the other Vietnamese Americans who remained family-oriented in the predominantly White community.

In fact, most of the decisions the Vietnamese American students were making, were influenced by their family members, especially their consideration about consequences of their decisions, which might impact their family traditions and structure. Therefore, all of the eight students' families contributed to their levels of engagement on campus. For instance, both Suzanne and Dylan cared very much about their families in their commitment to school, "I always do it for my family," said Suzanne. Several other students mentioned that they work hard in school for their families,

> especially for my parents because they're always in my mind. My mom, just having her there keeps me motivated to go to school and everything like that. (Dylan).

> in Vietnamese culture, they tend to push you to help the family, work for family and be successful for the family. (Suzanne, VSA students)
> I participated in campus military training because my grandpa was in military that 1931. (Hugo, Non-VSA)

> My parents love me to come to Charlotte, so it's easier for ... it's fun for us to ... like on the weekends to eat or to go shopping. It's good. I really like going here, because even though I still go to school, it's also a good chance to see my family. (Julie, VSA student)

Caring much about their family also encouraged the Vietnamese American students to become proactive in getting involved on campus to benefit their higher education development.

> It is good to be more involved in campus, because even though being here for academics is good too, I think being social and being more involved helps you as a person in the school. (Julie, VSA student)

> I just go and seek help, I am not just sit there and wait until someone come and help me … I go here and knowing that I have friends, fraternity, family here. All support me. When I need help, just call and then they come to help no matter what it is and I on the campus knowing that you got support from all … Get involved, got to know people, that helps a lot even if you are not good at something when you know some people are good at it, they can help you out. (Hugo, Non-VSA)

Being more proactive on campus also facilitated promotion of the Vietnamese American students' leadership competence. Five out of the eight students earned leadership roles because of their contributions to the group.

> My freshman year, I was given the emerging leader of the year which is a big deal for an exclusive group that I was interviewed into and then was accepted to, I was chosen to be 30 of the 600 students that requested to be at the orientation counselors who represent the school and welcoming the new parents and family members and students into the school that are accepted to Great City University. (Suzanne, VSA student)

> I'm president and I want all groups to join. All types of people are welcome, so it's really nice to see all... There're not just Asian people that join VSA. They're not even Vietnamese. There's like Chinese, Japanese, Korean, African-American students, White people too… We invite them because we're not a Vietnamese exclusive organization. We try to promote Vietnamese culture. (Dylan)

> It died out a little bit and then me and two other friends who are always part of it. We said it's ok, let's start of it and back up. And so I have with that and started to bring VSA more back to on campus. So we spread out that way. (Tommy)

#### 4.2.3.2 Social Identity of VSA Students

In responding to the "social engagement" question, the VSA students clearly exposed their social identities, including their embracing ethnic culture, interdependence with others, and community-oriented attitudes.

Being born and raised in White communities of the U.S., all of the four VSA students tended to reach out frequently to their peers of the same ethnicity in order to deeply understand about their ethnic culture, to promote pride in their ethnicity, and to better introduce their culture to others. Increasingly embracing their ethnic culture, the students also positively contributed to the ethnic community and the institution as well.

> My culture is my most important identity … We have a huge showcase of Vietnamese culture. It's our annual Vietnamese Night. This year we based it of the Lunar New Year, and we based it off of that which I think was very important because a lot of people have the misconception that The Lunar New Year is just Chinese New Year … When in reality, it really encompasses a lot of different Asian cultures and a lot of our cultures go by that lunar moon and

> New Year…I hosted the entire things of that event with my brother so we were the MCs, and we introduced every new showcase coming out … I really love being able to share our culture with other people that are involved with our culture. So giving free events to somebody to the showcase Vietnamese culture is a beautiful thing I think. It is able to show this is what we wear, this is kind of music we listen to, this is topic we like to talk to them, or this is our fan dance, things like that. So being able to actively include the Community of Charlotte with the Community in GCU is a huge thing for me…I feel like my culture is really cool anyway. I love the food that we eat, music, and history, and ao-dai, you now, everything like this is shaping me to become who I am and so I really do enjoying being Vietnamese…I mean there was a huge variety of entertainment envy in ethnic culture that was portrayed at night. And that was my main focus as culture chair in the VSA. (Suzanne)

> We try to promote Vietnamese culture, so at our meetings we have Vietnamese word of the day, then we teach you how to speak a little bit Vietnamese. (Dylan)

> Joining VSA is a way for me to know more about my own culture myself... So a lot of people around my ages they don't have that culture and I really know much about the history behind the culture in Vietnam. It sounds like I go through all festivals and I love other things that they do that show off Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese history … Originally it was a lot of word by mouth. Later on we made a Facebook group, and we started inviting people through there. Just inviting anybody that we knew, all our friends and then telling them to invite their friends. (Tommy)

Together with embracing their ethnic culture and their individual dedication to the ethnic community, these four VSA students acknowledged that they were supportive of interdependence rather than independence in connecting with both peers of the same and different ethnicities to enhance their social engagement on campus.

> We have a lot of people because they help us get the word out, spread awareness of our organization and events that we do because without them, we wouldn't have people at our events. And without members and people at our events, we wouldn't have this organization…So recently we just had the VSA Olympics, which is like an East coast kind of, Southeast coast region Olympics with all the VSAs, I think ten schools participated which is a lot better than last year, the University of Georgia, the University of South Carolina. So we have a lot of schools that we compete against. And it's with football, soccer, tug of war and volleyball. (Dylan)

> Initially, we came together as a club, kind of like an interest group, saying if you want to learn about culture, but we're going to become a student organization that truly runs almost like a business. So, we want to push out information that is important to us to those students that are around us that don't know much about our culture. (Suzanne)

> I know a lot of different organizations on campus and we are trying to do things more on the weekends to keep those students coming back to hang out. I feel like there're more opportunities than other things trying to be…And then we also just hung out once in a lot as friends... So they can kind of relate a lot to help with school, help with other things as well. (Tommy)

In demonstrating their social engagement, these VSA students indicated their truly community-oriented toward both the ethnic community and the university community.

> my engagement in the community here in the GCU, a lot of them is within VSA and also a lot of them with my fraternity because both groups do give us back to the campus a lots and also to the community…We help donating food to the food bank that school has, donating blood … That are different places in the community that students try to help Vietnamese community or at least coming out to support the community. They just go into the events or even once you like just participate in the event… we would help support the other Vietnamese and want to keep that going with Vietnamese community and also to reach out to the youth to make sure that they never forget that. (Tommy)

> When I joined the VSA, we all had a common goal, we all wanted to do something and we wanted a better outcome for our community…When I ran for culture chair in VSA, people knew that I had passion towards it. And I think that was something that rekindled that passion of just culture and unity and diversity within myself because someone somewhere acknowledged that … But the culture, my environment, my community that I care for came back and supported me, and that was something that I needed and I got from Great City University… I really have a passion for my culture and I feel like the best plan is to create a more professional environment. (Suzanne)

#### 4.2.3.3 Social Identity of Non-VSA Students

Affiliated with Whites and introverted could be categorized as two markers of social identity among the Non-VSA students when they engaged on campus socially.

Three out of the four Non-VSA students admitted their affiliation with Whites more frequently. In particular, Hugo reflected that most of his friends were White American, not Vietnamese students, and Jenny also reported her only close friend on campus was a White girl. Compared to Asians, Hugo commented that American students were "more likely to be outgoing," and therefore, he could join Whites to expand his social network at his convenience. Jenny also preferred Whites for their productivity:

> I want to be like White people … I think White people are so successful in the society and I want to be one of them … I work with group during the class with group of four people and most of my group, four of guys are White people and they work so hard and so productive so I really like the group. (Jenny)

On one hand, the Non-VSA students showed their desire of being extroverts for facilitating their social network expansions; on the other hand, they were rather conventional in explaining their tendency for less social engagement on campus due to their introverted personality, which caused some discomfort with openness in public places. Jenny expressed her unwillingness to start a conversation with campus peers, whereas Yolanda shared her challenges talking with peers.

> I just be quiet, be silent. I didn't talk to them … I'm not like hanging out … I feel like even I know the stuff but I am afraid to talk in front of them because they are mostly White people. (Yolanda)

Due to the discrepancies among the eight participants in their ages and immigration histories, both the VSA and Non-VSA participants indicated distinctive and unique experiences from each group on a PWI campus to develop their racial/ethnic, academic, and social identities. However, both the VSA and Non-VSA students still shared certain common threads as Asian minority students. Their divergent experiences can be explained critically through the MMM lens.

In short, throughout their experience of academic and social engagement on a PWI college campus, the collective indicators of the Vietnamese American students, such as their racial/ethnic identity development, academic identities, as well as social identities were spread out correspondingly, which could be visualized in the below figure:

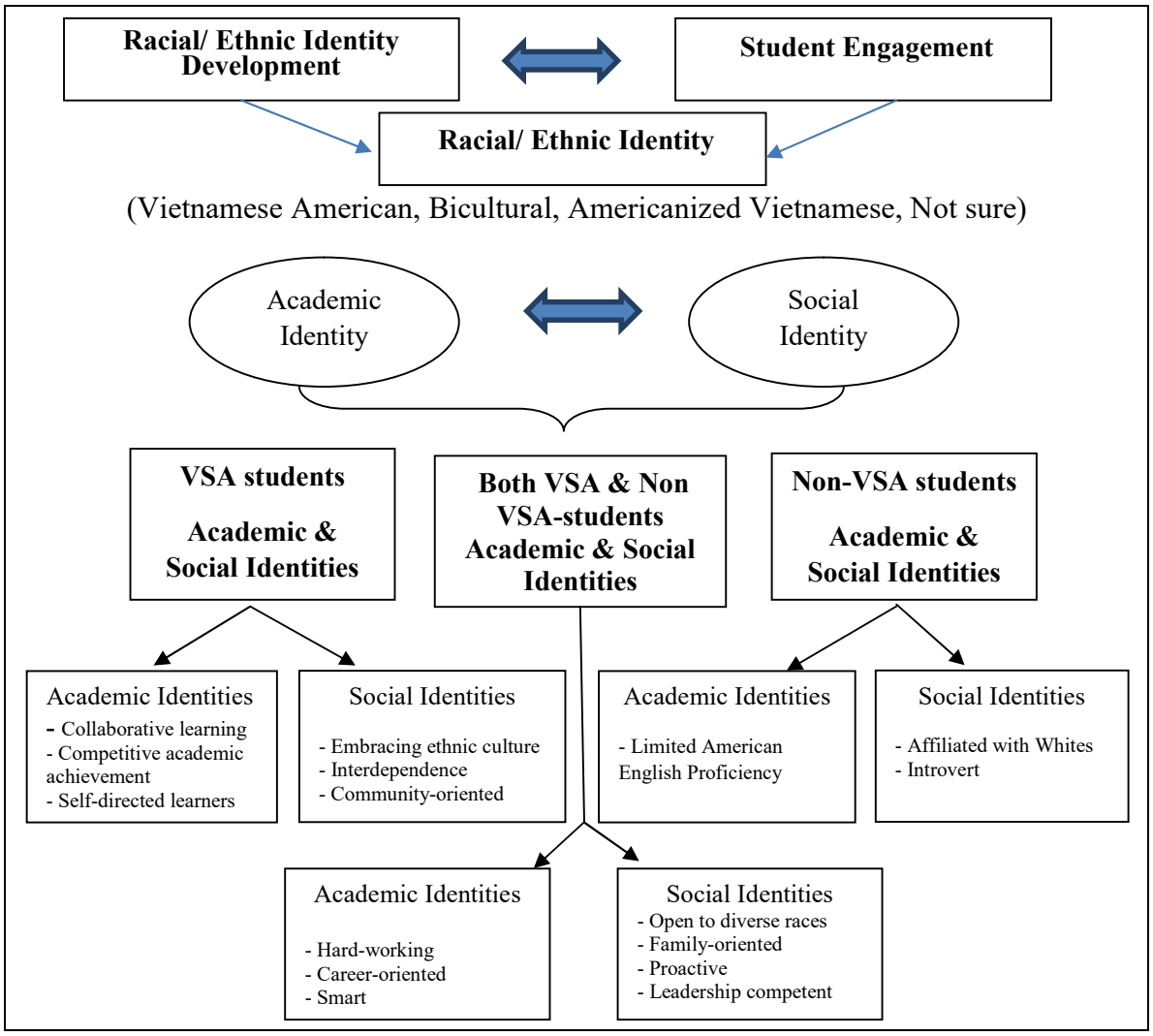


*Figure 2.* Vietnamese American Students' Racial/Ethnic Identity Development Shapes Their Academic and Social Identity through Their Campus Engagement Experiences

## 4.3 Challenges in Academic and Social Engagement on Campus

### 4.3.1 Academic Engagement Challenges

When asked about challenges they faced in academic engagement, the Vietnamese American students identified five major areas: (1) Academic courses, (2) Working with faculty, (3) Working with peers, (4) Campus navigation, and (5) Personal circumstances. Each area presented multiple challenges which will be detailed with supporting evidence below.

#### 4.3.1.1 Academic Courses

In the first area, "Academic Courses" five types of challenges were identified by the Vietnamese American students: (a) Challenging subject content, (b) Heavy course workload, (c) Missing study guide, (d) Stressful class, and (e) Tough assessment policy.

The first element, challenging subject content, was the most common finding, expressed by all of the eight participants even though Non-VSA members seemed to be troubled more than their VSA counterparts. For example, while Dylan and Tommy, VSA members, reported their possible/potential competencies in finding solutions to deal with challenging course content and assignments, all Non-VSA members (Wilson, Hugo, Jenny, and Yolanda) discussed numerous challenges and had little sense of competency in relation to challenging course content.

While he was clearly aware of the "requirement for course completion" and needed to be more committed to the coursework, Wilson complained, "I didn't like the material much. I wasn't like as I wasn't into it." His response included mixed emotions and frustration, an overwhelming pressure to master the challenging course contents and

his dislike of the given situation, “I needed to understand all concepts of the whole thing in my class … It really annoyed but I need to put a lot of effort into it, and it is one of the tough classes.”

Similar to Wilson’s experience, Hugo stated that he “got stuck” when the courses required a deep and thorough understanding of the concepts in which he was not really interested, “I struggled a lot in my freshmen, sophomore years … Chemistry was tough … when I am taking, Chemistry, Biology, Physics… which is terrible ideas… but I did not enjoy when I was doing.”

Hugo confessed that he was extremely stressed taking six classes during the semester and had to get involved in various activities since they were course requirements. Jenny echoes a similar sentiment saying, “… there are a lot of formulas and new concepts I need to learn in the finance field …there's so many things to get remembered and get ready for an exam.” In contrast, Suzanne, a VSA student, had a different interpretation about her challenging course content. She interpreted that the instruction provided in her course was very challenging “because sometimes the way they teach is different from the way I perceive the information.” She actively researched another way to grasp the challenging course content in her own way.

Heavy course workload was found to be another significant academic challenge, reported by three out of eight participants. Both Hugo and Yolanda complained that they were overwhelmed since they often had to deal with exams at the same time during the semester, whereas Jenny complained she was “overloaded because I take many classes and I don’t have time to balance my schedule.” Hugo agreed, stating, “I didn’t have

enough time. I have Physics, Biology, and Chemistry. And they all have the tests online at the same day or the same week.

In the same way, Yolanda stated, “We usually take full workload … sometimes 2-3 exams are on the same day and we are stressed out the night before.” She further described that not only a heavy workload but also the absence of study guides from some courses made her situation worse.

Accordingly, missing study guides was identified as another academic challenge that some participants experienced. Both Yolanda and Dylan agreed that missing study guides made their course become doubly-challenging. However, while Yolanda criticized the professor for not providing a sufficient study guide in her Organic Chemistry class, Dylan stated that academic support and study guides were not necessary in the Architecture department, since student creativity was always encouraged and promoted. These two students stated their points.

> As I told you about the Organic Chemistry … when the exams is coming, he does not provide a study guide. (Yolanda)

> Architecture program, we don't really need the support, but if you were in the Biology major, or Chemistry major, there is definitely academic assistance and study guides that help you if you need them. (Dylan)

Stressful class was another factor adding more challenges to Vietnamese American students’ academic engagement. Sadly, Yolanda, Jenny, and Hugo verbalized that they felt stressed when going to class. “The class is very stressful and hard. Every time when I go to school I feel like being stressful,” said Yolanda. Jenny recounted that she was stressed going to class since the coursework required her to master many formulas, but “the professor was strict and hard.” Jenny said, “It was a kind of stressful class because it's hard to remember all of the entries and the formula to apply into the real

work." Not surprisingly, the students became very anxious and uncomfortable attending the stressful classes.

Two participating students described their difficulty and heightened anxiety caused by tough assessment practices in some courses. Both Hugo and Yolanda said that some courses they had taken had rigorous assessment criteria, and both students had submitted papers that did not pass.

Yolanda repeated this point many times in the interview. She found that the assessment criteria used in her current class were different from those in high school or community college courses.

> The class is very stressful and hard because they expect you to do more [than what you do] in high school and in the community college. And it's very hard to make good grades in here …I am feeling stressed and worried about [my] academic performance. You know, a low GPA makes it harder to find a job, and it's hard to get into a graduate school. (Yolanda)

Overall, major academic challenges experienced by the eight participants included both course contents and course structures (workload, study guides, and course assessment). These academic challenges can be explained in two ways: student competency and course instruction/structure. It should be noted that Non-VSA students faced more academic challenges as compared with their VSA counterparts. As explained earlier, Non-VSA students did not actively engage in collaborative endeavors on campus including cooperative learning and working with peers to master given course contents and to complete assignments. Scholars have long suggested that college students are likely to better develop their academic competency if they stay engaged on campus and work collaboratively with others (Chickering, 1969; Coates, 2007). In terms of course structures, Vietnamese American students' academic challenges partly reflected

ineffective course instruction, including a heavy course workload, missing study guides, stressful class environment, and tough assessment policy.

#### 4.3.1.2 Working with Faculty

The second area in which the Vietnamese American students experienced a significant challenge was their relationship with faculty. The participants discussed four types of challenges when dealing with faculty; lack of faculty support, faculty unavailability, faculty high expectation without a study guide, and overlapped faculty office hours.

Lack of faculty support was the most frequently emerging theme when the participants discussed a challenge related to faculty. Seven out of eight participants expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment with faculty's academic support and assistance when they needed help to complete an assignment or understand difficult content. In the students' observations, faculty delegated the responsibilities to another individual, or their response times were too long to be helpful.

> I remember the first time I had trouble with an assignment. I talked to the professor and she recommended me to talk to people we had on campus like one-on-one tutor and things like that. (Wilson)

Julie's experience was not much different. She said, "I usually go straight to the instructor whenever I have a question, but when they don't explain it well enough for me rather than responding me directly, they just tell me, "Come by and see my office hours." Julie believed that faculty still had enough time for her questions in class but had little intention to genuinely support her learning. Hugo received a more explicit refusal from his professors whose priority was research productivity rather than teaching.

> If you ask them, some professors help you out but some suggest or they say they are here to do research not to teach … Some in Chemistry and Biology, they are

> required to teach a certain class, but they didn't like teaching because they all said they're here to do the research, they are not here to teach. So I just go to class and anything I can do in an hour and a half. (Hugo)

Dylan made his own conclusion that, "college professors, they don't really care about what you do outside of your courses." Therefore, according to him, students were supposed to spend more time and effort on a given challenging task and then they would be able to solve the academic obstacle on their own.

Faculty's unavailability was another consistent theme appearing in the participants' discussion of major challenges in their academic engagement on campus. There were some variations among the participants in the way they interpreted the same situation-their faculty's lack of availability. Wilson, Julie, and Suzanne expressed sympathy for their very busy professors struggling to manage their oversized classes, and Jenny did not even expect to receive on-time support from faculty since she assumed they were very busy. Jenny could remember "the only one" occasion when she "sent email to my professor but I didn't think he replied because he's, kind of, busy." Other students expressed a similar point.

> I needed to be able to understand the concept of the whole thing but she [his professor] didn't have time for that … she has a lot of students … she can't sit there and try to go over each chapter with each student that needs help. (Wilson)

> I think maybe they're just busy. They don't want to deal with it, because they have so many students they have to deal with. (Julie)

> I know my instructors are very busy. (Suzanne)

In contrast, Yolanda found it very frustrating and detrimental to her academic progress. She criticized her instructor for not providing adequate support but simply ignoring her request to spend more time.

> There was one time when I came to ask my professor, he said I could go to tutoring center or TA, and they will help me with my homework and solving the problem because he is kind of busy with other stuff and he has another class…That made me partially fail in that class … Even we ask but they still don't do anything different. (Yolanda)

Higher expectation without an expected study guide provided by faculty was another plaguing challenge to some students. Three Non-VSA members out of eight participants, Jenny, Yolanda, and Hugo, confessed that they were very worried about their GPAs since their faculty had high expectations of students' work but were not willing to provide a clear study guide to effectively support their learning. Jenny complained, "…the course is hard and then the professor requires too much … He gave it to us, and then he says "try to finish this and do the review session." Yolanda also commented on one of her classes that, "I think that professor … he just expected students to do too much" and she explained why she "felt lost" and felt it was impossible to meet the requirements of that class. Yolanda further explained that the challenge she faced was not her individual issue but a more systematic problem that affected a larger number of students taking the class. She detailed her point:

> It is not only me failed in that class, like half of that class failing ... He gave the exams but I see that something he did not cover it in the class … the lecture he is teaching is very general but in the exams it is about specific problem. When the exam is coming, he does not provide the study guide. He just read full chapters, ask us to understand it and do the exams. Therefore, a lot of students failing because they don't know how to do it … It's not only him. Most of the Organic professors [are] like that. I took two of them, so I feel that mostly they expect the students to understand ... So they expect that students have to do independently. They expect you read all ahead of the time. When you come to class they're just solving the problem that you don't understand in the book. (Yolanda)

The last challenge in academic engagement referred by two participants was faculty's overlapping office hours. Both Jenny and Yolanda shared the same problem

when they tried to meet with faculty during their office hours. Yolanda stated that she had to "take 6 classes every semester" and she could not visit her instructors during their office hours due to her own "full workload" that overlapped their office hours. Jenny had the same experience when she found her "schedule is busy. So office hours of my professors are the same as my other classes."

#### 4.3.1.3 Working with Peers

When describing their challenges in academic engagement, the Vietnamese American students reported that they did not have sufficient opportunities to work with peers. In particular, they stated that they lacked quality interaction with other students in class and they found it hard to find a study partners to further their knowledge development.

In responding to the question, "Have you had any challenges/trouble in your classes? What challenges? Why?" (APPENDIX C), three participants, Tommy, Hugo, and Jenny, complained they needed more peer- interactions to deeply engage in their program-specific studies. Tommy described most of his classes provided "just lectures", whereas Hugo evaluated his classes as completely uninspiring, "It's bored. Just copy down." Similarly, Jenny stated that she could not interact with any classmate when she had trouble understanding specific concepts or in solving an issue related to an assignment. Therefore, she just tried to manage everything by herself through "reading more books alone" or having a quick talk with a few peers after class.

When being asked to reflect on their challenges in finding a good study buddy, Jenny, Yolanda, and Hugo all said that they spent limited time talking with a few classmates who sat next to them. They had nobody to study with or work together with

after class since they could not spend enough time on campus. Tommy mentioned his engagement problem during his freshman year, “around my first year here it was hard to make friends to study with.” Both Jenny and Yolanda experienced the same trouble throughout their academic years since they stayed on campus only three days per week as commuting students. There was still some difference between Jenny and Yolanda, who experienced a lack of quality peer-interaction in their academic engagement. Yolanda expressed her emotional comfort in being with other Asian American students: “I feel more confident to talk to other Asian friends rather than Black and White students.” In contrast, Jenny preferred working with White students since she believed they are exemplary students: “They [White students] work so hard and so productive so I really like this group.”

In the light of existing literature that considers interaction with peers an important factor for student engagement (Coates, 2007; NSSE, 2013), the participants in this study were clearly missing one of the most vital components in their intellectual development. They did not have enough opportunities to build quality interactions with peers; therefore, they had to manage their academic challenges alone. As a result, even when these students truly needed external support and informed guidance, they did not know how to navigate any learning resources and support programs available to them on campus.

#### 4.3.1.4 Campus Navigation

Colleges and universities typically provide multiple resources and programs that intend to support student academic success. However, when being asked to discuss their use of any learning support resources on campus, two out of eight

students stated that they did not know how to navigate those resources and had never used them. Julie said, “I didn't really know what I wanted yet and I didn't know what organizations I could have participated in.” Jenny expressed the same point, “I really need some study resources or organization or mentor or tutor to help me, but I don’t know how to reach out.” These students did not know where to start and where to go to seek academic assistance on campus.

#### 4.3.1.5 Personal Circumstances

Each of the eight participants had some academic challenges derived from various personal circumstances, including limited American English proficiency, working a part-time job, and being a first generation college student in their family in American higher education.

Four among the eight students (three Non-VSA and one VSA members) revealed that their limited American English proficiency prevented them from confidently reaching out to their peers and faculty members for academic development. In particular, Jenny mentioned that her communication challenges were rooted from “language barriers”, and therefore, she was not “confident to talk loud and talk with them.” The same perspective was shared by Hugo saying, “My language is really bad.” Yolanda also described that she remained “quiet and silent” most of the time in class because “I don’t think I could speak English very fluently.” Dylan recollected that he had a trouble in an English class due to his poor grammar.

> It's happen in real life like I wasn't enough confident to reach out to other people to get them help me with my problems, to fix my problem. (Jenny)

> The one class I did have trouble in growing up with, was language arts, like English, because of my grammar. (Dylan)

Language barriers frequently emerged as a factor causing academic engagement challenges to participating students. Compared to four VSA-members who were born and raised in the U.S. and the other two Non-VSA members who immigrated to the U.S. as elementary or middle school students, the last two Non-VSA members, Jenny and Yolanda who came to the U.S as an eleventh grader, tended to face significantly more challenges. The two late comers reported that they experienced language barriers which made them lose confidence and feel isolated from the rest of students.

> I just talk to one who really close to me and most of the time we talk is about the class … It's kind of hard to explain your culture with other … I just let them pass by because I'm most not confident to say hi. (Jenny)

> I was a [new] immigrant at that time so I didn't speak English that much. They sent me to ESL class because English was my second language … I feel like I can't involve in American culture due to [the fact] I spoke a different language before. (Yolanda)

Another challenge in two Non-VSA students' academic engagement was their part-time job. Both Jenny and Yolanda stated that, unlike other college students financially well-supported by their parents, they had to work three days per week to pay their tuitions and other related expenses. Jenny said, "I don't think I have enough time to stay there in long hours because of my part-time job." Yolanda confessed, "I could not go for help with a lot of writings because I have to go to work for financial support."

There was another challenge posed to the Vietnamese American students beyond the language barriers and financial constrains that limited their interactions with peers and academic staff. They were not able to receive any support since they were first generation college students in U.S. higher education. Both Hugo and

Dylan were the first person in their family entering U.S. higher education. Dylan stressed the fact that he was the first college student in his family and "without any prior knowledge of how I get into college, and what I needed to do, I really focused on doing whatever it takes." Hugo mentioned his mother and he were currently attending college and enrolled in different majors; yet facing some academic troubles they could not help each other since they were both first timers. While Hugo's mother seemed to be more resilient with her academic challenges than her son, Hugo frequently felt "lost" and overwhelmed on campus.

### 4.3.2 Social Engagement Challenges

When asked to describe major challenges they experienced in their social engagement on campus, Vietnamese American students enumerated a total of eleven obstacles. The eleven major challenges were categorized into three groups: (1) Personal factors, (2) Cultural Factors, and (3) Campus factors.

#### 4.3.2.1 Personal Factors

Under the first category of personal factors were three distinctive themes: Being shy/ introverted, hard to find like-minded friends, and living off-campus. All eight participants considered these factors contributed to their lower engagement in social networking and/or extra-curricular activities on campus.

Three students (Jenny, Tommy, and Julie) described themselves as a "shy person" and their personality naturally kept them from proactive conversations with peers and faculty. Unlike Jenny, who immigrated to the U.S. as a teenager, both Julie and Tommy were born and raised in the United States. Still all three found it hard to start or proactively engage in conversions with others. Julie declared that "I

was very shy and quiet." Jenny and Tommy also discussed their introvert personalities that prevented them from making friends and mingling with new people.

> I was shy and not confident back then so [I] didn't have much friends… I was, kind of, like, introverted people. (Jenny)

> I am also a shy person as when you first knew me. So it's hard for me to open up to people… I am kind of awkward at the beginning… later on when I get familiar I can join other people soon. (Tommy)

In the case of Julie who tried to be open to others and make friends, it was hard for her to find a peer who shared the same interests with her. Three out of the eight Vietnamese American students reported that it was hard to find like-minded friends and listed it as one of the major challenges in their social engagement on campus. Julie even mentioned that "I don't think that if I did join any organizations, it would have been easier for me to make any friends, because then we don't really share an interest." Suzanne expressed a similar point saying:

> I feel challenged to find balance, to find someone who has the same interest that I do because a lot of students on campus have different focuses. …. It is difficult to find someone who is interested in classical music in the same way that I do. So challenges of reaching out enough to find someone who agrees with me in those ways and appreciate those things in the ways that I do versus students who are in teenager minds, young and adult minds because they want to go drinking, or they like hanging out with friends or party. (Suzanne)

One possible reason for these students' difficulty in finding like-minded friends could be their status as commuting students living off-campus. Only Julie and Tommy lived on campus during their freshman year, while the other six participants had never lived on campus. The latter six mentioned that their off-

campus living resulted in disconnection from peers and other stakeholders on campus.

> I didn't live on campus and that was a struggle because when I lived at home, I didn't have many friends on campus. I wasn't able to connect with people in my resident hall … I could not have many friends on campus in freshman year. It was hard … Probably people didn't want the best, they just wanted their friends. (Suzanne)

> I've never lived in a dorm apartment on campus. I live off-campus. So I have to drive to school and then leave campus immediately after class. (Yolanda)

Ironically, even when Tommy initially stayed in a dorm apartment on campus, he could not socialize as much as he had expected. He admitted that he was shy at that time and just wanted to talk to those who were his previous acquaintances.

> I just talk to people I know, they are in community schools so a lot of people come to campus and come back home. So a lot of people did not really stay on campus a lot. So a lot of people I met as I said they just really stay at home, they did really not stay on campus. (Tommy)

#### 4.3.2.2 Cultural Factors

The eight student participants identified two themes under the category of cultural factors: cultural differences and stereotypes, which prevented them from socially engaging on campus. Two participants, Yolanda and Suzanne, discussed the impact of cultural differences on their social engagement on campus. They explained cultural differences prevented them from participating in on-campus socializing opportunities and social networking in the community. Yolanda explained:

> Yes, I would see a lot of differences actually because I think I grew up half way in Vietnam and half way in America here when I was teenager. I feel like I can't involve in American culture due to I speak a different language before. And Vietnamese culture influences me a lot, so I feel like even when I speak to them, I don't feel that much confident. (Yolanda)

In contrast, Suzanne chose to shrink her social network since she merely wanted to focus on her successful studies while working with her mother to earn more money for college tuition. Her attitude was shaped by a sense of financial duty, as well as a common cultural belief in her ethnic community that academic success in college would translate into a gainful employment and higher SES status later on.

> Right now I am very alone body. I have been very digging into my major right now. I don't have much time to hang out with friends…I have 65 clinical hours of work so I do on top of my schooling and then I help my mom on Thursdays and Fridays. So, it is very busy because I have classes from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. So it is hard for me to create a strong social life when I am so much focused on succeeding in my major. (Suzanne)

Many Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans believe that a high GPA in some specific majors, such as STEM, business, or pharmacy, would help them gain a higher social status and others' respect, securing both political and financial stability in the United States. Therefore, most of Vietnamese American parents seem to push their college aged children to solely focus on their studies, rather than finding balance in their academic and social development during their college years (Li, 2009).

Faculty-student relationship was another cultural difference that restrained the Vietnamese American students from frequently and freely interacting with faculty both in and outside their classes. Traditionally, Asian cultures tend to create an invisible distance between faculty and students since faculty members are typically considered to be authorities. Jenny confessed that she perceived that her "professors are strict and hard," and she could not feel confident and comfortable to approach them. Also, Julie, who was born and raised in the U.S., still could not have positive feelings when communicating with faculty. According to Julie, her professors were just "available" but "not approachable", based on their overall attitudes towards students. She expected more

straightforward instruction from her professors responding to her questions, whereas she mostly was directed to academic support resources to figure out a solution by herself.

> I remember when we would, say, have a test or a quiz and I had a question wrong and I asked, "Can you explain to me why this is wrong," because I personally thought this was right. They would just tell me, "Come by and see my office hours," but sometimes I don't have enough time to do that because I have class or I have other things to do, so I say, "Okay. I can't do that," or they would say, "I want you to read this and then you'll understand." Sometimes that's not ... "I want you to explain straight to me why this is wrong not just look at this blob and you'll understand," because I don't like that. So, I would ask a peer or a student to see what they would say. And usually they would tell me what I want to hear, not what the professor's telling you. (Julie)

Two participants mentioned stereotypes as a cultural factor that kept Vietnamese American students away from socializing opportunities on campus. Interestingly, Wilson and Suzanne had the opposite experiences with stereotypes on campus. Wilson, who preferred working with White students, expressed a stereotype against his own ethnic peers-Vietnamese American students. He concluded, “What I have noticed a lot of Vietnamese American students don’t like to talk that much and it is hard to me like start conversation if they are not talkative.” In contrast, Suzanne explicitly criticized what she found unfair and even discriminatory.

> What I may face is discrimination or some kind of stereotypes against me … I tried very hard in high school to be Student Vice President and I was very successful. But then I came here to do some debates, and conversations with people I didn’t win … even when I had most credentials, like an appropriate candidate for the job. But I couldn’t have that vote because I did not have many friends of mine on campus in freshman year. It was hard. Probably people didn’t want the best, they just wanted their friends. (Suzanne)

These two cultural factors - cultural differences and stereotypes- clearly show a lack of congruence between the participants’ ethnic cultural beliefs and values and practices embedded in U.S. higher education. As evidenced in the study participants’

data, such cultural mismatch could negatively influence ethnic minority students' adaption in college environments, especially their social engagement on campus.

#### 4.3.2.3 Campus Factors

Participants indicated that there were some other factors on campus that contributed to the Vietnamese American students' difficulty in social engagement on campus. These two factors included students' inability to join student organizations and others' lack of attention.

When asked to describe why they did not or could not participate in campus activities, five out of eight Vietnamese American students revealed their initial inability to socialize with campus peers during freshman year. Three male students, Wilson, Hugo, and Tommy, admitted that they were "kind of awkward at the beginning" and could not make new friends easily. Wilson recollected his difficult time when he "mostly slept, after I did homework and I went home, spent a lot of time by myself because I didn't hang out with my friends." Hugo also remembered his first year when "they were all strangers and then the outcomes were terrible since I did not have a lot of friends." Tommy had a slightly different reason for his initial difficulties on campus. He explained he was lonely because he expected to hang out more frequently with other Vietnamese friends, but most of his Vietnamese friends were commuting. Two female participants, Jenny and Julie, also experienced this initial "lonely" status on campus which they had hardly anticipated prior to coming to college. Julie's comment below makes the point.

> I was very lonely. I had a lot of time for myself. It made me reflect a lot on what I wanted in college, because I thought that college was this experience where you meet all these people and have good times, but when I was a freshman, I didn't think that I had that. (Julie)

Likewise, Jenny felt “lost” when she “really needed some resources or organization or mentor or tutor to help me. But sometimes I don't know where to reach out.” Jenny simply blamed this on her part-time job. She thought her busy schedule made her unable to join student organizations on campus. Incongruously, she was unaware of the campus lacking support for freshman, who really needed sufficient orientation opportunities for better campus adaptation and engagement in their transformative first years.

Also, two participants, Jenny and Yolanda, discussed their inability to join student organizations on campus, mostly due to time constraints. Both students complained that they did not have time to participate in student organizations, clubs, or even small groups. Jenny stated: “due to the time I can’t participate in any club or groups.” Yolanda pressed the same point.

> It’s due to the time because even when I am a student here I have to spend a lot of time to work too. I work most of the weekend. Mostly, my friends - they hang-out. I can’t hang-out with them so I don’t have a chance even they like me. When I don’t have time and I avoid them a lot so they don’t call me anymore. (Yolanda)

There was a slight difference between the two students. Yolanda simply considered student organizations an opportunity to relax and hang-out with other students in her spare-time. Jenny was more aware of some benefits that she could possibly get from participating in student organizations. These students would be able to join several student organizations on campus if campus activities were scheduled at multiple-time slots as a way of including commuting students.

Another challenge under the category of campus factor was others’ lack of attention-being ignored by others. Both Suzanne and Jenny stated that they were frustrated by being discounted by peers and faculty members. Jenny simply justified that

her teachers did not respond to her emails because they were busy. Yet, Suzanne critically pointed out people's mistreatment of her and their ignorance of her accomplishments. "I feel like they didn't see me for what I worked … I felt like I wasn't part of something because no one acknowledged what I could be… they just wanted their friends," she said.

Put all together, two campus factors, inability to join student organizations and others' lack of attention, influenced the Vietnamese American students' social engagement on campus. Kezar and Moriarty (2000) assert that lack of social support and networks result in a negative impact on freshmen's adjustment on college campus. The Vietnamese American students showed numerous challenges in social engagement on campus.

To summarize, the Vietnamese American students shared their academic and social engagement challenges, which were categorized into eight areas, including: (1) academic courses, (2) working with faculty, (3) working with peers, (4) campus navigation, (5) personal circumstances, (6) personal factors, (7) cultural factors, and (8) campus factors, which are visualized in the following figure.

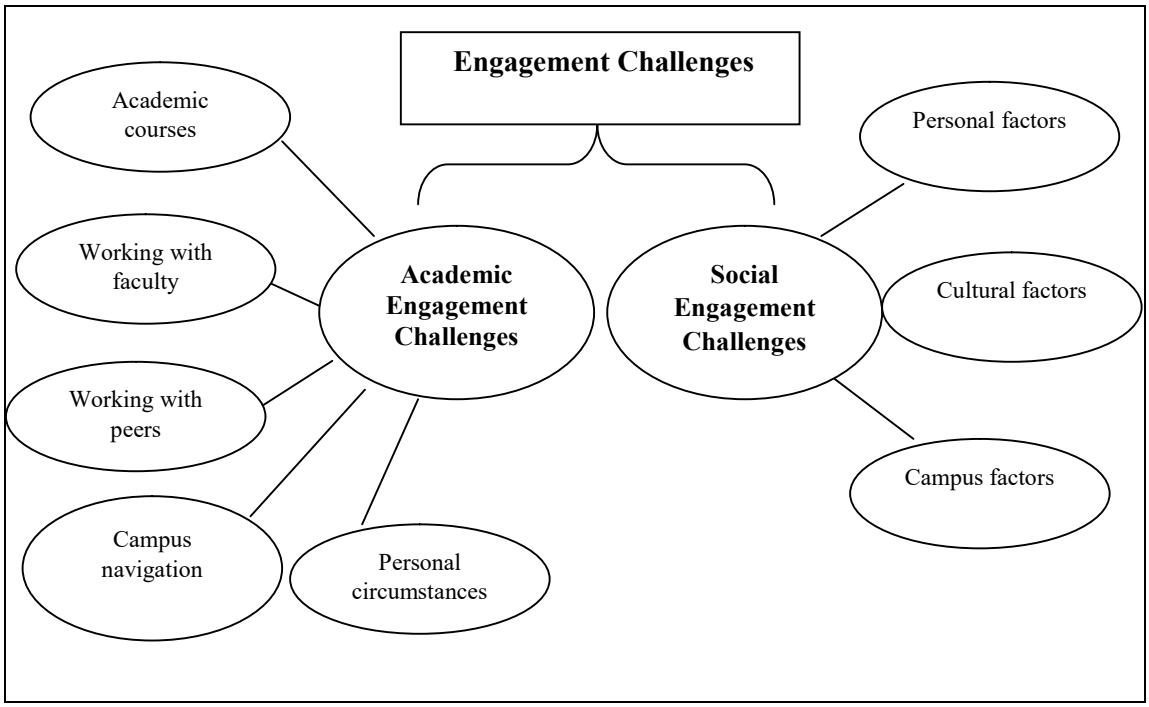


*Figure 3.* Academic and Social Engagement Challenges

## 4.4 Engagement Patterns and Strategies

In higher education literature, student engagement is commonly described in five aspects: (a) active and collaborative learning, (b) participation in challenging academic activities, (c) formative communication with academic staff, (d) involvement in enriching educational experiences, and (e) feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities (Coates, 2007). Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2011) provided a further elaboration, stating that student engagement presents two essential features: a students' efforts and purposeful educational activities and the institution's effort to "induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation" (p.44). The eight Vietnamese American student participants in this study provided some responses that are well-aligned to the existing literature, yet others posed slightly different or diverging

points. Below, findings pertaining to their academic engagement are presented, followed by the set of themes describing the participants' social engagement.

When asked about their academic and social engagement practices and coping strategies they used to respond to challenges on a PWI college campus, the eight Vietnamese American students reflected multiple similarities and differences, which are categorized below in inward and outward dispositions of academic and social engagement patterns and strategies.

#### 4.4.1 Inward Dispositions of Academic Engagement

Dedication to academic success and mentor-mentee involvement were found as the two prevalent inward dispositions of academic engagement patterns that the Vietnamese American students indicated in process of developing their intellectual/cognitive competency in U.S. higher education.

##### 4.4.1.1 Dedication to Academic Success

Dedication to academic success was clearly the most prevailing code that characterized the Vietnamese American students' academic engagement on campus. This finding presented three distinctive categories as its sub-codes: (a) self-management, (b) spending extensive time on course work and putting more effort into studies, and (c) seeking further and diverse subject matter.

In response to the questions related to academic engagement, the Vietnamese American college students consistently discussed their independent study capacity and self-management skills as the central element of their academic engagement. Both male and female students stated that they had found their own ways of dealing with academic challenges throughout their journey, and the majority of them appeared to have an independent and intelligent solution to resolve their challenging issues. In particular,

Julie, Hugo, and Tommy revealed the common experience that they worked their best by managing their academic challenges themselves rather than waiting for someone else to help them address the given challenge.

> Some classes, I actually don't know how to answer my questions, but I have to try to personally find the answers to my questions… I just struggle really hard but I have to find a way. (Julie)

> It's like trying to teach myself most of the time, yes, I teach myself dealing with tricky problems. (Hugo)

"Manage themselves," reflected their independent handling of academic obstacles; six participants clearly stated that they alone had to deal with and overcome all academic troubles that they faced in their course work. Both Jenny and Hugo stated that they had nobody to help them solve tough academic problems, so they repeatedly reviewed their learning materials and conducted an extensive search for any related resources to help them solve the problems. Dylan, majoring in Architecture, known to be a rigorous and demanding program on campus, also confessed that he "self-taught" himself with the "power through my own" attitude. "Just do it", said Dylan, who often slept only two hours each night in order to complete required assignments and projects on time.

The notion that they manage academic challenges on their own, coupled with the participants' reluctance to ask for help from their instructors/professors, may reflect the negative consequences of MMM that portrays all Asian students as smart students who do not need extra help to succeed in their academic programs. It was clear that the participating Vietnamese American students had limited expectations about faculty availability and instructional support, and chose to work independently when facing an

academic challenge. The next two findings described below are also aligned to this finding.

The second engagement pattern observed among the participants was spending extensive time on courses and putting more effort to studies. Both Wilson and Suzanne admitted that they were constantly striving to do their best and finish assignments on time. Dylan shared a similar sentiment saying that he frequently missed sleep in order to complete all of his Architecture projects.

> It's from caring about my homework. Spending majority of my time on it … I need to put hours of work into studying for the material by yourself or with other people. (Wilson)

> I do stay up late at night, trying to finish up all my coursework. And sometimes I get about maximum hours of sleeping is about four. Sometimes I sleep two hour a night … Sometimes I don't sleep at all. (Dylan)

Surprisingly, six among the eight participants admitted that they dedicated almost twice as much time as the typical hours of study by their classmates. This finding was closely aligned to what has been discussed in the literature, especially the ramifications of the MMM. Spending a great number of hours on their coursework was found as one of the most widely-used strategies by the Vietnamese American students. The Vietnamese American students also demonstrated that they not only spend more time studying, but also put in more effort to survive in their program and achieve their academic goals. Participants repeated their earnest intent to "work harder," "work more," and "work my best" throughout their narratives. Dylan stated, "that class takes up a majority of my time … I stay up late to finish models, or finish digital modeling, and drawing, and things for that class …I need to work more on this" (Dylan). Likewise, Suzanne frequently pushed herself "a little bit harder so that I would be able to go to my classes and complete my

homework." In Julie's case, the need to solve a given problem on her own was coupled with the need for "working hard".

There was a good reason for the Vietnamese American students' extreme devotion to their academic work. They were clearly aware of their racial/ethnic and linguistic marginality in the mainstream society which put them at a significant disadvantage in terms of gainful employment. Five out of the eight participants admitted that they had to work harder on studies than their typical "American" peers in order to gain a good job in the competitive U.S. labor market after graduation. In particular, to Tommy, knowing his family's sacrifice, doing his best was a moral obligation. He said, "I should work my best because they gave much for me to be better." Some of the participants were first generation immigrant students whose English proficiency was relatively low compared to native speakers. However, these students did not complain about their disadvantages of being immigrants with different English proficiency; they focused on finding alternative ways to succeed in their programs of study, which were extreme devotion to studying and putting in more time and effort.

All of the findings described above can be interpreted via the lens/myth of the MMM. The MMM falsely represents the idea that minority people can be successful in the U.S. if they are willing to work hard to overcome hardship and racial discrimination (Wang, 2007). The Vietnamese American students were not exempt from this myth, especially when they desired to be recognized for their capabilities in academics.

The last engagement pattern identified among the participants was seeking further and diverse learning opportunities. Several participants shared that they studied hard not only in their majors but also in their minors, as well as in diverse subject matters in which

they enrolled. They tended to experience more fun and earned benefits from exploring various subjects on campus. Several participants expressed their intrinsic interest in diverse topics, such as foreign languages and religious studies.

> I was minoring in religious studies, and I've taken a lot of Asian religion classes, such as Hinduism, and Buddhism, and Catholicism, and universal Christianity. We compare everything together. (Dylan)

Based on Chickering's (1969) theory, students are enrolled in majors, minors, and explore diverse subjects because they are motivated and inspired to pursue further intellectual growth along with their primary majors. This truly reflected the first vector of Chickering theory, describing how college students constructed their academic identity throughout their competency development on campus. Generally, both VSA and Non-VSA students consistently showed their devotion to academic success with their extensive time on course work and more effort on studies. Non-VSA students seemed to frequently self-manage their challenging subject matters, whereas the VSA students tended to seek further and diverse subject matter to maximize their higher education inquiries.

#### 4.4.1.2 Mentor-Mentee Involvement

Mentor-mentee involvement was another important theme of the Vietnamese American students' academic engagement. Four students, two males and two females, reported that their membership and involvement in mentor-mentee VSA groups on campus was very beneficial. In these mentor-mentee groups, Vietnamese American juniors and seniors served as mentors to freshmen and sophomores. Both mentors and mentees had a regular meeting every Thursday at the Student Union, and supported each other's academic and social development. For example, Julie clearly stated:

> it's just easier for me to connect with them, and I know them through mentor-mentee VSA already, so we're already friends. So, it's easier for us to connect that way… Most of them are all Vietnamese. (Julie)

> In my sophomore year I joined mentor-mentee VSA. It helps me branch out with other people that can help me academically too. (Suzanne)

Only half of the student participants were members of the VSA on campus and the Vietnamese Association at Charlotte (VAC) off campus. Four VSA students not only proactively engaged in mentor-mentee groups with peers of the same ethnicity but also with ones from other ethnic and racial backgrounds. These involvements, according to the students, helped expand their academic and global perspectives and critical insight that promoted their cognitive capability to successfully deal with complex academic tasks.

> In the mentor-mentee groups, they're not even Vietnamese. There's like Chinese, Japanese, Korean, African-American students, White people too …just learning about how people think and why they act the way they are … They help out a lot. (Dylan)

While Julie admitted that working in groups was helpful, she also shared this strategy with some of her VSA friends and encouraged the VSA to create mentee-mentor groups to support each other. As a result, Vietnamese Americans around campus increasingly joined the VSA, since they could see the benefits from supportive peer relationships. The four VSA members reported that these mentor-mentee groups not only were helpful to their intellectual development, but also were meaningful when they felt happy about their group partners' progression. Suzanne said, "I do a lot of with mentor-mentee groups VSA … We can text each other and ask if anyone is going to the library … So, that is how we study together and move forward."

### 4.4.2 Outward Dispositions of Academic Engagement

Interactive learning and participation in professional activities were indicated as two outward dispositions of academic engagement patterns that the Vietnamese American students demonstrated. These dispositions contributed to the students' development of intellectual and cognitive competency on a PWI campus.

#### 4.4.2.1 Interactive Learning

Interactive learning was the most common code, expressed by all of the eight participants when discussing their academic engagement on campus. The concept of interactive learning was clearly demonstrated when the participants proactively engaged in interactions with peers and faculty, facilitating meaningful learning, and voluntarily joined supplementary instructional, tutoring, and mentoring on campus. Interactive learning was also shown when the students tried to interact with others by sharing ideas and responses to build knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of a theoretical concept.

The first area in the sub-code of interactive learning was to "interact with peers." All of the students explained that to enhance their understanding of some challenging theoretical concepts, they tended to interact with peers, rather than with faculty, who seemed to be rarely available or approachable by the participants. When asked "Tell me what you normally did in your class? Which class you engaged most/ least with other students and instructors? What activities? Which whom? Why?" (APPENDIX C), all of eight participants stated that they frequently discussed the course content with peers, especially when they had troubles. Wilson stated, "I just walk to the smartest people to talk with, I want people that can explain what's going on … so if I get those people to come in the group with me once they understand something they can explain to me step

by step instead of just telling me what happened at the end." In response to the same question, all other students also reported that they normally interacted with peers to share ideas or to seek assistance, as shown in Dylan's statement:

> There's always support wherever I need it, like my friends, even if they're not Architecture majors, they are Computer Science majors, and they stay up late trying to script … We all have different creative minds, like we go through the same process designing, but in the end it looks different. (Dylan)

According to Chickering's (1969) theory of student development, college students have strong needs to interact with peers to develop their competency, including intellectual capacity and interpersonal communication skills. Suzanne, who had friends from diverse backgrounds, expressed her comfort and ease in connecting and communicating with friends.

> I do have friends of all races, Caucasian, African American, or Spanish. I am able to connect with them and can communicate with them in many ways … and I feel like a little bit less pressured when you [I] learn from my classmates versus from my professors. (Suzanne)

Noticeably, what the eight participants reported were closely aligned with the first two elements explained by Coates (2007) that students demonstrated their academic engagement through active and collaborative learning with peers. Productive peer interaction facilitates knowledge construction since students have opportunities to bring in their prior knowledge to the group discussion derived from their unique life experiences and/or previous formal education. Therefore, the student not only is able to solve academic challenges collaboratively but also actively engages in knowledge construction which helps him/her feel more deeply engaged and motivated (Hadfield & Atherton, 2008).

However, while some students felt less compelled to seek support from their instructors/professors, others admitted the need to "interact with faculty" for immediate assistance and effective problem solving. Four out of the eight participants reported that interacting with faculty was the fastest and most effective way to understand provided content and to help them solve the problem that they faced. Interestingly, female students seemed to be more actively and frequently reaching out to faculty for assistance when facing a challenge related to content. Three female students, Suzanne, Yolanda, and Jenny, described that they tended to stay longer after class to further discuss some theoretical concepts with their professors and ask questions about some confusing subject matter. Yolanda and Jenny's short comments below illustrate their after-class interactions with professors.

> If I get stuck at something I just talk straight to professors during and after the lectures … I just ask the professor since I hope he can explain me more about that. (Yolanda)

> I'm trying to ask her after class because I think she explained clearly than when I email. (Jenny)

Tommy was the only male student who actively contacted his professors to obtain further knowledge that he was seeking. He stated:

> I contacted with a lot of professors who are experienced within their field of what they do. So it was great of my professors knew what they were talking about because the Operations and Supply Chain Management is a relatively a new field that a lot of people don't know about. (Tommy)

Collectively, three VSA students tended to use their faculty's office hours, whereas other Non-VSA students just contacted their instructors after class to clarify confusing learning concepts and problems.

> I reach out to the professor … I need to stay after class to ask my professor … (Jenny, Non-VSA)

> I know that my teacher is there for me to talk… Absolutely they constantly supported me and letting me know that if I need something that they were at their office hours for me. (Suzanne, VSA-member)

Interactive learning, an outward disposition of academic engagement, was adopted by four Vietnamese-American students when they actively participated in many group projects on campus. Dylan and Suzanne reported their participation in numerous projects with classmates and faculty which effectively enhanced project members' knowledge building and development.

> I joined several projects. As long as I get the feedback from project members, and as long as they answer the question that I need, then I'm very happy with what they're teaching me and what I am exchanging with them. (Dylan)

Interestingly, Dylan and Susan recounted their similar strategy of working with faculty on their projects and they benefitted from these collaborations. Dylan was invited to participate in his faculty's architecture project.

> After a long process, I have a couple opportunities working with my professors. I'm commissioned to make a book for one of my professors right now because of my previous works in Korea with making books …And I am also working with a couple professors to get a grant for West Side - Charlotte NC Real Estate to do some Art installation work for the community and culture and history, so that's exciting. (Dylan)

Suzanne also had several projects that she worked on with her professors and she admitted that these projects would assist her in completing her degree, like projects on TPA (Teaching Performance Assessment) and ESL.

While all four of the VSA students interacted with peers and faculty, only the female Non-VSA students worked with both with peers and faculty. The two male Non-VSA students reported being uncomfortable talking with faculty. These students were disappointed with their interactions with faculty when they asked for clarification. Hugo

mentioned, “When I am confused, some professors just some suggest something or said not, they say they are here to do research not to teach.

#### 4.4.2.2 Participating in Professional Activities

Another outward disposition of academic engagement patterns which was described by four out of the eight participants was participating in professional activities. There were three sub-codes of this disposition: (1) internships, (2) professional organizations, and (3) professional training.

When asked to describe what they did for their academic development, the Vietnamese American students pointed out internship opportunities they had off-campus and considered these opportunities very beneficial. Undergraduate students who had plans to further develop their professional skills welcomed such opportunities. Suzanne recounted her 65 clinical hours working as a junior volunteer. Hugo also described his volunteer hours at a doctor’s office every week. These students reported that internship experiences not only sharpened their professional skills but also helped them enhance their specialized terminology. This, in turn, enabled them to increase their chances to land a job in their field.

> I got two training hours at doctor office, I volunteer basically as a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant), I do all the blood pressure, I do all of paperwork, I help people out in the office …it’s a learning environment. I’ve learned how to deal with people. People are different. They’re not happy persons. They suffer from something, I don’t know. They yell at you and you have to deal with them. You cannot be impolite because they yell at you without reason, some sick people. Just how to deal with them so they can get help from the doctor. (Hugo)

> For me, to participate in internship is to help me gain more professional …A lot of my friends did [it] and they says this really help. (Tommy)

Besides participating in internship opportunities off-campus, the participants actively enrolled in professional training programs on campus, such as career center

programs and interview training groups. Both Tommy and Hugo endorsed the effectiveness of these professional training programs since they could learn how to refine their Curriculum Vitae or Resumes, as well as their interview skills. Tommy said, “The Career Center, they will help you to write a resume. They help you write one if you don’t have one. They give you a mock interview and help you practice.”

Susan also reported that an on-campus training program called “Orientation counseling,” was beneficial to her. “It is basically about a student mentor’s other students,” explained Susan. She highlighted the fact that the programs helped new students “become comfortable with the college.”

In order to facilitate their professional development, some Vietnamese American students participated in a professional organization in their respective fields, such as Education groups, the Academy for International Studies, Architecture groups on campus, and an architecture organization outside the university, the American Institute for Architecture Students (AIAS). The students reported that these professional organizations served them well since their professional capacity and skills improved significantly after receiving documents and training opportunities offered by these organizations. Through their involvement in such professional organizations, the students naturally developed their professional identity as shown in Suzanne’s quote below.

> I was in the Education group and Academy for International studies which I think is important to me because these people in group also believe that educational practices we do is very important within our society. (Suzanne)

#### 4.4.3 Inward Academic Engagement Strategies

Inward dispositions of academic engagement strategies that the Vietnamese American students used to cope with their intellectual challenges included working autonomously and using varied learning support services.

#### 4.4.3.1 Working Autonomously

Working autonomously included three areas: putting more priorities on studies, setting learning goals, and time management. As college students, all participants in this study were clearly aware of the fact that they had to deal with any academic challenges on campus on their own. They devised multiple coping strategies to deal with each type of challenge, which clearly reflected their maturity and commitment to their academic goals.

Prioritizing academic work is another strategy adopted by most students as they dealt with an academic challenge. Five students out of eight admitted that facing hardship in their coursework, they always considered critically what should be focused on to overcome the obstacle. Yolanda even recommended that students should not have a boyfriend or girlfriend in order to focus on their schoolwork.

> If you don't have your boy-friend or girl-friend, you are just likely to spend time studying and studying by yourself and in groups or something like that. But I don't think you have a social life-- even hanging out with friends or club or organization because you want to be better with your studies. (Yolanda)

On the contrary, Wilson and Hugo found that their girlfriends made a significant contribution to their development throughout their college years, but they still showed strong commitment to their academic work and made it a priority above everything else. Hugo stated:

> You just need to manage your time well, and make sure that you prioritize what you need to do first and definitely stay up late all the time. Staying up late, now it becomes a culture. (Hugo)

Four students discussed that they had established specific learning goals, reminded themselves of the goals, and strived to accomplish them one by one. Dylan

discussed his intentional “effort to achieve that goal that I’m setting.” Hugo further elaborated how he had set up his own goals and his plans to “conquer” each one:

> I have my own goal, long-term goal and stuff and these are just short-term goal that I got to conquer before I get into my long-term goal and I set early like objectives, I just keep conquer one object one at a time. (Hugo)

It is important to note that the participants focused on learning goals rather than performance goals when they faced an academic challenge. Although they considered a high GPA on their resume to be very important, they also valued tangible learning outcomes from their major courses and linked such learning to their capability to apply their knowledge to the real world. Suzanne found a practice at TPA (Teaching Performance Assessment) was useful since “it's a huge culminating project that we have to do in order to go through our student teaching and our education degree process.” Tommy’s comments below reflected the same point.

> I would say the most engaged be the Supply Chain Management class because it’s like a core class that it gave you information about what the major is and what you can expect when you go out of the real world …That I can get the important information from that class. (Tommy)

Efficient time management was the last strategy that three participants utilized while dealing with their academic challenges. Hugo, Suzanne, and Dylan explained that they had developed highly efficient time management skills while dealing with their course workload and solving academic challenges. Hugo said he tried to stay “ahead of the game” and completed “most of your work either in a couple of days ahead, sometime a week.” Dylan set up his plan and follows through steps.

> I’m trying to be successful, you know what you have to do …I try to balance my schedules the best I can because I have a plan that I keep with me … It's

> just managing my time, and putting down the steps… and get it done… awards come. (Dylan)

It should be acknowledged that compared to the other five Vietnamese American students, these three students experienced great benefits through their active and meaningful social and academic engagement on campus since they were largely able to control their own schedule. In contrast, the other five students had an extremely constrained and tight lifestyle working part-time jobs and managing their course work simultaneously. The other five students' involvement in extra-curricular activities was much less than Hugo, Dylan, and Suzanne, who claimed that they were on top of managing their priorities. Interestingly, four male students seemed to be more effective in finding and balancing their schedule to complete their academic work while enjoying their college lives as compared to the four female students.

#### 4.4.3.2 Using Varied Learning Support Services

Once more, in responding to the question "Who helped you overcome academic challenges? And how?" (APPENDIX C), the Vietnamese American students shared their experience of using varied learning support services, including participation in tutoring/ mentoring/ supplementary instructions (SI), writing and speaking centers on campus and using available academic support online.

In describing their participation in campus learning support services, five of the eight student participants acknowledged that they benefitted from these campus services.

> I did go to the Writing center and Speaking center and practice from my presentation and I think it's really very helpful. (Jenny, Non-VSA)

> I did go help with a lot of writing. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

> A lot of the times we had, the school has a career center to help you with interviews. Help with professional address, how to speak and talk. (Tommy, VSA member)

These five students had different purposes for using campus services. Non-VSA students primarily used the campus services to improve their language production due to their limited English proficiency, the VSA students went to these centers for improving their job application skills, including interview and resume writing skills.

Extensively seeking academic support online was seen as an alternative strategy for Vietnamese American students to solve their academic problems. Four student participants reported frequently using online searches to handle their tough academic requirements. Jenny and Yolanda looked over online resources to confirm their answers when responding to course exams, quizzes, and tests, whereas Hugo and Julie used online resources for deeper understanding of course instructions.

> I search online for the solution my homework. If there's anything available to double check on the solution. (Jenny, Non-VSA)

> When I want to learn something, kinda find the other way of learning without touching textbooks, when I learn History and Biology I guess I go online, YouTube and searching professors to tell about … I got fit everything for myself to YouTube and do hand on stuff. (Hugo, Non-VSA)

> I use Khan Academy videos. I don't really like that, but it's like I have to look it up myself. I have to look at examples and try to understand from the examples… Those are videos that focus on one topic and they would show examples on how to do it …I look up a YouTube video on how to learn it. (Julie, VSA member)

They sometimes used other campus resources, such as library books and study rooms, to research solutions for assigned academic tasks. Julie also articulated her unique way of dealing with academic challenges. She learned how to use online resources from YouTube or Khan Academy to "teach" herself and successfully complete many of her

assignments. She said, “I use YouTube and sometimes I use Khan Academy videos … Those are videos that focus on one topic and they would show examples on how to do it.”

Interestingly, Tommy stated that he developed skills to independently navigate multiple campus resources by himself and used these campus learning resources to gain a solid understanding of theoretical concepts and to solve academic problems on his own. He used all means available to him, such as proactive online search habits and asking for tips from his older sister who attended another college.

> When I have trouble in knowing how to use the college resources, like looking for reading materials or text books, I did most of them by myself to explore things going on campus…there was a time the professor brought guest speakers coming the class and they talked about what they do and how they got into the place. That was a new aspect of what I can do…I would say some from the Websites but most from my older sister who did it all for me. She studies at the different university but she shared me with different tips … (Tommy)

The last and least frequently used academic engagement strategy used by the participants was utilizing any university-sponsored academic support services such as supplementary instruction, tutoring, and mentoring opportunities on campus. Only two out of the eight participants said that they had utilized any of these academic support services due to several internal and external obstacles. Some students stated that these services seemed invisible and they were unaware that they existed on campus. Others lamented that they were very busy with their part-time off-campus jobs and could not find enough time for using any academic support services. Hugo and Julie were the only two students using some of the campus learning support services.

> I use Supplementary Instruction (SI) sessions and tutoring that Great City University offers…but use the other resources that they have in campus like military training …to meet high standard for grading or GPA another stuff… we have mentor, mentee and I have an assigned mentor I just come to that person that need help, and my mentor is upper class when I was lower class so they know better, they know a lot more to help me out a lot. (Hugo)

> I go to a lot of SI sessions...They have these sessions every week … I go to one every Friday morning before I have quizzes … because I have a quiz every Friday in Chemistry… so I go there and they answer every question that I have… they answer all the questions that I need to know. (Julie)

This finding reflects one of the common theses in the existing literature, that the longer time a student spends on campus, the more they benefit from university-initiated academic support programs and services (Coates, 2007). It was clear that only a limited number of students (only two in this study) were able to utilize and gain benefits from the university's academic support programs even though all students paid the same amount of tuition and fees that fund those programs. Ironically, in this study, those who were most in need of the university's academic support were least served by these programs. Facing this significant challenge in using the university's academic support services, most Vietnamese American students resorted to a coping strategy of their own rather than raising their voice to request more tailored academic support services for non-residential, off-campus students.

In sum, participation in tutoring/ mentoring/ supplementary instructions/ career center/ and writing and speaking centers on campus and seeking academic support online happened to be effective for these four students to oversee their academic inquiry. Despite more involvement in both learning support services on campus and online resources for knowledge development, just two of the four students made use of these available learning resources. Noticeably, this happened to the students with their limited language proficiency. As a result, some Vietnamese American students were prevented from fully and critically engaging on campus, leading to fewer benefits to their higher education.

#### 4.4.3.3 Others

Switching majors, keeping things moving forward, visualizing learning materials of both audio and written texts, and having fun and being oneself, were the diverse strategies which the Vietnamese American students employed to improve their academic engagement.

Surprisingly, four out of the eight students reported they switched their initial majors in order to stay on course.

> I switched mainly because I didn't like Biology much as I thought it was. It required a lot like memorization things and Chemistry had a lot hand-on aspect when you learn about just particular things when you can do as calculation and figure it out to using Math and you can go to labs and like that. (Wilson, Non-VSA)

> I just stopped completely and then all the credits I studied is just a waste … I switched into Psychology and Earth Environmental Studies. The professors and everything are pretty much better. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

> In my first semester when I did some beginning in trouble at some classes of Engineering, it's like I guess they were not the ones I wanted to do at the beginning so I changed into the Business school major because I really asked why I did not have something else. (Tommy)

Four students decided to switch their majors when they could not successfully handle the demanding required courses, and one gave up his Engineering major after he recognized the mismatch between his interests and this academic pursuit. Two of the students switched their majors due to their preferences for faculty in the new departments compared to the ones from their initial majors. They valued the faculty's concern and academic support as this support could help ensure their graduation.

Along with switching majors, the two male participants stated that they strived to keep things moving forward when encountered their failures on campus.

> Keep moving … keep going by yourself and with the group, whatever you do, do more if you feel it does not help in change … if you feel your study

> group is not helping, then you need to fix that, make a new study group, just do something about it. (Wilson)
>
> Sometimes I would just forget about it and just move on, but the work was still there so I just revisited it. I still did it, even if it was wrong or right. (Dylan)

Interestingly, while Dylan recounted that his strategy of keeping tasks moving forward was worthy in the long run, since he could go back and complete tasks that he set aside. Suzanne shared an alternative strategy of visualizing learning materials that helped her better understand the challenging concepts, presenting in both audio and written texts. “Visual strategy that is good for me … I am able to follow visually through those things versus listening to my teacher is sometimes hard to keep up.” (Suzanne)

Beside the visualizing technique, Hugo and Dylan stressed the importance of having “fun and being yourself” in higher education development. While Dylan encouraged students to seek more fun, Hugo mentioned “kind of going to swim, walk in the morning” when he was truly stressed about his course requirements.

Together with the other inward academic engagement strategies, switching majors, keeping things moving forward, visualizing, and having fun and being oneself were also used by the student participants dynamically and creatively to overcome their academic challenges. However, academic engagement strategies should work concurrently with social engagement strategies, to help the students move forward towards graduation.

#### 4.4.4 Outward Academic Engagement Strategies

Actively creating collaborative learning relationships and proactively seeking assistance were two outward academic engagement strategies used by the Vietnamese American students to respond to academic challenges.

##### 4.4.4.1 Actively Creating Collaborative Learning Relationships

Creating collaborative learning relationships with peers of the same and other ethnicities was one strategy used by the Vietnamese American students for overcoming their academic challenges.

Six of the eight students reported that they worked collaboratively in groups with other students of the same and different ethnicities to master intellectual obstacles. According to Wilson, “finding the right group is the key” since he thought it was “really good especially if you can find right people, not everyone in class want to have a group and not everyone in class knows what they are doing.” Similarly, Julie stated that “in each class, I have a study group, or someone that I can study with. If not I got lost sometimes.” Julie also mentioned that her professors always thought their tests were appropriately designed for all and they were allowed to work together

> they think that their tests are fair, so they think that everything's fair to everybody. So, it's more if you study by yourself, you're okay, if you study with a group, you're still okay. (Julie)

Actively creating collaborative learning relationships appeared to beneficial to college students with their academic challenges. Eventually, while both VSA and Non-VSA tried to reach out to others to build up academic and social relationships to benefit their educational development, these student participants were likely to create groups with varied campus peers since they found this strategy was helpful for them to advance their intellectual inquiries.

> Study group is the big thing, just once a week we come there we bring our books we go over the questions that we don't understand … I got really good at forming study groups, so I just asked people at my table and let things set it up…people come but at the end bring it to the group and we do things together afterwards … we help each other understanding process and not just the answer. (Wilson)

> … it requires so much thinking and understanding that by yourself impossible to do that I need to meet people, a group of people every week just to study and understand the materials because that not something I figure out my own. (Dylan)

> …having a group of people that I could go to, because every single class that I have, I have a group of people that I study with that know what they're doing. They help me with any problems that I have. (Julie)

#### 4.4.4.2 Proactively Seeking Assistance

Proactively seeking assistance from peers, family members, and other acquaintances was another outward disposition of academic engagement pattern that the Vietnamese American students used to further their academic development.

Asking for family members' and other acquaintances' assistance appeared to be one of the most frequent responses to the question "Who helped you overcome academic challenges? And how?" (APPENDIX C)

> I would usually use student ... there are some students that know better than others. I would find those students and they would help me as much as they can. (Julie)

> I usually just asked my friends, especially the ones that were smarter and knew the materials well. I would always ask them for help to see if they could find an easier way for me to understand it. (Dylan)

Interestingly, the Non-VSA students seemed to prefer to ask assistance from peers of the same ethnicity since they felt that communication with them was more comfortable and easier, whereas VSA students felt comfortable reaching out to peers of other races for assistance.

> Vietnamese student will better explain the problem to me rather Black and White students cannot explain to me like that because of the language proficiency. (Yolanda, Non-VSA member)

> I think it's the best to learn from somebody of any races who understands the difficulties … Sometimes teachers don't understand what you're struggling with but peers understand cause they are new shoes as well. So the empathy just comes easier, it's more natural. (Suzanne, VSA-member)

This difference is the result of the difference in language proficiency among the students; the more fluently the students communicate in English, the more confidently and frequently they use language to look for academic assistance.

However, their peers were not always available when needed, so the Vietnamese American students also asked their family members to assist with their learning. Two of the eight students had asked family members to lend a hand with course assignments. Julie mentioned, “I asked my cousin when I had a question.”

> I would say some from the websites but most from my older sisters who did all for me… she studied at a different university but she shares me with different learning tips. (Tommy)

Alternatively, the other two participants sought other acquaintances’ assistance when they encountered tough assignments.

> I had a lot of support from my boyfriend because he graduated in 2016, and he had a Math degree, as well as a Physics degree. So all of those classes that I really struggled in, he already took and did really well in. So he was my tutor … I cannot overcome by myself that's when I would utilize my mentors in the faculty in the school but technically I start with me first and then I start using my resources. (Suzanne)

> I struggle a lot, my freshmen, sophomore year … but I use many Air-force RTC to get high standard for grading or GPA another stuff… RTC mentors, they know better, they know a lot more to help me out. (Hugo)

Rather than passively waiting for provided help, the Vietnamese American students appeared to proactively seek assistance from all available stakeholders,

including peers, family members, and the other acquaintances. Clearly aware those intellectual challenges would inspire more student engagement and cognitive development; the Vietnamese American students ultimately had to search for extensive assistance for academic problem solving. Statistically, while all eight participants looked for help from peers, three of them sought academic help from family members, and the other two still asked for help from other acquaintances, such as their partners and Air-force RTC.

### 4.4.5 Social Engagement Patterns

When asked to describe their social engagement experiences, the eight Vietnamese American students discussed these prevailing themes: (1) participating in extra-curricular activities, (2) participating in multicultural organizations, and (3) proactively communicating with peers of other ethnicities. Each of these four social engagement patterns will be described below with supporting evidence from the participants.

#### 4.4.5.1 Participating in Extra-curricular Activities

Participating in extra-curricular activities was the most common and highly rated social engagement strategy described by the majority of participants in this study. They admitted that extra-curricular activities helped them branch out to meet diverse individuals with whom they could exchange ideas and collaborate to improve their social development. Four male students and one female student among the eight participants said they benefited from taking part in campus activities, while the other three females who had little extra-curricular involvement confessed a feeling of overwhelming hardship and exhaustion in relation to their coursework and part-time jobs. Dylan proudly said, “I

had a lot of friends through extra-curricular activities, people noticed me because I was doing a lot … and just being involved was what I tried to do the most." Tommy was one of most active students, participating in many social organizations, such as Asian Association, Child Victim War (CVW), and Vietnamese Association of Charlotte (VAC). Wilson was deeply into faith-based organizations on campus since he believed his religious commitment would bring him a better life.

> The campus has hundreds of groups you can join, for example, M28 or C4… I went to M28 and then went to C4, they're really nice people and they're like let me in really quickly …C4 is on campus Christian group that try to reach everyone on campus and get a lot of people into it. (Wilson)

The participants' active social engagement through extra-curricular activities and on-campus student organizations clearly echoes a main thesis of Chickering's (1969) theory that college is critical time for young adult students to develop their social identity, including ethnic/racial, professional, and religious identities that are essential to their successful transition to adulthood.

#### 4.4.5.2 Participating in Multicultural Organizations

Along with extra-curricular activities, four out of eight students also took part in multi-cultural organizations through which they could deeply embrace their ethnic culture and identity, as well as having more chances to serve their own ethnic community. Tommy, Hugo, and Dylan all expressed a sense of pride and reward when discussing their involvement in multi-cultural organizations like the VSA and the Southeast Asian Coalition (SEAC).

> I was also part of VSA in my first year. My second year in college was my VSA because earlier I was talking about how Whitewashed I was …I joined VSA and they're like my second family. They're more close to me now than before. (Dylan)

> I like SEAC and I feel great, I mean I can help people. For example, I am serving under citizenship because it's hard to for some of them to fill up the paperwork … people have trouble to get stuff, when I was there I do more some translating for them…. It's more bonding I guess … I like it, I like to give me back to community, and I love helping people. (Hugo)

> I participate in the Vietnamese Association of Charlotte (VAC) which is pretty much like CVW. I guess the group of Vietnamese I help them with Vietnamese citizenship, help them with documentations, and help them with celebrations that a lot of Vietnamese people celebrate like the Lunar New year and Mid-Autumn Festival…I also help with the South-East Asian Coalition. (Tommy)

These four students deeply involved in multicultural organizations had a strong motivation to serve their ethic community and improve the university's institutional reputation in the community. In other words, although they initially considered that the multi-cultural organizations could enhance their opportunities to further embrace their ethnic culture, they grew to care about the positive contributions that they made to both the local Vietnamese community and to the reputation of Great City University in the region. In order to be as successful as possible when contributing to their communities or to the positive reputation of Great City University, the students found that they had to expand their social networks with peers of other ethnicities and actively sought such opportunities.

#### 4.4.5.3 Extensively Communicating with Peers of Other Ethnicities

Apart from their participation in multicultural organizations, the Vietnamese American students also proactively engaged in communication with peers of other ethnicities since they believed it necessary to promote their social skills. They also found their proactive inter-cultural communication offered them a sense of pride as they introduced their ethnic tradition to others from diverse races. Hugo stated, "I can introduce my culture anywhere and I'll make friends and keep going with this." Dylan

also commented on some differences across various ethnic groups while there was still a common goal to pursue together. “We do get stick together … I think it's very different from other ethnic groups because we do the same things in different ways.”

In the same manner, both Tommy and Suzanne proactively invited peers from other ethnicities to participate in the pageant competition so that their peers would gain more cultural knowledge about Vietnamese tradition. Most importantly, three students in this group demonstrated their leadership competency by intentionally initiating new student groups on campus.

Reflecting on how they intentionally initiated new student groups, both Tommy and Dylan stated that they thought of the benefits of student groups when calling for Vietnamese American students’ participation on campus. Tommy initiated the revival of the VSA after the long absence of this multicultural organization on Great City University campus. He wanted Vietnamese American students to have chances to make their ethnic culture recognized on campus. Wilson took a slightly different approach and initiated a study group based on his belief that higher academic achievements and professional competency would help advance Vietnamese Americans’ social and economic status and quality of life in American society (Maekawa-Kodama et al., 2001).

#### 4.4.6 Inward Social Engagement Strategies

Internal social engagement strategies were in two distinct categories: resiliency and development of interpersonal communication skills. The Vietnamese American students believed these strategies had a positive influence on their social involvement on campus.

#### 4.4.6.1 Resilience

In terms of resiliency, four of the eight participants reported that when they recognized their own resistance to be more socially active on campus, they tried to create opportunities to be more involved:

> I decided to change; to do different things… because I think that if I don't have a lot of connections in college, like if I was just focused on myself, I wouldn't be able to be as further as I am right now, because I have these connections with people that have helped me better myself and push myself to do better and I think if I didn't have them, I wouldn't be able to do that. (Julie)

> I actually have a lot of pride that when I need help I never try to ask for help, just stick on myself and try to work on myself… but I have to find any club or fraternity that fit you, of course I have do the research on it, and see if it fit me, and if doesn't I just go ahead to start to join in, rushing it. (Hugo)

> …it is my determination … adversity promoted growth and hardship only helped me become better …And I wanna be able to challenge myself and it has to be a discomfort that I'm okay with, because challenge is good, adversity is good. (Suzanne)

These students were aware that their resilience helped them become more engaged on campus.

#### 4.4.6.2 Focus on Self-Development/Building Interpersonal Communication Skills

Together with resiliency, developing interpersonal communication skills was an alternative strategy that four of the eight students considered a weakness that needed improving upon to facilitate more socializing opportunities.

> You just have to care, you just I guess show interest that you want to be there, you want to know them, and when you open up, and you want to know them and they also open up try to get to know you too so kinda both mutual friendship. (Hugo)

> So we just find ways to manage them and talk to each other more, not about the school but the other things so we become happy more and release my stress … I find out something unhappy and my friends can tell me to go or at least we go hang out and eat something to release stress. (Yolanda)

> I just keep talking, and I find the topic that we can both relate on … yes, I find the right person and right group. (Wilson)
>
> But the American all look the same level. So I kind of change a little bit …I would say it does impact to socialize. Personally I feel I act differently around Vietnamese people do around American students. I don't want to say act differently but think of things I have to say differently. As I said that I think like other Vietnamese people but I phrase my words differently…I guess my first year, I, myself, was a shy person in general. So I guess with me trying to get out of that… I felt like would help me grow out of my shyness and just be able to explore more within this. (Tommy)

Resiliency and improving interpersonal communication skills were the Vietnamese American students' internal factors, contributing to increasing their level of social engagement on campus. On one hand, these internal factors manifested due to individual personality traits as introverted/ shy, as well as their personal communication skills; on the other hand, the students' external factors also influenced their social engagement on campus.

#### 4.4.7 Outward Social Engagement Strategies

Living on campus, interacting with campus agents, and expanding social networks were three outward dispositions of social engagement strategies that helped these students create more social engagement opportunities on a PWI campus.

##### 4.4.7.1 Living on Campus

Two of the eight student participants lived on campus initially, and this positive experience of campus residency helped them have more friends. Therefore, these VSA students strongly recommended this strategy to their friends and family members who were commuting and lacked the socializing opportunities to better adjust and adapt to campus.

> the first of the making friends who were living in my dorm and then after that join in different groups and make more friends through that. (Tommy, VSA-member)

> When I first came here, I had a lot of friends living in my dorm because I met them through my classes and most of them were Whites. (Julie, VSA-member)

Also, in her attempt to have more friends, Julie later branched out and joined student organizations on campus to expand her circle of friends.

Tommy explained that being a campus resident afforded him access to information about campus activities, which he could then tell others who needed to know.

> And that's also a way I found out about student activities ... Then, at that point, spread about the information to other people so that they can join and they can get the same things that I did. (Tommy, VSA-member)

#### 4.4.7.2 Interacting with Campus Agents

To further describe his social engagement strategies, Tommy mentioned that interacting with campus agents was an initial strategy that was helpful to him when he was feeling lonely. "For me, to be more engaged I did ask my Resident Assistant in my freshman." Tommy started his socialization on campus by communicating with his Resident Advisor (RA) and also by reading flyers promoting events on campus. Dylan advised students to help eliminate campus discrimination by reporting the potential incidents with campus agents, such as Dean Office or Student Service Administrator:

> if you feel discriminated against you can just go to the Dean's Office. I'm pretty sure that's what it is, and they can help you figure out what you need to do if you do feel discriminate against, or if you feel like you're not treated equally… I would say the best interest of finding things would be the people who live in the dorm or their RA who I guess provided with them the dorm. They know about different organizations on campus and they can help you get things that you want to connect with … So you can go to them and ask if you want to meet with somebody or you want to figure out what you like to join in different organizations. They can help you with that. (Dylan, VSA-member)

According to Dylan and Suzanne, interacting with campus agents not only served as a helpful strategy for them to be up to date on campus information for more social engagement, but it also appeared as critical and practical strategy that helped them feel more secure about their campus engagement.

#### 4.4.7.3 Expanding Social Network

Pertinent to social engagement strategies, seven of the participants shared their experiences of expanding their social networks by interacting with peers from other ethnicities and VSA organizations from other universities nation-wide.

> When I first came, I did not have that with the mentor Asian people, I just go to class, go home, like just study and stay home so I didn't feel in that way. But later on when I get more involved, learn more socializing with different people and that why I feel more belonging to this campus. (Tommy, VSA-member)

> I would say I am more confident about myself too so that I could talk to anybody, just to get to know them very well and try to make connections … because in college, it's like a new physical life you need to go out and meet people. You will do the same with other people who come in campus. It's up to you as a mentor or as a physical friend. (Suzanne, VSA-member)

Tommy and Suzanne also reported that expanding their social network significantly helped them enhance their socializing opportunities, such as movies in Student Union, sports facilities, health center, counseling center, and flyers around campus. While Suzanne preferred the movies in the Student Union, Hugo was interested in the sports facilities, and Tommy was keen on cultural events advertised in campus flyers.

In the same manner, Dylan admitted that expanding his social opportunities was significant to helping with his engagement on campus. "I would say at least do try to join

some student activities on campus to make easier to what you like to do or what your passion are." (Dylan, VSA-member)

To summarize, the eight Vietnamese American students demonstrated distinctive patterns and coping strategies for academic and social engagement on a PWI campus which are visualized in Figure 4.

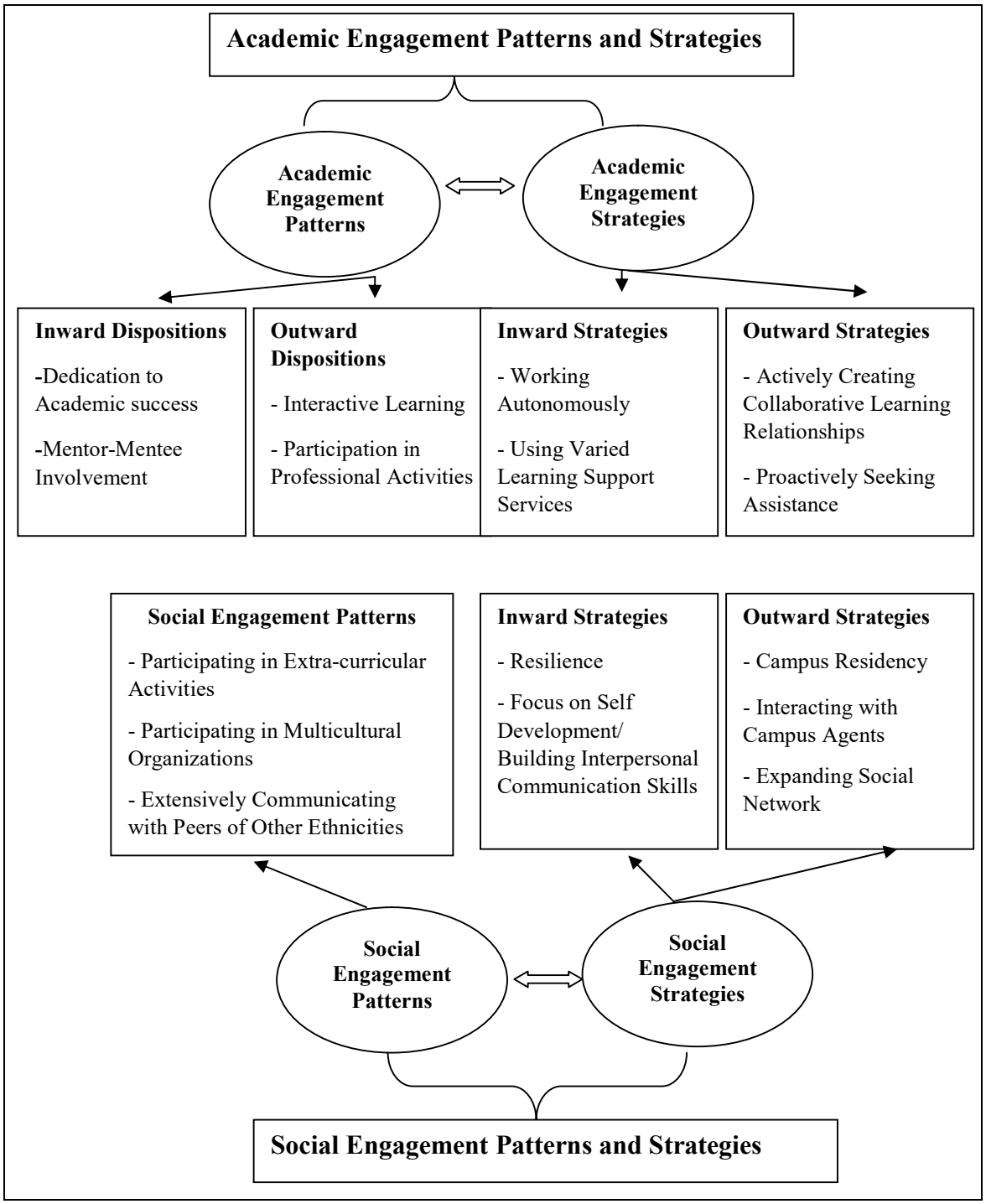


*Figure 4.* Academic and Social Engagement Patterns & Strategies

## 4.5 Resources Needed

As a committed researcher, interviewer, and primary data analyst, the author spent extensive time to deeply immerse in the collected data while revisiting the participants

frequently to observe and understand their complex experiences of campus engagement. It was clear that the four VSA student participants showed deeper engagement both academically and socially, as compared to their Non-VSA counterparts. Consequently, the VSA students described more positive campus experiences in terms of their academic achievement and social networks and enjoyed further benefits from campus resources. For example, while three out of the four VSA students could describe how their positive campus experience contributed to their overall development, both academically and socially, two out from the four Non-VSA students refused to recommend their university to family and friends as a good school to attend.

Accordingly, most of the VSA students could discuss mutual influences between students and the campus stakeholders, as well as campus services, in bringing benefits to both; therefore, these students showed greater engagement and a desire and agency to make some positive changes happen on campus.

> I think the school does its best… this school gives us the platform to host and house all these events, which is more than enough because without the school, we don't have a place to do this, that's convenient for everyone. (Dylan, VSA member)

Similar, one VSA student, Suzanne, stated, “I feel like GCU has done a great job, considering the fact that they are growing exponentially.” Another VSA student, Tommy, estimated this campus “the best university in the state.”

On the contrary, both Jenny and Yolanda, Non-VSA students, believed that the campus was stressful compared to “the Appalachian University” which they considered to be a “better campus” for their relatives and friends to enroll.

However, all eight student participants articulated several recommendations that they thought to be important so that Vietnamese American students can receive sufficient

resources and support on campus that facilitate their academic and social development. Their recommendations were in the five distinctive categories: (1) course design and syllabus, (2) faculty, (3) department, (4) student affairs and services, and (5) college administrators.

### 4.5.1 Course Design and Syllabus

When asked, "What kind of support do you believe to be more helpful for students' academic/social engagement?" (APPENDIX C), the VSA students tended to initiate suggestions related to student affairs and services and college administrators on campus, whereas the Non-VSA students were likely to prefer improvement in course design, faculty, and in departments. Several of the Non-VSA students expected to receive more informative course syllabi, including sufficient and effective study guides, while other Non-VSA students were concerned about a culturally responsive syllabus.

Two out of the four Non-VSA students complained about the syllabi provided, and the lack of study guides, which caused them greater challenges. They wanted course designers to care about their obstacles in their coursework:

> he is teaching is very general but in the exams it is about specific problem. When the exams is coming, he does not provide the study guide…just teaching without guiding students to the right direction…" (Yolanda, Non-VSA student)

Yolanda also expressed her strong desire for additional study guides, "without study guides, I'd better give up." Three out of the four Non-VSA students also noted that the syllabi were not culturally responsive, which contributed to their academic troubles. These students were unmotivated to process the required materials because they seemed inaccessible.

> I didn't like the material much, it wasn't like as I wasn't into it… I needed to understand the concept of the whole thing. (Wilson, Non-VSA)

> Sometime I get stuck because the course requires reading and I have to read, but I didn't enjoy what I am doing. (Hugo, Non-VSA)

> I guess the instructions because sometimes the way they teach is different from the way I perceive the information. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

> Therefore, "I really need any explanation that help me understand more … mostly I did not understand the details the basic concepts. (Yolanda, Non-VSA)

The Non-VSA students could have better understanding of course content if learning input like syllabi and study guides were provided and were culturally responsive explanations by instructors.

### 4.5.2 Faculty

More student-faculty interaction, more priority/focus on students, and inspiring teaching methods were the three categories of recommendations that the Vietnamese American students suggested for improving their engagement on campus.

Further responding to the "recommendation" question, two of the eight Vietnamese American students expressed their desire to have more student-faculty interactions, which they thought to be important for them to stay on course. For instance, Julie wished "the professors could reach out enough to the students." Hugo also explained that the reason he quit his initial major of Biology was that he could not interact with faculty when in need.

> the faculty in the Psychology department is more supportive and understanding than the Science Department …the Psychology, they are more approachable than the Science department because the Science department they have to do researches along with teaching. Psychology, not so much…When I switched to Psychology…the Psychology Department helped me a lot with all the paper work and the process. And making sure that I can graduate within four years, so they are really helpful… I wish to have that support in the Science department. (Hugo)

When discussing what a student expected from faculty, Wilson commented that he preferred more interaction between students and professors in class.

> Mr. X was more of approachable, I really enjoyed his class and he had a lot of things we could learn but like the teacher I would talk to the most is Mr. X because we had a lot of time in this class and we could have just like an open discussion what we thought. (Wilson)

Although they acknowledged that faculty members were busy with their research, the Vietnamese American students also expressed their annoyance at not being a priority of faculty. Julie stated that, “I would probably advise the professors to ... I know that they have a lot to do, but I think that they should focus on the students a lot, because they're here for us.”

More critically, some students recognized an unequal treatment from faculty:

> In the Biology, everyone started out want to be a doctor. Most of them want to be a doctor, so they pick and choose who they wanted to support, but in Psychology they don't. (Hugo)

In this regard, the students urgently requested more of the faculty’s attention to support students academically:

> Biology, Chemistry, most of them I guess need to pay attention more to the students because their retention rates are extremely low. I get it's hard and it's a hard major but you gain more support than student needs, and they will succeed. (Hugo)

According to these students, interactive and inspiring teaching methods were an essential component in the teaching of those faculty members who have cultivated student involvement in their courses. Two contrasting comments by Wilson and Dylan made this point very clear:

> it was really interactive, we were listening to him and we were learning and even… I never really had interest in. He just had a display in a way that was fun to learn and you wanna to learn. (Wilson)

> My professor currently, he's a new professor so his teaching isn't really that advanced. It's very slow paced and very mediocre, so I guess that's why it's not as stressful, but it adds more stress because we don't know what we're doing or what we're supposed to do or what the outcome is. (Dylan)

Accordingly, second-rate lesson delivery would cause the students to step back from their course content when they were confused about their learning process and outcomes. Alternatively, more inspiring teaching methods were suggested for faculty members, especially those who work with undergraduate students. These methods are believed to potentially promote student engagement in higher education.

### 4.5.3 Department

Although some academic departments have positive reputations in terms of their support for students, the participating students still expressed a strong interest in having faculty of the same ethnicity and sufficient academic support from the department for their emotional and intellectual engagement. The students were somewhat satisfied with the faculty and department support:

> Being in the College of Education, my professors are not only supportive academically, they're very supportive emotionally and mentally because of the struggles that I faced in my personal life. There they are. And very understanding. And very empathetic to help kind of my success in this program. (Suzanne)

However, the students still asked for further support from the department in terms of faculty of the same ethnicity. They thought faculty diversity to be important for diverse students' needs.

> In Psychology, they try to keep the professor, keep the diversity among professors. I mean, there's a lot of Russians, a lot of Indians in psychology department. But there's no Asian … I had one Vietnamese professor in Biology, and he helped a whole lot. And he's the reason why I switched to Psychology, because he made me realize that Science is not for everyone. Because without him, understanding me, I would just stick with Biology and just, I might drop out I don't know. He made me realize that I needed to follow my dream instead of just sticking it out because of that. (Hugo)

From Hugo's perspective, faculty of the same ethnicity would be more helpful in supporting disadvantaged students due to better cultural understanding. For that reason,

department administrators should exhibit a higher degree of concern for their students when considering recruitment.

In addition, the students mentioned their needs of sufficient academic support, related to department services like supplementary instructions, mentors, and tutors. These students stated that they needed practice opportunities provided by the departments which would help sharpen their specialized skills. Tommy mentioned, "… it's hard to find that Vietnamese mentor that does what is like to do or you tried to strive for," and he further elaborated non-internship offered in the department related to his major. Jenny also expressed her desire of having more support from the department, "I think I want to get more knowledge and skill or experience to get ready when I apply to my real job ... And I want to get more well prepared for my jobs in the future."

Taken together, having faculty of the same ethnicity and sufficient academic support from the department should be noted as two resources that the Vietnamese American students needed for their better engagement on campus.

#### 4.5.4 Student Affairs and Services

In responding to the "recommendation" question, the participants were concerned about student affairs and services, in terms of dissemination of information, recruitment of institutional agents of the same ethnicity, and adequate activities for undergraduate commuters after school.

Referring to dissemination of information, three out of the eight students reported they were not notified, either visually or online, of any information regarding student services, such as writing, speaking, interviewing, or counseling. With fewer notifications provided about learning support and socializing opportunities, students were less likely to participate in engagement opportunities on campus. In particular, Jenny sadly claimed

that, "…they didn't writing advertise or let people know about it." (Jenny) Even when they visited the counseling center on campus, their issues were adequately resolved due to the lack of cultural understanding. In this light, the Vietnamese American students requested to work with institutional agents of the same ethnicity.

In terms of student demand on institutional agents, student affairs and services tended to be less inclined to consider recruitment of institutional agents, such as counseling therapists or SOAR counselors, who were able to offer better advice for disadvantaged students and that help improve student retention on campus.

> But my friend did go and she is Vietnamese-American and she went due to the stress of the pressure of her parents in an academic setting and when she went to go to the counselor and have that conversation there was some kind of disconnect… And there is not exactly a solution to it all the time. (Suzanne)

> …it probably would be a good idea to have counselors that are different ethnicities. So students can connect with them a little bit easier. Because a lot of us have that same shared problems. So it'd be a little be easier for them to connect to and be more able to talk about them as well. (Tommy)

In addition to the recommendation of dissemination of information, recruitment of institutional agents of the same ethnicity, the Vietnamese American students were interested in having more activities for them as undergraduate commuters to participate in after school.

> the campus is a really big campus, 30,000 students is a lot and of that 30,000 only 4,000 live on campus. So, it's hard to get the demographics of those students, especially the ones who leave, because they are commuters… we do hope that we can promote enough to where we can, be that second home for the commuters, to have the chance to stay and join VSA as much as we want them to. (Dylan)

Based on the collective student opinions about resources they lacked on campus, three recommendations of better dissemination of information, recruitment of

institutional agents of the same ethnicity, and adequate activities for undergraduate commuters after school would be worthy changes.

### 4.5.5 College Administrators

Better campus accommodation and security were the other two recommendations the Vietnamese American students conveyed in the study, pertinent to the college administrators.

In addressing better campus accommodation, which they believed to be essential for their campus adjustment and better engagement, the Vietnamese American students intentionally mentioned current events on campus. For instance, construction sites were everywhere on campus, and student commuters had to spend an extensive amount of time to locate an available parking space. They were sometimes late for classes and other campus events. As a result, they were unwilling to be more involved on campus. Julie was bothered due to "the freaking parking." Yolanda claimed, "I don't like the traffic here. It takes me forever to come to class, even I get here on time, but the traffic made me late for the class which is I don't like that. It's too much people. (Yolanda)

Critically, Hugo articulated that the campus leaders should

> look at students more of a human being than just a number because they look at us as just another one…they need to try to accommodate, or not accommodate, but would try and with because that's more than just more than the school is very diversified. We have veterans here we have Asians, a lot of Asians here. We have a lot of Blacks, a lot of Hispanic. So at least try to diversify it, or education or the training, too. (Hugo)

Yolanda recognized the inferior parking services on campus as a detrimental factor that negatively impacts student engagement. Hugo was thoughtful in recommending sufficient support for diverse students. Alternatively, Hugo's suggestion

included an intended message about equity or equitable treatment that each student deserved for his/her development in higher education.

In addition to the recommendation of better campus accommodation, the Vietnamese American students disclosed their concern about the campus security system. Although they acknowledged that this recommendation is associated with the financial constraints of a public institution, the Vietnamese American students considered it to be important to send to the campus administrators:

> The campus is a little more dangerous now, just because it is public. But, I mean, the campus can only do so much, because the more they do, the more money they take from the students. So they don't wanna do that, but part of me tells me that they should do. (Dylan)

> We need some more security system in here. At least students, faculty, staff or all professors, can come to campus, not all people … I mean it is so crowded everywhere, plus almost everyone can get to campus. They're maybe criminal here. (Yolanda)

Noticeably, the VSA students tended to make suggestions related to student affairs services and college administrators on campus, the Non-VSA students were more likely to prefer improvements in course design, faculty, and department administration.

The collective recommendations that the Vietnamese American students believed to be essential to improving their academic and social integration on a predominantly White campus can be divided into to five campus levels, visualized in figure 5:

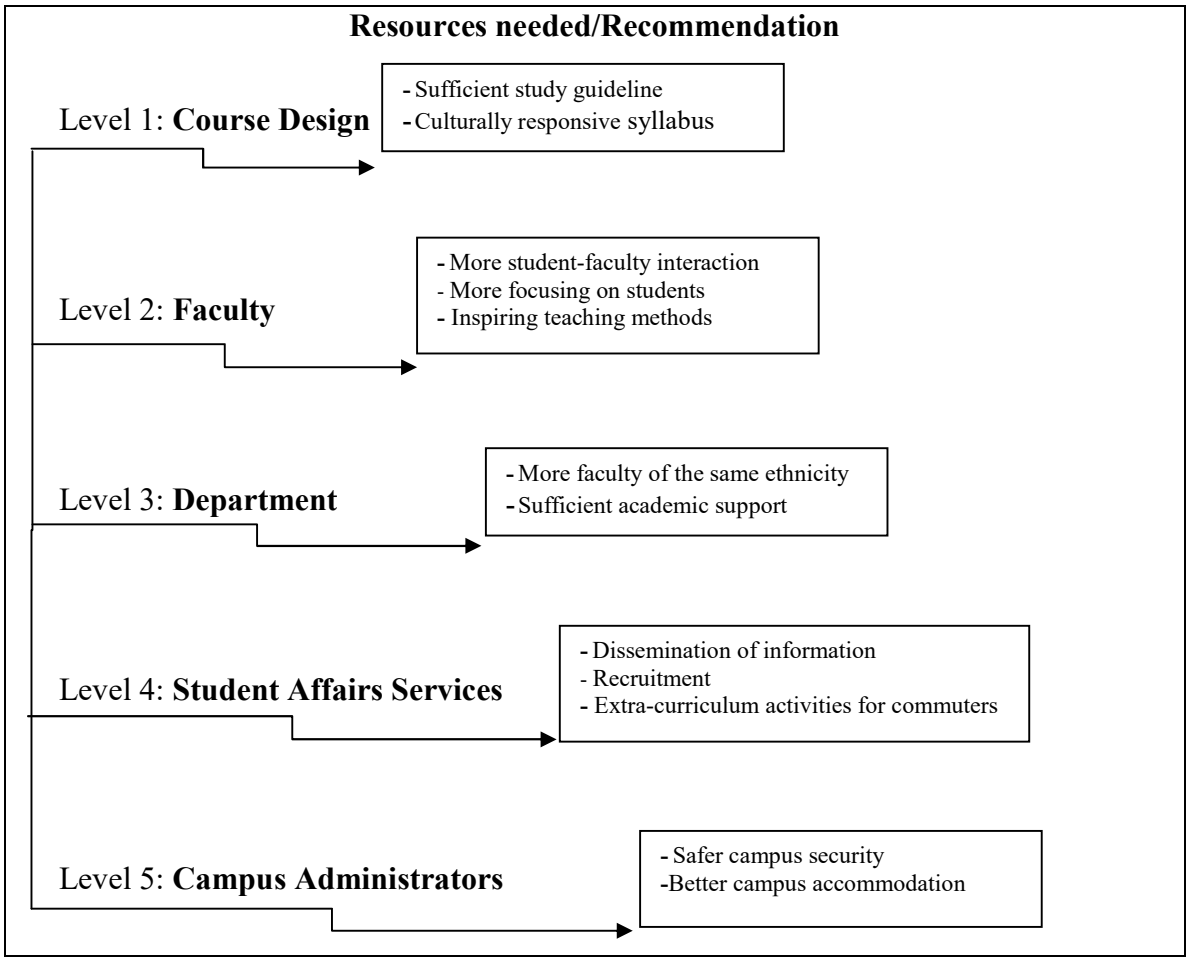


*Figure 5.* Vietnamese American Students' Resources Needed

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 reports major thematic findings derived from eight Vietnamese American students enrolled in a predominantly White campus located in the Southeast. The findings focused on four areas, the Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development aligned with their academic and social identities, their engagement challenges on campus, academic and social engagement dispositions and strategies used when responding to those challenges, and suggestions for improvement. The overall analysis revealed some commonalities and significant differences between two groups of participants, VSA students versus Non-VSA students, which included some overlapping

and other diverging aspects of their academic and social identities enacted on the PWI campus.

Both VSA and Non-VSA students exhibited three strong academic identities: being smart, hard-working, and career-oriented. They also showed four common social identities: open to diverse races, proactive, leadership competence, and being family-oriented. In contrast, the VSA students' academic identities presented three additional features: collaborative learning, competitive academic achievement, and self-directed learning. The Non-VSA students presented limited American English proficiency as part of their academic identity.

The VSA students' social identities included three elements: embracing their ethnic culture, interdependence, and being community-oriented, which in turn positively impacted their campus engagement and their overall development in higher education. In contrast, Non-VSA students' social identity showed: strong affiliation with Whites and introverted personality. These were often a hurdle to their social engagement. The Non-VSA students limited the boundary of their social interaction and engagement, resulting in further challenges to their academic and social integration on campus.

The eight participants showed multiple inward (e.g., dedication to academic success) and outward dispositions (e.g., interactive learning) in their academic engagement while utilizing various academic engagement strategies to overcome their challenges. Influenced by the MMM, most participants resorted to inward strategies such as working autonomously. As compared to Non-VSA students, VSA students were more likely to become proactive in seeking external assistance and using campus resources.

Participation in multicultural organizations and/or extracurricular activities as well as expanding communication/interactions with diverse students, were major social engagement strategies adopted by the participants. They still used some inward coping strategies (e.g., resorting to their own resilience and focusing on self-development) along with a few outward social engagement strategies (e.g., interacting with campus agents).

While the VSA students expressed a more positive outlook about campus support for their academic and social development, all the participants identified several areas in which campus resources were still lacking, but were considered essential for their campus engagement and overall development as college students. Therefore, they delivered several recommendations to campus stakeholders, such as faculty, academic departments, student affairs and services, and college administrators so that they would have a better and more supportive college environment. They expressed their voices demanding a college environment that would effectively facilitate their academic success and social integration on campus as well as their overall development as young adults.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

## 5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5

This chapter includes five sub-sections. The first three are (1) a brief description of the study context followed by a research purpose statement, the four research questions and a description of research design, (2) a summary of major findings, and (3) discussions that relate the findings to existing literature. The fourth sub-section discusses implications for future research and for various stakeholders, such as faculty and higher education administrators.

Despite the prevalent stereotype of Asian American students as high achievers from model minority communities, Asian Americans are a highly diverse group. Each Asian American ethnic community, such as the Vietnamese American community, possesses their unique cultural heritage and funds of knowledge; they also experience a set of challenges and struggles as a racial/ethnic minority and as a recent immigrant community in the U.S. When entering U.S. colleges, especially PWIs, Asian American students naturally bring in their cultural assets to higher education which could enrich the cultural life of the institution. At the same time, as members of a racial/ethnic minority, they are more likely to face a unique set of academic and social challenges, when integrating on campus (Lee et al., 2017). Considering that the college years are an important time for identity development, Asian American students go through a complex process of building their identities in multiple domains (e.g., racial, academic, and social identities) while adapting to the cultural and institutional context of the PWI. This study explored the Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and their experiences of academic/social engagement on a PWI campus in the Southeast of the

United States. This study also examined major challenges, strategies of engagement, and suggestions that these students believed to be essential to improving their engagement on campus. Four

RQ 1: How do Vietnamese American students develop their racial/ethnic identity as well as academic and social engagement on a PWI college campus?

RQ 2: What challenges do Vietnamese American students face in their quest for social and academic integration in a PWI college campus?

RQ 3: What are Vietnamese American students' academic and social engagement practices and coping strategies responding to challenges on a PWI college campus?

RQ 4: What do Vietnamese American students believe to be essential to improving their academic and social integration on campuses in the United States?

This qualitative study implemented Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a branch of phenomenological research which aims to understand participants' shared life experiences within a specific socio-cultural context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In particular, this study examined the complicated experiences of the eight Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and their campus engagement on a PWI campus. Participants' descriptions and elaborations of their first-hand experiences as well as their reflections were the primary data for analysis.

Data were collected through repeated semi-structured interviews. The initial interview took from 45 to 60 minutes while the follow-up interview lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. Data analysis started with a careful review of interview transcripts and the development of inductive codes that identified key points and/or important aspects of the participants' racial/ethnic identities and campus engagement strategies. Atlas.ti,

qualitative analysis software was used to ensure consistency and transparency in the coding process. Then, all the results from the data analysis were discussed in relation to Kim's theory of Asian American racial identity development and the MMM to explain the major facets of the participants' experiences and their unique needs on a PWI campus.

## 5.2 Summary of Major Findings

Findings related to the first research question indicate that the eight Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development are well explained through Kim's (1981, 2001) five stage model of Asian American racial development: ethnic awareness, White identification, awakening to social political consciousness, redirection, and incorporation. Furthermore, the students' racial/ethnic development clearly differs between two distinct groups, VSA and Non-VSA students. While four VSA students constantly tried to strike a balance between their ethnic identity and the dominant cultural practices on their PWI campus, the Non-VSA students showed a strong tendency to assimilate to the dominant cultural frames of reference. Therefore, four VSA students have reached stage 4 or 5 in Kim's model of Asian American identity development; all four Non-VSA students remained in stage 2 or 3. These stages were not linear but often intermingled with each other and/or co-existed in each individual's experience as a whole.

VSA and Non-VSA students presented some similarities and differences in their academic and social identities. Both VSA and Non-VSA students shared three types of academic identities: being smart, hard-working, and career-oriented. VSA and Non-VSA students also shared four types of social identities: open to diverse races, family-oriented, proactive, and leadership competency. However, the VSA students also expressed three

other characteristics: collaborative learning, competitive academic achievement, and being self-directed as essential facets of their academic identity. In contrast, Non-VSA students listed their limited American English proficiency, which they considered a significant academic disadvantage. Given that, surprisingly, the Non-VSA students, even with their limited language proficiency, desired to affiliate with Whites, and developed their social identities based on this preference. On the contrary, the VSA students held their social identities as individuals embracing ethnic culture, achieving interdependence, and being community-oriented. The four VSA students who proudly embraced their ethnic culture and identity demonstrated more proactive and effective campus engagement patterns than Non-VSA students, and therefore experienced fewer challenges and more desirable outcomes in their academic endeavors and social integration on campus.

The eight Vietnamese American students listed several academic and social engagement challenges that they experienced. Major academic engagement challenges included rigorous and hard-to-understand course content, even after they worked hard, and a lack of opportunities to work with faculty members when dealing with challenging academic requirements. Hardship in working with peers and navigating campus resources emerged as significant challenges, along with some personal circumstances. To detail the challenges in their social engagement on campus, the student participants mentioned several personal, cultural, and campus factors that hindered them from fully integrating into the campus social community.

Vietnamese American students' academic engagement practices reflected four distinct features: two inward dispositions - dedication to academic success and mentor-mentee involvement, and two outward dispositions - interactive learning, and

participating in professional activities. To deal with academic challenges, they identified five coping strategies: working autonomously, using varied learning support services, actively creating collaborative learning relationships, and proactively seeking assistance, as their inward and outward dispositions.

Some differences were found between VSA students' academic engagement strategies and those of Non-VSA students. While Non-VSA students discussed their practices of working autonomously, VSA students searched for and created collaborative learning relationships. Both VSA and Non-VSA students proactively sought extra-assistance, used varied support services online and on campus, and employed alternative strategies, such as switching majors, keeping things moving forward, visualizing subject content, and having fun and being oneself.

Heterogeneity among the eight Vietnamese Americans was also found in their social engagement coping strategies. While all participants demonstrated their social engagement on campus by participating in extra-curricular activities and communicating with peers of other ethnicities, only four students joined multicultural organizations, such as the VSA on campus. Non-VSA students focused more on self-development such as building interpersonal communication skills. Furthermore, the VSA students employed a variety of inward and outward social engagement strategies which they found to increase their socializing opportunities. These social engagement strategies included resilience, building interpersonal communication skills, living on campus/campus resident, interacting with campus agencies, and expanding their social network. As a whole, the Vietnamese American students were eager to utilize best-suited strategies that they believed would effectively support their campus involvement.

The Vietnamese American students made recommendations for five levels of campus stakeholders that they thought to be important to student academic success and social integration on campus. Their recommendations were under five different categories: course design, faculty, department, student affairs and services, and college administrators. Their suggestions showed the lack of tangible institutional support available to facilitate these students' academic pursuit and social integration on campus. In particular, the participants requested a more informative course syllabus along with effective study guides; a culturally-responsive syllabus was another recommendation. The participants asked for more faculty-student interaction, more priority/focus placed on students, and inspiring teaching methods. In addition to the recommendations about faculty, the Vietnamese American students pointed out necessary support from their programs/departments and expressed their desire to have faculty who share the cultural backgrounds with them and to have sufficient academic support services. The participants also requested that on-campus Student Affairs and Services employ more effective strategies for information dissemination, recruitment of institutional agents of the same ethnicity, and adequate activities and services for undergraduate commuting students after regular office hours. Finally, the Vietnamese American students also called for more attention from college administrators to improve campus safety and accommodations, which they perceived to be important in improving their academic engagement and social integration on campus.

## 5.3 Discussion of Major Findings

### 5.3.1 Racial/Ethnic Identity Development

As a whole, this study has supported that the ethnic identity development of the eight participating Vietnamese American students was congruent with what Kim (1981, 2001) described in the model of Asian American racial development. Kim's model has been criticized as being relatively out of date, yet this model has been found to be still relevant to this study. It might be due to the fact that the location of the university and surrounding community as well as the university's institutional characteristics as a PWI played a significant role in shaping Vietnamese American students' experiences. While there was a strong Vietnamese American community in the region, the size of the ethnic community was relatively small. Therefore, it was inevitable that most Vietnamese American students attended public schools with a large number of White students along with students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the GCU is a PWI where Vietnamese American students are still expected to follow the mainstream society's cultural frame of references and invisible cultural expectations held by the majority of White faculty members and peers on campus. All of these regional, community, and institutional contexts might have been similar to the environments in which Kim's theory was initially developed and such contextual similarities might have made Kim's original model is still pertinent to this investigation. It is still noteworthy that the Non-VSA students remained in the second stage, White identification, whereas the VSA students showed alignment with more advanced stages, awakening to social political consciousness, redirection, and incorporation. This given difference between VSA and Non-VSA student's ethnic identity status indicated that students' involvement in on-

campus multicultural organizations positively facilitated their ethnic identity development, ultimately leading to better academic engagement and social integration.

It should be noted that while six participants identified themselves using at least one ethnic term (e.g., Vietnamese Americans, Vietnamese culture, bi-cultural, or Americanized Vietnamese), two students' experienced ethnic identity confusion. This may be due to the lack of campus activities/events involving Vietnamese American culture, resulting in invisible racial recognition on campus. Chan's (2006) study reported a similar finding illuminating Vietnamese American students' confusion over their racial/ ethnic identities in U.S. higher education. According to Chan (2006), Vietnamese American students experienced both advantages and disadvantages as ethnic minorities on college campuses. They enjoyed the advantages of upholding their unique ethnic cultural traditions, diverse perspectives about society, and a sense of belonging to two cultures. The disadvantages were created by the dominant group's discrimination, racial/ ethnic identity confusion, and the process of social transformation and adaptation to their lives in a new environment.

### 5.3.2 Academic and Social Identities

This study reveals the strong influence of the MMM (Lee et al., 2017; Museus, 2008a; Ngo & Lee, 2007) in all eight participant's academic identity. Both VSA and Non-VSA students described themselves as smart, hard-working, and career-oriented. Even VSA students found it hard to resist this model and found it difficult to be critical of this ingrained cultural myth, which served as a source of ethnic pride and an indicator of a successful future. This myth resulted in a more negative consequence for Non-VSA students who were not involved in multicultural organizations and possessed critical

attitudes towards other Vietnamese American students who did not conform to this myth. The Non-VSA students pursued their academic and social identity affiliated with White students, which often resulted in a lack of confidence, anxiety, and social isolation. While the VSA students described themselves as academically competent and socially engaged students, (e.g., self-directed, engaged in collaborative learning, and gaining high academic honors).The Non-VSA students, especially those who came to the U.S. as teenagers, confessed that they had faced greater challenges in their academic engagement due to linguistic and cultural barriers (Yeh, 2002). Again, the participants' narratives revealed a MMM-inflicted deficit thinking that unfairly frames and marginalizes Asian American students' experiences, engagement, and identities. This finding suggests that a significant heterogeneity exists, even among the eight Vietnamese American students, depending on their immigration circumstances and their length of time in the U.S. educational system. This is an important point for college faculty and administrators who should consider the individual variations existing in each Southeast Asian American ethnic community and avoid treating all Vietnamese American students as if they have the same background entering college.

It should also be noted that the VSA students embraced their ethnic culture and exhibited community-oriented attitudes whereas the Non-VSA students showed their desire to socially affiliate with Whites. In particular, the Non-VSA students found themselves engaged with White peers only for academic purposes, yet they felt inadequate to further develop other types of relationships with them. Conversely, the VSA students felt more pride in their ethnic identity and were eager to disseminate their cultural heritage while learning from others. They were able to enact a deeper and wider

variety of campus engagements, which afforded them more positive college experiences and personal development (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003; Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007).

### 5.3.3 Academic Challenges

Course content, a lack of faculty assistance, and tough assessment were identified as the three major academic challenges that the Vietnamese American students faced on campus. When dealing with classroom assignments and projects, the Non-VSA students encountered more challenges, compared to their VSA counterparts, as a result of their limited language proficiency and culturally unresponsive syllabi. For instance, one Non-VSA student complained, “I didn’t like the material much I wasn’t like as I wasn’t into it … It really annoyed …” Also referring to academic challenge, the other two Non-VSA students reported having less confidence in discussing course content with classmates due to their language barrier. This finding is congruent with previous research on Asian American students’ challenges with language problems (Lee et al., 2017; Suyemoto et al., 2009; Suzuki, 2002). In Lee et al.’s (2017) study and Suzuki’s (2002) study, graduation of Southeast Asian American students was delayed one or more years due to lower language proficiency. Handelsman et al.’s study (2005) and Umbach and Wawrzynski’s study (2005) indicated that a culturally responsive course syllabus and effective teaching stimulated more student engagement. The results of this study suggest that a culturally unresponsive syllabus and ineffective teaching methods could have made it more difficult for Vietnamese American students to fully engage in learning.

The most significant academic challenge faced by the participants was the lack of instructional support from faculty. Seven out of eight participants expressed their

dissatisfaction or disappointment with the help - or lack of help - from their instructor when they asked for additional support. However, the students further elaborated that their professors were not to blame, since they had to or preferred to do research, rather than devoting their time to teaching. Instead of criticizing the faculty's unwillingness to support student learning, the Vietnamese American students simply accepted the faculty's lack of availability and instructional unwillingness as an inevitable consequence of the faculty's heavy research obligations.

Despite this significant lack of faculty instructional support and other hardships that they faced, the Vietnamese American students continued to hold onto their academic goals. There was clear evidence that the MMM and family expectation placed a lot of pressure on them, pushing them to continue their struggles toward academic and professional success. This finding is also congruent with the previous research on the negative impact of the MMM on Asian American students' stress and alienation, which ultimately results in their unwillingness to engage in the learning process and can lead to academic decline (Kumashiro, 2008; Museus, 2008b).

### 5.3.4 Social Challenges

Among all social engagement challenges faced by the Vietnamese American students in a predominantly White university, the four major struggles were: initial isolation on campus, discrimination, stress, and inability to f joining student organizations. While the first three challenges seem to be related to a less supportive campus environment for the ethnic minority student population, the last was based on the students' socioeconomic status (SES).

Five of the Vietnamese American students reported that they had experienced an initial feeling of isolation on campus. They felt lonely and excluded from their peers. They had a hard time finding and joining student groups due to their introverted personalities and/or busy schedules. These students, however, could not see the lack of systematic support for first-year students' social engagement as a problem. They simply accepted the initial struggle as a natural process of their adaptation as first year students. They endured a high level of stress but found their own solutions as best as they could. This finding is not new. Earlier research reveals that on campuses with less support and in a competitive environment, students experience feelings of isolation, intimidation, and stress (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). These studies found that first-year racial minority students were socially excluded in most clubs and organizations dominated by White peers, or they felt pressured to join the mainstream groups, which often resulted in negative experiences and added stress. This study and existing literature (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000) demonstrated the vulnerable position that racial/ethnic minority students have as they enter the social community on a PWI campus.

While college campuses are known to be spaces that celebrate multiculturalism, racial equity and social justice, this study found that the Vietnamese American students were not exempt from facing various forms of discrimination and stereotyping in their classes and around the university campus. Ironically, while the VSA students voiced their strong opposition against racial/ethnic prejudices, the Non-VSA students directed their criticism at their own ethnic peers (e.g., other Vietnamese American students) and endorsed the superiority of a White cultural frame of reference, praising White peers'

intellectual superiority (smartness) and outgoing, proactive dispositions. This finding not only echoes Kim's (1981, 2001) second stage of White identification and third stage of awakening to social political consciousness. It is also consistent congruent with what Chou and Feagin (2008) and Museus and Kiang (2009) reported in their studies of the prevalent racism and stereotypes that Asian American students face in U.S. higher education. Noticeably, most of the Non-VSA students can be identified with Kim's (1981, 2001) second stage, but four VSA students' narratives showed the entire spectrum of their racial identity development from the beginning stage and developed to the advanced stages of third, fourth and fifth.

It is important to note that the Vietnamese American students expressed that stress and depression was caused by family expectation and the MMM, through which students view their own achievements. While the Non-VSA students discussed their lower language proficiency and part-time jobs that prevented them from socializing opportunities on campus as major challenges, the VSA students critically examined the burden of family expectation and the MMM mask. The MMM mask constructed the belief, that working hard would enable them to overcome discrimination and earn social respect in American society. Therefore, some Vietnamese American students pushed themselves to focus exclusively on their studies, rather than building both academic and social integration. This finding resonates with a previous study by Li (2009) which examined a Vietnamese American college student who suffered intense social isolation and psychological stress due to her multiple responsibilities at home, but strived for academic success on campus that did not offer adequate support either.

The last social engagement challenge encountered by the Vietnamese American students was their inability to join of joining the multicultural organization on campus as commuters. Four Non-VSA and two VSA students reported they could not afford campus residency and they had to work for their college tuition and fees. This reflects how their SES led to disadvantages for these students in terms of campus involvement, which led to less intellectual and social development. This result validates the recent research that found that undergraduate students' socioeconomic characteristics resulted in different opportunities for learning experiences and engagement in support systems, further leading to different educational learning outcomes (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Lee, 2015; Lee & Zhou, 2015).

### 5.3.5 Academic Engagement Patterns and Strategies

Strong dedication to studies and searching for interactive learning were the two most prevalent themes found in the participants' academic engagement practices and strategies. The findings echo earlier studies on student engagement (Ing & Victorino, 2017) while illuminating the strong impact of the MMM, which was deeply embedded in Asian American students' consciousness and campus practices.

Even though it was expected to some extent, the level of the Vietnamese American students' commitment and investment of time and resources to their academic goals was extremely high. Therefore, it was not surprising that strong dedication to studies emerged as one of the most prevalent themes that characterized their academic engagement. This theme included their self-directed study behaviors, independent task management, and investment of massive amount of time and effort to complete a task in the absence of other supporting resources (e.g., faculty or peers). Five participants from

both VSA and Non-VSA groups described that they intentionally engaged in a significant amount of self-directed study time. Rather than passively waiting for extra assistance, these students strived to use any available campus resources, such as library books, online learning resources, and the availability of a quiet study rooms on campus, to deal with their demanding academic tasks. Self-managing their own academic and social obligations is a common adaptation strategy utilized by all college students (Krause & Coates, 2008) and the participating Vietnamese American students' perseverance and unwavering academic commitment were surely commendable. However, the arduous struggle ubiquitously found across the VSA and Non-VSA students clearly reflected the detrimental impact of the MMM, that portrays Asian students as smart enough to solve their academic issues without extra support or guidance. As indicated by the MMM, the Vietnamese American students chose to manage their academic workload in silence by spending more time on their course work as compared to their peers. Wang (2007) explains that the MMM presents a false logic that if minority people are willing to work hard, they will overcome hardship and racial discrimination in American society. Unfortunately, even VSA students found it hard to challenge this myth that served as an ideological buttress for their academic perseverance, especially when no others but themselves were the only reliable source to utilize and depend on. The finding corroborates what Museus (2008b) found in the research that students suffered from the MMM that exerted significant influences on their college experiences, including their campus academic engagement.

Two Vietnamese American students stated that they were studying extremely hard not only in their majors but also in their minors, as well as in diverse subject matters they

enrolled since they believe that doing more and better will bring them a bright future. Working “more” and/or “harder” was a repetitive comment from the participants even when they virtually had no additional spare time to dedicate to studying.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the VSA students had more proactive interactions with their faculty and peers on campus to address their academic issues, compared to Non-VSA students who had more disadvantages caused by their part-time jobs and lower language proficiency. The VSA students also spent more time on their studies and used more campus resources since they had more access on campus than the Non-VSA students who felt directionless attributable to the missing study guides and difficulty in navigating the campus resources. This finding corroborates what was reported in recent studies on Asian American students’ engagement (e.g., Ing & Victorino, 2017). Ing and Victorino found some variations in engagement of Asian American Engineering subgroups. In particular, East Indian students showed a higher level of campus engagement compared to other subgroups, and Korean college students indicated a significantly higher level of academic engagement than Vietnamese American students due to their difference in immigration pathways to the United States, leading to differences of campus engagement experiences (Ing & Victorino, 2017; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011; Poon et al., 2016). This study further illuminated the significant disparity that also exists within the subgroup of Vietnamese American students between VSA and Non-VSA students.

Searching for interactive learning was widely demonstrated in the Vietnamese American college students’ academic engagement strategy on campus. While all of the eight participants felt more comfortable to collaboratively work with their peers on class

academic projects, six students strived to approach to faculty members for assistance. In reflecting their collaborative working, some Vietnamese American students shared that they reached out to their peers regarding their course content and class projects in order to enrich, exchange, and update their current intellectual competency.

An alternative strategy employed by the Vietnamese Americans in this study was to actively participate in study groups. It was clear that compared to the Non-VSAs, the VSA students, who were born in the U.S., with better English fluency and proactively embracing their ethnic culture, initiated collaborative learning relationships in the form of study groups more often than the Non-VSA students. Additionally, while the VSA students preferred involvement in the mentee-mentor groups in the ethnic organization, the Non-VSA students intentionally affiliated with White classmates to handle heavy intellectual tasks, since they believed their White peers were better problem solvers. Sadly, some Non-VSA students were not able to overcome their academic problems since they encountered the dual challenges of limited English proficiency and not feeling welcome to collaborate with dominant-race students, resulting in more social isolation and depression.

According to the NSSE (2013), effective educational practices are related to active and collaborative learning. College students are expected to interact with peers and discuss ideas; working collaboratively with peers in and outside of class is essential to developing their academic competency and interpersonal communication skills. As student Suzanne contended, “I feel like a little bit less pressure when you learn from my classmates versus from my professors.” Students can relieve their stress while learning from their peers. Noticeably, what the eight participants reported closely aligned to the

first two elements explained by Coates (2007) that students demonstrated their academic engagement through active and collaborative learning with peers and by participating in challenging academic activities together. In the learning process, peer interaction facilitates knowledge construction when students have opportunities to bring something they have already learned to the group, whether it is their life experiences or previous formal education. Given that, the learner not only is able to collaboratively solve academic challenges with their peers but is also personally and professionally involved in constructing knowledge out of the course content, which helps them feel more motivated (Hadfield & Atherton, 2008).

### 5.3.6 Social Engagement Patterns and Strategies

Participating in extra-curricular activities and joining multicultural organizations were two primary sub-codes that emerged from the Vietnamese American students' social engagement practices and strategies on campus. Both the VSA and Non-VSA students participated in diverse extra-curricular activities, whereas only four students among the total eight had interest in or commitment to joining a multicultural organization such as VSA.

There was a clear discrepancy in the social engagement practices between VSA and Non-VSA students. The VSA students were engaged in multiple on-campus organizations and social events such as Child Victim War (CVW), blood donation events, SOAR, or other sport events and enjoyed the benefits of various campus events while promoting their organization, their ethnic community and the university's reputation in the locally. Inversely, only two Non-VSA students joined campus organizations, like the Christian groups M28 and C4 on campus and the Air-force training at Raleigh Transit

Center (RTC).Those who participated found these groups to be supportive and instilled a sense of belonging. It should be noted that the VSA students in extra-curricular activities participated in events that were help on and off campus. For example, Dylan, leader of the VSA, stated that,

> We just had the VSA Olympics, which is like an east coast kind of, Southeast coast region Olympics with all the VSAs, I think ten schools participated …The University of Georgia, the University of South Carolina. So we have a lot of schools that we compete against. And it's with football, soccer, tug of war and volleyball. (Dylan)

In addition, four VSA students proactively engaged in several multicultural organizations, such as the VSA of GCU, the VAC, and the SEAC, where they could offer their volunteer services. The VSA students also moved beyond embracing their own ethnic culture and social networking by actively inviting peers of other races and ethnicities to join their VSA group. Their activities indicated that they were moving along the third and fourth stages of Kim's (1981, 2001) model of Asian American ethnic identity development. They became more aware of social and political ideas and wanted to be more connected to their ethnic group. They were also eager to facilitate and disseminate their pride in their ethnic culture and community heritages.

This finding also reflects one of five benchmarks in the NSSE Standards (extra-curricular activities, multicultural organizations, and community services) that is essential to enriching the educational experiences of college students. Kuh's (2009) study affirmed the importance of students' participation in extra-curricular activities since this led them to better academic and social integration on campus. The Vietnamese American students' engagement beyond the campus boundary found in this study resonates with Slocum and

Rhoads' (2009) research that reported a higher growth in academic and social integration among college students who had engaged in the community services.

In responding to social engagement challenges, the VSA and Non-VSA students had a different perception about the cause of their initial isolation on campus and enacted somewhat contrasting sets of strategies to solve the problem. All four Non-VSA students, who possessed different levels of English proficiency, considered developing interpersonal communication skills, especially communications with Whites, as an appropriate way of improving their communication skills and further expanding their socializing opportunities. Conversely, the four VSA students chose the strategies of joining multicultural organizations and expanding social networks to promote their social engagement opportunities, which later led them to proactively embrace their ethnic cultures and played the role of Vietnamese cultural advocates on campus and in the community.

The Non-VSA students hoped that if they successfully developed interpersonal communication skills (e.g., having a similar accent as noted in White peers' intonation) and understand White peers' culture better, they would be accepted by those White peers in the PWI campus and improve their social engagement and learning outcomes. On the contrary, the VSA students chose to join multicultural organizations and expanded their social networks through the organizations. These organizations helped them feel proud of their ethnic culture and values, and embrace their ethnic identity with a renewed sense of pride and appreciation. In the end, the VSA students' strategies helped them more effectively respond to their real needs regarding social engagement; their approaches

additionally provided them with more opportunities to learn other cultures and cultural-related values which prompted their overall growth as young adults in higher education.

The above findings support that Southeast Asian American students' racial/ethnic identity development is closely linked to their engagement on their college campus; in this case the patterns of social engagement strategies adopted by VSA and Non-VSA students. While the VSA students naturally moved from the beginning level to advanced stages of racial/ethnic identities through their engagement in various on-campus and community-based activities and social opportunities the Non-VSA students' racial/ethnic identity development was stalled in the second stage of White identification, as explained in Kim (1981, 2012)'s model. The results of this study are supported by earlier research on minority students' ethnic identity development, engagement experiences, and learning outcomes (Arana & Blanchard, 2017; Bingham & Okagaki, 2012; Zhou & Bankston III, 1998).For example, Zhou and Bankston III (1998) found that Vietnamese students who were alienated from the Vietnamese culture were at risk academically at school. Bingham and Okagaki (2012) validated Zhou and Bankston's (1998) study that ethnic minority students who possessed strong ethnic identities were more likely to be engaged in school than those who did not.Arana and Blanchard (2017) also found that students who were more ethnically loyal were more likely to be involved in campus resources than other students.

### 5.3.7 Significant Contributions of the Study

This study provides significant scholarly and practical value to student development in U.S. higher education, especially concerning racial and ethnic minority college students at PWIs. First, there is a scarcity of research studies on Vietnamese

American students' ethnic identity development and their campus engagement on a U.S. college campus; therefore, this research presents solid insight about their experiences in U.S. higher education. Particularly, this study critically explains Vietnamese American students varied academic and social engagement patterns which are intricately related to the stages of their racial/ethnic identity development during the college years. In addition, this study helps stakeholders in U.S. higher education to better understand the complex nature of college student experiences currently masked by the MMM highlighting Asian American student success.

## 5.4 Implications

As one of few empirical studies that examines the racial/ethnic identities of Vietnamese American students and their academic and social engagement on a PWI college campus, this study provides several important implications for various stakeholders. Two sub-sections below describe the implications for universities' institutional policies and practices as well as suggestions for future research.

### 5.4.1 Implications for Institutional Policy and Practices

Asian American college students, including Vietnamese American students, are heterogeneous populations who will have diverse needs in terms of their academic and social engagement as they enter higher education. This is also a critical time for the racial/ethnic minority students to develop a healthy racial/ethnic identity.

In order to facilitate Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development, all stakeholders should better understand who they are among other Asian American groups on campus, why some Vietnamese American students develop their racial and political awareness whereas others do not, and what facilitates their

racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement. In particular, both Academic Affairs and Student Services on campus as well as Vietnamese American student leaders should invest enough attention, effort, and resources to achieve specific tasks such as establishing Asian American studies, including Vietnamese studies programs, recruiting an Asian or Vietnamese American scholars for leadership positions, diverse faculty, counselors or psychologists on campus. Like many other racial and ethnic minority students, Vietnamese American students are experiencing important milestones in their racial identity development while attending a PWI campus. Therefore, it is critical to establish a supportive campus environment that reduces socio-emotional vulnerability and fosters resilience and integration. Their issues also change over time, reflecting the dynamic relationship between racial/identity development and their academic and social integration, as shown through their campus engagement experiences. Therefore, university administrators and student affairs professionals should be well-informed of these students' unique needs and how to effectively support them on campus.

Most importantly, institutional stakeholders should develop a critical awareness regarding the misleading MMM image of Asian American students which has been widely circulated in American society. Acknowledging the heterogeneity that exists within Asian students is an essential step toward a better and deeper understanding of those students' academic struggles and social isolation problems. Whatever they achieve academically, each individual student, coming from a specific family background and immigrant path, has particular academic and socio-emotional needs. Therefore, it is important for institutional stakeholders to pay attention to each student's academic and social profile and to design more effective campus programs/events that would facilitate

racial/ethnic minority students' participation. In particular, campus counselors and faculty should work closely with this student population group to identify their particular academic and metal health needs and offer effective ways to address them.

Considering the strong influence of the MMM upon many Asian/Vietnamese students, creating a safe, comfortable, and accommodating environment for them seems to be very essential. It should be noted that many participants did not come forward to request additional instructional support from the institution when they faced a challenge in their academic and social engagement. It seems there is a cultural or comfort gap between the students and how student support services are structured or offered by the institution. One possible solution would be recruiting and placing diverse staff members and counselors available to students so that they find it easy, comfortable, and safe to approach the campus counselor and faculty. This may help the reluctant Asian American students, including Vietnamese American students, come forward and freely consult with university staff or professor to express their needs and to explore possible resources to overcome their challenges. Also, Asian/Vietnamese American faculty and student affairs professionals should be more involved in leadership roles so that campus policies would effectively serve this student population.

### 5.4.2 Implications for Future Research

This study is an important addition to existing research literature on Vietnamese American students in U.S. higher education. However, there were still several limitations in the study and more research on this student population needs to be conducted in the future. First, only eight student participants currently enrolled in a 4-year-university located only in the Southeast of the United States were recruited in this study. It is

recommended that future research be conducted in different geographical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts. California and Texas have high numbers of Vietnamese American students enrolled in universities, and Vietnamese American college students living in these states might have different experiences in their academic and social engagement on campus. Combining the current study's outcomes, emerging findings from future research in multiple states will be able to make a robust recommendation that will help improve universities' support for Asian/Vietnamese American students who have been largely ignored and excluded from adequate and quality support from their institutions.

Additionally, this study used a single data collection method: in-depth interviews with the participants. Therefore, future research is encouraged to employ other types of data collection, such as observation and document analysis, mixed research method, or other theoretical frameworks to examine complexity and uniqueness of Vietnamese American college students' experiences. Future research may validate this research and provide more comprehensive understanding of Asian/Vietnamese American college student development on PWI campuses in the United States.

While underserved students from other racial/ethnic groups have been subjects of numerous studies, Asian/Vietnamese American college students have been ignored. The misconception that all Asian American are academically superior should be dismissed by future research that highlights the reality of the diverse needs and barriers to student success in PWIs in the U.S. Future research should focus on academic and developmental issues that this student population encounters and explore possible solutions for these students.

Despite the intricate confluence shown in the eight participants' ethnic identity development and campus engagement practices in this study, there is much that educators and researchers still do not know. For example, it is hard to pinpoint the factors that either support or prevent racial and ethnic minority students' or Vietnamese American students' campus engagement at PWIs. It is desirable that educational researchers and scholars further investigate other factors, such as culturally responsive curriculum or teaching practices, to promote better student engagement on U.S. college campuses.

## 5.5 Conclusions

The Asian American student population is one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States. Vietnamese Americans are the 4$^{th}$ largest of this minority group, but there is evidence that they are educationally at risk (Yeh, 2002). Therefore, it is an urgent call for student affairs professionals, faculty members, and college administrators to expand and deepen their understanding of this growing student population and better understand the major challenges, academic and social obstacles that these students are dealing with. Such understanding by major stakeholders on campus is essential to developing high quality and effective on-campus support services for Southeast Asian American students so that they can succeed and flourish in U.S. higher education.

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# APPENDIX A: PHONE PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

**Newly recruited participants**

The recruitment of participants will be by phone.

PI: Hi, this is Nhu Nguyen speaking. How are you?

Interviewee: I'm good. Glad to hear from you.

PI: As I told you before, I am conducting research on Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and experiences of academic and social engagement on their college campus, and you showed your interest in this project. I want to know whether you are still interested in participating?

Interviewee: Sure. Please tell me what I can do for this project.

PI: It sounds great. Thank you. I plan to conduct this project from Fall 2017 to Spring 2018. So, please tell me when you can meet for our in-person interview and how much time you have.

Interviewee: Good. How about … (time)

PI: Perfect. Can you recommend the place where we will meet?

Interviewee: Sure, what do you think … (location)

PI: Great. I will give you the student consent form before we start. Thank you so much. I can't wait to see you on… (time). Take care and good bye.

Interviewee: Same here. Bye.

**OR,** if Interviewee responds:

Interviewee: No thank you. I do not want to do this project.

PI: Thank you for your time. Bye.

**Previous participants**

PI: Hi, this is Nhu Nguyen speaking. I am so glad to hear from you and excited to talk with you in person. How are you?

Interviewee: I'm good. Glad to hear from you too.

PI: As I told you before, I am conducting research on Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and experiences of academic and social engagement on their college campus, and we already had an initial interview last September/ October. I really appreciated that we had a very thoughtful conversation about your experiences of engagement. I was very happy to see your interest in this project. I want to know whether or not you are still interested in the this study and willing to spend about 10-15 minutes with me in a follow-up interview to elaborate on some or your experiences of engagement.

Interviewee: Sure. Please tell me what I can do for this project.

PI: It sounds great. Thank you. So, please tell me when you are available for an in-person follow-up interview in-person and how much time you have.

Interviewee: Good. How about … (time)

PI: Perfect. Can you recommend the place where we will meet?

Interviewee: Sure, what do you think … (location)

PI: Great. Thank you so much. I can't wait to see you on… (time). Take care and good bye.

Interviewee: Same here. Bye.

**OR,** if Interviewee responds:

Interviewee:  No thank you. I do not want to do this project.

# APPENDIX B: STUDENT CONSENT FORM


Educational Leadership
9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28223

**Project Title and Purpose**

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled "Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and campus engagement experiences at a Predomimantly White Institution (PWI)".The purpose of this study is to explore the Vietnamese American students' racial/ethnic identity development and their academic and social engagement on a college campus, which in this case is a PWI in the Southeast United States. This study further examines the major challenges, strategies of engagement, and suggestions that these students believe would improve their engagement on the PWI campus.

**Investigator(s)**

This study is being conducted by Nhu Nguyen, a doctoral candidate in the Cato College of Education, and Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, the responsible faculty, an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, and chair of the dissertation committee.

**Eligibility**

You can participate in this project provided that you are 18 years old or older, currently enrolled at a U.S. university as a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.

**Overall Description of Participation**

You will be invited to participate in one face-to-face individual interview from August, 2017 and December 2017. The interview will take about 45 minutes to an hour, covering the questions regarding your racial/ ethnic identity development, as well as your experiences and strategies of engagement on your college campus and in the community. We will schedule an appointment for the interview on campus or at a place that is convenient to you. The interview will be audio-recorded for verbatim transcription. You will receive a copy of the transcript so you can check the accuracy of the data and provide feedback or clarification if needed. You may be asked to participate in a short follow up interview (10- 15 minutes at most) to verify your vebatim transcripts and answer a few additional questions as needed.

**Length of Participation**

Your interview will be scheduled between August 2017 and December 2017 and last from 45 to 60 minutes. The follow-up interview, if scheduled, will take no more than 15 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of Participation**
There are no major known risks for your participation in this study. However, the project may involve risks that are not currently known. The interviewer will try to avoid causing any discomfort when you discuss any challenges in your current situations. Apart from that, you may benefit from this study because you will have time to think about your college experience and possibly develop a more positive outlook based on your thoughtful reflection.

**Volunteer Statement**
You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

**Confidentiality Statement**
Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. Your interview data will be protected and shared with the research team only.

**Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect**
Great City University wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the Office of Research Compliance contact information: 704-687-1871 and uncc-irb@uncc.eduif you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please contact Nhu Nguyen (980-214-7615, nnguye49@uncc.edu), and Dr. Lim (704-687-8864, jhlim@uncc.edu).

**Approval Date**
This form was approved for use on September 8th, 2017 for one year.

**Participant Consent**
I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of the research study.

_____ _____
Participant Name (PRINT) DATE

_____ _____
Participant Signature DATE

_____ _____
Investigator Signature DATE

# APPENDIX C: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This is a semi-structured qualitative interview starting with a few open-ended questions. The interviewer will possibly ask some probing questions depending on the response of the interviewee in the interview process.

*Research Questions*

RQ 1: How do Vietnamese American students develop their racial/ethnic identity development as well as academic and social engagement on a PWI college campus?

RQ 2: What challenges do Vietnamese American students face in their quest for social and academic integration in a PWI college campus?

RQ 3: What are Vietnamese American students' academic and social engagement practices and coping strategies responding to challenges on a PWI college campus?

RQ 4: What do Vietnamese American students believe to be essential to improving their academic and social integration on campuses in the United States?

**Background question**

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself: name, major, interest …
2. When and how did you arrive at the United States?

(Your age, wave of immigrant: Boat people, the Orderly Departure Program ODP, Amerasian Homecoming Act, Humanitarian Operation (H.O) or others?

3. How is your family making for a living in the U.S.? Have you worked to support yourself in the U.S.? Or your family supported you financially?

**Past high school experience**

1. Tell me a little bit about your high school.
2. What type of high school student do you think you were then?
3. Tell me about your close friends from high school, those you studied with or played with.
4. Tell me about your teachers or others adults in your schools who you spoke to when you needed help.

**The current enrolment in U.S. College or University**

1. Tell me about how you decided to go to the current college/ university after graduating from high school.
2. Tell me a little bit about the current college/ university you have attended.
3. What do you like the most about your current college/ university?
4. What do you like the least about your current college/ university?
5. Was there any specific person who influenced you when you decided where to attend college? Who is he/she? Tell me about the person if any.
6. What kind of expectation did you have about your college and major?

7. Overall, are you satisfied with your choices of your current college and major? Why or why not?

**Student Identity on College Campus**

1. Tell me about your friends on campus. What are your friends' nationalities? Who are your close friends or other students with whom you spend time? How frequently do you hang out with them? What do you normally do with them?
2. Do you have any preference to work or collaborate with any specific group of students on campus, such as other Vietnamese-American students, Vietnamese international students, or any other racial/ethnic group of students on campus and in the community? Why do you prefer (avoid) those students?
3. Do you feel comfortable around friends who are not the same ethnicity? (Have you experienced any peer pressure when acting, dressing, or communicating in certain ways differently from the dominant American culture? How have these pressures made it difficult for you to adapt to the mainstream American society?
4. How do you identify yourself on the campus? (Ethnicity/ race: Vietnamese, Vietnamese American- Americanized, or bicultural person? Your social economic status: upper, middle, or low-income class in the U.S? Your ability/ disability? Your gender identity? Your religious affiliation?)
5. What identities do you think most important to you?
6. What identities of yours do you think most important from others' perspective?
7. What do you think about positive and negative about being a Vietnamese American?
8. Do you think that being a Vietnamese American has impacted the way you have socialized with others on the college campus? If so, tell me about how.
9. Have you ever tried to assimilate to the mainstream American culture?
10. How do you balance yourself as a Vietnamese American - your ethnic identity - and a college student who needs to adjust to the mainstream society?

**Academic Engagement**

1. Tell me what you normally did in your class. Which class you engaged most/ least with other students and instructors? What activities? Which whom? Why?
2. Have you had any success at school? What do you think are the main factors contributing to your success at school?
3. What college resources do you use? (E.g. library, tutoring, mentoring, gyms, sports, counseling. How do you know about those resources?)
4. Have you had any challenges/trouble in your classes? What challenges? Why?
5. How did you feel when facing such trouble, if any? (Disappointed? Isolated?)
6. How did you deal with such challenges, if any?
7. Who helped you overcome those challenges? How?
8. What helped you overcome those challenges?
   (What kind of support did you receive from peers, instructors, and others at your college/ university and major? What services have you used to overcome your trouble? How do you know about those services? Do you think those services on campus effective?

9. Have you thought about changes that could be made to current syllabus, course books, or any other factors that would have helped you learn better? Have you discussed or recommended these suggestions with others, if any?
10. What strategies did you use to be more engaged in the classes? ( E.g., tips you use to pay more attention to learning inputs, participate actively in class discussion and negotiation, complete assignment on time, and more joy)
11. What kind of support do you believe to be more helpful for students' academic engagement?

**Social Engagement**

1. Tell me when and how you have engaged with other students, and other adults on the college campus. (Who? For what purposes? What activities? What club/ fraternity/ sorority).
2. Why do you choose to participate in these groups?
3. Have you had any success in your social engagement on the college campus? What success? Is it important? Why or why not? Do you think your social engagement in ethnical community on the campus help you to better acculturate on the campus? Tell about your feeling of engagement success.
4. Have you had any challenges/trouble in your social engagement on the college campus? What challenges?
5. How did you feel when facing such success/trouble?
6. Who helped you overcome those challenges? How?
7. What helped you overcome those challenges? / How did you deal with such challenges/ trouble?
8. Do you think that other people on the campus treat you fairly? Why or why not?
9. What strategies did you use to be more engaged on the college campus?
10. What kind of support do you believe to be more helpful for students' social engagement?

**Senses of belonging**

1. Tell me about any place or organization to which you feel you are really part of it (e.g., college, major, local organization)
2. Tell me the time when you felt most isolated/ exclusive. (With whom? Which class/ organization? Why?)
3. What made you feel more comfortable/ belonging/ inclusive? Why?

**Close-up**

1. Imagine yourself five years later. What do you think you will be doing then and where?
2. Is there anything to add or to share with me today?

*Thank you for your volunteering!*