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# Socio-Academic Interaction as Predictors of Academic-Performance for Vietnamese Government Scholarship Recipients in US Graduate Programs

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**SOCIO-ACADEMIC INTERACTION AS PREDICTORS  
OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE FOR VIETNAMESE  
GOVERNMENT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS  
IN US GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

A Master Project Presented

by

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And always and ever, thank you, Mom, Dad and Anh for being my guiding stars.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the predictability of social interaction and academic interaction to academic performance. Descriptive analysis, multiple regression analysis, factor analysis and correlation analysis of data provided by 71 students who are Vietnamese Government Scholarship Recipients in graduate programs all over the United States indicate that socio-academic interaction can be used as predictors of students' academic performance but only 15% of the predicted variance is explained by the model. The length of students' US sojourn has effect on both social and academic interaction and degree sought by students has effect on academic interaction. Gender and length of exposure to English before coming to the states have no effect on either social interaction or academic interaction while students' English proficiency is only related to their social interaction. The extent that a student exposes to the American culture and people is related to his or her social interaction and the level of institutional and human support received the students is also related to their degree of academic interaction. Aspects of cultural, social, political and educational differences together with factors of identities and some other objective obstacles (e.g. program size, location, students' personality and motivation) are believed to block students' efforts in engaging more in social and academic interactions and relations. The findings are used to discuss practical implications for education stakeholders at both sides.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	
Desire for learning	1
Policies and investments in education and human resources	3
Overseas study movements	7
The Vietnamese Government Scholarship Program	8
Problem Statement	12
Definitions and Terms	12
Purpose of the study	14
Hypothesis	14
Objectives	14
Significance of the study	15
Literature Review	16
CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY	
Statistical terminology	20
Research questions (RQs)	25
Participants and sampling	26
Design and Procedure	28
CHAPTER 3. RESULTS	
CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Ways of explaining	49
Recommendations	58
CHAPTER 3. CONCLUSION	
Limitations	67
APPENDICES	
A. Online survey	68
B. List of US institutions attended by Vietnamese graduate students	72
REFERENCES	74

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Country background

Open to the East Sea like a ‘balcony on the Pacific’, Vietnam surrounds more than 1,200 kilometers of southern China, shares borders with Laos and Cambodia to the west. The total area is 329,560 square kilometers (about the size of British Isles) and the current population is 84,402,966 (CIA July 2006 est.), with which Vietnam is ranked the 13<sup>th</sup> ~~top-down~~ among the world’s most populous countries. Kinh is the biggest ethnic group, accounting 85% of the Vietnamese population. Compared to any Southeast Asia state, Vietnam “has the oldest continual history, being able to trace its lineage back more than 2000 years” (Kingsbury, 2001, p. 232). However, the long journey from Van Lang (the first ancient state name, believed to exist around 500 BC) to the present Socialist Republic of Vietnam, has been recorded with a millennium of resistances and struggles, both armed and unarmed, for independence and identity. Each ‘encounter’ with foreign rulers and invaders left certain impacts on Vietnamese culture and languages, and “marked it as distinct from the cultures of its SEA neighbors” (Kingsbury, 2001, p. 233). As a matter of fact, “Vietnamese includes many words derived from other languages, such as English, French, Malay and Chinese” (Cheng, 1987, p. 41).

#### Desire for learning

Historically, the Vietnamese have been proud of their long tradition of deference to education ethics (*ton su trong dao*), where “education retains tremendous prestige” (Nguyen, 2001, p. 64). The old values of education were favored until today, as shown

in a popular saying: You had better give your child some books. Rather than bequeath him a bag of gold. Vietnam's first national university – Temple of Literature (*Van Mieu* – *Quoc Tu Giam*) was built during the reign of King Ly Thanh Tong in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

A special characteristic of the Temple of Literature is its 82 Doctors' stela, large stone pillars, each one resting on a sculpted tortoise and inscribed with the names and birth places of some group of the 1,306 graduates who passed their doctoral examinations at the university between 1442 and 1779. Each stele honors the most accomplished graduates of a different Vietnamese dynasty. This public recognition of their achievements was meant to encourage others to serve society in similar fashion. Vietnam's first national university provided training in more than 700 scholarly areas. The development of intellectual capacity was considered an excellent way to build the State. Engraved in 1466 on one of the stone stelae are the following words, translated from the Vietnamese: "Virtuous and talented men are State sustaining elements. The strength and prosperity of a State depend on its stable vitality, and it becomes weaker as such vitality fails. That is why all the Saintly Emperors and clear-sighted Kings sought men of talent and the employment of the literati to develop this vitality, for their role is the most important in the government. Thus, our suzerains have always shown honor and consideration to the literati (Mémorial on the Stele of Doctors, Laureates at Nham Tuat Examination, Dai Bao Dynastic Title. Third Year (1442))" (The World Bank, 1997, p. 3)

Traditionally dominated by agriculture (56% of labor force occupation is in agriculture, World Fact Book July 2005 estimate), "Vietnam is and has always been one of the most literacy civilizations on the face of the planet" (Woodside, 1976, p. 2).

Although this may sound a bit far-fetched, Alexander Woodside's statement is arguably understandable. Ho Chi Minh, the first president of an independent Vietnam, in a letter to the pupils on the occasion of a new school year, wrote: "Whether Vietnam can become glorious, whether the Vietnamese people can stand as honorable equals to the powers in the five continents, all depend largely on your efforts in learning" (Ho Chi Minh, 1984, p. 10). The spirit was also affirmed by the Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet in modern days, "in a short time, in the field of education (we) are determined to catch up with other countries in the region" (Nguyen, 2001).

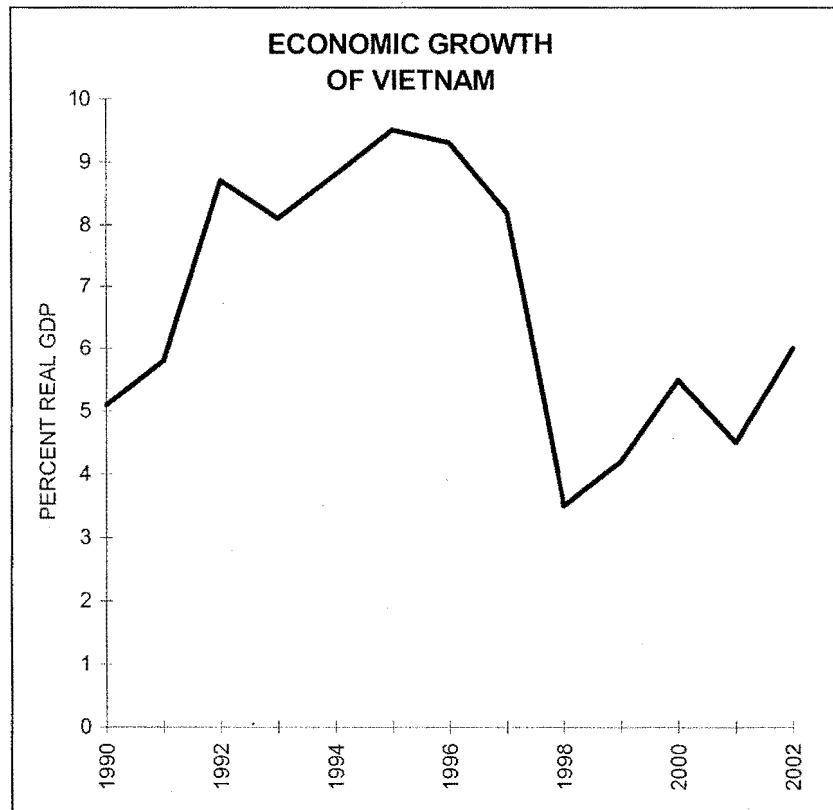
### **Policies and investments in education and human resources**

After the French war, Vietnam and its newly formed Government immediately embarked upon another 'fighting' against hunger and illiteracy and named them 'new state enemies'. Prior to the Independence gained in 1945, less than 10% of the population has been estimated to be illiterate. Some forty years later after the beginning of the anti-illiteracy movement, some 90% of the population is considered to be literate (an estimation of UNICEF in 1990).

More than 10 years after the country was reunified in 1975, Vietnam was still facing a war-weary economy and populace. During the 6<sup>th</sup> National Congress in December 1986, the Vietnam Communist Party decided to ground bold foreign and economic policy initiatives in order to bring the country out of poverty and under development. A reform program, *doi moi*, has been launched and gradually shifted the country from a subsidized regime to a market-oriented economy and moving towards the direction of positively joining the world economy and international community. As aptly noted in the 2001 National Human Development Report prepared by a broad group of independent national specialists, Vietnam has been undergoing a triple transformation: from war to peace, from central planning to market economy, and from isolation to international integration (NCSSH, 2001).

Since then, fruits of *doi moi* have been tasted. On the 'Doi moi and Human Development' report serial (1995-2001), the UNDP observed a consistent decline in overall poverty in Vietnam from 70% in mid-1980s to 58% in 1993 and to only 37% in 1998. According to Bradford Philips, Country Director of ADB Viet Nam Resident Mission "Viet Nam has made impressive progress in achieving both rapid economic

expansion and poverty reduction in recent years, yet comparisons with other East Asian and Southeast Asian countries during their high-growth periods suggest that Viet Nam's GDP growth rates could be higher" (ADB, 2004). Table 1 presents Vietnam's economic growth over recent years.



Source: US Pacific Command [www.pacom.mil/publications/apeu02/25Vietnam8.doc](http://www.pacom.mil/publications/apeu02/25Vietnam8.doc)

In addition, the country's performance in terms of human development is extremely remarkable. It reflects through the gradual increase of the human development index and the progress made in education, health and standard of living. Out of 173 countries, Vietnam climbed from the 120<sup>th</sup> on the Human Development Index table in 1995 to 101<sup>th</sup> in 2001 and the literacy rate (at age of 15 and above) is 94%, outperformed to most countries in the region (UNDP, 2001). Table 2 shows Vietnam's HDI from 1995 to 2001:

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Reference year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1997	1998	1999
Adult literacy	65.2	65.5	66.0	66.4	67.4	67.8	67.8
Human Development Index (value)	0.611	0.618	0.634	0.639	0.666	0.671	0.682
Human Development Index (rank)	120	121	121	122	110	108	101

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 1995-2001, p. 30

With 91% of children between the ages of 5 and 10 enrolled in school and 88% of working-age population reported to be literate, Vietnam can also point to an impressive educational record, even in comparison with many countries at higher income levels. UNDP notes that adult literacy and education enrollment rates are much higher in Vietnam than in countries with similar income levels (UNDP, 2001, p.37). There is a clear change in ideas and policy during the process of *doi moi* with specific focus on human factor and human development.

It has been shared and recognized among Vietnamese top leaders that “education is the foundation, the highly qualified human resources are one of the important driving forces that accelerate the industrialization and modernization process, the basic factor for social development, rapid and sustainable economic growth” (MOET, 2002, p.21) and that “investment into education is an investment for development.” (SRVN, 1999, p.27). That is why education has been granted on the most important State document - the Constitution of Vietnam (item 35) - as “a first national priority” and “the cause of the State and of all the people.” (The National Assembly of SRVN, 1992)

The Ninth Congress of Vietnam Communist Party has envisioned the ultimate goals of the socio-economic strategic plan for the period of 2001 – 2010 as follows: “To bring our country out of the under-developed situation, to increase significantly the

level of material, cultural and spiritual life of people, to lay down the foundation for our country to become basically an industrialized, modernized one by 2020” (as cited by MOET, 2002, p.8). In line with broad goals set by the Party and the Government, the Education sector has specified its missions in the Education Development Strategic Plan for 2001-2010 accordingly, one of them is “to give priority to the enhancement of the quality of manpower training, special attention should be paid to training of highly qualified science-technology personnel, excellent managerial staff, skilful business managers, skilled worker-masters, who will contribute directly to the enhancement of competitiveness of economy”. The Education Development Strategic Plan has also addressed financial solutions for education development: “The state budget is the main financial resources of education. The State should give the priority to investment in education comparing with other sectors. To increase the percentage of state budget for education from 15% in 2000 to at least 18% by 2005, 20% by 2010; to gain the loans with privileged interest for education from World Bank, Asian Development Bank, from other international organizations and foreign countries. The state budget is focused to...training at high qualification, for study fields which is difficult to attract the investment outside of state budget”. (MOET, 2002, p. 41)

One significant and meaningful event in Vietnamese education and training is the promulgation of the Education Law approved by the Vietnamese National Assembly on 2 December, 1998 encouraging the expansion of international cooperation in education. Noticeable contents include:

1. Spending a certain amount of the Government budget to send adequate people to study and research abroad.
2. In the past ten years and in the forth coming years, international relations cooperation has and will contribute greatly to training teaching staff,

technicians, and managers for all economic sectors. Therefore, education and training institution need to take advantage of scholarships to send Vietnamese people to study abroad. On the other hand, the should make strong requests to the Government to spend partially the state budget on sending students to study in key fields, which we do not have conditions to train in our country”.

3. By financial sources at international, national and local levels, it is necessary to increase the number of educational leaders, managers, scientific researchers going abroad to exchange, and gain advanced educational experiences of the world in order to upgrade training quality in Vietnam.
4. Encouraging and creating conditions for training institutions, universities, colleges and general schools to integrate and join regional and global associations to exchange and gather information, materials, curricula serving training services; to exchange teaching staff and students with other countries towards the mutual diploma equivalence recognition.”

### **Overseas study movements**

Along with strong thirst for learning, Vietnamese have been very active in searching for off-shore study opportunities. For them, education crosses any border. Vietnamese overseas study movements started very early at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the sending of 200 Vietnamese youths to Japan. Although Đông-Du (Go East, referred to Japan), name of the movement, led by the nationalist Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) was shorted-lived, lasting from 1905 to 1909, “it occupies a unique and important place in modern Vietnamese history” (Vinh Sinh, 1988). During the French colony period, beside scholarships saved for children from wealthy families, the ruler also selected many elite Vietnamese students such as Nguyen Truong To (1859), Pham Phu Thu (1863) to study in France. There were also self-financed students, among whom Nguyen Tat Thanh (later President Ho Chi Minh of the Independent Vietnam) was the representation of successful combination between intellectuality and nationalism. Following the path opened by Nguyen Tat Thanh, many nationalist-students upon return

from study overseas became leaders of the Revolution for Freedom which seized the Independence for Vietnam from French colonists in 1945. Soon after the Declaration of Independence, President Ho Chi. Minh and his provisional government decided to send 50 Vietnamese students to study in the United States (MOET, 2000).

From 1951 to 1990, more than 70,000 Vietnamese technical and scientific staff was trained in the former Soviet Union and another 30,000 in the Eastern Block. During the American War (or Vietnam War called by the American side from 1961 to 1975), the Southern government sent its students and soldiers for study and training in the United States, Australia and Japan. No one was sent to the United States by the Northern Government. Between 1991 and 1993, after the fall of Soviet Union and the Eastern Block, student exchange and educational agreements between Vietnam and allied countries stopped. That was a gloomy period for the whole country and overseas study activities as well. Not until the US trade embargo against Vietnam was removed in 1994 did international organizations and governmental agencies return to Vietnam and brought with them study opportunities outside of Vietnam for the Vietnamese. Fulbright and Ford scholarships were among the first. When the economy really turned into the market orientation, many families wanted their children to enjoy study in the most developed countries and educations, regardless of expenses, even in the United States.

### **The Vietnamese Government Scholarship Program**

During the “open-door” era, Vietnam has enjoyed cooperation and support from international donors and developed countries, especially in the field of human resources. “Up to now, the Ministry of Education and Training has established relations and

cooperation with 69 countries, 19 international organizations and some 70 NGOs.” (MOET, 2000, p.4). Thousands of Vietnamese from both private and public sectors have been offered graduate scholarships to study overseas through governmental, bilateral and multilateral programs such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Fulbright (US Government), Vietnam Education Foundation (US-VN joint), Ford Foundation (US), Japan International Cooperation Agency, (JICA) Europe Union, British Council, French Embassy, the Netherlands Embassy, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Asian Institution Technology (AIT - Thailand), etc.

However, the yearly scholarship allocations are not meeting the increasing demand of the country for professionals majoring in fields related to the specific interests of national development. The shared lessons and experiences of Vietnam with other developing countries in the search for qualified and skillful staff have lead to the creation of a visionary training plan: the Government of Vietnam decided to sponsor a long-term and big-scale project send potential employees from public sectors to study overseas. This is the first official and the most ambitious scholarship program run by the Vietnamese Government with a state budget reaching 53.43 USD millions over 6 years of program initiatives. 1,940 candidates who are working in the government offices, universities and research centers have enrolled in graduate programs of leading higher education institutions all over the world and more than one tenth of them are studying in the United States.

The Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is governed through a highly centralized system and exercising leadership in all matters, including education. Since “the Ministry of Education is the institution of the Government implementing the function of state management nationwide . . . aiming at the target of raising people’s intellectual level, manpower training, talent fostering, meeting the requirements of national construction and defense” (MOET, 2000, p.11) and one of its key responsibilities is to formulate “regulations for the enrollment, management of pupils, students of undergraduate and post-graduate levels inside the country and overseas” (MOET, 2000, p.11), the Ministry of Education and Training was assigned by the Government as the implementer and monitor of the scholarship program. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April in 2000, the Prime Minister of Vietnam signed Decision Number 322/QD-TTg to launch the scholarship program entitled "Training Scientific and Technical Cadres in Institutions Overseas with the State Budget" (in short, the Vietnamese Government Scholarship or Project 322). The scholarship official website is [www.vosp.org](http://www.vosp.org)

### **Project 322 (VOSP, 2006)**

#### Objectives

To train staff at doctorate, master's or bachelor's level in institutions overseas, and to cooperate with overseas institutions in offering training courses with the aim of preparing individuals for the task of modernization and industrialization.

#### Eligible Candidates

Lecturers, technical and scientific managing staff and cadres working in colleges and universities, scientific research institutes, National Laboratories, high-tech zones, Central and Local Government Offices, socio-political organizations and state-owned enterprises.

#### Fields of Study

Technical Sciences and Technology, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, Education, Business and Economics, Medicine, Pharmacy and Sports, Arts (Literature, Linguistics, History, etc.), Fine Arts (Music, Theatre, Film, etc.)

### The Annual Number of Scholarships

400 scholarships, among them 200 for PhD students, 100 for Master's students, 40 for Bachelor's students, and 60 for non-degree study.

### Financial Support

The scholarship covers: Tuition and fees, Medical insurance, Roundtrip airfare, Living expenses

### Study Destinations

The United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, Australia, Belgium, Thailand, the People Republic of China, South Korea and some other countries.

### Selection of Postgraduate Students

18 universities organize the selection examinations on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Training. The scholarships are allocated to each university following these principles:

- The designated number of scholarships is different for each of the 18 universities, based on the field of study and the size of the relevant department.
- The number of applicants is not limited.
- One candidate can register for only one country to study in.
- Candidates' overall points are based on the total score of all subject tests, and language proficiency (DEFL for French and TOEFL for other countries).
- Candidates are chosen starting with the highest score and moving down until the number of scholarships designated for the university are filled.

### Requirements for Postgraduate Candidates

Applicants must be upstanding citizens with a clean criminal record and be in good physical condition. Applicants have to sign an agreement with their nominating employers showing their readiness to return and serve for the country after finishing their study overseas.

### Success of Project 322 from Implementation up to July 2003

Since 2001, the number of scholarships offered has exceeded the designated number by 20%. At the end of 2002, there had been a total of 1184 scholarship holders. There have been 2 "sandwich" doctoral training projects with a total of 42 doctorate students. There have been 2 intensive English courses offered for selected candidates in need of improving their English skills. Up to July 2003 there have been total of 761 students studying or completing their study in 18 countries. In Australia: 113 students; in Germany: 89 students; in the USA: 93 students; in AIT and Thailand: 75 students; in France: 64 students; in the UK: 69 students, Netherlands: 22 Japan: 20, China: 34, Canada: 13, Belgium: 11 etc. There have been 101 students who finished their study; most of them in non-degree programs and some have finished their Master's degree. After graduation, all of them have returned to work for their previous employers. There have been 8 students continuing to pursue their doctorate degree after completing their Master's degree.

### **Problem Statement**

So far, the reports and data collection conducted by the Scholarship Management Board mostly focus on the pre and post of a scholarship circle (e.g.: selection process, numbers of awardees, numbers returning students, transcripts) and their analysis lacks a deeper look into what really is behind a transcript and diploma such as academic issues and social barriers faced by students and how effectively they adapt to the new learning and living environment, whether and how student's performance can be improved academically and socially etc. In response to one of these unanswered questions and also from the perspectives and observations of an insider, the project writer expects to explore a new aspect of Vietnamese student life by examining if there is a relation between socio-academic interaction and students' study results or in other words, if the degree to which students integrate into social and academic activities and relations is a useful predictor of his or her academic performance.

### **Definitions and Terms**

**Social interaction:** There have existed numerous definitions of social interaction.

According to Shaffir and Turowetz (1983), "social interaction refers to mutual or reciprocal action with 'others' in an individual's social network" while Rummel noted that "social interaction is not defined by type of physical relation or behavior, or by physical distance. It is a matter of a mutual subjective orientation towards each other. Thus even when no physical behavior is involved, as with two rivals deliberately ignoring each other's professional work, there is social interaction." However, in this study, "others" mentioned by Shaffir and Turowetz mainly refer to on-campus and off-campus host nationals (Americans) and co-nationals (Vietnamese fellows) in the relation and connection with the scholarship recipients.

**Academic interaction:** Helen (2004) introduced the notion of academic interaction in reference to all aspects of communicative and non-communicative behavior in academic situations. In the scope of this study, communicative behaviors of the scholarship

recipients will be explored through their interaction with course instructors and other faculty members as well with peer students. Academic interaction will also be measured through the degree of support and acceptance received by scholarship recipients from school, program and peers. In addition, scholarship recipients' level of accessibility (or interaction) to academic and study resources and services such as library, International Student Program Orientation will be considered.

**Academic performance:** Although “it has been a common practice to use GPA as an indicator of students' academic performance (Yang and Lu, 2001, p.19)”, the study will include additional quantitative indicators such as the number of publications and awards received by the scholarship recipients over their study period and qualitative information like the degree of recognition given by the program, faculty and students to them in order to give a full weight to the evaluation of academic performance.

**The Vietnamese Government Scholarship:** in some places hereunder called the Scholarship Program or Project 322.

**The Vietnamese Government Scholarship recipients:** in some places hereunder called the students or the participants.

**US graduate program:** in some places hereunder called the graduate program.

**Co-nationals:** individuals of the same nationality (Ward, 2001).

**Host nationals:** individuals who are nationals of a country that accepts international students (Ward, 2001).

**Sojourn:** a person who temporarily relocates to another country, generally for a specific time and purpose (e.g., education, work) and with the intention of returning to his/her home country (Ward, 2001).

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to better understand the effects of socio-academic interactions conducted by the Vietnamese Government Scholarship recipients who are students in US graduate programs to their academic performance.

### **Hypothesis**

The study hypothesizes that Vietnamese Government Scholarship recipients' academic performance could be predicted from the degree they interact academically and socially in their US graduate programs. It meant that students who were more active in their socio-academic interactions would perform better academically (had higher GPA scores, produced more publications, receive more awards, and highly recognized within their program).

### **Objectives**

1. To examine the social-academic interaction and academic performance patterns of the Vietnamese Government Scholarship Recipients as students in US graduate programs.
2. To investigate if and how a student's academic performance can be predicted from his or her degree of social-academic interactions.
3. To explore effects of some factors on students' socio-academic interactions.
4. To analyze possible reasons for preventing students from more engaging in social and academic interactions.
5. To propose recommendations to related actors.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is significant and relevant firstly to the field of education, especially for the study of international students in the United States in general. Particularly, the study provides invaluable information for those who have an interest in understanding and exploring the situations and issues faced by the Vietnamese students in US graduate programs. These students are not Vietnamese-Americans, refugees or immigrants. They are Vietnamese citizens as international students in the United States, about whom no independent or comprehensive study has been conducted before. The study, therefore, will serve as a preliminary source of reference.

As mentioned, most of the Scholarship Program reports have relied on what so called the “hardware” information (statistics and counting), however, the “software” parts of those numbers and figures have not been revealed. They are personal, cultural, social and academic problems and challenges with which students may have to struggle daily on their own. With findings and discussion, the study attempts to send initial signals to the Ministry of Education and Training and the Scholarship Program Management about the importance of preparing their candidates and help their students to excel socially and academically in US graduate programs. Another message sent by the writer to the Ministry is the necessity of conducting a comprehensive research on the socio-academic experiences of Vietnamese Government Scholarship Recipients in both undergraduate and graduate programs in all countries where students were sent to, which needs more statistical and financial backup from the Ministry and the Government.

A number of quantitative analyses have pointed out the determinants of satisfaction among international graduate students and assessed their self-regulating and adjusting abilities in the college situations (Perrucci and Yu, 1995; Gonzalez, 2004). Some American researchers did explore the connection between classroom social experiences (lack of peer acceptance or teacher and classmate helps) and academic performance (Flook, Repetti and Ullman, 2005). Nevertheless, no study has tied the quality of social and academic relations to academic performance in Vietnamese students.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review of the academic and social interactions is rather rare and rarer is one with international students, let alone Vietnamese students. The review will start by looking at the social capita theory as a hypnotized explanation for student social and academic behaviors and outcomes. Then, the literature is represented by studies on two major topics: 1) Social and academic interactions in higher education context and effects in learning, 2) Second language acquisition as a fundamental for international students to function well in social and academic interactions.

#### **Social capital theory**

According to this theory, access to resources and opportunities available within an institutional setting are unequally distributed among institutional members. As stated by Bourdieu, Tierney and Jun (2001), access requires social capital, defined as relationship with individuals who are and willing to provide, or negotiate the provision of, institutional resources and opportunities. These relationships are quite valuable because they can supple access to information about cultural norms, insight into how

organizational units operate (e.g, chains of command, explicit and implicit rules). Members of the White middle-class typically have the social capital necessary to access these resources. As children they acquired knowledge about functioning within the dominant culture, and it is members of this culture that typically control institutional resources and opportunities. Those from minority groups, on the other hand, often lack adequate social capital, and thus the power, to function well at a college or university. They learned different linguistic and cultural competencies as children, making it more difficult to develop social networks within the dominant culture.

### **Social and academic interactions in higher education context and effects in learning**

Ramsden (1988) provides a framework for understanding the complex web of relationships between educational context and learning outcomes in higher education. According to higher education outcomes research, student-student interaction and faculty-student interaction are central influences in students' learning outcomes (Astin, 1993; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Contributing to the ubiquitous socialization process central to human activity, human interaction affects both the process and result of a learning experience (Jarvis, 1992; Jarvis, Holforde, & Griffin, 1998; Weidman, 1989). Individual personality and level of engagement with the learning environment create a particular perception of the education context. This perception leads to choices about individual action. Learners react in typical ways for them across situations as well as in a way dictated by a particular situation (Biggs, 1987, p. 2). Contextual characteristics in learning environments include opportunities to engage with other students and instructors. "A large part of the impact of college is

determined by the extent and content of one's interactions with major agents of socialization on campus, namely, faculty members and student peers" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 620). Besides, the learning context will also vary in the extent to which students are supported, facilitated in their attempts to perceive the salient character of the context.

Researchers have also found that international students' social networks with American peers are related to important benefits. First, contact with American students positively influences international students' academic experiences. In one study, those were involved with an 8-month program that paired them with host national students had higher grades and higher retention rates than those who were not involved in the program (Westwood & Barker, 1990). Researchers have also demonstrated a link between establishing relationships with local people and international students' overall satisfaction with both their academic and non-academic experiences abroad (Hull 1979). Limited social contact with host nationals is also related to students' perceptions of the extent to which they have been able to adjust or fit into their new environment culturally and academically. In qualitative study of African and Southeast Asian students at a Canadian university, Heikenheimo and Shute (1986) found that those who were isolated or had little contact with Canadians were more likely to face difficulty with cultural, academic and social adjustment. Those who were not just isolated from Canadians, but also frustrated about their isolation, expressed even greater adjustment problems. Zimmerman (1995) also found that frequency of interaction with American students was strongly related to international students' self-reported adjustment to American life. Finally, Surdam and Collins (1984) reported that international students who spend more

their free time with Americans were better adapted than those who spent their free time with co-nationals.

In a quantitative analysis of determinants of satisfaction among international graduate students at one university, focusing on academic program, academic appointment, and non-academic social relationships, Perrucci and Hu revealed that academic satisfaction is strongly related to contact with US students, language skills and perceived discrimination. Social interaction is linked with marital status, language skills, perceived discrimination, and contact with US students. Students' gender, grades, aspirations, and financial situation has no relation to satisfaction.

### **Second language acquisition as a fundamental for international students to function well socially and academically**

Language is crucial to social life. Giddens, Duneier and Appelbaum agreed that much of our interaction is done through informal conversations with others. Also from Perrucci and Hu findings, language ability is correlated to social and academic adaptation, and with other variables that facilitate adaptation. English-language ability has been found to be related to academic achievement in a review of research on foreign students conducted since 1950 (Helen, 1986). White and Brown (1983) research on international students at a single university found poor English usage to be a major impediment to scholastic performance. Command of English skills is also related to social satisfaction, and overall satisfaction with experience in the host country (Lee, Adb-Ella, and Burks, 1981; Fletcher and Stren, 1989)

## Chapter 2

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the research method dominant in the study by first posing research questions and then determining if and to what extent they are answered. The chapter also describes the procedures of study design and data collection. Results of the study will be mainly revealed through statistical analysis.

#### Statistical terminology

The following explanations were quoted from the Oxford Dictionary of Statistical Terms (Davison, Solomon, Wilson, Dodge, Cox, & Commenges, 2003).

**Multiple regression (also linear regression)** is a statistical technique that allows us to predict someone's score on one variable on the basis of their scores on several other variables.

**Regression modeling** is to formulate a mathematical model of the relationship between a response (outcome, dependent) variable,  $Y$ , and a set of explanatory (predictor, independent, regressor) variables,  $x$ . Depending on the characteristics of the variables, the choice of model can be simple linear regression, multiple regression, logistic (binary) regression, Poisson regression, etc.

**Correlation (also bivariate correlation)** is a statistical measure of how variables or rank orders are related classes are related.

**General Linear Model (GLM) Univariate Analysis (also two-way Factorial ANOVA)** is a method that studies the effects of two factors (with several levels) separately (main effect) and, if desired, their effect in combination (interaction).

**Predictor variable (explanatory or independent variable)** is the variable already in hand in the beginning of an experiment or observation and whose effect on an outcome variable is being modeled.

**Categorical variable (sometimes called a nominal variable)** is one that has two or more categories, but there is no intrinsic ordering to the categories. For example, gender is a categorical variable having two categories (male and female) and there is no intrinsic ordering to the categories.

**Interval variable (equivalent to continuous variable)** is a quantitative variable measured on a scale with constant intervals (like milliliters, kilograms, miles so that equal-sized differences on different parts of the scale are equivalent) where the zero point and unit of measurement are arbitrary.

**Criterion variable (outcome variable, dependent variable, predicted value or fitted value)** is the variable in a study that is expected to change as a result of alteration of the independent variable. The dependent variable is NOT manipulated by the experimenter. It is the measured variable.

**$b_0$  (intercept):** In linear regression, the intercept is the mean value of the response variable when the explanatory variable takes the value of zero (the value of  $y$  when  $x=0$ ).

$b_1, b_2$ : slopes of  $X_1, X_2$  lines respectively.

**Beta (standardised regression coefficients)** is a measure of how strongly each predictor variable influences the criterion variable. The beta is measured in units of standard deviation.

**R, R square, Adjusted R square:** R is a measure of the correlation between the observed value and the predicted value of the criterion variable. R Square ( $R^2$ ) is the square of this measure of correlation and indicates the proportion of the variance in the criterion variable which is accounted for by the regression model. In essence, this is a measure of how good a prediction of the criterion variable one can make by knowing the predictor variables. However, R square tends to somewhat over-estimate the success of the model when applied to the real world, so an Adjusted R Square value is calculated which takes into account the number of variables in the model and the number of observations (participants) our model is based on. This Adjusted R Square value gives the most useful measure of the success of our model. If, for example we have an Adjusted R Square value of 0.75 we can say that our model has accounted for 75% of the variance in the criterion variable.

**Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (or simply the sample correlation coefficient)** is a measure of extent to which two samples are linearly related.

**Mean or average (M)** is a measure of location for a batch of data values; the sum of all data values divided by the number of elements in the distribution. Its accompanying measure of spread is usually the standard deviation.

**Standard deviation (SD)** is a measure of spread (scatter) of a set of data. Unlike variance, which is expressed in squared units of measurement, the SD is expressed in the same units as the measurements of the original data. It is calculated from the deviations between each data value and the sample mean. It is the square root of the

variance. For different purposes,  $n$  (the total number of values) or  $n-1$  may be used in computing the variance/SD.

**n:** total number of samples

**t-value** is defined as difference of sample means divided by standard error of difference of sample means.

**p value** gives the probability that the null hypothesis is correct; therefore, if it is a small value (like  $<0.05$ ), null hypothesis is rejected. More technically, it is the probability of the observed data or more extreme outcome would have occurred by chance, i.e., departure from the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis is true. In a genetic association study, the P value represents the probability of error in accepting the alternative hypothesis (or rejecting the null hypothesis) for the presence of an association.

**Statistical significance:** In normal English, "significant" means important, while in Statistics "significant" means probably true (not due to chance). A research finding may be true without being important. When statisticians say a result is "highly significant" they mean it is very probably true. They do not (necessarily) mean it is highly important.

**Significance level (Sig.)** shows how likely a result is due to chance. The most common level, used to mean something is good enough to be believed, is .95. This means that the finding has a 95% chance of being true. However, this value is also used in a misleading way. No statistical package will show "95%" or ".95" to indicate this level. Instead it will show ".05," meaning that the finding has a five percent (.05) chance of not being true, which is the converse of a 95% chance of being true. Convention in the social

sciences dictates the use of 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. A 0.05 level of significance means a 5 percent probability that the differences occurred by chance. A 0.01 level means a 1 percent chance. Usually these two levels are accompanied by the letter **p**, which means probability. If the significance level is smaller, a value will be less likely to be more extreme than the critical value. So a result which is "significant at the 1% level" is more significant than a result which is "significant at the 5% level".

However a test at the 1% level is more likely to have a Type II error (which exists when the null hypothesis is accepted when it is in fact wrong) than a test at the 5% level, and so will have less statistical power. In devising a hypothesis test, the tester will aim to maximize power for a given significance, but ultimately have to recognize that the best which can be achieved is likely to be a balance between significance and power, in other words between the risks of Type I (which exists when the null hypothesis is true but we reject it) and Type II errors.

**SPSS** is a computer program SPSS (originally, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) which was released in its first version in 1968, and is among the most widely used programs for statistical analysis in social science. It is used by market researchers, health researchers, survey companies, government, education researchers, and others. In addition to statistical analysis, data management (case selection, file reshaping, creating derived data) and data documentation (a metadata dictionary is stored with the data) are features of the base software.

**Likert Scale (pronounced 'lick-ert')** is an often used questionnaire format. It requests respondents to specify their level of agreement to each of a list of statements. It was named after Rensis Likert, who invented the scale in 1932.

### **Research questions (RQs)**

The study was design to answer the following questions:

1. What are patterns of socio-academic interaction and academic performance among Project 322 students?
2. Is criterion variable (academic performance) predictable and explainable from predictor variables (social interaction and academic interaction)? And how?
3. Which predictor variable (academic interaction or social interaction) is better for predicting the criterion variable (academic performance)?
4. Is there a relation between two predictor variables (academic interaction and social interaction)?

Although the major goal of the study is to examine variables mentioned in the research questions, several variables as gender, length of US sojourn, extent of exposure to American culture, and extent to which students spend time with others from their home country, extent to which students are supported by the university and program and their English proficiency will also be included in order to determine if those factors hold any power on the extent to which students interact socially and academically. There have existed studies conducted on these variables in relation with students' social interactions but conclusions were controversial and varying across studies and ethnic groups (Trice, 2004). Information gathered from additional variables will provide hints for in-depth discussions and recommendations in chapter 3. Precisely, additional research questions are composed as follow:

5. Do the factors of gender, degree sought, and length of US sojourn, length of exposure to English before coming to the states, extent of exposure to American culture and their English proficiency effect or relate to social interaction?

6. Do the factors of gender, degree sought, and length of US sojourn, length of exposure to English before coming to the states, extent to which students receive human and institutional support and their English proficiency effect or relate to academic interaction?

### **Participants and sampling**

Participants are male and female graduate students who are recipients of the Vietnamese Government Scholarship (Project 322) and currently studying in the United States. An invitation enclosed with an online survey link was sent to 96 students' personal email address. Because of non-responding students and because of missing information on at least one variable, consequently, a valid sample of 71 respondents was comprised. However, the sample size ( $n$ ) still somehow satisfies the rule of thumb (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996) which is  $n \geq 50 + 8m$  (where  $m$  is the number of independent variables = 2, then  $n$  should be equal or larger than  $50 + 8 \times 2 = 66$ ). 87 % of the participant was in the range of age from 24 to 35 to and the remaining 13% was identified to be 40 or older. As an incentive to participate, participants who missed no questions and provided their names and contact information were entered in a lottery prize upon completion of the survey. Graduate students were chosen to be subjects of the study because they were originally targeted by Project 322. Applicants for undergraduate study were only added in 2004 and consistently accounted for 10% of the annual scholarship allocations.

The following table presents the background information of the sample

	N	%
Gender		
Male	54	76%
Female	17	24%
Major	17	23.9%
Engineering	22	30.99%
Natural and Applied Sciences	23	32.4%
Economics/Business/Management	8	11.3%
Social sciences, Humanities, Health and Education	1	1.41%
Law		
Degree sought		
Masters	31	43.7%
Doctor	38	53.5%
Visiting scholar	2	2.8%
Length of US sojourn		
Less than 1 year	16	22.5%
1 to up to 2 years	34	47.9%
2 to up to 3 years	19	26.8%
More than 3 years	2	2.8%
Length of exposure to English before coming to US		
Less than 1 year	8	11%
1 to up to 3 years	11	16%
3 to up to 5 years	13	18%
More than 5 years	39	55%

## **Design and Procedure**

### **Instrument**

The instrument, which was self-report measure, was designed with total 78 items. These items were pulled from different questionnaires conducted by other researchers mentioned in the literature review. Although there are concerns about their reliability and validity, deliberate falsification, and recall error (Elliot, Hungzinga, & Menard, 1989), self-report measures are still in use as considerable evidence indicates that the scores on these measures have as good reliability and validity as the scores on other social science measures (Hungzinga, & Elliot, 1986). They also have been found to be reasonably accurate and compatible with official statistics (Hingdelang, Hirshi, & Weis, 1981).

All items were classified into six categories: 1) contact information which is optional and will used for the purpose of incentive announcement and delivery, 2) background information, 3) questions to measure degrees of social interaction, 4) questions to measure degrees of academic interaction, 5) questions on academic performance and 6) additional open-end questions for students to express further comments and recommendations regarding the research topic and questions.

The crucial part of the instrument which are section 3, 4 and 5 makes use of 5-point, forced-choice scale questions with 3 main Likert-style formats: Frequency: (1 = Never to 5 = Always) or (1 = Never to 5 = Daily), Likelihood: (1 = Never to 5 = Very much), Quantity: (1 = None to 5 = A lot) or a serial of 5 number ranges. For some questions such as “In everyday conversations (e.g. stopped by a stranger for directions, making orders, claiming with sale persons, asking for information from librarians, etc.),

do Americans often find difficult to understand you?” or “Do you ever feel forgotten in group situations?”, answer values will be coded reversely (1 = Always to 5 = Never). Similarly in the question “How often do you socialize with your co-nationals?”, frequency values should be: 1 = Daily to 5 = Never.

Social interaction questionnaire consists of 17 questions that ask students to report: 1) how frequently they participate in school and local events; 2) how frequently they socialize with campus and local communities, with host nationals and co-nationals?; 3) how exposed and relaxing (or close and uncomfortable) they are in relations and communications with host nationals; 4) How concerned they are about their level of social interaction. The mean of each student’s responses to the 17 items was computed, with higher score indicating higher frequency and activeness of social interaction.

Academic interaction questionnaire also composes of 17 questions that ask students to assess: 1) how involved they are in academic activities and relations inside and outside of class 2) how much support they receive from teachers, peers and school; 3) how often they access to academic resources and how concerned they are about utilizing academic services; 4) how they perceive themselves as students and about their level of academic interaction. The mean of students’ responses to the 17 items was computed, with higher score indicating higher frequency and activeness of academic interaction.

Academic performance questionnaire is consisted of three 5-scale questions about students’ GPA, number of publications and awards for study and research excellence. These three questions are followed by other five statements in Likert-format

to measure the level of recognition and popularity received by students in their graduate programs.

### **Variables**

The predictor and criterion variables were examined using different answers based on students' perceptions about themselves and self-reported grades. Variables were measured across participants regardless of gender, age, major, degree sought, length of their stays in the US and language proficiency. However, as mentioned, some latter variables will be used in exploring their possible effects on social and academic interaction variables. All independent and independent variables are continuous.

Predictor variables (independent variables): social interaction and academic interaction. The relation between these two variables will also be determined in order to answer the final research question.

Criterion variable (outcome variable or dependent variable): Academic performance. As mentioned, beside self-reports about GPA score, publications and awards, participants also have to answer some 5-point Likert statements to self-evaluate their performance at school and the level of recognition received in their graduate program. Then, mean score of each student's answers will be computed to create the dependent variable (academic performance). Due to confidentiality, it was impossible to ask for students' GPA either from their School Records Office or Scholarship Program Management Office. Besides, during pre-study interviews, when the question of whether students would be willing to honestly report their GPA score on the survey was raised, most of answers were negative. Therefore, an alternative solution had to be employed. A range of GPA scores was created with small internal differences. Scores

were calculated relatively as follow: (1 = < 3.0, 2 = 3.0–3.29, 3 = 3.3–3.59, 4 = 3.6–3.89, 5 = 3.9–4), with higher score indicating better academic performance. In some graduate programs, students with GPA under 3.0 are not allowed to continue their graduate study but in others, that rule is not applied. Therefore, < 3.0 option still was included.

### **Research questions and selection of methods**

Quantitative method is dominant in the study but in order to provide inputs for discussion ideas, open-end questions and interviews were also conducted. The researcher used the multi regression technique to identify predictors of students' academic and social interaction to their academic performance. The analytical strategy employed in this study is very similar to those used by some other researchers (Hearn, 1988). It enables the researcher to examine the role of different independent variables in determining students' academic performance.

#### ***RQ1***

To draw patterns of socio-academic interaction and academic performance of students, descriptive analysis will be used. We will mainly look basic statistical tools such as frequencies, percentage, mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and sample distribution (normal curve).

#### ***RQ2 and RQ3***

In both second and third questions, multi regression models will be built to analyze the predictability and the relevant importance of predictor variables to the criterion variable. The *p*-value will be examined to decide if and how the criterion variable is explained and predicted by the predictors. Significance level chosen both for

the regression model and the predictors is  $p = 0.05$ . It means the regression model built is reliable (the criterion variable CAN be predicted by the predictors) if its  $\text{sig.} \leq 0.05$  and a predictor is good if its  $\text{sig.} \leq 0.05$ .

The relevant  $t$ -value,  $p$ -values, and standardized regression coefficients provide information about the relative importance of the predictors. The larger the  $t$  and standardized regression coefficient and the smaller the  $p$ -value, the more important the predictor was (Yang and Lu, 2001). It is also necessary too look at the Adjusted R Square value to find out the percentage of the variance in the criterion variable that our model accounts for. In other words, how many percent of the criterion variable pool can be explained by the model?

Among regression methods offered by SPSS, the researcher decided to use the 'simultaneous' method (which SPSS calls the 'Enter' method) to assess the relative contribution of each predictor because it was probably the safest method for this kind of study (i.e. one designed with relatively low numbers of cases).

#### ***RQ4***

Answer to this question will be sought through analyzing the relation between two independent variables (social interaction and academic interaction) by applying correlation method. If two variables are correlated, the Pearson's correlation coefficient computed must be less or equal 0.01 ( $\text{sig.} \leq 0.01$ ). For this pair of variables in correlation, the chosen significance level should be 0.01 ( $p = 0.01$ ).

#### ***RQ5 and RQ6***

Since gender, degree sought and length of US sojourn are categorical variables (factors), we will have to use GLM Univariate Analysis (two-way factorial ANOVA) to

conduct variance analysis. Toothaker (1993: 69) notes that in two-way ANOVA most researchers set the alpha significance level ( $p = 0.05$ ) at the same level for the two main effects and the interaction effect. Therefore, a factor (e.g. gender) will have an effect on an independent variable (social interaction or academic interaction) if its  $\text{sig.} \leq 0.05$ .

In treatment with interval variables (not categorical variables) such as students' English proficiency, the extent of their exposure to American culture, the extent to which students receive human and institutional support (converted to points on continuous scale), instead of examining the "effects", we again use the correlation method to find out if there are relations between these factors to each independent variable accordingly (i.e. a relation between the extent of students' exposure to American culture and the social interaction variable will be identified, not with the academic interaction variable and vice versa, a relation between the extent to which students receive human and institutional support and the academic interaction variable will be examined, not with the social academic interaction variable). Similarly, a relation between these variables is possible if the  $\text{sig.} \leq 0.01$ .

### ***SPSS***

Data were imported into SPSS table in columns and rows. Seventy one students occupied 71 numbered rows. Mean scores of student on the 'social interaction' and 'academic interaction' sections were entered in columns labeled 'socio' and 'acad' relatively. Mean of students' score on recoded GPA, publication and award frequency and level of recognition among their program, faculty and peers were calculated and entered under column labeled 'performance'. For different methods, different groups of variables were used.

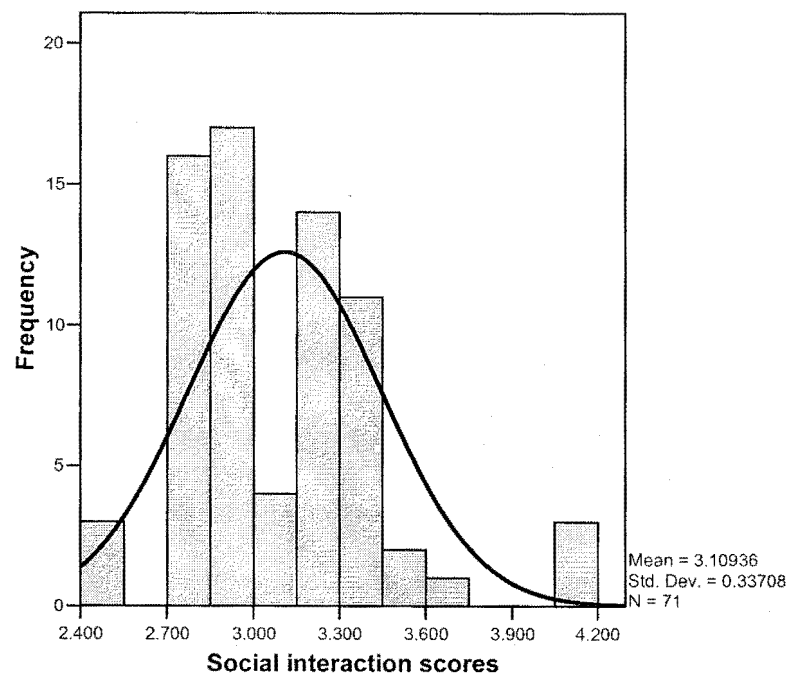
## Chapter 3

### RESULTS

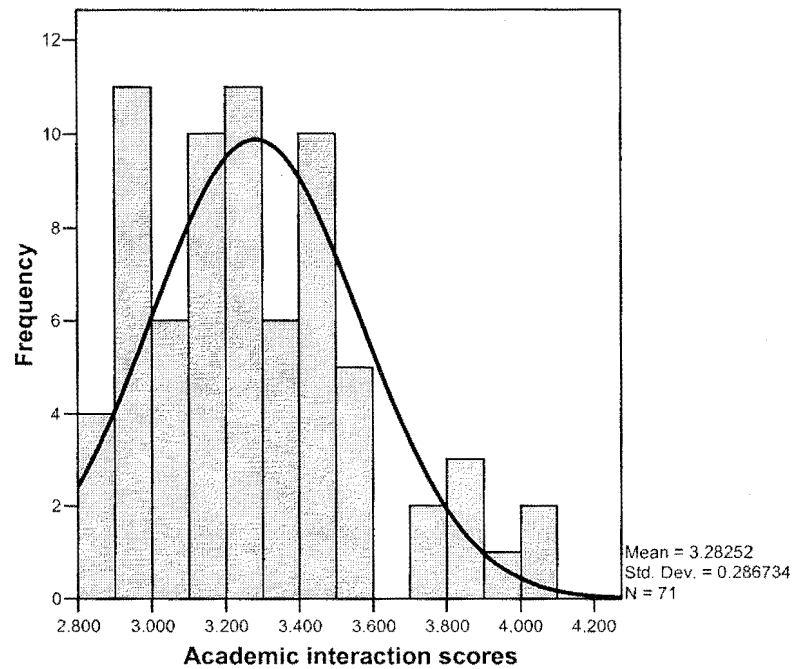
The key findings were organized according to each of the four research questions (RQ):

**RQ1: What are patterns of socio-academic interaction and academic performance among Project 322 students?**

**Social interaction scores distribution**



### Academic interaction scores distribution



### Social interaction

#### Participation in school and local events/activities

The amount of students' participation in school and/or local events/activities are high: 50.7% of students reported that they USUALLY or ALWAYS attend...or are member of...Still, 22.5% of students NEVER or SELDOM do so.

#### *Socialization with host nationals versus co-nationals*

The socialization of students with host nationals is mixed: 30.9% was either NEVER or SELDOM welcome to American homes in special holidays but 25.3% reported they USUALLY or ALWAYS went to American home in special holidays. A 54.9% reported they socialize with American communities on a daily or weekly basis. However, noticeably, there exists 14.1% which NEVER socializes with American community off campus.

Students keep a fairly regular contact with co-nationals. 35.2% socialize with their co-nationals on a daily or weekly basis and 23.9% contact every 2 weeks.

Most of them (77.5%) confessed that they preferred to have a roommate or housemate who is American.

#### Exposure and relaxation (or closure and no comfort) in communications with host nationals

The exposure and relaxation in relations and communications with host nationals were repeatedly neutral over answers. Half of respondents (49.2%) accounted the middle score (SOMETIMES feel comfortable) to evaluate their ability of initiating a conversation with an American. Only 4.2% was confident that they ALWAYS comfortable initiating a conversation with an American. Consistently, 47.8% reported that Americans SOMETIMES found difficulty to understand them in everyday conversations. Another exactly 47.8% also reported they SOMETIMES tell jokes to American and 59.1% SOMETIMES felt forgotten in group situations. Noticeably, no one reported they were either NO difficulty at all of being understood by American or ALWAYS telling jokes to Americans or NEVER forgotten in group situations.

#### *Self-reflection and perception*

30.9% NEVER or SELDOM considered themselves or was considered by people good communicator and only 9.8% USUALLY (not ALWAYS) see themselves or was seen by others as effective communicator.

Although 45% claimed that they had USUALLY or ALWAYS succeeded in making friend with Americans but 24% actually had NO American friends and 39.4% had only 1 or 2 American friends.

The students' concerns toward making friend with Americans and about learning how to understand American values and respond to American behavior were not quite positive: 31% showed MUCH and VERY MUCH concerns but the 69% only showed LITTLE or SOMEWHAT concern and even NO concern at all.

Overall, majority (67.6%) was neutral when being asked if they were satisfied with their current level of social interaction. Only 4.2% reported the highest score (VERY SATISFIED).

### **Academic interaction**

#### Involvement in academic-related activities inside and outside of class

75% of students reported that they USUALLY or ALWAYS chose a front seat or a position which is most visible to instructor in class. 60% took part in group assignments or study groups on a regular basis (two third even on a daily basis). However, only one third of student sample size USUALLY or ALWAYS asked questions during lecture or voluntarily answer questions (without being called) during class sessions. 40% could hardly dominate group discussions while half of that could USUALLY handle them. Support received from peer and school

There are more students who felt they were supported by school than those felt they receive assistance from peers (53.5% as to 29.5%). Only 20% frequently share class notes or do exam review with other students.

#### Teacher-student interactions

40% of students SOMETIMES approach their lecturers after class or in those lecturers' offices. Half of the rest lie on two ends of the distribution. Nevertheless,

53.5% of respondents keep a close contact and tight advisory schedule. They consult with advisors or supervisors daily or weekly.

#### Frequency of accessibility to academic resources and services

The frequency is low, 36.3% of students access library resources every 4 weeks. They were equally divided into two spectrums: one shows much concerns about utilizing academic services and resources while the other showed little concern.

#### Self reflection and perception

Students showed significantly high interests in school. 84.5% of them reported they liked being at school. 42.2% students reported they worked (both on and off-campus) from 15 to more than 20 hours per week during semester. While 22.5% were employed from 7 to 14 hours per week, there was bigger percentage of students (35.5%) who solely studied and did not work. Unlike with social interaction where significant neutrality was involved, 57.7% in this part affirmed that they SATISFIED with their current level academic interaction.

#### **Academic performance**

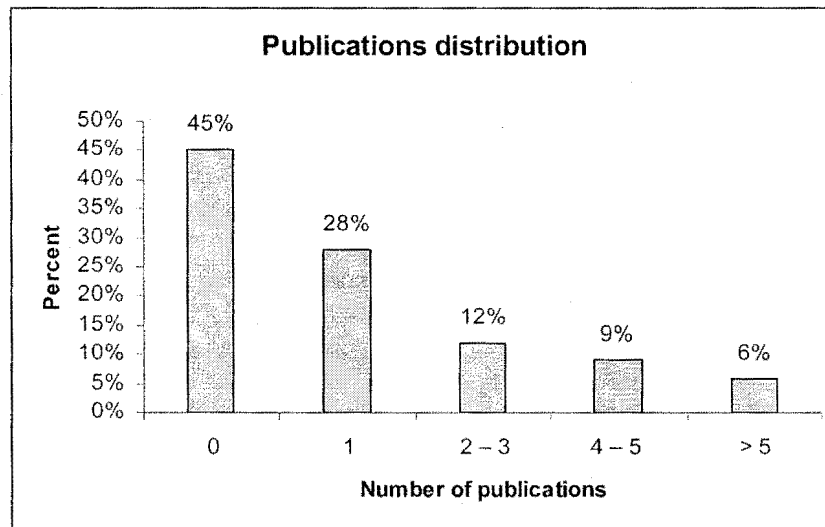
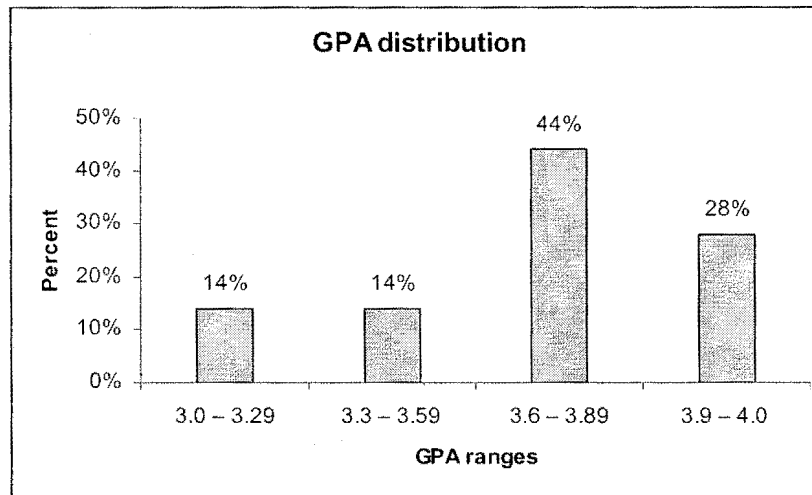
Three first questions to measure students' academic achievements include:

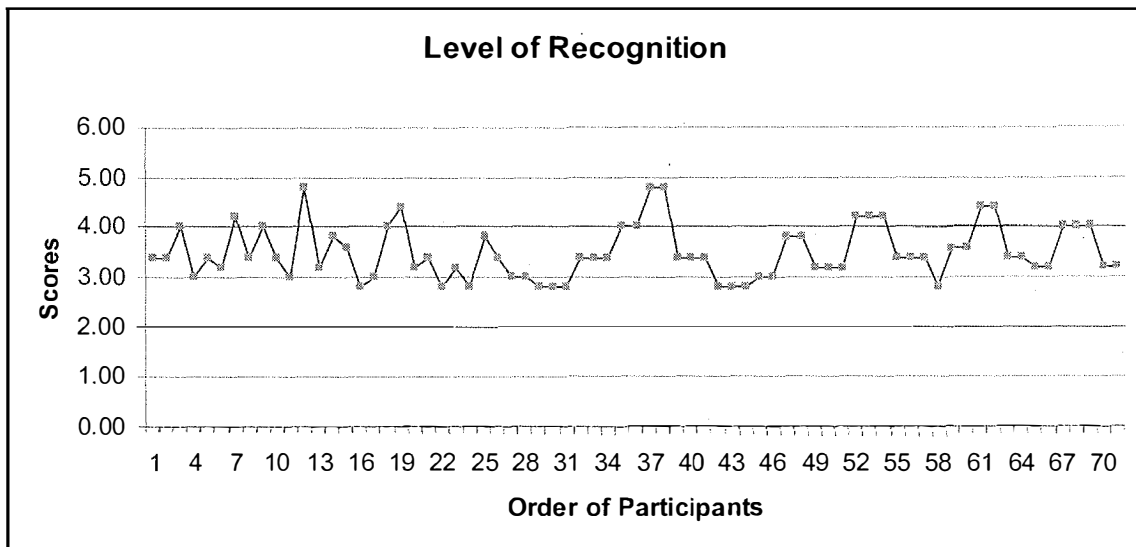
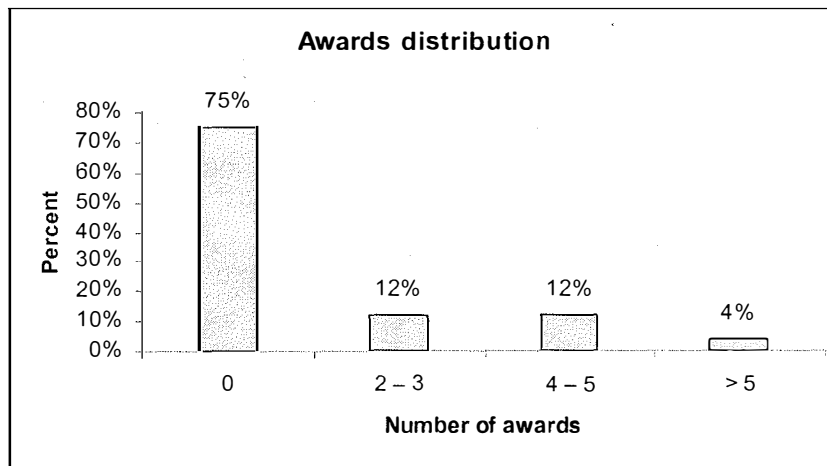
- What is your cumulative GPA?
- How many of your articles have been published in a peer-reviewed journal?

- How many times have you been nominated or conferred award(s) for academic and/or research excellence?

And statements in the Likert format (with answer options range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) are:

- My courses are interesting to me
- I consider myself a competitive student in my program
- I am popular among students and faculty members because of my academic achievement
- My advisor and course instructors ALWAYS give positive feedback about my schoolwork





An interesting observation is 49% (both students with high and low GPA scores) was neutral on the question if the GPA did reflect their real academic potential. Moreover, 5% students on top GPA scores (3.9-4.0) AGREE that GPA didn't reflect their real academic potentials. 32% agreed that they did not try hard at school, 39% DISAGREED but more than 60% consider themselves competitive students in their program and said that their advisors and course instructors ALWAYS give positive feedbacks about their schoolwork.

In general, from statistics and the histograms above, we can see Vietnamese students are more actively involved in academic relations than in social interaction. All above, most of them, regardless of scores gained on each, maintained high academic records.

In order to answer research questions 2 and 3, we will run the multiple regression (also called linear regression) analysis which is the key statistical instrument for this study.

With two independent variables, the prediction of  $\hat{y}$  is expressed by the following equation:

$$\hat{y} = b_0 + b_1 * X_1 + b_2 * X_2$$

Where:  $\hat{y}$  : predicted value (dependent variable or in this study, it is criterion variable)

$b_0$ : intercept

$b_1, b_2$ : slopes of  $X_1, X_2$  lines respectively

$X_1, X_2$ : independent variables (in this study, they are predictors or predictor variables)

In our case, the regression model for predicting Academic Performance ( $\hat{y}$  value) is:

$$\text{Academic Performance} = b_0 + b_1 * \text{Social Interaction} + b_2 * \text{Academic Interaction}$$

**RQ2: Is criterion variable (academic performance) predictable and explainable from predictor variables (social interaction and academic interaction)? And how?**

**ANOVA(b)**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.445	2	4.222	7.366	.001(a)
	Residual	38.981	68	.573		
	Total	47.426	70			

a Predictors: (Constant), acad, socio

b Dependent Variable: perform

**Model Summary(b)**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.422(a)	.178	.154	.757137

a Predictors: (Constant), acad, socio

b Dependent Variable: perform

The ANOVA table reports an overall significance of the regression model. As  $\text{sig.} = 0.001 \leq 0.05$ , our model, therefore, is significant. However, in the Model Summary table, the Adjusted R Square value tells us that our model ONLY accounts for 15% of variance in the academic performance scores (Adjusted R Square = 0.154). In other words, only 15% of the academic interaction variable can be predicted by the two dependent variables but that 15% is reliable (because the regression model is overall significant). Students fallen into that 15% are predicted to have better academic performance if they are more active in socio-academic relations and interactions, and vice versa.

**RQ3: Which predictor variable (academic interaction or social interaction) is better for predicting the criterion variable (academic performance)?**

**Coefficients(a)**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.973	1.196		-.814	.419		
	socio	1.008	.278	.413	3.631	.001	.935	1.06
	acad	.091	.326	.032	.279	.781	.935	1.06

a. Dependent Variable: perform

From the Coefficients table, we can conclude that between two independent variables, social interaction is a better predictor for predicting the academic performance because its sig. = 0.001 < 0.05 while sig. of the academic interaction is bigger than the p-value (sig. = .781 > 0.05). Besides, the larger the t-value and the standardized coefficient and the smaller the p-value, the more important the predictor is. Comparing relevant values between two predictors, we can definitely tell social interaction is clearly more important than the academic interaction in predicting the academic performance.

**RQ4: Is there a relation between two predictor variables (academic interaction and social interaction)?**

**Correlations**

		perform	socio	acad
Pearson Correlation	performance	1.000	.421	.137
	socio	.421	1.000	.255
	academic	.137	.255	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	performance	.	.000	.128
	<b>socio</b>	.000	.	<b>.016</b>
	<b>academic</b>	.128	<b>.016</b>	.
N	performance	71	71	71
	socio	71	71	71
	academic	71	71	71

Earlier, we have set the significance level for this pair of independent variables in a correlation analysis is  $p = 0.01$ . As seen from the Correlations table above, these two predictors are NOT related because their  $\text{sig.} = 0.016 > 0.01$ .

**RQ5: Do the factors of gender, degree sought, and length of US sojourn, length of exposure to English before coming to the states, extent of exposure to American culture and their English proficiency effect or relate to social interaction?**

Gender, degree south, length of US sojourn, length of exposure to English before coming to the states, and social interaction

#### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: socio					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1.834(a)	9	.204	2.031	.051
Intercept	98.903	1	98.903	985.863	.000
sex	.001	1	.001	.007	.934
degree	.169	2	.085	.845	.435
<b>US sojourn</b>	1.116	3	.372	3.709	<b>.016</b>
English exposure	.124	3	.041	.413	.744
Error	6.120	61	.100		
Total	694.391	71			
Corrected Total	7.954	70			

a. R Squared = .231 (Adjusted R Squared = .117)

At the significance level set at 0.05 for a two-way ANOVA analysis, only the effect of students' length of US sojourn on their academic performance is significant ( $\text{sig.} = 0.016 < 0.05$ ). It means the longer a student stays in the host country, the better he or she perform academically and vice versa.

### Extent of exposure to American culture and people and social interaction

**Correlations**

		Ameculture	socio
Ameculture	Pearson	1	.722(**)
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71
socio	Pearson	.722(**)	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Correlations table reports that the extent to which students expose to American culture and people is strongly correlated to their degree of social interaction because the sig. level is much smaller than the p-value ( $\text{sig.} = .000 < 0.01$ ). Pearson Correlation represents the strength of the linear association between the two variables. If the correlation coefficient is positive (as in this case, 0.722), the variables tend to go up and down together. It can be interpreted as the more a student exposes to American culture and people, the more involved and active he or she is in social interaction.

### English proficiency (4 skills) and social interaction

**Correlations**

		Eproficiency	socio
Eproficiency	Pearson	1	.364(**)
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71
socio	Pearson	.364(**)	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, students' English proficiency and their degree of social interaction are related. The better students master English skills, the more active social interactions they enjoy. As shown,  $\text{sig.} = 0.002 < 0.05$  and the Pearson Correlation is positive.

**RQ6: Do the factors of gender, degree sought, and length of US sojourn, length of exposure to English before coming to the states, extent to which students receive human and institutional support and their English proficiency effect or relate to academic interaction?**

Gender, degree south, length of US sojourn, length of exposure to English before coming to the states, and academic interaction

#### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: acad					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1.440(a)	9	.160	2.261	.030
Intercept	114.072	1	114.072	1612.411	.000
sex	.007	1	.007	.097	.757
degree	.820	2	.410	5.795	.005
US sojourn	.682	3	.227	3.213	.029
English exposure	.179	3	.060	.844	.475
Error	4.316	61	.071		
Total	770.775	71			
Corrected Total	5.755	70			

a R Squared = .250 (Adjusted R Squared = .140)

At the significance level set at 0.05 for a two-way ANOVA analysis, both degree sought by students and length of their US sojourn have effects on their academic performance ( $\text{sig. relatively} = 0.005$  and  $0.029 < 0.05$ ). So, the higher level of academic degree that a student pursue and the longer he or she stays in the host country, the better he or she perform academically and vice versa.

Level of institutional and human (peer, faculty...) support and academic interaction

**Correlations**

		support	acad
support	Pearson	1	.510(**)
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71
acad	Pearson	.510(**)	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

English proficiency (4 skills) and social interaction

**Correlations**

		Eproficiency	acad
Eproficiency	Pearson	1	.229
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71
Acad	Pearson	.229	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	71	71

From two Correlations tables above, we can tell that the level of human and institutional support received by students are correlated to their degree of academic interaction (because sig. = 0.000 < 0.05) while English proficiency is NOT. It means when students are highly facilitated and supported by people and the institution in their graduate program, they avail more.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This final chapter will deal with issues behind data, numbers and findings. As learnt from the previous chapter, the degree to which students interact in their current US social and academic environments can SOMEWHAT predict how well he or she performs academically. We have also explored factors that effect and relate to students' socio-academic interactions. Some factors are acknowledged but unchangeable (such as gender, the length of exposure to English before coming to the states). Other are more directional and forecasting (e.g. a student with low level of socio-academic interaction would expect that the situation may be just temporary and will change when they reach a higher academic degree or they stay long enough in the host country). To help students who still are struggling with their low level of socio-academic interaction (which, as proved by the study, may leave bad impacts on their academic performance), this chapter will provide readers and students with some other explanations that supplement to findings and analyses represented from the literature review and quantitative results. The explanations are mostly based on personal experiences and studies (of the researcher and the participants in this survey) on the factors that may have prevented students more engaging in their social and academic interactions. Following explanations, recommendations to related actors within the scope of this study will be raised.

## Ways of explaining

### **Cultural, social and political distances**

According to the country scores report on Hofstede's four dimensions, Vietnam is a collectivist society with high degree of power distance (score). The society level of inequalities are reflected through organizational hierarchy and desired by the whole society. People find it normal for someone to have a great deal more power than they do. Within Vietnamese organizational hierarchy, each member of an organization has a position according to his or her rank, title, and status, and this position signifies the power on holds in the organization. On contrary, Gonzalez identified the US cultural system with characteristics of high individualism, informality in appearance and encouragement to be involved in the community to express opinions, and to question the system status quo. Moreover, according to Banks and McGee Banks, the central value of the mainstream US culture is equality. This value was the core culture ideal expressed in the Declaration of Independence in 1776, "all men are created equal, they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". An interesting coincidence is this sentence was exactly quoted by Ho Chi Minh in the Vietnam's Declaration of Independence in 1945 but social revolutionary flows seemed hard to unearth cultural roots.

The Vietnamese society also valued harmony very high. Mutual support and effort toward a group aim is far more important than individual achievement. Ties are strong between members whether in family, workplace or society and it means that each individual can easily finds his or her "protective" seat in a group which, in turn, always expects its "member" loyalty. Sympathy is for weak and friendliness, rather than

competitiveness. The strong attachment to family and filial can be attributed to Confucian ethics and tradition. “Within Confucian thought, the individual is a developing part of a continuing family lineage” and “the Confucian self is a part of an ethnic continuity that envisages the self as the center of relationships and engaged in a dynamic process of becoming or developing”. Therefore, “the standard for self-development is not derived from an ideal sense of one’s ego, but from societal roles and cultural values that are ascribed” (Tu, 1976). In contrast, within the US culture, self-reliance and individual competition and achievement are more highly valued and rewarded. Also, individual success is more important than commitment to family, community, and the nation of state. And even though Americans are interested in forming friendships, it is difficult to maintain them within a mobile society. Friendships result from repeated interactions between individuals who share similar points of view and experiences.

Apart from being influenced by Confucius values, one of reasons for the consistent practice of large power distance and collectivism might attribute to the fact that Vietnam has been ruled by a communist regime of which the concepts and ideals are based on group and community sharing, common concern and uniformity. Meanwhile, American ideas of personal autonomy, individual rights and individual uniqueness originate from their historical assumption of the existence of the fore-mentioned “inalienable rights”, a result of birth. As a matter of fact, the furtherance of what is “good” is a personal rather than a collective concern. Even more, the collective “good” might have to be compromised to protect and preserve the individual rights.

“The common good can not be allowed to become the prime concern from which policy is derived” (Lawson, 1985, p. 224)

Another crucial feature of a communist society is it has been created with primary interest in human well-beings and relations, not in material gathering. Supported by Confucius and Asian ideals, for Vietnamese, work and wealth are not considered major goals of life. There is popular phrase “death is end”. It implies material values are meaningless to a person’s meaningful life. However, Gonzalez believed a core value of US society is materialism and consumption in which the value of the individual is related to his or her economic status.

Politically speaking, in its 2000 years odd of history, Vietnam had to suffer from continuous wars and resistances against the biggest world powers including China, Japan, France and America, lasting a sum of more than a thousand years, resulting in instability. Rarely were peaceful periods long enough for Vietnamese leaders and people to strategize and implement systematic policies in developing the country and human power. In only 30 years, the Vietnamese had carried out three educational reforms (in 1950, 1956 and 1981 (Tran & Nguyen, 2000, p. 219). Nevertheless, in peace, Vietnam faced another hardship: being isolated from the world community and economies, and thus, being backward and underdeveloped. These difficulties have disabled any effort and desire of Vietnamese state and people in integrating at any levels. One who is isolated for a long time might have difficulty getting familiar with the idea of integration, no matter kind it is.

These mentioned differences and problems are believed to have created cultural, social and even political shocks for an incoming Vietnamese student to the United

States that slowed down or even blocked their process of engaging in social and academic interactions and relations.

### **Vietnamese vs English linguistic systems**

Vietnamese is a tonal language that is basically monosyllabic. For most of history, the Vietnamese used Chinese ideographs for writing. Since the seventeenth century the Vietnamese have adopted a modified Romanized alphabet system called Quoc ngu (national language). Diacritical marks are used to signify the tone of each word. The tones with the pitch changes within a word reflect different lexical meanings. This system remains in use today.

A comparative analysis of the English and Vietnamese phonetic systems reveals the following differences:

1. Consonant blends occur in all word positions (i.e., initial, medial, and final in English, whereas there are no consonant blends in Vietnamese
2. Syllabi stress is used for contrastive purposes in English, but is not phonemic in Vietnamese. Lexemes in Vietnamese are typically monosyllabic.
3. English uses many final consonants; however, Vietnamese may uses only a limited number of final consonants, including /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, and /ng/.

This explains why many Vietnamese speakers who are learning English may mispronounce certain English phonemes by substituting a similar Vietnamese phoneme. As touched upon in the literature review and study findings, second language acquisition (English) is related and fundamental to students' academic outcomes. However, the differences in linguistic and phonetic systems are claimed to be biological and natural attributes, for some individuals, may take a lot time to adjust. Once a

student is unconfident about his or her language ability, at least with speaking (which is key to human daily contacts and interactions), that student will be reluctant in socio-academic interactions.

### **Factors of identity**

Things change for students when they move to a country that is very different from the native one. International students, including Vietnamese in the United States are further challenged to build their own identity in a community of diverse cultures. According to Pierce (1997), identity refers to: the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety. Students' interaction with social and academic environment is weak when they are not recognized, lack of affiliation and feel unsecured within it.

Ethnic identity is defined by interaction in the cultural practices and activities of one's ethnic group. In a study, Saylor and Aries (1992) found that "students who entered college with stronger ethnic identities established new bases of support for those identities by linking themselves with ethnic people and engaging in ethnic and cultural practices and activities. They were significantly more likely to join ethnic organizations and to attend events sponsored by ethnic organizations; they made a significantly higher percentage of friends of their own ethnicity and a smaller percentage of White friends than did the students who had entered college with weaker ethnic identities" (p. 561). From the survey results, % of Vietnamese students maintains their regular contacts with co-nationals and prefers a roommate who is a Vietnamese; don't participate in events of school and off campus community. This show a high ethnic identity of some Vietnamese. It is understandable when international students show strong identities

because they are only temporarily living in the states without being immigrants. In terms of social identity, according to McNamara (1997), minority students experience a complex renegotiating of their social identity in the host country. That process has deep implications for their attitudes towards their native language and second language learning. Moreover, Pierce found that language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood as to its social meaning and practice in the target language to create the transformation of social identity. Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment in learner's own identity. Vietnamese students who reported to be unsuccessful in mastering the target language may have difficulty in creating their social identities. Lack of social identities, consequently, they will like to withdraw from social and academic interactions.

In the book "Vietnam past and Present", SarDesai (1998, p.12) wrote that "the Vietnamese developed into one of the most determined, persistent and tenacious people anywhere." Over history, Vietnamese has significantly developed a strong and consistent spirit of nationalism. The historical defense for an identity of a nation, a people was reflected in Vietnamese resistance to foreign domination and has built in each Vietnamese a character of resistance. However, it may be the over resistance and self-identity nature, to some extent, considered pride of Vietnamese that used to close Vietnam from the outside world economically, socially and culturally for centuries. Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh, two Vietnamese leading anti-colonists and nationalists in early 20<sup>th</sup> century hammered their critics to Vietnamese of their closure and too much resistance to the Western culture and ideology (Thanh Nien, 2006). And to set an example, Phan Boi Chau stirred up the Dong-du movement with the purpose

to “bring as many Vietnamese students as possible to the East, that is Japan, for study” and with the hope that “the acquired knowledge in technology and military science would eventually contribute to overthrowing the French colonial rule in Vietnam” (Vinh Sinh, 1988). However, the movement was short lived (1904 to 1909). The closure was reinforced in modern times when Vietnam was under US embargo and isolated from the other part of the world. This might explain why the Vietnamese leaders also named their renovation period (*doi moi*) an “openness” era (*mo cua*). Consequently, study overseas movements in Vietnam, representation of recognizing and receiving Western cultural values, started late, at least compared to regional neighbors such as China, Japan and Southeast Asian block.

Deeply rooted perceptions of self identities, students unconsciously

### **Differences in practice of graduate study**

The following table will highlight some essential differences in educational concepts and teaching methods in general and especially at the graduate level between Vietnam and the US.

	<b>Vietnam</b>  <b>an education of obedience</b>	<b>US</b>  <b>an education of freedom</b>
Purpose of education	First to serve the state and the people. “The principal tasks and goals of education are to be aimed at training people who deeply attach to the ideal of national independence and socialism...for national construction and defense;	First for individual interests, personal growth and development (Lawson, 1985)

	for national industrialization and modernization....community-conscious” (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 1997)	
Higher education management	Subsidized, centralized, higher institutions are under the control of the Ministry of Education and Training	Decentralized, higher institutions are given more autonomy
	Newly developed educational privatization and commerce	Strong private and commercial education
Degrees and diplomas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intellectual work is generally valued by the society.</li> <li>- Degrees and social, economic status are interrelated.</li> <li>“those...receive diplomas or degrees, will be honored with high social status” (Nguyen, 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highly paid jobs are generally valued by the society</li> <li>- Diplomas and degrees are not guaranteed tickets for prosperous social and economic status</li> </ul>
	No confidentiality (open praise, punishment and competition)	High confidentiality
	Group success is put before success of each member	Individual success is important
Teaching and learning process and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher-oriented</li> <li>- Teacher is a knowledge provider</li> <li>- Non-participatory</li> <li>- Coursework and memorizing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student-oriented</li> <li>- Teacher is an instructor/facilitator</li> <li>- Participatory</li> <li>- Project and research-oriented</li> </ul>

	- No critical thinking, hoc ngoai ngu thu dong, theo kieu translated (Gonzalez, 2004)	- Critical thinking highlighted
Graduate curriculum	No free choice of courses  Designed with strict order and number of courses that a degree- sought student has to follow	Free choice of courses  Credit system
Graduate class size	Big (> 25 students)	Small (< 25 students)
Graduate programs	Limited number of programs and graduate subjects	Big range of programs and diversified majors
Academic resources, services and lab facilities at higher education institutions	Poor	Rich

### **Lack of internal motivation**

When interviewed why US was chosen as a destination for graduate study, some students admitted that they wanted to be admired by friends, co-workers and family because people back home owned a stereotypic view of the US academic reputation, and that having a degree from any American university was of much value. Some even said because the US had not been included in their past itinerary, it was not easy to enter

the US though. Others were more prepared but they had no idea of the big workload waiting or the cultural differences they would face. As mentioned, there has been a thinking path embedded on Vietnamese minds that they tend to study not for themselves or for their personal interests but for family, parents, community, for job placement, promotion or even vain fantasies. The practicality in the way Vietnamese value learning and study was clarified in an old saying to ridicule member of the intelligentsia: “First rank the scholars, next the peasants, when rice runs out, you turn around, first rank the peasants, next the scholars” (*nhat sy, nhi nong, het gao, chay rong, nhat nong nhi si*). Of course, this easy conclusion should not apply to all Vietnamese learners and those who are sponsored by the Vietnamese Government Scholarship program; however, legitimate answers can only be sought in another empirical study.

### **Objective obstacles**

Answered to questions about factors that may prevent students from integrating more in socio-academic interaction, 63 % of respondents agreed that other factors such as small size of program, institution is located in a low populated state, suburban or rural area, personality (e.g. shy, unconfident, introvert, close, silent, etc.), busy schedule, limited communication and social skills (not necessarily only in English but also in their mother tongue) were SOMEWHAT accounted for.

### **Recommendations**

The findings showed us that a student’s academic achievement can be predicted through his or her role in social and academic interaction. It is highly expected by student, program and sponsor that students will keep a good academic standing and record. However, it is also important for them to realize that student should develop an

active role in social and academic interactive relations, not only to have a worthy time in a foreign country but also because it is closely related to their academic achievement. There are a number of recommendations that can be made in response to the picture presented by this research. Underpinning these recommendations are the goals of nurturing mutual understanding, respect and tolerance between Vietnamese and host nationals; creating an infrastructure that encourages more frequent interaction in both academic and extra-curricula domains.

#### **For current and future Scholarship Program Recipients**

Student should be aware of the fact that the how they interaction academically and socially have certain effects on their academic performance. They should also acknowledge of differences in terms of cultural, social and political values and prepared themselves for possible changes before and upon arrival to the United States. A suggested solution when encountering difficulties and barriers in socio-academic interaction is a student can sit alone or together with friends to make an objective self-evaluation about his or her own weaknesses, reasons for the reluctance and plans to resolve the situation. However, plans must be followed strictly because to overcome one self's weaknesses is universally challenging.

Instead of reserving after experiencing difficulties in socio-academic interactions and relations, students should reach out for help from host nationals and co-nationals who have staying long in the states and succeeded in their socio-academic interactions. It would always the best for students to ask for assistance and consultations from their peers, teachers and the program because those are interactions that they will be involved with the most. Language and communication ability must be considered top

priority and decisive to successes in any type of interactions, even should be treated by students as their “major”.

### **For US students and faculty**

It has become a stereotype that American people show little concerned about other peoples, therefore, have little motivation in understanding other cultures except theirs. There is a joke like this: a person who can speak three languages is called a tri-lingual, a person who speaks two languages is a bilingual and one who speaks only one language is called American. Althen (1988) in his “American Ways” book claimed that “Americans generally believe that theirs is a superior country, probably the “greatest” country in the world. It is economically and militarily powerful; its influence extends to all parts of the globe” and “If Americans consider their country to be superior, then it cannot be surprising that they often consider other countries to be inferior. The people in those other countries are assumed not to be quite as intelligent or hard-working or sensible as Americans are. Foreigners (with the exception of Canadians and northern Europeans, who are generally viewed with respect) tend to be perceived as “underdeveloped Americans”. Foreign visitors often find that Americans in general condescend to them, treating them a bit (or very much) like children who have limited experience and perhaps limited intelligence”.

Obviously, the application of stereotypes is always questionable but American faculty and students should be advised that these stereotypes may be deeply perceived by international students, including Vietnamese who actually come from an “underdeveloped country”. Therefore, in addition to encouraging interaction, teachers can also play an important role in raising awareness of internationalism like discuss

topics of stereotypes or mutual perceptions of in-groups and out-groups. Originated from an education system of obedience, many Vietnamese students, even at graduate level, are lack of critical and independent thinking. American teachers should make students aware of expectations concerning critical thinking which is often discouraged in the Vietnamese culture of questioning of and challenges to authority, and explain learning practices with specific examples of critical thinking applied to course content. On the other hand, teachers should also make an effort to understand the learning styles of Vietnamese students as learners and to seek to reconcile differences in teaching and learning practices. It may time consuming but important for Vietnamese students to be allowed enough time to adjust to the new learning environment and without being assumed that they know what is expected of them. Practically, US program and admission committees should ensure that Vietnamese students meet appropriate graduate entry language levels.

**For US institution/ graduate program/ related supporting centers**

International Students Programs and Vietnamese Student Associations (VSA) all over the United States have actively organized events to promote cultural diversity. However, due to the historical context, VSA groups, dominated by undergraduate students who are decedents of Vietnamese leaving Vietnam after the American War in 1975 did not share much in ideology and belief with current Vietnamese graduates who received scholarships from the Vietnamese Government. Some VSO activities are not enjoyed by the students because of its one-way political imposition. Apart from cultural factors, historical problems between Vietnamese should be also considered by graduate programs and other offices on campus. US universities or Learning Support Centers are

encouraged to open free and intensive ESL as well as academic and technical English courses for Vietnamese students, at all levels, not only for future teacher or research assistants as present. The International Students Program should promote positive policies (through work and immigration) that facilitate Vietnamese students' choices for study in the United States. The US visa application now still is a miserable to Vietnamese graduate students while the visa validity only lasts for a year. Students will lose many opportunities to travel outside of the United States for research cooperation and conferences when their visa is expired.

On one hand, graduate programs where Vietnamese graduate students are hosted can set up informal learning and social support networks among American and Vietnamese students and on the other hand, draw on the expertise of Vietnamese graduate students, where appropriate and in an inclusive manner. If American students may perform support/assistant roles, act as mentors, tutors, and providers of learning support, so might Vietnamese students. US university or research centers can conduct further in-depth research to better understand the socio-academic interactions that takes place between Vietnamese students and Americans.

#### **For local community**

Each city attracts international students including Vietnamese students for different reasons. City leaders, educational institutions and community groups should work together to promote the development of educational materials for the wider community on the benefits of attracting more international students and to develop strategies for effective support of international students and improvement of their relationship with local communities.

American local community off-campus can provide home-stays for Vietnamese students or invite them over in special occasions, so can the Vietnamese-American families. They can also create campus-community links and organize special events like Vietnamese day, ESOL tutoring and community workshops while ensuring the quality of the contact has positive features, such as cooperative, pleasant and mutually beneficial encounters. Local authorities should offer support to NGOs and voluntary organizations that engage in recruiting Vietnamese students and link them to the community and strengthen support for home-stay families. Local media should be utilized to present positive images of the Vietnamese students in the United States, particularly examples of how they have integrated well into the social and academic interactions.

### **US Government**

The US Government should expedite the process of issuing visas to more welcome Vietnamese students to the United States. Vietnam is now among countries with strict visa rules: selected processes and one-year validity. Not only student visa but work visa policies should be broaden so that Vietnamese students have greater opportunities to engage in paid work in the community and undertake holiday jobs. The Government or the Department of Education can fund an in-depth qualitative research on the nature of American and Vietnamese student interactions to better understand the processes of promoting intercultural interaction.

### **Vietnamese Embassy in Washington DC**

The Embassy should strengthen its bridge roles (which are rather weak now) in connecting the Scholarship Program Recipients and the Vietnamese Government. A hot

line or a consultant center can be available at the Embassy where students will seek for when they have social and academic difficulties. With financial support from the Ministry of Education and Training or the Government, the Embassy should host cultural awareness or orientation workshops for students who travel to the United States at the same time.

### **Students' undergraduate institution in Vietnam**

Vietnamese students from undergraduate level should be prepared and familiar with critical thinking abilities and skills. However, for higher education institutions and system in Vietnam, it requires continuous and systematical renovations and reforms in ways of thinking and ways of teaching that have been applied for year. Difficulties and resistances will appear but in order to upgrading the education and especially human resources to the international platform, visions and strategies should be adopted by school heads. English, communication skills improvement and cross-cultural awareness classes should be included as extracurricular activities.

### **Scholarship Program Management**

During the orientation, the Scholarship Program Management should integrate topics of social and cultural awareness, especially when stereotypes (good and bad) of the United States, to some extents, have been embedded in Vietnamese students' mind. Alumni scholarship recipients, US Embassy officers, researchers on American studies can be invited to the orientation to help answer students' questions and concerns.

On the Project official website, the Scholarship Program Management can weekly post a topic or story in which students share their experiences in socio-academic adaptation and interaction in the United States.

To avoid the negative impacts of some objective factors such as program, school location, program size etc., during school selection process, the Scholarship Program Management should encourage students to conduct careful research about the school and locality to get realistic information and notice students of possible challenges they may face with their choices (e.g. weather, poor public bus system, living costs).

### **Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training**

DeSimone and Harris (1998) stated that management education is one of the most common human resource development activities. Keys and Wolfe (1988) defined management education as “the acquisition of a broad range of conceptual knowledge and skills in formal classroom situations in degree-granting institutions” (p. 205).

Without approval and facilitation of the Ministry of Education and Training, efforts in renovating curricula design and teaching methods in order to equip students with critical thinking ability is infeasible. Thus, as the highest authority over the education system, the Ministry brains should be the first who change. Education should be considered personal interests and needs, first and foremost done for the benefits of the learners themselves, then their families and finally the country. Only by that, students are motivated to study for the sake of study other than others.

## **Chapter 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

Overall, this study confirmed the findings of the international students in the United States revealed in the literature on and satisfied the hypothesis. That is, the academic performance of Vietnamese Government Scholarship Recipients who are students in US graduate programs can be predicted by degree of their socio-academic interactions. The fact that the regression model built (the dominant statistical method to answer the hypothesis) is significant is an encouraging result. Scholarship Program Managers and students should take into consideration the result in policy making process and helping students ready for and overcome social and academic challenges in order to gain the best academic outcomes. However, the researcher expected of more than 15% of the criterion variance to be explained by the model.

Findings successfully supported the usefulness of socio-academic interaction as predictors of academic performance among Vietnamese graduate students. In this study, we discovered that social interaction and academic interaction are not related. Between two variables, social interaction is a better predictor for predicting students' academic performance. The result may be against some assumptions that academic interaction should be a better predictor. Nevertheless, it should be noted that findings are only applied to the sample size of this study. The length of students' US sojourn has effects on both social and academic interaction and degree sought by students has impact on academic interaction. Gender and length of exposure to English before coming to the states have no effect on either social interaction or academic interaction while students' English proficiency is only related to their level of social interaction. The extent that a

student exposes to the American culture and people is related to his or her level of social interaction and the level of institutional and human support received the students is also related to their degree of academic interaction. Further explanations for preventing students from more engaging in socio-academic interaction were also addressed and followed by recommendations to related actors at both American and Vietnamese side. The study results call for further research in this area, especially with Vietnamese students. Particularly, other important variables such as age, program location, students' personality and motivation must be investigated.

### **Limitations**

As with all survey research, this study is affected by a number of limitations. First, the results from this study must be treated with caution as they cannot be generalized to all Vietnamese graduate students or Vietnamese undergraduate students, considering the size of the sample and the limitations in the sample selection. While the sample still meet the rule of thumb but there are more male than female. Another is the possibility of response distortion due to social desirability influences, due to over reliance of the study on self reported data. Unlike where direct observation techniques are used, self reported data may be biased and is easily affected by issues of social desirability. Finally, anybody but a Vietnamese can access to the survey as it is put online. However, only three respondents (4.2% of the participants) did not provide their contact or email address. The other 97% are targeted participants. Errors, if available, should not ruin the outcomes.

## APPENDIX A

### Online survey

<http://bongkin.net//survey.php?sid=28>

Dear 322 scholars,

Following is a short survey about your social and academic experiences as a graduate student in the United States. Please respond to each question using the rating scales allotted.

Participants who miss no questions and provide their names and contact information will be entered in a lottery for a \$30 cash prize upon completion of the survey (April, 2006).

Your names and responses are completely CONFIDENTIAL.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Please click "Next Page" below to begin.

### **PLEASE TELL US TO WHOM AND WHERE TO SEND THE LOTTERY PRIZE**

1. Name
2. University/Department
3. Address
4. Phone
5. Email

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

6. Sex

Male Female

7. Age

8. What is your major area of study?

9. You are a

Master's student Doctoral student Visiting scholar

10. When did you first enroll in your current graduate program? (mm/yy)

11. How long had you studied English before coming to the states?

Less than 1 year 1 to up to 3 years 3 to up to 5 years More than 5 years

Please rate your English proficiency

Very Poor Poor Fair Good Excellent

12. Listening

13. Speaking

14. Reading

15. Writing

## **SOCIAL INTERACTION**

(Never                      Seldom                      Sometimes                      Usually                      Always)

16. Have you ever been a member of any student organizations, clubs or activities?
17. Have you ever attended any campus or local events (e.g. job fair, cultural festival, concert, theatre production, artistic performance, sport games, etc.)?
18. Have you been invited to an American family in special holidays?
19. Have you succeeded in making friends with Americans?
20. Do you prefer to have a roommate/housemate who is American?  
Never                      Seldom                      Sometimes                      Usually                      Always
21. Are you comfortable initiating conversation with an American?
22. In everyday conversations (e.g. stopped by a stranger for directions, making orders, claiming with sale persons, asking for information from librarians, etc.), do Americans often find difficult to understand you?
23. Do you often tell jokes to Americans?
24. Do you consider yourself a good communicator?
25. Do others tell you that you are a good communicator?
26. Do you ever feel forgotten in group situations?

(Never                      Monthly                      Fortnight                      Weekly                      Daily)

27. How often do you socialize with Vietnamese speakers?
28. How often do you socialize with the American community off campus?
29. Are you concerned about making friends with Americans?  
Never                      Little                      Somewhat                      Much                      Very Much
30. Are you concerned about learning how to understand American values and respond to American behavior?  
Never                      Little                      Somewhat                      Much                      Very Much
31. How many close friends do you have that are American?  
0                      1-2                      3-5                      6-10                      > 10
32. How satisfied are you with your level of social interaction?  
Very Unsatisfied                      Unsatisfied                      Neutral                      Satisfied                      Very Satisfied

## **ACADEMIC INTERACTION**

Never                      Seldom                      Sometimes                      Usually                      Always

33. How often do you approach your lecturers after class or in their offices?
34. How often do you interact with other students during free time outside of school/class?
35. How often do you share class notes or do exam review with other students?
36. Do you often receive peer assistance?
37. Do you feel supported by your school/program?  
Never                      Seldom                      Sometimes                      Usually                      Always
38. Do you like being at school?
39. In class, how often do you choose a front seat or a position which is most visible to instructor?
40. How often do you voluntarily answer questions (without being called) in class?
41. How often do you ask questions during lecture?
42. Are you always dominating group discussions?

43. Do you consider yourself a self-starter student?  
 Never    Monthly    Fortnight    Weekly    Daily
44. How often do you consult with your advisor(s)/supervisor(s) about your study and research?
45. How often do you take part in group assignments or study groups?
46. How often do you access library resources?
47. Are you concerned about using academic services?  
 Never    Little    Somewhat    Much    Very Much
48. Averagely, how many hours per week are you employed (on campus/off-campus) during semester?  
 0    Up to 7    8 to 14    15 to 20    More than 20
49. How satisfied are you with your level of academic interaction?  
 Very Unsatisfied    Unsatisfied    Neutral    Satisfied    Very Satisfied

### ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

50. What is your cumulative GPA?  
 < 3.0    3.0-3.29    3.3-3.59    3.6-3.89    3.9-4
51. How many of your articles have been published in a peer-reviewed journal?  
 0    1    2 to 3    4 to 5    More than 5
52. How many times have you been nominated or conferred award(s) for academic and/or research excellence?  
 0    1    2 to 3    4 to 5    More than 5

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements  
 (Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree)

53. My courses are interesting to me
54. I do not try very hard in school
55. I consider myself a competitive student in my program
56. I am popular among students and faculty members
57. My advisor and course instructors ALWAYS give positive feedback about my schoolwork
58. I do not think the GPA reflects my real academic potential

Please indicate to what extent each of the following factors (skip if not applicable) prevents you from engaging more in social and academic relations.

- Not At All    Little    Somewhat    Much    To a Great Extent
59. University is located in a low populated state, suburban or rural area
60. Small program
61. Lack of encouragement from program and university about contact between international and local students
62. Differences between your culture and the host's culture (e.g. collectivist vs individualist, high vs low power distance, etc.)
63. Different interests between you and others
64. Inadequate English proficiency

- 65. Limited communication skills
- 66. Lack of concern/motivation to understand and interact with the American people and culture
- 67. Personal characters (e.g. shy, unconfident, introvert, close, silent, etc.)
- 68. Busy working and study schedule

In your opinion, what might the following actors do or change to make the social and academic experiences better for you?

- 69. Yourself
- 70. Your US peers, teachers
- 71. Your current institution (graduate program, student organizations, international student program, etc.)
- 72. The local community you are living in
- 73. The US Government
- 74. Your undergraduate institution in Vietnam
- 75. The Vietnamese Embassy in the US
- 76. The Scholarship Management
- 77. The Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam
- 78. Others (please indicate)

THIS IS THE END OF THE QUESTIONS.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO ANSWER THEM !!!

PLEASE CLICK "FINISH" TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **List of US institutions attended by Vietnamese graduate students**

Florida International University  
Florida State University  
Florida University  
George Mason University, DC  
Georgetown University, DC  
Indiana University  
Kansas State University  
Kent State University  
Mississippi State University  
New Mexico State University  
Ohio State University  
Ohio University  
Purdue University at Indianapolis  
St. John University, NYC  
State University of New York at Buffalo  
University of Central Florida  
University of Colorado at Denver  
University of Massachusetts at Amherst  
University of Missouri, Columbia  
University of Oklahoma  
University of San Francisco  
University of Utah, Salt Lake City  
University of Texas at Arlington

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