Muslim International Students’ Perception of Islamophobia in Their Immigration Journey to the U.S.: A Case Study

Sheri Beyer

University of New Orleans, New Orleans, sbeyer@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td

Part of the Comparative Politics Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Higher Education Commons, Higher Education Administration Commons, Immigration Law Commons, International and Comparative Education Commons, and the International Relations Commons

Recommended Citation

Beyer, Sheri, "Muslim International Students’ Perception of Islamophobia in Their Immigration Journey to the U.S.: A Case Study" (2024). University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations. 3181. https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/3181

This Dissertation is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Dissertation in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself.

This Dissertation has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.
Muslim International Students’ Perception of Islamophobia in Their Immigration Journey to the U.S.: A Case Study

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration

by

Sheri Beyer

B.A. Hawai‘i Pacific University, 2000
M.Ed. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2007

May, 2024
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and chosen family. Your support and encouragement helped me when I needed it most. It is dedicated to my biological family, to whom gave me the opportunity to find myself and blaze my path forward in this lifetime. To my adopted family, who provided the foundation and groundwork that catapulted me to do the hard work in life. I dedicate this dissertation to marginalized groups whose voices are not heard by the mainstream politics and media. This study was conducted to be an advocate for Muslim international students and to explore the stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice, and barriers they face in their immigration journeys. It is my hope that further studies will be done with larger samples to provide more exposure to the biases they face through media, politics, and in their everyday lives.
Acknowledgment

The Ph.D. journey is not one taken alone. Many people provided guidance, support, friendship, and laughter throughout this adventure. I want to acknowledge the participants of the study, for without them this would not be possible. I appreciate their willingness to disclose very personal experiences. I am forever grateful to my dissertation committee: Dr. Broadhurst, Dr. Robinson-Morris, and Dr. Ammigan. The insight, guidance, and mentorship were invaluable and appreciated immensely. Thank you Dr. Broadhurst for sticking with me and pushing me through the process with your feedback and support. I believe it all happened for a reason and I am thankful for your direction. Thank you, William and Dede Mitchell for your unconditional friendship and love; our worldly travels, VR Krewe nights, and dinners rejuvenated my spirit to keep me going. Thank you, Dr. Wendy Schluchter for your forever support and guidance when I felt lost. I am so grateful for our and our boys’ friendships! Chocobear, thank you for your steadfast love, encouragement, and for being there the last five years to nudge me when I wanted to stray. Jason Peter Castro for your friendship, laughter, and support. Our travels and travel planning are great memories and renewed my energy to complete this dissertation to continue my explorations around the world. To Stacey and Kym – thank you for helping me continue my dissertation with a new MacBook Pro. Rebecca Kinnersley, whose friendship and encouragement have been absolute for 30 years. Grace Funai, for being my older sister the last 20 years and your endless encouragement. Foster Boom – for sharing your love and light with me the past 10 years and teaching me the meaning of living. A heartfelt thank you to my friends: Shante Williams, Dr. Matthew Farley, Dr. Celyn Boykin, and Tim Sattler for your constant support, our fun times together, and for sharing this intimate experience with each other. Finally, thank you to my parents for instilling the ambition and drive to reach for the stars. #PHinisheD
# Table of Contents

Dedication .................................................................................................................................................. iii

Abstract ....................................................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1

Problem Statement ......................................................................................................................................... 3

  Statement of Purpose ................................................................................................................................. 8

  Research Design ......................................................................................................................................... 9

Research Questions ......................................................................................................................................... 9

  Definition of terms ...................................................................................................................................... 9

Chapter 2: Review of Literature .................................................................................................................. 12

International Education ............................................................................................................................... 12

International Student Barriers and Issues .................................................................................................. 13

  Pre-Arrival .................................................................................................................................................. 17

    Admissions Requirements – English Proficiency .................................................................................... 17

    Evidence of Financial Support ............................................................................................................... 18

    Visa Issues ................................................................................................................................................ 19

  Arrival ...................................................................................................................................................... 21

    Orientation for New International Students .......................................................................................... 21

    Assimilation ........................................................................................................................................... 22

    Language ................................................................................................................................................ 23

    Academic ............................................................................................................................................... 24
Social Barriers........................................................................................................................................24

Changes to International Education Post-9/11....................................................................................25

Policies post-9/11 ..................................................................................................................................25
USA PATRIOT Act .................................................................................................................................26
Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).................................................................26
National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS)..............................................................27
Executive Order 13769 and 13780 (also known as ‘Muslim bans’) ....................................................28

Islamophobia........................................................................................................................................32

History of Islamophobia .......................................................................................................................33
Media Role of Perpetuating Islamophobia ............................................................................................35

Critical Muslim Theory.........................................................................................................................37

Tenet 1: Islamophobia is endemic and pervasive .................................................................................39

Tenet 2: CMT is critical towards how the dominant society views Islam and Muslims......................40

Tenet 3: Islamophobia is a social construction ...................................................................................40

Tenet 4: Legal basis ...............................................................................................................................41

Tenet 5: Intersectionality ......................................................................................................................41

Tenet 6: Storytelling and counter-stories reveal the oppression and pain of Muslims.......................42

Rationale for Critical Muslim Theory ..................................................................................................43

Chapter 3: Methods...............................................................................................................................46

Research Design....................................................................................................................................46

Inquiry Methods .................................................................................................................................50

Research Questions .............................................................................................................................51
Supporting international and Muslim students from the Administration Level .......................................................... 101

Providing consistent information nationwide to international students ................................................................. 103

Staffing of international student and scholar offices ................................................................................................. 104

Create mentoring programs for smaller colleges and universities ........................................................................ 105

Implications for theory ................................................................................................................................................. 107

Limitations ................................................................................................................................................................. 108

Future research ............................................................................................................................................................ 109

Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................................. 111

References ................................................................................................................................................................. 115

Appendix I ................................................................................................................................................................. 154

Appendix II ............................................................................................................................................................... 155

Appendix III .............................................................................................................................................................. 156

Appendix IV .............................................................................................................................................................. 157
Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to discover whether Muslim international students from a public university in the Northeast believed Islamophobia impacted their visa and immigration journey to the U.S. Data collection included a questionnaire to obtain participant qualification, interviews, and document analyses. The participants in the study did not believe their Muslim identity was a factor throughout their visa and immigration journey but shed light to the process of visa application processes for students from particular countries and provided recommendations for institutions and future international students.

This study serves as an impetus for universities to address improving pre-arrival services and procedures for Muslim international students and a resource for practitioners and lawmakers to examine current policies specifically through the lens of Critical Race and Critical Muslim Theory. Policymakers can examine the effects of Islamophobia on international students and how it affects higher education, communities, and the economies.

Keywords: International students, immigration, Critical Muslim Theory, Critical Race Theory, Islamophobia, Muslim Ban
“We have to constantly critique imperialist White supremacist patriarchal culture because it is normalized by mass media and rendered unproblematic.” – (hooks & Mesa-Bains, 2006)

Chapter 1: Introduction

International education (IE) connects people from one part of the world to one another through educational experiences, but all students do not have the same immigration experiences. International Muslim students, in particular, experience discrimination in multiple ways. The IE term is often used interchangeably with “international studies, international affairs, international relations;” (Brickman, 1950, p. 617-18) though William Brickman provided several defining characteristics for the discipline: international education refers to the exchange of thoughts, understandings, and cooperation between nations in an educational setting (Sylvester, 2002). IE has been existent since the 19th century but became more prevalent in literature in the 1990s (Sylvester, 2002), specifically after World War II. International education included international students, scholars, and U.S. students who study abroad. These cultural interactions are critical ways to exchange new ideas through worldly perspectives (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Beydoun, 2018; Jibeen & Khan, 2015). Therefore, the importance of international education cannot be understated; an increase to over one million international students and scholars in the U.S. (Open Doors, 2023) demonstrates its relevance in higher education and the sharing of new knowledge. The academy has minimized social and political events, including religious identity (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). The result is a lack of research and critical considerations understanding Islamophobia, its provocation of fearing Islam, and its impact on Muslim students (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Beydoun, 2018). The shortage of literature on this specific topic provided a challenge to find supporting studies and research to ground parts of this study.
International students attend institutes of higher education (IHEs) in the United States from around the globe (Open Doors, 2020). The rise of xenophobia and Islamophobia since September 11th has been proven many times over by FBI and think-tanks’ reports and the academy (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018; American Psychological Association, 2017; Sheridan, 2006; Khan and Ecklund, 2013; Naber, 2006). The previous political climate towards Muslims was inflamed by the Trump administration (Frazin, 2019), inciting hate and vitriol (American Psychological Association, 2017). As an area that scholars have failed to address, this further provides an incentive for this specific study.

The number of international students and scholars has fluctuated over the decades, but recently surpassed one million in the U.S. There are currently 1,057,188 international students in the United States, specifically, 467,027 graduate international students (Open Doors, 2023). China leads with 289,526; followed by India with 268,923; South Korea with 43,847, followed by Canada and Vietnam with 27,876 and 21,900 respectively (Open Doors, 2023). The Open Doors report (2023) notes New York University, Northeastern University - Boston, and Columbia University as the top three universities hosting international students by numbers. Arizona State University and University of Southern California are fourth and fifth accordingly. In the 2022-2023 academic year, international students and scholars contributed nearly $38 billion into the U.S. economy, with over 60% of the students’ majority of funding originating from outside the U.S. (Open Doors, 2023). The economic impact of international students is noteworthy and crucial to state and local economies. Internationalization can create cross-cultural awareness and understanding through higher education’s role in international education (U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2011) while simultaneously
demonstrating imperialistic displays of power that established a contrast between the First and Third Worlds (Amin, 1999; Miyoshi, 1996; Said, 1993; Smith, 1999).

Cross-cultural understanding and communication can prepare U.S. students for global careers post-graduation. It is essential for higher education professionals to understand the journey of international Muslim students because of the diverse worldviews they bring to the classroom, communities, and campus (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). Islamophobia affects higher education in different ways: the number of Muslim international students who may want to study in the U.S., which affects the economy of the institution and the lower number of Muslim students decreases the exchange of knowledge from different perspectives. The importance of the number of international students hosted by institutes of higher education cannot be understated. Islamophobia in politics and international education can affect the bottom line financially – schools will be more apt to see a notable decrease in the out-of-state tuition paid public universities, from international students affected by the Muslim bans and those who study in another English-speaking country (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020).

**Problem Statement**

International education provides a gateway for members of the university and outside community to meet, learn from, study with, and befriend students from other countries. International students not only benefit the economy financially, but they also bring different cultural perspectives to the community (Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2013). While many benefits are obvious, there are also issues for international students that may not be as clear without delving further.

Islamophobia is an issue that affects society beyond the targeted Muslim populations. It affects universities and higher education when international students from Muslim-majority
countries are either delayed F-1 student visa issuance because their name was similar to a terrorist watchlist or if the visa is not issued. International students and scholars contribute to campus communities beyond the financial aspect. The presence of international students offers new or different perspectives in the classroom (Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020), and can open minds to ways of seeing things differently. International students and (international) education faced increased scrutiny after the September 11th attacks on the United States.

In pursuit of national security, the U.S. created policies to thwart future terrorism, however, the policies focused primarily on one group: predominantly Muslim countries and Muslims, examples of Islamophobia (U.S. Congress, 2001; Brown & Aktas, 2012; Byng, 2008; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). As such, these policies added another layer of bureaucracy for applicants to navigate in their quest to become bona fide international students. Beginning in 2017, President Trump implemented three variations of ‘Muslim bans’ through executive orders or proclamations. These severe restrictions have caused great concern in academia and scholarship; diversity not only includes race, gender, and culture, but also different religions (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). Institutes of higher education who attract students of diverse backgrounds accomplish their educational mission of “…fostering open and dynamic discussion while teaching local students about the greater world” (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020, p. 66), further demonstrating the importance of international education.

Islamophobia manifests through stereotypes in media, such as Middle Easterners depicting roles of terrorists. Since 9/11, politics and economics have been oriented around the ‘war on terror’ and the Muslim as the feared global other (Brown & Aktas, 2012; Byng, 2008; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018). Such misnomers can create bias, prejudice, and
discrimination based on the actions of a few people, rather than the whole population. The overall numbers of international students in the U.S. declined after years of steady increases, “amid widespread concern that prospective new students could be deterred by the current political climate and uncertainty about immigration policies in the United States” (Redden, 2018b). Many Muslim students experience a deficiency of respect or familiarity with their religious practices and face internal and external problems in their adherence to Islam (Nasir & Al-amin, 2010). International Muslim students encounter additional hurdles, because they also encounter a lack of familiarity with their religious practices, as well as anti-Muslim sentiments on campus (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). These all exemplify illustrations of Islamophobia towards Muslim international students.

It is crucial for universities to understand the impact Islamophobia and racial oppression have on Muslims and their campus. Understanding students’ perspective is important because their constructive feedback and expressed needs can assist universities in better preparing, to mitigating, and addressing possible institutional issues. Further, their first-hand knowledge of the issues and impacts can encourage critical discourse about Islamophobia on campus, in society, and how it affects citizenship.

This study used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Muslim Theory (CMT) as theoretical frameworks to provide lenses for the study. Parker and Lynn (2002) contend:

Traditionally, educational research has (a) ignored historically marginalized groups by simply not addressing their concerns, (b) relied heavily genetic or biologic determinist perspectives to explain away social educational problems, or (c) epiphenomenized or de-emphasized race by arguing that the problems minority students experience in schools can be understood via class or gender analyses that do not fully take race, culture,
language, and immigrant status into account (p. 13)

Hence, CRT allows those who are marginalized to have their voices heard; it highlights their experiences as people of color – since they hold the experiences, it only makes sense to hear the stories first-hand through interviews and storytelling.

Current literature addressed the issues of international students after they arrive to campuses (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009) or about the recruitment of international students. However, there was an absence of research available to connect the experience of international students after admission and before arrival (pre-arrival); pre-arrival for this study referred to the period from admission to the university to the student’s physical arrival on campus. U.S. universities have cultural and financial vested interests in enrolling international students and international students who serve as teaching assistants means that departments can offer more courses (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). The shortage of this literature and benefits of international education established the necessity of this topic being researched further to provide practitioners recommendations and insights from students firsthand. While there were limited resources that mentioned the mobility of Muslim international students post-9/11, these websites were unable to be verified as creditworthy so they were not included in the study.

Further, post-9/11, various policies have been implemented that seemingly focused on ‘national security,’ targeting Muslims. The law, “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism,” also known as “The PATRIOT Act,” (2001) gave law enforcement expanded privileges to investigate, detain, and surveil (U.S. Congress, 2001). The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was created under the umbrella of the PATRIOT Act, requiring the registration of citizens from
Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan. The list of four countries was later increased to twenty-five (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2002); all but one’s (North Korea) predominant religion being Islam. Although Islamophobia seemingly focuses on religion, it becomes an enigmatic expression of race and racism (Taras, 2013).

Muslim international students were selected as the population of study because international students comprised 34% of the total international students in the U.S. at the time of data collection, not including post-completion Optional Practical Training, a one-year opportunity to obtain employment authorization to gain practical training in their field of study (Open Doors, 2020). In addition, the experience of Muslim international students can be different than that of others. Immigration policies targeting Muslim international students have existed for decades. President Carter’s administration implemented policies requiring Iranian students present in the United States on student visas (F-1) to report to the then-Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) with their address and school enrollment information (Akram & Karmely, 2005). Former President Trump made his intentions clear, attempting to temporarily restrict the entry of foreign nationals from the countries listed on Executive Order 13780: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen (Trump, 2017); all predominantly Muslim nations (Muslim majority countries comprising the Islamic world | Center for the Education of Women, 2018).

Immigration regulations have become cumbersome enough to dissuade some students from applying to colleges and universities in the U.S. (Lee & Rice, 2007). It remains critical, then, that universities provide services to support the students so they can have the best experience (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). Thus, while there is a body of literature that explores the experience of international students in the U.S., particularly their adjustment, academic issues,
and engagement, studies on their pre-arrival experience are limited if not absent. Specifically, the role or perceived role of Islamophobia during the admissions to arrival process had not been studied at the time of data collection or analysis.

Immigration laws were applicable to nearly all populations, including Muslims; however, September 11th, 2001 was a poignant time in American history that highlighted Muslims from a variety of countries and grouping them as a monolithic entity (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). The discourse of Muslims in America has changed significantly post-September 11th, 2001 by racializing the ‘Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim’ other; creating a… “dual process of cultural racism and the racialization of national origin” (Naber, 2006, p. 236). After September 11th, 2001, America created and reinforced the ‘Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim’ ‘enemy’ and decreed that those who could live in a culture or ‘religion’ that was so different than the ‘American’ Christianity were inferior (Naber, 2006).

**Statement of Purpose**

The intent of this qualitative case study (Yin, 2018) was to examine the perceptions held by Muslim international students based on their experiences from admission to their arrival to a selective public predominantly White (PWI) research university. The qualitative study explored any experiences of Islamophobia, if any, in their voyage. The participants were first-time international students to eliminate a previous experience for comparison. Using Critical Muslim Theory (Abdullah, 2013), which builds upon Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980; Bell, 2018; Crenshaw, et al., 1995) as an analytic lens, this study examined the impacts of Islamophobia on Muslim students’ identities. Qualitative inquiry, specifically case study, seeks to understand a real-world case and explore its meaning. Stake (1978) noted that “…intentionality and empathy are central to the comprehension of social problems… the discourse of persons struggling to
increase their understanding of social matters features and solicits these qualities” (p. 7). This method allowed an in-depth exploration at the process and issues faced by participants. The study was exploratory in nature due to there being little to no current or prior research conducted on the journey of becoming Muslim international students from admission to arrival in the United States, and the role of Islamophobia played, if any, in this journey.

Research Design

This qualitative case study (Yin, 2018) sought to examine the perception of Islamophobia by first-time Muslim international students in their passage from admission to arrival at the U.S. campus. This study’s setting was a pre-determined selective public research university in the Northeast, and it recruited students whose first semester was fall 2017 to 2020. The focus of qualitative inquiry was to obtain rich information to understand intricacy and context of a population (Creswell, 2013). The case being studied was the perception of Islamophobia that Muslim international students encountered in the admission-to-arrival process (immigration process), and how their ability to become an international student was impacted, if at all.

Research Questions

Thus, the research question was:

- Did Muslim international students perceive the role of Islamophobia to affect them while moving through the immigration process into U.S. higher education? If so, how?
- What was the effect of former President Trump’s executive orders on Muslim international students’ ability to study in the U.S.?

Definition of terms

- Administrative Processing: occurs after an applicant’s interview at the U.S. embassy or consulate. This means the consular officer must clear the applicant’s name through a
database of known terrorists and obtain a clearance (U.S. Department of State, 2018; Penn State Dickinson School of Law, 2010).

- **Consular officer:** Officer at a U.S. embassy or consulate who conducts visa interviews and determines the decision (U.S. Diplomacy Center, n.d.).

- **F-1 student status:** Refers to what the student must maintain after they have entered the U.S. For example, they must be enrolled in a full course of study as part of maintaining their status (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

- **F-1 student visa:** Issued to bona fide students enrolled full-time at a SEVIS-approved university (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, n.d.). The visa is a stamp placed in the applicant’s passport used to apply for entry to the U.S.

- **Form I-20:** Officially known as the “certificate of eligibility,” the I-20 is the document issued to the student. The I-20 is used for the visa interview, to apply for a Social Security Number, and other benefits (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019).

- **International student:** a student enrolled in a full-time course of study at a SEVIS-approved university (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

- **Islamophobia:** “…an irrational distrust, fear or rejection of the Muslim religion and those who are (perceived as) Muslims” (Van Driel, 2004).

- **Muslim Bans:** refers to Executive Order 13,769; 13,780, 13,781; Proclamations 9,645, and 9,983. These doctrines listed Burma, Chad, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Venezuela, and Yemen (Trump, 2017a; Trump, 2017b; Trump, 2020) as countries with suspended entry into the U.S. for a period of at least ninety (90) days, with additional stipulations.
- **Nonimmigrant visa**: visa issued for a temporary visit to the U.S. with a permanent residence outside the U.S. for reasons such as tourism or study (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2018).

- **Racism**: a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties (Mills, 1997, p. 3).


- **Xenophobia**: aversion, fear, or hostility of people from different cultures or foreigners (Dictionary.com, 2021).

After the September 11th attacks, the rhetoric, media portrayal, and new government policies affecting Muslims went into overdrive to depict Muslims as terrorists based on the actions of a few (U.S. Congress, 2001; Brown & Aktas, 2012; Byng, 2008; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018). Islamophobia spread far and wide; Muslims were portrayed as terrorists in TV and film; passengers on airplanes suddenly became afraid to fly with anyone who looked “middle eastern” or wore a hijab or who spoke Arabic; legitimate international students were delayed in obtaining their student visas to return to the U.S. to resume their studies as American universities (Lee & Rice, 2007). These are only some of the examples that Muslims faced worldwide.
**Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

Over the past few decades, higher education has explored the importance and benefits of the presence of international students and scholars on its campuses. As the world becomes more interconnected through venues such as study abroad or tourism, universities follow suit through international education with the exchange of ideas from around the world on one campus. Internationalization has become prevalent on many of the postsecondary institutions because of its benefits such as cultural and social, academic, political, and economic (Qiang, 2003; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). Academic and corporate sectors seek graduates with multicultural experience or awareness and international education helps to fulfill these requirements through exchanges between American and international students. These benefits warranted universities to increase efforts recruiting international students and enjoying the diversity and financial gains they brought to campuses. Throughout the literature, four themes emerged: overview of international education; international student barriers and issues; changes to international education post-9/11, and Islamophobia.

**International Education**

International education encompasses various meanings and concepts, but for this study, the term concentrates on the presence of international students in the United States on student visas. There are ample benefits – not just to the international students – but also to the U.S. students and campus communities. The global exchange improves academic quality through different worldviews and experiences; internationally oriented students and staff; and transnational citizenship for students and staff from less developed countries (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). International students are not alone in the learning process; U.S. students also learn new cultural view, empathy, and become more culturally adept through repeated interactions with
their international classmates (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2013). Cross-cultural exchanges have been a foundation of higher learning in the U.S. “…and one of the primary reasons for our economic growth and our position as a global innovator – relying on diversity of knowledge, points of view, and scholarship to advance our own country and the world” (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020, p. 67).

International education flourished quickly and widely in the 1990s, but the notion that it was an important component of higher education was not a new concept. World War II’s ending created a new beginning for the field. International education has been supported by Congress to “promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations” (U.S. Congress, 2012). The first international exchanges began after World War II (NAFSA, 2018), an important step in the direction of international education. NAFSA (Association of International Educators) is a leading professional organization supporting international education and educators and has been a part of the field since its inception, advocating for the importance of international education – culturally, globally, and financially. A closely related organization, the Institute of International Education (IIE), was created in 1919 to serve as a central point of contact between the U.S. universities and international organizations interested in creating educational exchanges (IIE history, 2018). Today, IIE partners with corporations, universities, and government to facilitate international study and work exchange programs (NAFSA and IIE are the two predominant organizations prevalent in the literature and practice of international education advocacy).

**International Student Barriers and Issues**

Through review of the literature, the emerging themes were collapsed to create four major themes, some with subthemes: pre-arrival and arrival. Pre-arrival topics include the
demonstration of financial documents to obtain form I-20, evidence of English language proficiency, and visa issues. These topics are all areas that can hinder or prohibit a student’s ability to study in the U.S. The few studies done have been predominantly about the adjustment and transition challenges international students face when arriving on campus and throughout their first year. Further research examining Islamophobia in the process from admission to arrival is needed to understand the students’ barriers and determine how to address them. Next, the study connected the literature on the international student admission-arrival process, not solely the transition periods post-arrival. This study is important to address the gap in literature between recruitment and arrival to campus, because the pre-arrival to arrival is a major phase of becoming a student.

The researcher-identified ‘middle phase’ is the phase where the student is involved with the U.S. embassy or consulate when they apply for their student visa and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) when they arrive at the airport to apply for entry to the United States. This study aimed to explore the students’ perception of this phase; something that was yet to be researched fully. Further, using Critical Muslim Theory to examine the role of being Muslim and Islamophobia (if applicable) through the journey provided insight from participants first-hand. This study attempted to narrow the gap in literature by examining the process from the students themselves. Using interviews, document analyses of immigration documents, emails, websites, and other items received from the university or government, the researcher used iterative data collection process while also doing analysis. Categorizing, coding, and crystallization were all examples of ways to address the research questions.
International students must prove they can support themselves financially for the first academic year to obtain their form I-20. The I-20 certifies their eligibility to study at a specific IHE for a specified amount of time in a particular program (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2018). After the first academic year, they may be eligible to apply for off-campus employment under certain conditions after their first academic year (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2018). International students work with their Designated School Official (DSO) at the institution to obtain information or work authorization.

Finally, the students faced visa issues. Some students cannot apply for a visa in their home country because the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations with them (e.g., Iran). Thus, students must do extra legwork to find an embassy or consulate that will accept their application since they are not a citizen of that country. Further, the student must plan travel and lodging for a possibly lengthy stay if there are any issues with the visa application. These themes all connect to the Critical Muslim Theory framework through their identity as Muslim and the tenet of counter storytelling.

Five arrival topics emerged through the literature review: orientation; assimilation; language; academic issues; and social adjustment. Orientation is often a busy time on campuses. International students have an additional burden of information to retain immigration regulations governing their stay in the U.S. Cramming immigration regulations into a half or one-day orientation session can be overwhelming. De Sousa (2014) suggests expanding orientation for international students to be a two or three-day event. Adding time to the experience would allow more time for them to absorb the information; it may also provide more opportunities for staff to create interactive learning experiences for the students. Lastly, students would have more time to interact with one another and ease their transition process.
Assimilation was the second theme to emerge from the literature. Duru & Poyrazli (2011) and Kilinc & Granello (2003) remind us that international students have more components of their transition to campus. Berry (1980) defined assimilation as the process of individuals developing relationships with members of the dominant culture while losing their cultural identity. The process of assimilation is typically the burden of the international students (a minority group) and obtaining the acceptance of the dominant host culture (Sato & Hodge, 2009). However, assimilation has been criticized for being a “…worn-out theory which imposes ethnocentric and patronizing demands on minority peoples struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic integrity” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 827). They are in a completely new country surrounded by new people; attending courses in English, which may not be their first language; and they are separated from their family and friends. Compounding these factors describes added difficulties international students face in the early stages of their arrival. Further, some universities provide services culturally appropriate for domestic students, but are inappropriate culturally for international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Language is a common hindrance for new international students. Andrade (2006) posits that proficiency in English language is often named as the primary barrier to adjustment. Students with lower English proficiency are likely to endure more hardship in their adjustment to the U.S., because of the communication barrier (Hayes & Lin, 1994, Surdam & Collins, 1984, Yeh & Inose, 2003). This communication barrier may elicit a longer adjustment period.

Academic issues arose particularly for students with lower English proficiency. American classrooms can require class participation and interaction, a complete opposite way of learning from their home country (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). Students with lower English proficiency may be less likely to participate for fear of making a mistake when speaking English.
Also, many students may be proficient in reading or writing English, but less proficient in speaking (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). Therefore, students encounter academic issues because of the many differences they must adjust to as international students, such as learning in classrooms only being taught in spoken English.

Lastly, social adjustment was highlighted in the literature as a difficulty for international students. Zimmerman (1995) and Mesidor & Sly (2016) expressed the importance of matching or buddy programs, pairing American students or older international students with new students. These pairs gave the new students opportunities to improve English, learn intricacies of American culture, meet other Americans (if desired), and have a resource to answer any questions they have as newbies to America. These pairings did not only benefit the international students; the American students were exposed to new ways of thinking, new perspectives, and new cultures. Older international students could use their experience to mentor the new international students in their transition to campus. Both American and older international students could provide avenues for the new students to meet new people and attend different events to connect them to campus.

**Pre-Arrival**

*Admissions Requirements – English Proficiency* International students apply to universities the same ways U.S. students apply, but there are additional requirements for international applicants. International applicants must submit academic transcript evaluations if their degrees or instruction were not in English and English proficiency test scores such as TOEFL or IELTS (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2019; University of Southern California, 2019; Louisiana State University, 2019; University of California Berkeley, 2019). TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is an English proficiency test that measures “…
the ability to use and understand English at the university level” (Educational Testing Service, 2019), by evaluating the test-taker’s listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in academic scenarios. Applicants must prepare and pay for the test, like the GRE or SAT/ACT. IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is another English proficiency test that can be used for admission to some universities. Comparable to TOEFL, IELTS evaluates various communication components that will be needed for international students during their tenure in a U.S. university but in a different format (paper versus internet-based). If students do not meet the required minimum score their choice university requires, they must study again, retake the test, and hope for a satisfactory result.

**Evidence of Financial Support** In addition to demonstrating their English proficiency, international applicants must demonstrate they can financially support themselves for the first academic year. While American students may submit the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), international applicants or students are not eligible for federal financial aid because they are non-citizens of the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Thus, international students must demonstrate they have the financial means to cover tuition and fees, room and board, and other living expenses to begin the international student process (post-admission). This coincides with the importance of financial contributions international students and scholars make to the local, state, and national economies of the host countries. Unlike U.S. students, if international students run out of money, they cannot apply for financial aid and must navigate the federal regulations governing employment authorization. Further, transferring money internationally can be confusing and subject to various restrictions.

Most public universities charge international students out-of-state non-resident tuition. This means they are paying the highest rate of tuition and fees of all students (Flores, 2009,
Rizzo & Ehrenberg, 2003). Students are required to show proof of the total cost of attendance, including living, medical insurance (if applicable), etc., because this information is entered into SEVIS and displayed on their form I-20 to demonstrate they have the ability to financially support their first academic year.

**Visa Issues** After admission to the university, students must demonstrate their ability to pay for their tuition and fees, living expenses, and any dependents for the first academic year (Urias & Camp Yeakey, 2009). The I-20 is issued by the university and proves to the U.S. embassy and port of entry that the student has been admitted to the institution for the specified program, level, duration, and the financial requirements for one academic year of study. Students use the form I-20 to apply for an F-1 student visa at the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest them. The F-1 visa is a nonimmigrant type of visa; this means that the intent of the visa holder is to complete their program of study and return to the home country, of that their intent is not to immigrate to the U.S. (U.S. Department of State, 2023). International students are interviewed at the U.S. embassy or consulates to demonstrate their intent to return to their home country upon completion of their program of study.

According to the U.S. Department of State (2018), there are two possible outcomes of the visa application: issuance or denial of the visa. Since 9/11, the U.S. government has implemented precautions to detect potential terrorists; conversely, these new provisions can also make the process more difficult for legitimate international students and scholars who want to study in the U.S. as bona fide students (Urias & Camp Yeakey, 2009; Hefner-Babb & Khoshlessan, 2018). The visa issues are exacerbated if the students are from a country with no U.S. embassy (e.g., Iran).
Students from countries such as Iran must incur the financial and logistical burdens of scheduling an appointment with an embassy in a nearby country that will accept their applications as third country nationals (meaning they are not citizens of the country they must visit to apply for the student visa). For example, Iranian students may opt to schedule their interview appointment with U.S. embassy in the United Arab Emirates (U.S. Virtual Embassy in Iran, n.d.). Before making an appointment, the students must confirm the selected embassy will accept their application as a third country national (Urias & Camp Yeakey, 2009). At the interview, the consular officer determines whether the applicant has satisfied the burden of convincing them that they will come to the U.S., complete their course of study, and return to their home country and use the knowledge gained.

If the consular officer determines they are not able to make an immediate decision on the visa application, they may inform the applicant they are selected for administrative processing. Also known as a ‘Security Advisory Opinion (SAO),’ it takes place after the applicant’s interview with the consular officer. Administrative processing entails the officer reviewing various databases to determine whether there is information that negatively affects the applicant or findings contradiction the applicant’s story (Penn State Dickinson School of Law, 2010). If there is a ‘name hit,’ a security clearance must be approved before the student can be issued the visa.

The wait time for administrative processing to complete can be days, weeks, or even months. The U.S. embassy in London states that Administrative processing can take “…a couple of days to several weeks; in some cases, it can take sixty days or more” (U.S. Embassy and Consulates in the United Kingdom, 2018). The U.S. embassies in Amman, Jordan and Cairo, Egypt list nearly double that time, stating “most administrative processing is resolved within 120
days of the visa interview” (CGI Federal Inc., 2018). The 2019 U.S. Department of State (DOS) website does not list reasons why applicants may be selected for AP (U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2019). There are not consistent time frames provided – some basic information may be provided on embassy-specific websites. The DOS website only states that “applicants should wait at least 180 days from the date of interview or submission of supplemental documents, whichever is later” (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2019). Six months to wait for a decision of a visa can be detrimental to a student’s admission or enrollment if the university is not able to hold their admission place.

Arrival

Orientation for New International Students International students attend orientation much like American students, with the added component of student regulations that govern their stay in the U.S. Universities that enroll international students have a responsibility to serve the students to the best of their capabilities. Kuh (1991) noted that college and universities have a responsibility to communicate institutional expectation and commitments to new students with clarity and to “make the strange familiar” (p. 77). Orientation for international students can be the first interactions the students have with the university staff. These interactions are crucial, for they can form the foundation of their relationship with the institution. Since international students must maintain a full course load each term (except vacation such as summer), international offices often have the students complete a portion of the regulatory orientation online.

Cramming volumes of information into a day or two combined with jetlag or homesickness can be disadvantageous to the students and their retention of information presented. Extending the orientation can allow for the students to absorb more information, build relationships with other students, and older students can mentor the newer (De Sousa, Jr., 2014).
Extending the orientation time provides the staff more opportunity to execute different types of learning activities that may help the students retain and understand the plethora of information given, aiding in the adjustment process. Further, it offers additional time for the staff to interact with students.

**Assimilation** Most students will likely face adjustment issues at a new campus. International students have more issues to tackle than domestic students because of the added language, immigration, visa, environment, and separation from home (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Kilinc & Granello, 2003). Students from non-Anglo countries also report higher instances of discrimination (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Thus, students who are viewed as racial minorities such as Indian or those from the Middle East are more likely to experience acts of racial prejudice. These incidents can hinder the student’s adjustment process by creating adverse associations to their home country or American culture (Atri, Sharma, & Cottrell, 2006–2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Race remains a weighty point of contention on campuses, and Levine and Dean (2012) found that over half of American undergraduates self-segregate. The racial prejudice, language barriers, new environment, and separation from their families compound the adjustment process.

Muslim international students have an added layer of adjustment challenges due to the contrast in cultures of their home country and America. Cultural values in Muslim students are likely to be vastly different the dominant American culture (Akhtar, 2011; Asvat & Malcarne, 2008; Berry, 2005). American and western cultures are less hierarchical and more focused on individuals than Islamic ones, which tend to be more collective. Religion may also be a factor impeding their adjustment to their new home with anti-Muslim rhetoric and atmosphere on campuses (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Wedding et al., 2009). Islam requires prayers at five different
times throughout the day. Students may find difficulties finding private prayer spaces and scheduling classes around these prayer times or having faculty with enough cultural sensitivity to understand the prayer times and their importance to the student’s faith.

**Language** Proficiency in English language is often named as the primary barrier to adjustment (Andrade, 2006). Students can feel anxious or reluctant to initiate conversations with American students because of the perception of their English-speaking abilities. Studies have shown that international students with less English proficiency had more difficulty adjusting to the host culture (Hayes & Lin, 1994, Surdam & Collins, 1984, Yeh & Inose, 2003). “Many international students get the impression that any experiences of social isolation are due to their own deficiencies in the English language” (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009, p. 44). Institutional staff and faculty can be proactive and reach out to students who they know have limited English-speaking abilities to address any barriers the students may have in class due to language.

The language barrier outside of the classroom can be intensified inside the classroom using academic language. Trice (2004) noted that some professors recognized the adjustment process for international students, and the major obstacle was the student’s low level of English proficiency. The student’s level of English abilities is commonly associated with their mental health (Leong & Chou, 1996; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991). Silva (1994) posits that linguistic abilities or differences may be interpreted as “intellectual deficiencies” (p. 39), resulting in alienation inside and outside of the classroom. Students from some countries are less likely than others to seek academic or mental health counseling because of the stigmatisms associated with these services. Consequently, if students do not have a sufficient working level of English, they cannot ask for the help they need – inside or outside the classroom. Faculty can take the initiative on language misunderstandings by inviting the student
to discuss the class or even the differences in academic settings between their home country and America.

**Academic** Classroom participation and the American academic learning environment can be stark differences from how they learn or behave in their home countries, in addition to attending class in a language that is not their native tongue. Sherry, Thomas, & Chui (2009) suggest that different pedagogical approaches that emphasize conversational English can be disadvantageous to international students whose strengths are in reading and not oral English. For example, Asian students may have been taught to memorize information using the teacher-centered approach rather than question or ask questions or engage (learning-centered approach). The American classroom values the learning-centered approach (Smithee, Greenblat, & Eland, 2004) where the students and professor interact in their ultimate pursuit of knowledge. This approach lends to students using critical analysis and provide opinions on the subject, encouraging the students to participate in class discussions; this can be completely opposite from how they learned in their home countries.

**Social Barriers** To enhance an international student’s transition to their new campus, some universities pair an American or older international student with new international students. These ‘buddy’ programs promote positive interactions with American students and help their English-speaking abilities and adjustment through conversations and activities (Zimmerman, 1995). As Andrade (2006) mentioned, some international students reported feeling anxious about initiating conversations with American students because of the student’s perceived English-speaking abilities. Buddy or pairing programs can help the new international student in several ways; primarily practicing speaking English. The student will benefit by building confidence and building vocabulary that can increase their spoken participation in class.
The ‘pairs’ in the programs meet informally to have conversation or attend events together. The mentor can provide insight to the American culture that the student may not have observed on their own. The importance of pairing or buddy programs not only accentuates the significance of international education, but also intercultural awareness and communication. Peer programs benefit the international student and the mentor by exchanging different worldviews and opening perspectives through discourse.

Changes to International Education Post-9/11

Policies post-9/11

The third theme of the literature encompasses changes in international education through policies implemented post-9/11. Many of these policies allege they are focused on national security; however, an underlying commonality is the concentration on people from predominantly-Muslim countries – also known as racial profiling. Since September 11, there has been a shift in ideology of the country towards Muslims and citizens of the Middle East. Plausibly, it is because six of the nineteen terrorists were in the U.S. on student visas that were “expired” (Romero, 2003). Thus, began the ‘war on terror,’ a term that is still used twenty years later.

A common misnomer is that a visa dictates the time a person can remain in the country; in fact, the visa is an entry document used to apply for admission into the U.S. by Customs and Border Protection at an air, land, or sea entry (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). This misconception is perpetuated through media and presented to the public as truth, propagating the fallacy. After the attacks, American politicians and media created perceptions that immigration and international education threatened U.S. national security (Johnson, 2018; Rosenblum, 2011).
and that the visa dictated a person’s status, rather than the last date they could use the visa to apply for entry to the U.S.

**USA PATRIOT Act** The USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) was enacted on October 26, 2001 (U.S. Congress, 2001), less than sixty days after the terrorist attacks. The PATRIOT Act was designed to “…protect innocent Americans from the deadly plans of terrorists dedicated to destroying America and our way of life” (U.S. Congress, 2001). The PATRIOT Act provides law enforcement agencies more discretion in their surveillance and investigations of suspects, such as conducting investigations without notifying the person of interest of a search warrant or request business records – all in the name of ‘national security.’

Section 507 of the PATRIOT Act stipulates an exception to the Family and Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), allowing designates of the Attorney General access to student records pursuant to investigations involving terrorism (Romero, 2003). Before and after the attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) primarily sought information only on international students (Romero, 2003). Essentially, the PATRIOT Act provides law enforcement overarching access into personal lives of unsuspecting people through investigation and detainment.

**Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)** The U.S. Congress (2001) approved more than $36 million to transition the international student tracking system to what is now-known-as ‘SEVIS’ (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System), which was implemented in August of 2003. SEVIS is a web-based reporting system used by all institutions authorized by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, a branch of the Department of Homeland Security) to enroll international students. SEVIS tracks the enrollment, biographical
data, and employment of all international students and scholars in the U.S. Schools must report on all enrolled international students each term and meet ICE requirements to continue enrolling them. Schools must apply for SEVIS recertification every two years (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019a), or they lose the ability to host international students.

*National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS)* NSEERS was created and implemented to record the arrival and departure of every single alien to and from the United States under the umbrella of the PATRIOT Act. The program also included required biometric technology and machine-readable passport requirements (Penn State Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, 2012). Aliens entering the U.S. were required to ‘register,’ have their photo taken and their fingerprint scanned and compared to fingerprints of known terrorists in a database; initial registrants were required to re-register after 30 days (Penn State Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, 2012). NSEERS intended to know whereabouts of all aliens from Muslim-majority nations by the end of its rollout.

There were four phases or groups of the program. NSEERS began by requiring all 16-year-old male nonimmigrant visitors in the U.S. from five countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria) to register in-person at specified immigration offices (Penn State Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, 2012). Phase two included nationals from fourteen more countries (Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Eritrea, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen); phase three included Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; and finally, the last phase included Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, and Kuwait (Penn State Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, 2012). In total, twenty-five countries were included in the list. Aliens who failed to comply with the program faced serious consequences. According to the regulation (Immigration and Naturalization, 2002), aliens failed
to report and register their departure from the U.S. by an immigration inspection officer were presumed to be inadmissible to the U.S. in the future; those who did not register upon entry were considered in violation of their nonimmigrant status and subject to the initiation of criminal proceedings.

While NSEERS may have been created for an overall safety feature at ports of entry, twenty-four of the twenty-five countries required to register were predominantly-Muslim. This suggests that the national security issue was not universal, but specific only to those from Muslim-majority nations or practitioners of Islam. Eventually, the NSEERS program was terminated under President Obama in May 2011 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2015). The Department of Homeland Security acknowledged its failure of the NSEERS program in its statement that it will “…seek to identify individuals and actions that pose specific threats, rather than focusing on more general designations of groups of individuals, such as country of origin” (Penn State Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, 2012). But the damage was done; the policies indicated that America was concerned about national security regarding Muslims or nationals of the Middle East, verified through the PATRIOT Act and NSEERS.

Executive Order 13769 and 13780 (also known as ‘Muslim bans’) The previous president used consistent language on the campaign trail; often perceived by the liberals as hateful, divisive, and racist rhetoric (Beydoun, 2017; Wolf, 2019; NBC News, 2019). The vernacular continued after inauguration as president. Known for the use of social media, the president used twitter as a megaphone to deliver messages to followers, expanding the outreach of his audience.

One of the promises made on the campaign trail was to create a ‘Muslim ban’ (Beydoun, 2017; Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017). On December 7, 2015 on the campaign trail, the then-candidate stated, “I think Islam hates us” (Beydoun, 2017; Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017; Schleifer, 2016). The
president also advocated for a “Muslim registry,” to include “all Muslims in the country” being forced to register (Gabriel, 2015; Miller, 2015; Blake, 2016). Keeping the promise of a Muslim ban, the president enacted Executive Order 13769 on January 27, 2017 (Executive Office of the President, 2017). The ban restricted citizens from seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, all predominantly Muslim nations (Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017) from entering the U.S. The problem with the ban was that bona fide temporary and immigrant visa holders, including lawful permanent residents (green card holders), were prohibited from entering the U.S., even though they had right to enter (or apply for entry in the case of visa holders).

The White House confirmed the ban did not include lawful permanent residents, evidencing the haste in creating the order. International students, scholars, working professionals, and those with families in the U.S. were forbidden entry – students could not return to campus; professionals could not return to employment; people could not return to join their families. Finally, the Executive Order discontinued Syrian refugees’ ability to seek asylum in the U.S. indefinitely, suspended entry of all refugees for 120 days, and lowered the cap of refugees allowed per year (Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017). Students could not return to complete their studies or perform research; universities felt the setbacks and had to find replacements and provide assistance when available.

The Executive Order was met with surprise and chaos, as people subject to the ban were already outside the U.S. when the order was enacted. The order went through litigation when Washington and Minnesota filed a complaint to the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, requesting that the court issue an injunction and temporary restraining order to prevent enforcement of the order (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2018). The
District Court granted the request and applied the injunction and restraining order nationwide; advocates were celebratory, but the airlines and ports of entry were not in agreement of how to process incoming visitors from the listed countries (Berman, 2017; Bromwich, 2017).

By March 2017, the president had created and signed a new order, Executive Order 13780. The new order revoked Executive Order 13769 and removed Iraq from the list of countries denied entry to the U.S. (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2018). The new order (also nicknamed ‘Travel Ban 2.0’) included a 120-day ban on refugee entry; again, the order was met with chaos and protests (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2018). Washington, Michigan, Maryland, Virginia, and Hawaii all filed lawsuits against the government, attempting to stop the enforcement of the order. The litigation went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the president signed a proclamation that created a new ban (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2018; ACLU Washington, 2018).

In September 2017, the president signed Proclamation 9645, or ‘Travel Ban 3.0’ to continue the previous order but add North Korea and certain Venezuelan officials to the list of those barred from entering the U.S. (ACLU Washington, 2018). The Proclamation continued the order that nationals of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen – all Muslim-majority countries – were not allowed entry into the U.S. The Executive Orders caused confusion and panic amongst universities and Muslim communities (Gutierrez, 2021; Torbati et al., 2017). Proclamation 9645 removed the language of the suspension of Syrian refuges, suggested a formal procedure for people from the banned countries to apply for a waiver, and removed language that prioritized Christians seeking religious persecution (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2018). North Korea and Venezuela were the only two countries that were not predominantly Muslim.
Effects of the various bans were widespread across the United States. In addition to students and scholars’ inabilities to return to the U.S., professional associations boycotted conferences that were scheduled in America (Redden, 2020). Attendees to academic conferences were unable to obtain visas or enter the U.S. and the Middle East Studies Association’s conference registration was down by approximately 400 people (Redden, 2020). After the first travel ban, U.S.-based academic conferences were scrutinized and thousands of supporters signed an online petition boycotting the conferences (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). These boycotts compromise research and new exchanges of knowledge – nationally and globally – putting international education in a vulnerable position (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020).

Public universities became involved in various legal challenges to the bans, using the arguments that the inability to recruit international students and scholars became increasingly difficult because of the bans’ negative effects (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). International students typically pay out of state and non-resident tuition and fees, in addition to the requirement of enrolling full-time to maintain their F-1 student status (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019; Durrani, 2019; Semotiuk, 2019). According to one survey, Carapezza (2017) noted the travel ban(s) could potentially cost U.S. universities hundreds of millions of dollars per annum. Further, Carapezza (2017) pointed out a survey showing that students from the original six banned countries (Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen) alone brought in over $500 million annually to the U.S. economy. The absent financial contribution to the economy and threat to furthering the exchange of knowledge and innovation demonstrate the imminent dangers of the ban(s).

Despite the continued acknowledgement from courts and university administrators that Muslim students and faculty make immense contributions to American universities, Muslim
students in the U.S. still have insufficient support services to feel comfortable on campuses (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). Coincidentally, despite the fact that universities called out the essential role that Muslims play on campuses, university administrations have continuously failed to create environments that ensure Muslim students feel secure and comfortable (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). Thus, the lip service paid by IHEs regarding the bans were present during the ban challenges but provided inadequate follow through for Muslim students.

These changes in policies were created and executed out of a fear and or rejection of Islam, or Islamophobia. The ‘war on terror’ enhanced increased surveillance in the U.S. on ‘brown’ bodies, or those who appeared Middle Eastern or Muslim (Sian, 2017). Islamophobia does not have one central definition, but many. Van Driel (2004) offered the most practical definition for this study: “…an irrational distrust, fear or rejection of the Muslim religion and those who are (perceived as) Muslims” (p. ix). There is social inequity in the concept of Islamophobia, construing Muslims as ‘other.’ Byng (2008) expanded on this definition by adding the racial component to the notion: “even though Muslim is a religious label and not a racial one, since September 11th, 2001, Muslim American identity has been restructured to reflect the systemic inequality that is readily associated with racial minorities” (p. 662). Accordingly, the theoretical framework used for this study is Critical Muslim Theory.

Islamophobia

The first three themes outlined the issues international students face during pre-arrival and arrival. The fourth theme discussed the changes in federal policies to target Muslims post-9/11. This provides a natural segue into the fifth and final theme, Islamophobia. Grosfoguel & Mielants (2006) posit that Islamophobia is a form of racism and cultural racism which meets seamlessly with Critical Muslim Theory (Abdullah, 2013), a subtheory of Critical Race Theory.
History of Islamophobia

Islamophobia encompasses more than the fear of Islam, but also its people. The first instance of ‘otherness’ was about religious identity, with Jews and Arabs portrayed as practicing the wrong religion (Grosfoguel & Mielants, 2006). The belief of the ‘wrong religion’ turned into ‘people with the wrong religion,’ then to ‘savages and primitives,’ and finally labeled ‘people without civilization’ (Grosfoguel & Mielants, 2006). The late 1870s brought the critiques of Islam and those who pledged allegiance to the Ottoman empire, because Muslims believed in a deity that was not the Christian God (Ernst, 2013). The demotion of the humanity of people with different religions to being cast as ‘savages’ demonstrates the minimization of non-Christian religions (Grosfoguel & Mielants, 2006) and marked the devaluation of non-Christian religions.

In America’s incessant need to label and categorize people, Islam “…represented a liberatory racial identity… that translated into a threat to White Christian supremacy that was then used to further racialize immigrant Islam” (Rauna, 2007, p. 150). Thus created the racialization of Muslims. The term “Islamophobia” became propagated by a report in 1997 from Runnymede Trust, addressing the issue as a social concern and consequences of the discrimination against Muslims in communities and recognized social and political affairs (Ernst, 2013). The report (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 4) further provided characteristics of Islam that comprised Islamophobia, such as

1. Monolithic and static;
2. Separate and ‘other,’ not sharing the values of other cultures;
3. Irrational, primitive, and inferior to the West;
4. Aggressive, violent, and implicated in a clash of civilizations;
5. An ideology used to promote political and military interests;
6. Intolerant towards western critiques;
7. Deserving of the discriminatory practices towards and exclusions of Muslims; and 
8. Making anti-Muslim hostility natural and normal

In Europe, society has become hostile towards Muslims because it believes the cultural wars and increase in Muslim immigrant communities have put it in danger (Benjamin, 2002). Politics and society have made the discernable symbols of Islam (burqas, mosques, hijabs, minaret) serve as catalysts to Europe’s “Islamafication” (Benjamin, 2002). Notably, Islam has been otherized by the West because it does not conform to the West’s culture. Similar to Islamophobia is xenophobia, a fear of or hostility towards foreigners or people of different cultures (Dictionary.com, 2021). The French historian Pierre-Andre Taguieff posits that xenophobia includes racism (2008, p. 251) and is even an original form of racism. According to Taguieff (1988), racism operates on three basic levels. First, racism is natural and common with strangers. Second, racism results from hypothesizing reactions to the stranger into a justified racism and that xenophobia is a rationalized attitude. Finally, racism is puzzling and pits the first against the second (Taguieff, 1988). Said (1978) further suggests that anti-Muslim/Islamophobic dialogues draw on newer racist and Orientalist discourses emerging from “…colonialism, decolonization and mass post-war migration, where Muslims form one strand in a broader tapestry of racist stereotypes, images, and discourses.” In essence, the historic and cultural relationship between Asia and Europe and the political and social implications between East and West. The hegemony of the West that believes it is superior to Oriental cultures, noting the assumption that individualism is better than collectivism (Said, 1978). One way of orientalizing Muslims is by depicting Muslims as terrorists.
Islam’s role in terroristic activities, descriptions of the way openly-Muslim countries such as Iran menace Americans and their way of life, theories of the next terroristic plot appear to increasingly raise Western awareness (Said, 1997). Malevolent generalities about Islam have perpetuated and become an acceptable form of vilification of foreign cultures in Western society (Said, 1997). Muslims and Arabs have been degraded to represent oil suppliers or terrorists (Said, 1997), further disregarding their belonging to society. These stereotypes and misnomers are found in ‘Western’ elite male-run society in its epistemic racist ideologies; a hegemonic Western philosophy that omits non-Western scholars and philosophers (Grosfoguel, 2010). The propagation of these societies infer then, that the ‘Western’ schools of thought are the only ones of importance, further extending the elitist and hegemonic ideologies, exemplified by the self-propelled elevation of the Christian ideologies over non-Christians.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, candidate Trump called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on” (Taylor, 2015; Lind, 2015; Johnson, 2015). This is an example of Islamophobia, but can also include sentiments about mosques, cultural dress, or even prayer. The notion of Muslims as threats to others or society happens through the reframing the ideals of the nation between who those who do belong and those who do not (Jamil, 2017). Islamophobia is not new, but the topic surged after the September 11th, 2001 events that persist today, despite nineteen years passing (Allen 2010, 83-87; Kundnani 2014, 230-63; Rana 2011, 134-75; Perera & Razack 2014).

**Media Role of Perpetuating Islamophobia**

The media’s role in the promotion of Islamophobia is insurmountable. After September 11th, 2001, the acts of discrimination and prejudice towards Muslims increased and Muslims
have continued to feel the social implications that range from negative interactions to phobia (Hamza et al., 2009). The media fixated on the attacks being caused by Muslims, thereby spreading the stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists. Arabs, South Asians and Muslims around the country have been impacted by a string of laws, executive orders and policing strategies—dubbed ‘designer’ laws by some American Muslims—that are almost exclusively target them (Bayoumi, 2006). The lack of information, propagated by movies, television, and even radio, play a dominant role in shaping perceptions, attitudes of, and misinterpretation of Muslims (Hamza et al., 2009). Some examples of films with Arab-Muslims being portrayed as terrorists after September 11th include: The Kingdom (IMDb, 2007), Rendition (IMDb, 2007b), American Sniper (WarnerBros.com, 2014), Zero Dark Thirty (Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2012). These four films portrayed Muslims and or Arabs as terrorist bombers, propagating the stereotype.

In the social media realm, the most recent proponent of Islamophobia was former President Trump. Using Twitter as his main method of disseminating rants and propaganda to his followers about negative perceptions of Muslims, Trump was ultimately suspended indefinitely from Twitter (Twitter, 2021). Twitter found that Trump’s tweets had the propensity to incite violence after assessing the culmination of messages that ranged from attempting to link Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar to the September 11th attacks to alleged messages inciting the January 6, 2020 U.S. capitol insurgence (Byman, 2021; Twitter, 2021). Trump stated that “…there’s a sickness. They’re sick people. There’s a sickness going on” when asked if all Muslims should be banned from the U.S. (Fox News, 2015). Social media proved to be a megaphone to the former President, with his tweets reaching the 88 million followers (Beer, 2020), casting the uncontrolled messages worldwide. During the ‘X’ ban, Trump created his own
social media platform, “Truth Social”. In 2022, however, Trump was allowed to return to X (formerly known as Twitter) after Elon Musk purchased the company (Colvin, 2023).

**Critical Muslim Theory**

Critical Muslim Theory (CMT) was named by Muhammad Abdullah in his doctoral dissertation in 2013, using religion as the centrality of the theory rather than race as in Critical Race Theory (CRT). CMT originated from the model of CRT but changed the focus from race to religion. Critical Race Theory aims to end minority oppression because oppression can be a form of racism. CRT further attempts to eliminate oppression addressing the study of power to speak to control, decision-making influences, and how special interest groups are affected (Abdullah, 2013). Critical Race Theory began as a movement to address the intersectionality of race and legal studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT focuses its lens on communities of color and challenges the position that White middle-class communities are the norm of which to compare others (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). The late Derrick Bell, who created CRT in the legal field, intentionally kept race as the focus of his intellectual inquiry rather than reducing its significance to a sub-classification in a rubric (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical Race Theory is comprised of five tenets:

1. Tenet 1: Racism is ordinary – it is embedded into societal and everyday experiences of people of color in America (Bell, 2018, p. xxi). Bell posited that racism is permanent and an eternal part of the American way (Bell, 2018).

2. Tenet 2: Interest convergence – it acknowledges that the White population is the primary beneficiary of the civil rights legislation (Bell, 2018, p. xvii; Bell, 1980). Bell (1980) desegregation of schools in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas was not solely focused on the racial inequality, but also provided benefit to Whites. In layman,
Whites approve of advancing minority issues, provided they do not disrupt the status quo regarding their White privilege.

3. Tenet 3: Race and races are social constructs – this tenet posits that race is not correlated to a biological or genetic reality, but rather a category created, used, or retired when convenient. Society has created race and races to perpetuate the social hierarchy of power, or ideas created and/or accepted by society.

4. Tenet 4: Critique of liberalism – suggests that colorblindness will allow us to redress only extremely egregious racial harms, ones that everyone would notice and condemn.

5. Tenet 5: Counter-storytelling – minority status brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism because of their experience being a minority. Counter-storytelling provides voice to populations whose voices may not be heard mainstream because of their minority status.

CRT serves as the foundational theory that Abdullah (2013) used to propose Critical Muslim Theory; upon review of the CMT tenets, the similarities between CRT and CMT become well-defined and evident. CRT and CMT focus on the lens of the oppressed and the ways the race and Islam components are pejoratized. Critical Muslim Theory uses tenets like CRT, but the foci of Critical Muslim Theory lie in the experience of oppression of Muslims and the religion of Islam (Abdullah, 2013).

Critical Muslim Theory includes six tenets (Abdullah, 2013):

1. Tenet 1: Islamophobia is endemic and pervasive.

2. Tenet 2: CMT is critical towards how the dominant society views Islam and Muslims.

3. Tenet 3: Islamophobia is a social construction.

4. Tenet 4: Legal basis.
5. Tenet 5: Intersectionality.

6. Tenet 6: Storytelling and counterstories reveal the oppression and pain of Muslims.

**Tenet 1: Islamophobia is endemic and pervasive**

The first tenet in Critical Race Theory is that racism is endemic and pervasive, meaning that it is an everyday, normal occurrence, experienced by people of color daily (Bell, 2018). Racism is difficult to address or ‘cure,’ because laws are written as if everyone were created equal, when in fact, people are not treated equally across the board. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) offer examples such as hiring a White high school dropout rather than hiring a Black Ph.D. holder or mortgage redlining (making the mortgage unavailable to certain people based on race or ethnicity (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2019). Memmi (1999) further suggests that:

> racism subsumes and reveals all the elements of dominance and subjection, aggression and fear, injustice and the defense of privilege, the apologetics of domination with its self-justifications, the disparaging myths and images of the dominated, and finally the social destruction or social nullification of the victimized people for the benefit of their persecutors and executioners—all this is contained in it. (p. 93)

Islamophobia and racism intertwine encompassing these same aspects. Islamophobia also includes the assumption that Islam is a religion based on terror and Muslims are terrorists, stereotypes and pejorative labels of Muslims (e.g., “rag head”), oppression of Muslim women because they wear the hijab, misconstruing Sharia Law to divert people from Islam (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Another example of Islamophobia being pervasive is in media and social media portrayal of Muslims. For example, Awan (2014) noted that anti-Muslim abuse on Twitter can be
considered ‘cyber bullying, incitement/threats’ or ‘cyber hate’ (p. 134). Anti-Muslim extremists operate blogs, websites, and social media accounts to promote Islamophobia. These factors, along with the stereotypes of Islam corroborate the notion that Islamophobia is endemic and pervasive. The media’s role in perpetuating Islamophobia will be discussed more in-depth later in this literature review.

Tenet 2: CMT is critical towards how the dominant society views Islam and Muslims

Where CRT is critical towards how the dominant society in the U.S. understands privilege and colorblindness regarding legal discourse, CMT looks at how society views Islam and Muslim (Abdullah, 2013). This tenet stresses the importance of society being nondiscriminatory when forming impressions of Islam and Muslims. For those who reject or criticize Islam or Muslims, this tenet proposes it be rejected based on logic and disagreement with the foundations instead of fear or ignorance. Consider the image media creates of Muslims – characters are often portrayed as terrorists or an acquaintance of a terrorist; women wearing hijab are depicted as oppressed; or are taxi drivers (Jackson, 2010). Media provides brief clips of information in segments, making a critical analysis of the information presented less likely because we have moved on to the next segment (Abdullah, 2013). Hence, the opinion is formed not based on research, but on short clips of media soundbites.

Tenet 3: Islamophobia is a social construction

Social constructions can be formed through repeated information or misinformation. Tenet 3 addresses the idea that the hatred toward Islam and Muslims originates from one of two places: societal ignorance or hatred based on political views (Abdullah, 2013). A social construction of pertaining to Islamophobia is the hijab because of the negative attention associated with it from the media and society. Abdullah (2013) asserts that “the oppressors
(White male colonists) that brought ‘modernity’ to the Middle East believe their ‘high status’ as the upholder of modernity faced rejection because Muslim women hold esteem to the hijab” (p. 240). Muslim women refused to ‘convert’ to the ways of the White man which left them subject to the oppression of the colonists and being exposed in photos and paintings (Abdullah, 2013). During the Iraq war, American soldiers dehumanized prisoners at Abu Gharib by forcing them to pose naked (most were hooded) in compromising positions and intimating homosexual acts (homosexuality is against Islamic law); in fact, being naked around other men is also humiliating, and forcing the prisoners to masturbate was a form of torture (Hersh, 2004). These examples demonstrate how far back in time Islamophobia towards the hijab was socially construed.

**Tenet 4: Legal basis**

The PATRIOT Act provided extended reach to law enforcement for investigative and detainment purposes. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) took this privilege one step further and created a program that secretly spied on Muslims in New York City. The NYPD surveilled mosques, businesses, and individuals in their ‘war on terror’ (Abdullah, 2013). The covert operation pitted individuals against one another and created a relationship of mistrust between Muslim citizens and police.

**Tenet 5: Intersectionality**

Intersectionality refers to the various components of one’s identity. “The intersection of religion and gender and the intersection of gender, religion, and U.S. national security create a powerful paradigm and methodology to understand oppression towards Islam and Muslim women” (Abdullah, 2013, p. 242). The intersection of being a woman and a Muslim woman can be more challenging than being a Muslim man because of the oppression of women and the
added layer of being a Muslim woman. Interest convergence is a tenet of CRT, and Critical Muslim Theory is parallels this tenet through oppression. Abdullah (2013) gives the example of the U.S. war on terror and its hegemony in oil production control in the Middle East. The media portrays Islam and Muslim nations in a fashion of colossal, backwards, and an impeding threat to the American ‘democracy.’ America’s stake in oil production and demonizing Islam remains part of the West’s maintenance of its global hegemony (Abdullah, 2013). Progressive Islamist movements are feared because they may interfere with the West’s interests and inadvertently threaten Israel; pro-Western, secular governments in the Muslim world are supported, even if they repress their own populace (Abdullah, 2013).

**Tenet 6: Storytelling and counter-stories reveal the oppression and pain of Muslims**

Storytelling is an important component for the majority group to remind it of its distinguished identity compared to the ‘others,’ and offers a shared truth to evoke remembrance of its dominance (Delgado, 1989). Counterstories can reveal new versions of truth, giving opportunity to see the world as others live it – different from our own – and to contrive one richer than theirs our ours (Delgado, 1989). Critical Race Theory uses counter-storytelling to advocate voice for those whose stories are not typically heard. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-storytelling as the method of telling stories in marginalized populations, or whose voices are not in the majority. Critical Muslim Theory reveals the voice of Muslims who are oppressed. The theory also provides a voice of Muslims as unique sources of knowledge and experience that “…address the centrality of their counterstories” (Abdullah, 2013, p. 244).

Storytelling can defy the stereotypes and falsehoods through first-hand accounts of events or culture. “Storytelling and counterstories begin the healing process and remediation for oppressed Muslims and at the same time help to transform the Islamophobic society to
understand what it entails to live under religious oppression” (Abdullah, 2013, p. 244). CMT serves as a venue for Muslims to counteract the dominant story told by American society and media. The six tenets also function as areas for non-practitioners of Islam to explore and reflect upon.

**Rationale for Critical Muslim Theory**

Critical Muslim Theory is appropriate for the study because it provides a lens to develop questionnaire and interview questions and analyze the data. CMT seeks to explore how Islam impacts people and society the role Islam plays in the oppression of Muslims, and the research question of the study examined Muslim international students’ pre-arrival process to their university. CMT and its tenets guided the researcher during the data collection by helping to formulate questionnaire and interview questions.

Abdullah (2013) posits that Islamophobia has become endemic and pervasive, oppressive; religion is the contributing factor to the oppression; and reveals the injustices Muslims experience through storytelling. Critical Muslim Theory investigates intersections of race, gender, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, and racism. Understanding and using the tenets of CMT will be crucial in the data analysis stage, because they are the foundation of connecting themes to the research question and literature.

International education has become a major initiative for U.S. universities because of the financial and cultural rewards international students bring to the institutions (Qiang, 2003; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020). The literature review found pre-arrival and arrival themes, but several sub-themes under each. Pre-arrival sub-themes include additional university admissions requirements; international students must also submit their TOEFL scores to demonstrate their level of English proficiency (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2019;
Evidence of financial support – to obtain their form I-20 (certificate of eligibility) from the university, the students must demonstrate they have the financial means to support their tuition, living, and other expenses for an academic year. The final sub-theme in pre-arrival is the visa issues. Students must then apply for a student visa, attend a biometrics appointment, and attend an interview at the U.S. embassy or consulate in their country (Urias & Camp Yeakey, 2009). If they are approved for their visa, they can plan their next step of the journey to the U.S. If they are selected for increased security checks, it can be several weeks to several months before they can learn if their visa is approved.

Arrival sub-themes include language barrier, social barrier, assimilation, academic, and orientation. English may not be the students’ first language and being forced to use English all of the time may be exhausting and frightening (Andrade, 2006). Social barriers consist of different social cues and norms. Assimilation may not be as easy for international students because they are so far away from their family and friends; in addition, students who are minorities report higher instances of discrimination, further hindering their assimilation (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Kilinc & Granello, 2003). Their academic issues may arise because they are being taught only in English, causing added stress to their adjustment (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). Finally, orientation for international students is often full of dense information such as immigration status-related requirements (Kuh, 1991). Students may be jet-lagged or not 100% fluent in English, or homesick – but days full of so much information in a new environment can easily be a barrier to their adjustment to their new home. After September 11th, policies changed to restrict international students from predominantly Muslim countries from studying in the U.S. (Romero,
2003). The government claimed these policy changes (e.g., PATRIOT Act) were due to national security, but the commonality among the policies is that they target Muslims (Romero, 2003).

The foundational theoretical framework for the study was Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT was appropriate for this study because of its focus on elements of race and power. CRT addresses the intersectionality between race and law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While CRT was the foundational framework, the main theory used for the study was Critical Muslim Theory (CMT). CMT was proposed in 2013 by Abdullah; it is like CRT, except its focus is religion instead of race. CMT was an ideal match for this study, as one of the purposes of this study was to raise awareness and or affect change in the ways Islam and Muslims are portrayed and treated; specifically by policymakers.
Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions that Muslim international students had based on their experiences from admission to their arrival (immigration process) to a selective public predominantly White (PWI) public university in the Northeast. The role of Islamophobia was explored through interviews with participants. A single case study using the Critical Muslim Theory framework and narrative inquiry methods was utilized to interview Muslim international students at a selective PWI.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document, policy, and artifact analyses. Semi-structured interviews have no predetermined order or wording, include more and less structured interview questions, allow questions to be used flexibly, and are guided by the list of questions to be explored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews were recorded and the questions were open-ended to allow participants to answer freely. The purpose of this single case study was to describe the perception of Islamophobia by Muslim international students from the time of admission to the time of their arrival to a selective predominantly White public university. More specifically, the study explored what impact their experiences during this time had on their ability to study in the U.S. as international students. This chapter will address the methods used, including the participant recruitment and selection, research design, data collection and analysis, and researcher identity and positionality.

Research Design

Qualitative research is designed to understand experiences using words and statistical data and is collected and analyzed in a variety of ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve understandings of how people make sense of their lives, delineate the process of making meaning, and describe how people interpret their
experiences. In qualitative research, the researcher is the “…primary instrument for data
collection and analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16), using an inductive approach;
gathering data to create or support theories from observations, documents, or interviews. Finally,
qualitative research provides rich descriptions, using words and or photos to communicate what
the researcher has learned. All of these components demonstrated the appropriateness and
cruciality of using qualitative research for this study.

Qualitative research using the single case study method guided the design of the study.
Case study studies the “…particularity and complexity of a single case… to understand its
activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). The case study approach was
appropriate for several reasons, but primarily because the researcher sought to understand a real-
world case and assumed that having this understanding involved particular circumstances
pertinent to the case (Yin & Davis, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). Further, case study
method relies on a variety of sources for synthesis, offering a deeper exploration through
multiple lenses, and qualitative case study “…provides tools for researchers to study complex
phenomena within their contexts” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Data collection is not required
to be performed in a particular order or system, providing more efficiency in the analysis and
evaluation stage (Nock et al., 2008). These reasons made it the most suitable for this study. Yin
(2018) mentions that one of the precursors for using a case study approach is when the focus of a
study is a contemporary phenomenon and require an in-depth description of a social
phenomenon. The topic of the study is contemporary, focusing on recent events in the 2017-2020
time period under the administration of President Trump. The case being studied was the
perception of Islamophobia by Muslim international students in their journey to the U.S. from
2017-2020.
Stake (1995) approaches the case study through the constructivist worldview. Constructivists believe that reality or truth is relative to the owner’s perspective (Baxter & Jack, 1998). Stake posits that constructivism and existentialism should be the epistemologies that orient and inform the qualitative case study research since “most contemporary qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99). According to Stake, researchers act as interpreters who report their construction of the knowledge they gathered through their research process (Stake, 1995). This was aligned with the constructivist view that multiple realities exist.

This further aligned with one of the researcher’s worldviews, believing that the truth is subject to the owner’s perception of what they interpret as truth or fact. Social Constructivists posit that people seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2013; Baxter & Jack, 1998). As Manning (1997) confirmed, “… high-quality, meaningful research, which offers insight for practice and makes a valuable contribution, is a goal of constructivist researchers” (p. 93). These were all supporting components of the researcher’s constructivist worldview. In addition to the constructivist paradigm, the researcher subscribed to the transformative worldview.

The transformative worldview surmises that the “…research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever level it occurs” (Creswell, 2013, p. 9; Mertens, 2007). Trevors et al. (2012) provide a similar definition where transformative worldview creates a significant change in thought. Mertens (2007) states that “the transformative paradigm’s central tenet is that power is an issue (p. 213).” This worldview also focuses on the needs of the groups in society who may be marginalized and the power hierarchies they embrace (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2007; Trevors et al., 2012). The
transformative worldview closely aligns with the Critical Race Theory and Critical Muslim Theory because it correlates political and social action to inequities and discusses the issues of race and power as part of the issues (Creswell, 2013). These two worldviews comprise part of the researcher’s positionality.

Yin (2018) approaches case studies through the positivist worldview, highlighting objectivity, validity, and generalizability as the fundamental notions (Crotty, 1998). Positivists believe that causes probably determine effects or outcomes; the problems researched by positivists seek to determine what causes an outcome (Creswell, 2013). Case study allows the researcher to examine alternate but simultaneous circulating narratives. It offers a venue for researching complex social components with multiple variables of importance to understand the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). The case study provides a full-bodied method for investigating a (single) case (Yin, 2018) – in this case, the role of Islamophobia experienced by first-time Muslim international students’ academic journey to the U.S. post-9/11. Case studies also provide insights based on real-life circumstances, creating a richer and more holistic account of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). According to Yin (2018) and Myers (2009), the case study method is used to study a contemporary issue or phenomenon and aims to answer ‘how’ or ‘why’ research questions. Further, interview and document analysis techniques are heavily relied on (Yin, 2018). Interviews of students and document analyses of federal policies, websites, and immigration documents, in addition to collaborating with the participants all comprised the rationale to use a single case study method.

Finally, the case study method was best suited to this study because the information came from a group of Muslim international students bound by a location (the university) and time (from admissions to arrival from fall 2017 to fall 2020). The importance of the place and time
was due to the timeliness of the study. It was imperative to the study that the students were admitted to a university and entered the U.S. during the previous Trump administration, binding the study; this provided context and background to the study and its purpose. The case of the study was the perception of Islamophobia by the participants in their journey. Part of the study’s goal was to examine the effects of the policy changes by administration on Muslim international students. Given the aspiration for some researchers to “…make more meaningful contributions towards educational practice and/or decision-making, … the case-study research paradigm holds considerable potential…” (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1984). As stated above, another goal of this study was to influence policymakers to recognize their biases and discrimination in their policy decisions. Therefore, case study research plays a crucial role in progressing a discipline’s body of knowledge (Merriam, 2009) and was the appropriate method for this research.

**Inquiry Methods**

Case study research relies on a breadth of information sources, and interviews, document analyses, and artifacts offer the most appropriate method to collect information. Qualitative case studies rely on qualitative data garnered from observations, documents, and interviews (Stake, 1995). The interview method uses stories or narratives to convey the experiences of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Important to note, narrative stories occur within “…specific places or situations. Contextual details may include descriptions of the physical, emotional, and social situations” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). Contextual details are paramount because the purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions the role of Islamophobia may have played in Muslim international students’ journeys to the U.S. “The strength of Critical Race scholarship is its identification of the commonality of the minority experience” (Espinoza, 1990, p. 1885). Counter-storytelling, the narratives of people whose
stories are not typically highlighted (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002), is another tenet of Critical
Muslim Theory and was conducted using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were: Do Muslim international students perceive the role of Islamophobia while moving through the immigration process into U.S. higher education? If so, how? What was the effect of former President Trump’s executive orders on Muslim international students’ ability to study in the U.S.?

**Participant Recruitment and Selection**

An invitation to participate was sent to students from the selective PWI by a colleague connected to the Global Center. An ideal number of participants was seven to ten. Five students would be sufficient if they provided enough data, but up to ten participants was ideal to provide more breadth to the study. Students who responded to the questionnaire were contacted to participate in a semi-structured interview (Fetterman, 1989). The semi-structured interview included open-ended questions allowing for the participants to elaborate and speak at length instead of ‘yes/no’ questions and were conducted using a video platform such as Zoom and the interviews were recorded. In addition to the interviews, participants were asked for any documents, e-mails, or letters pertaining to their admission, program notices, immigration documents (if participants were willing to share with the researcher), status, and processes (e.g., admission letter, I-20, visa appointment letter, decision notice from embassy of visa application, etc.) for purposes of document analyses. These documents would be used to further determine and connect emerging themes at the data analysis phase of the dissertation process. All personally identifying information was redacted by the researcher.
The original research site was a private, very selective research university in the Northeast. A flyer (See Appendix IV) was posted and distributed through the international office in their news and updates emails. However, due to low participation, the research site was moved to a public land grant university in the spring of 2022. The university is one of the oldest in the United States and boasts alumnus who were fundamental in the formation of the United States. The university hosts students from all around the have pages on their website dedicated to the international student and scholar communities. The international student admissions page welcomes the international community and the attributes they bring to the university. The main page for the International Students and Scholars Services (ISSS) offers separate links for the students, scholars, and departments. Further, there is a video from the staff welcoming the international community and reinforcing their dedication to supporting their tenure at the university. It includes mention of the changed protocols, seemingly from the period of the COVID lockdowns. Finally, the page also includes the upcoming events, contact information, and other pertinent information to its audiences (such as costs, safety, employment, etc.). Access to this university was also through a colleague and they introduced the researcher to the gatekeeper at the new research site. The flyer was sent to the university’s Muslim Student Association inviting participants for the study and the seven respondents were interviewed via Zoom, an audiovisual platform. It is a possibility that the experiences of the participants of the new research site were exceptionally different from those at the original research site and this was considered when changing research sites.
Data Collection

Data collection began upon approval from the UNO Institutional Review Board. Pseudonyms were assigned to each respondent according to their preference. If they did not have a preference, originally, a generic label would be given such as “respondent A” or “respondent 1.” However, after discussion with the researcher’s advisor, pseudonyms were used for all participants to humanize them and to protect their identity. Participants were provided an overview of the study and an informed consent, which was collected before beginning any interviews. Data collection was anticipated to begin fall 2021 but ultimately collected during spring 2022 semester. Using network and purposeful sampling with a goal of five to ten students, participants were recruited from a selective public university in the Northeastern United States, with the invitation to participate being sent by a colleague at the university’s international students office using the international office’s social media platforms. Before each interview, each participant was emailed the informed consent document, notifying them they could opt out of the study at any time of their choosing. At the beginning of each interview, participants were given time to ask any questions about the study or the informed consent and were asked to sign and return the documents to the researcher via email.

Purposeful sampling is founded on the basis that the researcher seeks to explore, understand, and obtain discernment; thus, the researcher selected a sample that provided the opportunity to learn the most (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data was collected from several sources such as document analysis and physical artifacts (e.g., F-1 student visa, immigration entry stamps, emails from the university, websites of embassy/consulates and or university), field notes, interviews, internet, public and private records, and questionnaire. While these separate
resources were not conflicting, the multiple sources enhanced data credibility (Yin, 2018) and provided a rich source of findings (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Each source comprised a piece of the puzzle, helping to create a better understanding and “this convergence adds strengths to the findings as the various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). The data collection occurred over a three-month period (See Appendix I). Finally, conducting the interviews with participants via video conferencing rather than in-person did not allow for the full effect of interpreting body language. However, being able to video conference provided at least a visual and real-time conversation with the participants. Video was preferred because the researcher was able to observe nonverbal communication and have an in-person experience to discuss the questions. Six of the seven participants had their cameras on during the interview; the remaining participant did not because they were not in the U.S. at the time of our meeting.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis occurred throughout the collection of data, using an iterative process of data collection simultaneously to create counter-stories. The narratives of the interviews were collected to create counter-stories. The counter-stories then underwent thematic analysis. Counter-stories serve four main purposes. According to Solozarno & Yosso (2002), the four functions are: building community among the marginalized, challenging perceived wisdom of the majority by providing context to understand established belief systems; demonstrating the reality of others, particularly, marginalized population; and teaching others that their reality combined with counter-stories create a richer world. To create counter-stories, Strauss & Corbin (1990) refer to “theoretical sensitivity:”
a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. One can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending upon previous reading and experience with or relevant to the data. It can also be developed further during the research process. Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t. (pp. 41-42)

Thematic analysis explores what is spoken and how it is spoken, views language as a resource (Riessman, 2008) and was used to analyze the transcripts from interviews and archival documents (e.g., letters, documents). Braun & Clark’s (2006) thematic analysis model was used to create counter-stories. An inductive approach for coding and analysis was applied, using a ‘bottom-up’ approach driven by what is in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). The thematic analysis model of Braun & Clark (2006) offers a six-phase approach.

Phase one begins with the researcher familiarizing themselves with the data. This includes reading and rereading the transcripts and watching and re-watching the video data (Braun & Clark, 2006). After each interview, the recording was reviewed and initial journaling was completed by the researcher. Journaling in this phase was also helpful, as it provided initial thoughts or questions had during initial readings of data. The authors propose ‘immersing oneself’ with the data, including taking notes, writing comments, asking questions, or even highlighting; this aids in reading the data as data. Further, this phase’s goal is to become intimate with the data; the note-taking and comments or questions provide triggers for coding (Braun & Clark, 2006). It was also during this stage the researcher created a password protected excel sheet that listed the participants and their corresponding pseudonames.
After the researcher’s initial review, the transcripts were printed and reviewed to generate the initial codes. Notes were added in the margins or on back of the transcripts. Categories and codes were labeled using a numeral system. Once the codes were identified, they were numbered for easier reference throughout the transcript reviews. Phase two began the analysis by generating initial codes. Codes identify parts of the data potentially relevant to the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006). The authors suggest coding whatever may seem pertinent to the research questions guiding the study. The codes in phase two are initial thoughts, not required to be completely thought out and explained; this is still an early phase. Some sections of data may have codes, some may have none. The goal of this phase is to have labeled enough codes “… to capture both the diversity, and the patterns, within the data,” (Braun & Clark, p. 63) and some of the data may have multiple codes. The initial codes were added to a separate tab on the excel sheet for easier data review.

The third phase transitions from coding to finding themes. The themes represent a pattern or repetitive response or meaning within the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Themes are identified through finding areas where similar codes are present or overlapping. The researcher is seeking common features of the codes that can be combined to form a clear and significant pattern in the data. Phase three also includes the researcher exploring any possible relationship between the themes thus far and determining how the themes can be combined to tell a general story of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This phase ends with a thematic map that outlines the themes and the data from each theme to prepare the researcher for theme review. Another tab was created on the spreadsheet to list the emerging themes.

Phase four invites the researcher to begin reviewing potential themes and how they are related to the coded data and complete data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). The researcher checks
the themes against the extracts of data for each theme to determine whether they are related. Some themes may no longer be relevant to the data extracts and the researcher can either reallocate the parameters of the theme or move the non-applicable themes to the side and add other data that may be more relevant. Upon completion of reviewing the themes and checking against the coded data, the researcher transitioned to checking the themes against the entire data set, depicting the themes most relevant to the research question.

The fifth phase proceeds with the researcher naming and defining the themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). The themes should be clear and specific and have three components: have a singular focus; are related but do not overlap; and directly address the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 66). Whereas the third phase (finding themes) sought to tell a general story of the data, these themes should now offer an articulate general story of the data. The researcher also began parcing data extracts to tell the story of each theme. The extracts provided a clear picture of the points being made. The analytic narrative explained why each extract is important and what made each extract relevant. It is during this phase where the analysis was done and connected to the research question and literature (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Finally, the last phase, producing the report, demonstrates an overall story about the data based on the researcher’s analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). The report should be persuasive and make an argument that answers the research question. The themes should be presented in a logical and meaningful way. They should build on previous themes if applicable and connect to the previous and following theme being presented, and provide a compelling story of the data.

Credibility was crucial and was sought through crystallization, which uses several data sources and lenses but encourages researchers to “…open up a more complex, in-depth but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Crystallization provided
the researcher a different way to seek credibility using multiple sources of data while still performing a deep, robust analysis. Crystallization allowed yet another way for the researcher to obtain a thick description of their findings from a plethora of details (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008; Ellingson, 2014). In addition, researchers use crystallization to create knowledge or forms of analysis across various points of the continuum; this challenges the belief that researchers must sacrifice social science’s rigor for the entirety of a methodology (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008; Ellingson, 2014). Crystallization and triangulation are similar in their purposes.

The interview conversations were transcribed by Zoom and refined by the researcher and sent to the participants for review and feedback, verified the transcripts were accurate, and offered a copy of the dissertation upon approval. This member check was performed to increase trustworthiness of the researcher. The researcher began thematic coding of the data to categorize topics that were common throughout the interviews. During the process of transcribing, the researcher took analytic memos to note themes that were observed and reflected in journal notes on how the researcher’s positionality influenced the interview process and interpretations. The themes found were connected to the theoretical framework, Critical Muslim Theory (Abdullah, 2013). After analysis of the transcriptions, documents (student’s F-1 visa for any annotations), university websites, and government policies, the analyses were performed of all documents and artifacts to synthesize the themes and interpretations as a whole.

**Research Quality**

There were four possibilities that have been considered: possibility of participants not being 100% truthful; participants not telling their complete story or experience; the possibility of misinterpreting information from the interviews; or the sample size would be too small.
Credibility was achieved by providing a clear and concise explanation of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were asked to confirm their transcriptions were interpreted correctly to increase trustworthiness and to increase the opportunity to share their voice accurately, also known as member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This was crucial as a researcher, as part of the researcher’s role is to present their story accurately and truthfully.

As interviews were performed, document analyses, physical artifacts, and triangulation were used to increase the credibility of data analysis (Lichtman, 2013; Denzin, 1970). Triangulation combines various methods such as observations, interviews, and physical evidence to study the same element. Triangulation provided the researcher with an opportunity to use several data collecting methods and each method could complement the other’s weaknesses (Lichtman, 2013; Denzin, 1970).

Finally, for dependability and confirmability, Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe this as providing a clear, explicit, and concise explanation of the study. Confirmability was reached through researcher journaling throughout the process, and I was able to review my thoughts and reflect on any biases.

Researcher identity is that of a Constructivist, Transformative, and Critical Theorist, wanting to better things for those who are being treated unfairly. A follower of bell hooks (author of *Writing Beyond Race, Teaching to Transgress, The Will to Change*), the radical outspokenness against the hierarchy and racial disparities inspired the research on this topic.

**Potential Ethical Implications**

The integrity of the data was preserved on a password-protected laptop using password-protected files. The only person with access to the passwords was the researcher, and the passwords were not written anywhere. Participants were given pseudonyms and their
confidentiality was protected first and foremost. Pseudonyms were assigned to anyone, any institution, or job titles referred to in the interviews. After the required record keeping time limits, the information will be shredded or deleted from any electronic devices.

Another implication of the study was change. A major goal of this research and study was to affect change for Muslim international students: graduate and undergraduate. This study focused solely on Muslim international students at the specific research site for the sake of feasibility and sheer volume, but the intent was to bring awareness to policymakers at the local, state, and yes – the federal level – mostly at the federal level. The rhetoric from the Trump administration has harmed international education – the number of international students coming to the U.S. dropped for the 2018-2019 academic year (Open Doors, 2020), the various travel bans left students from Iran in secondary inspections at U.S. border airports for hours before being returned to their home country (Hampton and Dickerson, 2020; Dickerson & Hampton, 2020), or they were removed from the U.S. even after a federal judge had ordered the student not be removed (Redden, 2020). The student was ultimately returned to Iran by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Redden, 2020). Professional organizations such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators dedicate their mission to advocacy for international education and all its facets (NAFSA, 2019). NAFSA boasts a membership of over 10,000 professionals worldwide (NAFSA, 2019); members likewise devoted to advocating for, the betterment of, developing, and supporting international education. Being a member of NAFSA has been impactful, seeing the resources and networks the organization utilizes to lobby and promote policies for the good of international education.
Synthesis

Returning to the research questions, thus far, the lack of current literature demonstrated the need to further explore this topic. Islamophobia is real and prevalent in the underpinnings of policies created post-September 11th, 2001 and these policies can affect the ability of international students from predominantly Muslim countries to study in the U.S. The paucity of literature focusing on the topic could be less significant if this research could be used to affect change at the governmental level. America was founded by immigrants, and the Trump administration’s lack of receptivity to immigration was a stark showcase of malice and recklessness. As President Obama said, “This is America. And our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that peoples of all faiths are welcome in this country and that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are” (Obama, 2010).

Researcher Identity

This topic was approached with certain assumptions and concerns about Muslims, international students, and Muslim international students; primarily that Muslim populations encounter unfair discrimination. The four years under President Trump exacerbated the xenophobia (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016a; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016b) and evidenced an even stronger need for this study. The interest in Islamophobia became prevalent when the researcher visited the United Arab Emirates and saw a society in a nearly complete opposite perception of how America and its media attempted to portray their worlds. This topic was solidified after visiting Turkey in another similar experience. Both places, oft-portrayed as somehow ‘less than’ or ‘less developed’ than America, were incredible; simply different.
As an Asian woman, it was the researcher’s hope to build a rapport and gain the trust of the participants, from one minority to another, to obtain honest and complete responses. Her insight and unique connectedness to this study is the career in immigration research and a Senior International Student and Scholar Advisor at three universities, both public and private, small and medium sized. The researcher obtained a master’s degree in Higher Educational Leadership and is currently employed at a corporate law firm as a Senior Client Services Consultant, overseeing paralegals working on the labor certification process (part of the “green card” process) for a highly visible and high volume client. Thus, this topic was a natural and clear path to further research in international education and followed an intrinsic need to fight the imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchies that try to oppress or otherize different groups. Further, there was an innate feeling of needing to provide research and evidence that the media, the government, and the policymakers could be shown that – like CRT and CMT – confronts racism and Islamophobia straightforwardly and directly. The innateness also sought to provide substantive but thorough information for them to see unmistakably the effects of their policies on marginalized groups.

bell hooks is one of the authors who provides motivation and inspiration to delve further into this topic; partly because she emulates radicalism and partly because the spirit behind her writing is as fierce as her ideas. She writes as one speaks, she speaks her truth unapologetically, is a highly regarded scholar, and discusses ‘touchy’ subjects seemingly without concern for making sure White people feel comfortable talking about race. hooks addresses resisting the patriarchy of the imperialistic White supremacist society. In Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom (2014), hooks belies the normative standards of race, class, gender,
and equity in and out of the classroom. This was a poignant reading for the researcher and further enhanced the scholarly interest of hooks.

The strength of hooks’ language is clear: “Even when it became more acceptable to give at least lip service to the recognition of race, gender, and class, most professors and students just did not feel they were able to address… in anything more than a simplistic way” (hooks, 2014, p. 184). An example of this was mentioned by Ahmadi & Cole (2020), discussing the university administrations decrying the Executive Orders because of the important contributions made by international and Muslim students, but not following through with providing a safe and comfortable environment for the same students. hooks has influenced Critical Race Theory through her consistent use of ‘White supremacy’ analyzing mainstream cultural production oppresses people of color (Bell, 2018).

While the door may be opening to address these topics in academia more freely, hooks’ statement intimates that there do not appear to be avenues or means to delve more deeply into these issues. The status quo cannot be challenged if nothing scrutinizes how the pedagogical process is usually shaped by the middle-class norms (hooks, 2014). As a supporter of hooks’ writings and thoughts, the researcher’s work in the immigration law field and resistance to current political and cultural patriarchy all tied into their academic research interests.

Further, the researcher view the world through a combination of Critical Theory, constructivist (aligning with Stake, 1995), and transformative lenses; the want to create change to benefit those who are oppressed by social power, but also believe that truth is relative to the owner of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher sought to advocate for Muslim international students in their journeys to the U.S. because they have also experienced injustices as someone deemed “other.” Recognizing the need to address Islamophobia and policies and
practices that may prohibit international students from predominantly Muslim countries may impact interpretation, but various methods were used to address bias, such as reading contradictory news sources, opposing news stations, and listening to podcasts with opposing political viewpoints.

Below is the general overview of a student’s arrival in the U.S. by airplane, according to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website (2018). Upon arrival to the U.S., individuals are required to be inspected by the Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019). Upon inspection, the CBP officer examines the student’s form I-20, F-1 visa, and passport. They may ask the student questions about their program of study or the university they plan to attend (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2018). As such, Appendix I includes the interview protocol, designed for open-ended responses and to engage the participants in the sharing of their stories.

**Chapter 4: Findings**

The qualitative interviews for this study were conducted by Zoom, a video platform connected by the internet. All interviews were conducted in May 2022 and Zoom was used due to convenience as all participants were either across the country or across the world. Zoom provided the easiest access for all participants. A total of seven interviews were completed, only one time per participant. All participants were asked if they would like to do a follow-up interview or had any further questions or information they wanted to provide. No participants were willing to do another interview because they indicated they had no further questions or information to provide.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom transcription feature. The researcher then reviewed each transcript to refine the original to correct errors and sent to each
respondent for their feedback and the opportunity to correct anything that was incorrectly transcribed or interpreted. After review, the interview transcripts were coded beginning with broad categories, then narrowed down to themes identified through data analysis. See Table 2

This study sought to discover the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim international students’ immigration process who entered the U.S. between fall 2017 and fall 2020 under the former President Trump administration. International students were defined as those who entered the U.S. using an F-1 student visa. The research questions were:

- Do Muslim international students believe Islamophobia impacted their immigration process to the U.S.? If so, how?
- What was the effect of former President’s executive orders on Muslim international students’ ability to study in the U.S.?

During the interviews, participants described their process of becoming an international student. This process included the steps from the point of admission to the university to the point of entry in the U.S. as an F-1 international student. The participants discussed the reasons for choosing to study in the U.S., their preparedness for the visa interview, overall preparedness for the immigration process, and suggestions for future international students coming to the U.S. The research findings were analyzed using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, physical artifacts, field notes, interviews, internet, public and private records. The Critical Muslim Theory (CMT) framework was applied to highlight the counterstories of the participants.

**Participants**

Seven participants were successfully recruited for the study during the spring 2022 semester. Each interview occurred via Zoom and the interviews were recorded with each participant’s permission, some with video and some without. The interviews lasted from 30-70
minutes, largely dependent on how forthcoming the participants were about their experiences and perceptions of Islamophobia. Each participant agreed to be given a pseudonym to protect their identities. They were given the pseudonyms of Muslim names matching their gender in the order the interviews were conducted for simplicity and ease. The Muslim names given as pseudonyms were found on the Islamic Relief website (Islamic Relief USA, 2022). Four of the participants were females from Pakistan, one a female from Bangladesh, one participant was a male from Pakistan, and the final participant was a female from Iran. The findings are categorized into four themes: participants’ reason they chose to study in the U.S.; preparedness for the visa process; preparedness for the immigration process; and finally, the participants’ suggestions for future international students.

The participants were admitted to a variety of programs: Physics (2); Public Policy; Economics; Materials Science & Engineering; Communications, and Urban Studies. All students are graduate students at the University with six at the Ph.D. level and one at the Masters level. The demographics of the participants can be found in Table 1. Following, a brief depiction of each participant is provided.

**Table 1. Participants’ Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Program Level</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Citizenship</th>
<th>First semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amara</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faiza</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Fall 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiba</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Materials Engineering</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Summer 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amara

Amara is a Pakistani female studying her Ph.D. in Physics. Her first semester at the University was fall 2018. She chose to study in the United States because of the lack of opportunities in Pakistan if she studied there. Further, she mentioned the funding and research opportunities were much better in the U.S. than other countries. Finally, she cited the value of the U.S. degree versus one received in other countries as an important factor in her decision to study in the U.S.

Faiza

Faiza is a female Ph.D. Communications student from Pakistan who began her studies in fall 2019. She chose the U.S. to study because the United States was known to have more research universities that provided students research opportunities. She also noted the funding opportunities as a Ph.D. student were more accessible than from other countries, such as the United Kingdom. Faiza applied to universities in the United Kingdom, but the funding offers were not comparable to the scholarships offered at her university. She is the only participant who is on a J-1 visa. The J-1 visa is used for cultural exchanges, but there are categories for undergraduate and graduate students to use as well (Department of State, 2022).
Hiba

The third participant comes from Bangladesh and is a third year Ph.D. student in the Materials Science and Engineering program at the research site. She chose the U.S. again working with different kinds of solar energy. Hiba’s first semester was summer 2019.

Ahmed

Ahmed is the sole male participant in this study. He is from Pakistan and started his Ph.D. in Economics in fall 2020. He struggled because it was the beginning of the COVID pandemic and the world was beginning to shut down. Fortunately, he was able to enter the U.S. in time for the semester of admission. He stated that his mentor suggested he study in the United States and that was a major part of his decision to do so.

Khadija

Entering the U.S. in the fall 2019 semester from Pakistan, Khadija is studying her Ph.D. in Public Policy. She noted that even though she is studying Public Policy, her background is Economics. She chose the U.S. for her studies because the programs here are known to be more rigorous than those abroad. Her entry as an international student was not her first time in the U.S., because she previously visited as a tourist, providing familiarity with the immigration process and entering the United States.

Mariam

The sixth participant is also from Pakistan. She is in her 3rd year in the Physics doctoral program. She chose the U.S. because her master’s thesis advisor is from the university where she studies and could provide a recommendation for her admission application. Her master’s degree was also in Physics, which provided the impetus to pursue her Ph.D. in Physics.
The seventh and final participant is from Iran and entered the U.S. for fall 2017 semester. She recently finished her master’s degree in Urban Affairs. She chose to study in the U.S. because other than her family and friends, she felt there was no reason to stay in Iran for her studies and the lack of professional opportunities once she would finish her degree. Between the economy and the political tensions between Iran and the United States, she was determined to complete her PhD here. Sadia believed the corruption of the government, the workforce, and nepotism played a crucial factor in her decision to leave Iran and migrate to the U.S. Sadia endured difficulties with her overall immigration process due to political issues and background checks. Ultimately, she was able to successfully enter the U.S. as an international student.

**Findings**

This study sought to understand the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim international students’ immigration journey to the United States, with a specific focus on the process from the point of university admission to entry into the U.S. The research offered a space for Muslim international students to talk candidly about their experience, including fears, frustrations, and successes. Finally, the participants were asked for suggestions to make the process easier for future students.

The participants’ answers were divided into four predominant themes: 1. Reasons for studying in the United States, 2. Preparedness for the visa process, 3. Preparedness for the immigration process, and 4. Suggestions for future international student success. The data analysis demonstrates the participants had many similar experiences, particularly that they did not feel their Muslim identity affected their visa application process, the immigration process at the port of entry, or their ability to become international students. While some did mention their
initial worry because of social media campaigns such as “Punish a Muslim Day” (Joseph, 2018) and other discussions they read online, they did not find the overall process impacted by their Muslim identity.

The overall findings suggest that there are still stereotypes to be dispelled, negative experiences do still happen to Muslim international students, and the research site provided information but some would have liked more to prepare for their journey to the United States. The themes were derived directly from the participant transcripts.

**Table 2. Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Reasons for studying in the U.S. | 1a. Rigor of programs  
1b. Prestige of U.S. degree  
1c. Institutional funding  
1d. Personal/professional connections |
| 2. Preparedness for the visa process | 2a. Documents from university  
2b. Social media platforms  
2c. Visa application/appointments |
| 3. Preparedness for the immigration process | 3a. Social media platforms and information session |
| 4. Suggestions for future international students | 4a. More information needed  
4b. Stories about immigration  
4c. University officials  
4d. Feedback for prospective students |

**Reasons for Studying in the U.S.**

Four of the seven participants indicated that they chose to study in the United States because of funding opportunities from the university. They stated that the funding opportunities along with the lack of opportunities in their home country were two of the three main determinants of choosing the U.S. The third determinant commonly mentioned was the meaning of an advanced degree earned in the United States versus their home country or another country.
One participant, Sadia, indicated that because of the political tensions between the U.S. and Iran, there was no reason to stay in Iran to continue her studies. She stated that because of the economy and political issues happening in Iran and having a sibling living in the United States at the time of her admission, the only logical option was for her to study in the U.S.:

First of all, and for most important, there wasn't that much reason to stay in my own country and I reached a point that there was no reason to stay. The sanctions and you know, tensions with other countries. So…there wasn't that much of opportunities, even for educated people, so I didn't envision a good future in that regard regarding you know, social, you know society.

Iran’s social and political issues were paramount in Sadia’s pursuit to study in the United States. Her view of the economy in Iran led her to believe that it was in her best interest to come to the U.S. to further her studies. In addition, her mother encouraged her to build her life outside of Iran, pursuing her dreams and goals, and advance her studies: “My mother always encouraged me and pushed me but I ignored it for many years. I didn’t want to you know leave them alone, but at the time, but there was a time that I understood.” Her parent’s support reassured Sadia that studying in the U.S. was the right choice, even though she worried about them remaining in Iran.

All of the participants were explicit in their belief in the weight of the U.S. degree as well as the availability of funding for graduate students being better here versus other countries.

Amara stated:

I think it is because the U.S. has such a large number of institutions that are producing really good research… The U.K. it was my second choice, but then it came to funding opportunities; because U.S. organizations and institutions, universities, they offer
much more scholarships and funding opportunities than U.K. universities. So that was another factor.

Amara’s message coincided with several of the other participants’ reasons for choosing to study in the United States. This part of Amara’s story correlates to the theoretical framework because it is part of her experience and is her voice offering information on the experience. These responses align with Critical Muslim Theory’s sixth tenet: *storytelling*. Storytelling is an important component for the majority group to remind it of its distinguished identity compared to the “others,” and offers a shared truth to evoke remembrance of its dominance (Delgado, 1989). Counterstories can reveal new versions of truth, providing a new worldview – different from our own – and to contrive one richer than theirs our ours (Delgado, 1989). Critical Muslim Theory reveals the voice of Muslims who are oppressed. The theory also provides a voice of Muslims as unique sources of knowledge and experience that “…address the centrality of their counterstories” (Abdullah, 2013, p. 244). In these instances, the counterstories of the participants offer a narrative of the minority (Muslim) population. CMT serves as a setting for Muslims to counteract the dominant story told by American society and media.

**Rigor of programs**

Several participants indicated that one of the reasons they wanted to study in the United States was because of the rigor of the graduate degree programs and was a major recurring theme in the responses. Six of the seven are in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) degrees, so the academic difficulty of the programs was important to them. A few also indicated the quality of graduate programs in the U.S. compared to their home country and knew it would be more beneficial to obtain a degree in America than at home.
Khadija had been pondering pursuing a doctorate degree and knew that American programs provided more academic rigor. “um I was thinking about a Ph.D. for some time, and I know that the programs for us are much more rigorous”. As a public policy major, the rigor of the program was important to Khadija. Faiza felt the quality of research emerging from American universities surpassed those in other countries, stating, “Such a large number of institutions that are producing really good research. Especially in Pakistan whenever studying authors, they would be from the US.” This sentiment also qualifies for the “prestige of U.S. degree” theme, but was placed in the “academic rigor” theme because she specifically mentioned the research component. Hiba shared Faiza’s thoughts, stating, “considering and based on the research opportunities on my field” when discussing her reason for choosing the United States. Hiba believed that her research focus on semiconductor industry was best performed in the U.S.

**Prestige of U.S. degree**

Nearly all participants stated the importance (six of seven) of attaining an American degree because of the weight it would carry internationally versus the weight of a degree in their home country. They alluded that America and the United Kingdom are the ‘gold standard’ when it comes to obtaining a degree and that having a degree from the U.S. (or UK) would provide them more professional opportunities in their career after graduation. These statements align with a two-week survey conducted by the World Education Services (WES) in 2017. The survey found that the overall majority of international students believed that the recognition of their credentials worldwide was important in their decision to study in the U.S. (Loo, et al., 2017). Finally, participants indicated that along with the recognition worldwide of their American degree, they also had the opportunity to participate in their practical training upon completion of their studies.
Amara felt the weight of the degree from America would carry its weight professionally, even if she returned to her home country. She noted that “…for being like financially independent, I decided to like move to U.S., and I wanted to come here because, …even if I decide to go back then that degree, that U.S. Ph.D. degree, it has more rated compared to the ones that we get from elsewhere.” Amara’s knowing the value of a U.S. degree if she returned home drove her to the U.S. for her terminal degree. She explained that when applying for jobs, being able to prove that she has a degree from the United States would have more clout than listing her degree from her home country. She indicated that it is common knowledge that an American degree is valuable internationally, so it would be to her benefit to obtain her degree here. Faiza echoed this, stating, “the U.S. has such a large number of institutions that are producing really good research. Hiba further noted that “… for Semi-Conductor industry, you guys have the best.” These statements confirm the participants’ views that the United States is the country with the highest return of investment value pertaining to their academic degrees.

**Institutional funding**

All of the participants indicated interest in obtaining a graduate (graduate, research, teaching) assistantship at the research site. Funding was paramount to their decision to attend the university. The assistantships not only allowed the participants to study, but also offered opportunities to perform research (with or without their advisor), teach classes and gain teaching experience, or work in a department on campus and gain institutional campus experience. The funding was not only crucial for their ability to afford their education. Two participants also indicated they believed it helped with their visa interview and getting their visa approved.
Ahmed noted in the interview that he received tuition funding, but no stipend. He said “that’s nice. At least I can start. If they hadn’t given me the funding, I couldn’t have traveled and because of all the restrictions, so I accepted the offer and started the program.” His program informed him that if he did well in the program, they would consider providing more funding at a later time. Ahmed ultimately did do well enough to receive funding and receive a graduate assistantship at the university. The assistantship aided his studies and ability to finish his program at the university.

Faiza considered universities in the United Kingdom and the United States, but decided to study in the U.S. because she received more funding from the university. She stated “…the UK is, it was my second choice, but then it came to funding opportunities, because us organizations institutions, universities, they offer much more scholarships and funding opportunities and UK universities, where. that's what was another factor.” She mentioned that American universities were more likely to provide funding for Ph.D. students than in the U.K., which influenced her decision to choose the U.S. Amara’s sentiments were similar regarding funding; she knew that “…students rarely, very rarely, get any funding or job opportunities aside with Ph.D.” She was asked at her visa interview how she would be paying for her education and she confirmed she received a scholarship from her department, evidencing she was able to afford the tuition and fees. The ability to obtain financial assistance from the university offered Faiza the ability to continue her Ph.D. program.

**Personal/professional connections**

Two of the participants stated that they had a contact at the university that factored into their decision to study there. They indicated that by attending the university, their contact would serve as their faculty advisor, further solidifying their choice to study at the research site. The
personal and/or professional connections were another paramount factor in their decision to study at the university.

Mariam’s master thesis advisor went to the same university and recommended she study her Ph.D. at the research site. This personal connection and advisement was instrumental because she connected with a faculty member at the university who researched the same topic of her interest. Ahmed’s peers and professional colleagues played a role in his decision to study in the U.S. in addition to funding.

...if you want to progress, then your Ph.D. is important and especially the circle, you are in your peers your mentors they also push you to you know because all the researchers, all my peers managers, they were from the U.S., so recommendation was easier. So I think that has a role.

Mariam and Ahmed’s personal connections to the university influenced their decision to attend the university, in addition to the other factors (e.g., funding, research). They stressed the importance of these connections in their decisions to study in the United States.

**Preparedness for the visa process**

The second theme found from the responses is whether the participants felt they were aptly prepared for their visa application and interview process by the university. Three participants stated that the university prepared them by providing documents and the types of questions to consider or that were generally asked at the U.S. embassy or consulate. Two of the participants did not feel they were prepared, only provided the documents and told how to schedule the visa appointment. The final two participants thought they were provided information but would have preferred to receive more on the whole visa process. One participant
had a particularly difficult experience because she is Iranian and the timing of her visa appointment coincided with political unrest.

**Documents from university**

The responses were varied concerning whether they were prepared for the visa process and the information they received from the university. Sadia noted:

They just sent me the I-20. We have different websites and platforms to get ready for that. I started to search out on my own. As we do not have a U.S. embassy in Iran, you know, we had to find another country where we could apply for our visa. Turkey was the closest place for me to apply, along with Dubai and Yerevan, and the appointments would be available one second, and in the blink of an eye, they were taken. I had to travel to Ankara for my visa appointment and the time I was there, a political coup was happening in Ankara, so I couldn’t get the result on time and I had to postpone a semester.

While Sadia used forums to prepare for the visa interview, Mariam was ready for the interview and did not indicate that the university provided additional documents: “They didn't initially like prepare us for a visa process, they will just tell us that to be you have got admission and they will just give a little bit of instructions on how to like use the websites only how to apply.” She said they received basic instructions but were left to navigate the process on their own. This is important insight because international students are required to follow specific regulations to obtain their F-1 visa and maintain their F-1 student visa status (Department of Homeland Security, 2022). There is an explicit process to follow when applying for a visa depending on the U.S. embassy or consulate where they apply. While the universities may not have the particular instructions for every embassy or consulate’s processes, providing basic timelines may have been helpful for the students to navigate the process.
Social media platforms/forums

Several of the participants indicated the use of social media platforms and discussion/forums about the visa process and what they could expect. Amara’s story about being apprehensive when reading about “Punish a Muslim Day” (Joseph, 2018) online correlates to the research theory as the day was specifically discussed as a day to physically harm Muslims and was due to discrimination and prejudices against Muslims. This aligns with Critical Muslim Theory’s tenet number two: how the dominant society views Islam and Muslims (Abdullah, 2013). This tenet stresses the importance of society being nondiscriminatory when forming impressions of Islam and Muslims and for those who reject it do so based on fear and ignorance rather than logic. Nearly all of the participants indicated tenet two was not applicable to them during visa application process as they did not feel they were discriminated against because they identified as Muslim. When asked whether they felt their religious identity played a part in their process or if they were concerned that it would, all of the participants stated that they did not feel being Muslim was a barrier in the visa application or interview process, although they knew people who had been affected and believed it was because of their religion.

Sadia was particular about the social media platforms, software, or forums she used to secure her visa appointment:

Getting some timely results and getting time for interview, it was, it was a challenge you know. They only had a limited number of visa appointments saved for Iranians. There are very limited number of openings and it was it was a nightmare, I remember that I asked my brother to check and myself check. So my brother and I would be checking the websites constantly. We set some you know software to tell us of any openings so it just in a blink of eye just you know all that opens, or close very close, so it was a challenge to
get there, you know interview time so I went to Ankara, which is difficult to get the interview.

Sadia’s Iranian nationality proved to be an additional hurdle since there was no U.S. embassy or consulate in Iran. She ultimately had to travel to Turkey to attend her visa interview and obtain the F-1 student visa. This is a significant point because it highlights how geopolitical issues affect international students in their attempts to apply for student visas. It also adds extra financial burdens to Iranian students because they must incur travel, lodging, and possibly additional entry visas to the country where they apply for the U.S. visa. Finally, the Iranian students must also factor additional time for the overall process since they must travel to a completely different country to attend their visa interview, not including time spent waiting if they are selected for administrative processing.

**Visa application and interview**

All of the participants indicated their visa interview went well and that the consular officers were professional in nature. They stated that the interview itself was quick, with only a few questions such as “what do you plan to study? Why did you choose this university? Where did you receive funding to study at this university?” Ahmed stated that the officer did not have any questions for him and told him that everything looked good, but that they were going to put him in administrative processing. Participants stated that the interview seemingly lasted only a few minutes, less than 15, and that the preparation for and scheduling of the interview was more intense than the interview itself.

Three of the seven participants reported being placed in administrative processing, an additional background security check performed through various government agencies. These three included one male Pakistani, one female Pakistani, and one Iranian female. Sadia, an
Iranian female, believes it was not due to her being Muslim but because of the government coup happening in Turkey at the time of her visa interview. This coup disrupted normal visa processing and delayed her ability to obtain the F-1 student visa in the normal posted time of 30-60 days. Because of the delay, she was not able to arrive to her university in time for the beginning of fall semester and had to postpone her admission to the following spring. Sadia was the only Iranian participant, but Ahmed and Faiza, Pakistani nationals, were also subject to administrative processing.

Ahmed, a Pakistani male, attended his visa interview on July 14, 2020 and was told all was well. However, the consular officer told him they were going to place him in administrative processing and it could take a couple of weeks. Ahmed stated that his interview at the U.S. consulate went smoothly. He mentioned that “…there was this lady, a very nice lady she did my interview. Didn’t ask any questions just said everything looks good, but we are going to keep your passport for and we're going to put your passport in an administrative check.” He received a blue slip indicating the administrative processing notice, but no definitive timeframe. The officer told him “it can take a couple of weeks.” He received his passport with the F-1 student visa on August 13, 2020, one month after his interview. Fortunately, he was able to arrive in the United States in time for the fall semester to begin his studies. Ahmed’s interview experience was positive as the consular officer was courteous, but being placed in administrative processing was cause for concern because he did not receive a specific timeframe of when to expect the results of the extensive background checks. This was an additional stressor for Ahmed during an already in-depth process of trying to come to the U.S. as an international student. If the administrative processing returned a negative decision, Ahmed would need to determine whether he could apply again for an F-1 student visa (if he was told why he was denied), what his other options were to
study in the U.S., if he needed to find a different country to study, or even if he would pursue his degree.

Faiza noted that her attendance at the information seminars were helpful in her preparation for the visa interview. She mentioned that “they don't provide like personal counseling because they cannot, but you can ask them just general questions like in this situation, what should a person do.” On the day of her interview, Faiza noted the lengthy process just to enter the U.S. embassy:

So in Pakistan, the U.S. Embassy is like you're about to meet like Queen Elizabeth or something you have to like go through…I would say 10 stages of like security. You can't go there on your personal vehicle. You have to park your personal outside of a territory and then you're taken on buses, to the embassy on vehicles and from there you're just, like, I don't know, they were having fire drills I remember. It was terrible, I had to wait for like two hours. Before my process would start for the interview, but two hours, just to get inside the building, because I don't know they were having fire drill or something… the fire was something but, the number of checks that you have to go through, it's just nerve wracking even going that you're like oh my God what's happening, who did they think I am.

Faiza’s interview concluded and she was issued the F-1 student visa, but the additional security checks, while may be considered necessary, proved a hindrance for applicants to attend their visa interviews on that day.

Finally, Mariam, a Pakistani female, noted that the university “didn't initially like prepare us for a visa process, they will just tell us that to be you have got admission and they will just give a little bit of instructions on how to like the websites only how to apply.” She attended her
visa interview with her husband who was joining her in the United States. She was placed in administrative processing that ultimately required her department to “…jump in and they had to write a support letter for me.” Mariam believed the consular officer had some concerns about “…what kind of physics, I would be studying and will, I have access to any confidential data or something.” It appears that Mariam’s specific major raised a red flag with the consular officer or it was on a list that cause Mariam to be subject to administrative processing. The U.S. has regulations about technology and types of information that non-residents may access, due to national security concerns. Restrictions are in place to decrease the likelihood of confidential information being learned by foreign nationals and used against the United States. Certain types of sensitive information require screening by the U.S. Department of Commerce to determine whether a license is required “…from either the Department of Commerce (DOC) or the Department of State (DOS) to release technology or technical data to the beneficiary of the petition” (Frequently asked questions about Part 6 of form I-129, petition for a Nonimmigrant worker, 2011). The purpose of the license is to control sensitive information and alleviate concerns of the information leaving the U.S. to countries with whom we have concerns (e.g., political, technological, etc.). Mariam’s administrative processing lasted approximately 30 days and she and her husband were finally issued their visas.

**Preparedness for the immigration process**

The participants’ feelings about how prepared they were for the immigration process varied. The Pakistani male, Ahmed, felt he was adequately prepared for the encounter with the immigration officer when he arrived in the U.S. He was not placed into secondary investigations, where the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer asks further questions. Instead, he was asked to go to a “hall” and waited approximately 30 minutes before the officer found him and
returned his passport. The officers told Ahmed to have a great trip and with that, Ahmed was free to continue on his journey. Ahmed believed this to be a common occurrence where the international students were corralled into a designated space while CBP officers contacted the schools to confirm they were bona fide international students.

Mariam noted that the university provided the documents needed for arrival (form I-20 and admission letter) along with the documents required from the U.S. embassy. She had minor trouble when she arrived in the United States. Mariam’s uncle lived in New Jersey, so when the immigration officer asked her for her U.S. address, she informed them she would be staying with her uncle until she found an apartment. The officer brought her to the secondary area and asked for her uncle’s address, phone number, and her email. She guessed that the officer was verifying the information she provided. Mariam stated that the whole interaction lasted perhaps five to ten minutes and she was on her way. This could have happened because she did not provide the CBP officer the university address or indicate she would be staying on campus; rather, she already had family here and was staying there. Her response may have caused the CBP officer to question whether she was truly planning to be a student or was here to visit or possibly overstay her visa.

Khadija indicated that nothing was sent from the university to prepare them for their encounter with immigration, such as a “what to expect” document or frequently asked questions. When she arrived at the U.S. airport, she handed the officer her passport, F-1 visa, and I-20, and answered the officer’s questions. The officer asked Khadija questions such as where she was studying, what she was studying, and then contacted the international office to confirm her responses. While she was not placed in secondary inspection, Khadija stated that she was placed in a big hallway with other people who she presumed were also international students. She thought they were international students because they looked “like other international students.”
When asked if she thought she was placed in the hallway because of her Muslim identity, she responded,

I think my immediate reaction was “oh God what happened. What am I doing this into the other room? Once I saw other students over there, I was like more relaxed. Okay, this is probably just part of the process and not just me. I mean if it wouldn't be me alone in a room like I’m so sure it would have been like I might have, but I think initially I had like one of those thoughts in my mind.”

Khadija stated that she did not feel she was placed in the hallway because she was Muslim, but more so because she was an international student. She noted that she thought the other people in the hallway were likely other international students whose international office was being contacted based on their appearance.

Faiza experienced advice from Pakistani friends that she should expect to face a lot of scrutiny at the airport immigration, especially when arriving for the first time in the United States. Faiza noted that

I was told by a lot of my friends who had the same experience that Muslims and Pakistanis they have to like face a lot of scrutiny, especially when you're coming from the for the first time at immigration so just be prepared. Just have your documents with you at all times. I also kept like the university's emergency contact numbers with me, because I was, I was kind of expecting that. I would have to face more scrutiny.

Faiza’s child accompanied her to the U.S. for her studies and she believes that may have been a factor in her easy encounter with the immigration officer. Perhaps Faiza having her daughter with her was reason for the CBP officer to allow their entry without issue; seeing a mother and child arriving so the mother could further her education in the United States.
Hiba also experienced a smooth encounter with the immigration officer at the U.S. airport. She carried her immigration documents and was prepared for the questions the immigration officers asked. She did not believe being Muslim was any factor in her encounter with the immigration officer and stated that she had the correct documents with her for admission to the U.S. She believed that because she carried the proper documents, she did not have any issues. Hiba explained,

I just made sure that I have all the documents, because, as an international student,…

we need to have documents verified and validated. Every single time. I think I… did not take into account that I have to be prepared for any culture shock or culturally so yeah.

Hiba also explained later her feelings about being in America as an international student. This is discussed the section where participants provided feedback for the university and or future international students.

Amara shared that she was nervous about her trip to the United States because of things she had seen on social media such as “Punish a Muslim Day” (Joseph, 2018). She also shared that the university did not send any materials on what to expect about the immigration process or encounter with the immigration officers when she arrived in the U.S. She stated that her friends were asking if she was sure she still wanted to go to the U.S. to study because of the social media posts about the “Punish a Muslim Day,” (Joseph, 2018) especially since she chose to cover (wear a hijab or headscarf):

So for that time and I was just sitting in front of my computer looking at those news and I know I was scared. It was by flying when I came to the U.S. first. It was not a huge issue; I showed my passport and I-20 and my daughter’s, I guess these are the
things that they do check for every international student. There wasn't any additional requirement that I had to like show for being a Muslim.

Amara arrived at the United States airport and reiterated that she had an uneventful encounter with the immigration officer. She carried the requisite immigration documents for herself and her daughter and was admitted to the U.S. in student status without incident.

Finally, Sadia stated that she was nervous about her arrival to the U.S. Not because she was not prepared, but because she was Iranian and the tensions between the United States and Iran at that time were still contentious. The political state between the U.S. and Iran connects to Critical Muslim Theory’s second tenet: looking at how society views Muslims and Islam (Abdullah, 2013). Sadia’s nationality as Iranian could have caused her to face discrimination, harassment, or even violence by American society members who were prejudiced against Muslims (fortunately, she stated she has not encountered this). Sadia stated that she wished the school had fought more on her behalf when she was stuck in administrative processing so perhaps it may not have been such a delay. However, she understood that the university or its officials could not control the situation. Sadia said she felt prepared not because of information she received from the university as much as from what she read on forums and social media platforms from other Iranian students going through the same process. “So it was mainly that and the officer wasn't that much, you know confused, you know, it wasn't that I faced that much questioning or investigation. I know it was routine and nothing happened, but I know it depends on a case by case.” Ultimately, she had no issues when she arrived to the U.S. and passed through immigration easily.
Social media platforms and information session

Several of the participants stated that they used various social media platforms to review and prepare for their travels to the United States. They indicated they felt the information was valuable because it was coming from other international students and they were from the same country. These platforms allowed community members to post questions and have online dialogue with others about their questions. Various government websites such as Study in the States (Study in the States, 2022) also provide information, but they felt that the various chatrooms were more beneficial because they could discuss things with people who had already experienced what the participants were soon to encounter.

Faiza indicated she attended an information session provided by the U.S. Education Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP). Faiza, a Pakistani female, noted that the USEFP provided free advising services to international students heading to the United States, including information seminars. Fortunately for Faiza, the panelist at the information seminar was a consular officer at the U.S. embassy in Pakistan. The information seminar allowed her to ask questions about the process and things to consider. She stated, “...because EFP United States education foundation Pakistan or like we directly connected with the US Embassy and they provide directly, so there are speakers are usually the ones conducting the interviews.” USEFP is a binational commission and one of 49 “Fulbright Commissions” located worldwide. USEFP strives to foster reciprocal understandings between the U.S. and Pakistan through cultural and educational exchanges (The United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan, 2020).

Suggestions for future international students

The participants were asked at the end of the interview if they had any feedback of what could have been done better by the university to prepare them for their journey to the United
States. Two of the participants felt they were aptly prepared while five had suggestions for the university and prospective international students. This was surprising considering all participants were from the same university and all graduate students.

**More information needed**

While the participants who felt adequately prepared for their visa application process, Khadija felt the opposite, not feeling well-equipped for the task. Khadija stated that she wished she had received more information from the university:

> Well, better informed, because I have been to the U.S. before I know this, but um I think most of the time, people are just left, students is left to do work on their own and do them because they just gave me that admission like form and. They were like okay just go ahead and apply right. So I mean they were, I suppose, they would be there if I had asked questions, but they didn't like proactively you know guide me in that sense.

The suggestion she provided was for the university to hold information sessions for new international students to receive an overview of what they could expect for the visa application and interview process and port of entry process. She felt this would have been helpful to prepare and manage expectations throughout the journey for future international students.

The information sessions could have also been recorded and uploaded to the university website for students to watch at their convenience. Huma stated that it would be helpful if the university could “…have more trainings for the people involved in the process…” These sessions would not only benefit the international students, but also give the university officials insight to the common questions and experiences the students are facing at that particular time. Other participants stated that if information sessions were available online with advisors or other staff,
many questions could have been answered early on in the immigration process. Further, if there advising sessions with international student advisors could be provided, it would have provided more in-person support before they arrived on campus. Finally, it would have given the students an opportunity to meet their advisors and have some familiarity when they arrived on campus.

**Stories about immigration**

Stories about other international students’ experiences with immigration were prevalent throughout the interviews, but Amara indicated that she contemplated to stop wearing her headscarf because of another student’s story. The other student told Amara that an American began screaming at them because they were wearing a hijab. Eventually, that student also decided to no longer cover. Amara recalled, “when I came to us, I was told by someone who was initially in the US that stopped taking your head cover because she was screamed on by some American for it, we had and then she really shouted on her a lot and then she stopped taking the headscarf.” Their story did not convince Amara to stop wearing her hijab. Her response and story can be correlated to the second theme in chapter two: assimilation. Amara’s consideration whether to continue wearing her hijab was part of her process to assimilate to her environments. She continues to wear her hijab despite knowing she may face prejudice or discrimination.

Amara’s story connects to the “counter storytelling” tenet of Critical Muslim Theory (Delgado, 1989) revealing a new truth (Amara’s). Further, Mariam told of how she was “…actually scared in the start, because of the Trump administration… Maybe life would be difficult over there.” This further exemplifies the effect of Islamophobia and fear it places on international students and communities.
University officials

Two participants (Faiza and Sadia) suggested that the university provide more training to university employees to learn more about working with international students. Faiza was explicit in her comment about stereotypes and including something at the policy level reminding faculty and staff about media and stereotypes. Specifically, how media perpetuates the stereotypes as was discussed in chapter two’s literature review. Television and movies portray people of Arab or Middle-Eastern descent as “terrorists” or “bad guys,” propagating the stereotype of Muslims as terrorists in mainstream media (Hamza et al., 2009; Twitter, 2021). Former President Trump further incited bigotry when stating that “…they’re sick people [Muslims]. There’s a sickness going on” (Fox News, 2015).

Tenet 3 of Critical Muslim Theory addresses how race and races are social constructs used to validate hierarchies, power, and ideas created and/or accepted by society. These ideas are spread through many venues, including the media. Media was also discussed in the literature review as one of the ways stereotypes are disseminated to the masses, particularly post-9/11. Faiza did not explicitly say that she felt the faculty and staff were affected by the stereotypes, but simply addressed the media’s role in propagating such views. Faiza suggested,

Have more trainings for the people involved in the process regarding like. Diversity and inclusion because um but you know, being a communication student myself. A lot of these stereotypes are. You know, come down from media; those sources so. But just you know, connect that at the policy level would be nice.

It was discussed with Faiza that this study explored a section of the media’s role in perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices in addition to ‘otherizing’ various populations.
Around the time of the interview with Amara, it was announced that some international students and scholars may not be required to attend in-person visa interviews if they met certain qualifications. Sadia stated “from now onwards, they will not take the interviews for the F or the J-1 visa holders, that is very good, I guess.” Because of visa appointment availabilities and the sometimes lengthy wait times for appointments, the waiver of in-person visa interviews was welcomed by Amara. In addition to the feedback for university officials, Amara recommended “Besides that for the administrative process, they shouldn't put students into the background check in the store for two three years, it is a very long time.” As Sadia experienced, when students are placed in administrative processing and have visa delays, the processing times vary and may cause students to delay their start date.

The participants noted that they wished the faculty and staff at the university had more awareness of working with international students to either be more supportive when they needed assistance or be more proactive when immigration issues arose. Sadia also recommended that university officials become more proactive when international students are stuck in visa delays. University staff could ask questions could contact the students to ask how they could assist in the situation or if there was anything they could do. University officials could assist with assisting the international student in deferring their admission or with their graduate assistantship. Primarily, just being there to advocate for the students when they are stuck in visa processing because it is not their fault and understanding that the students are at the mercy of the U.S. government agencies’ processing times. The international students are unable to make the processing go faster since it is done by government agencies. Sadia also believes that “…helping them to know about the process, you know, … it would be more helpful I guess.” This further substantiates the feedback that university officials should provide more in-depth information to
international students to help their preparation for the visa and immigration processes. Another wish was that faculty were more aware of basic regulations when it came to international students and academics to better advocate for them when there are problems. The example Sadia provided was professors notifying international students they could drop a course without realizing the implications on their F-1 student status. She stated, “it would be helpful if they have kind of a basic understanding or background or having that background knowledge and you know just operating more with the students to help them.” As international students are required to be full-time students, academic advisors or professors can help the students better by providing their recommendations for their academics and referring them to their international student advisors to obtain guidance on how the recommendations may impact their student status.

F-1 students must remain enrolled full-time unless explicitly authorized by the international office (Department of Homeland Security, 2021). If faculty and staff understood basic regulations, participants felt it would be beneficial when discussing academics with their advisors or administrative staff. One respondent mentioned the importance of international students knowing they cannot rely on their graduate advisor for immigration advice; rather, they must seek immigration advice from the international office. Further, intercultural communications skills were mentioned as a possible caveat to misunderstandings with university officials. These examples can be connected to the orientation theme found in literature review; the university’s orientation programs often jampack as much information as possible into the day(s). But international students may be jetlagged and overwhelmed, struggling to absorb all of the materials they receive. If the university employees were better versed in working with
international students, the participants indicated that some of the miscommunications could have been avoided.

**Feedback for prospective students**

Hiba and Sadia stated that it was not the responsibility of the immigration officer to teach international students what is required to enter the United States, but that international students should research before and be prepared. Both participants had easy encounters with the immigration officials and believed that it was because they were prepared. Hiba further stated that the international students should not only prepare themselves for their visa and immigration journeys, but also be willing to share their culture, costumes, and open themselves up to new experiences and encounters:

The immigration officers are not responsible at teaching you how to enter a foreign country and all that. They're coming to a different country, you should educate yourself access to some extent, ‘I’m going to read that document,’ and if you don't, I believe, like if you don't have anyone around you like that, you can always ask the university. You got the admission, do some research so what are the resources out there that can help you to prepare to come here as an international student, for the first time.

Hiba elaborated that the responsibility to research and understand the basics fall on the international students and they should prepare themselves accordingly.

I think if you have a mindset that you want to go to a different country away from your parents and friends to pursue your degree or your job, you should at least like learn the basic stuff like how to like respect other people out there and also like. Like, as you're coming to a different country, you should
learn how to respect your culture and you should also learn how to respect the new countries people's culture.

On the other hand, Hiba felt that international students should be proud and willing to share their culture, using traditional dress as an example. She described wearing the colorfulness of saris and “you should never feel ashamed or afraid of like, to impress your culture and your like identity.” She has “…friends from Muslim countries who've been really shy to wear most like this kind of colorful clothing because they think people might look into them and comment on them.” Finally, Hiba recommended international students be open to new experiences, new interactions, and open to learning new things. She believes this is important so people can get to know the international students. She suggested, “…as an international student, it's our duty to let people know where we are from…or people will have misconception or will misjudge you. Be more open to learn new things. So that we both can learn some new at the end of the day.” These examples further connects to assimilating to the dominant culture and environment where the students reside.

Participants advised to have their immigration documents (F-1 visa, passport, I-20) in hand, the international office’s phone number, since they already knew why they were coming to the U.S. The participants detailed that most international students have access to the internet, online forums, and other venues to research what is needed to successfully enter the United States. Moreso, they stated that much of the information was available 24/7 online, indicating there was little reason for the international students to be surprised or unaware of what to expect.

The seven participants are all students at the same university but had widely-varied experiences with their immigration process. Specifically surprising to the researcher was the difference in responses when asked if they felt prepared for the visa application and interview.
process and the immigration process when they arrived in the United States. Although six of the seven students are from the same country and all are graduate students, the discrepancy in whether they received informational materials to prepare them for their immigration journey was unexpected. It evidenced the difference in perspectives of what each student considered “being prepared” for their journey.

**Conclusion**

It appears that all of the participants prepared themselves to become international students at the research site. They indicated that they wanted to obtain a U.S. degree for the academic rigor, prestige of an American degree, institutional funding, and they had a personal or professional connection who suggested the importance of studying in the U.S. Receiving institutional funding was an additional facet that influenced their decision to study in the U.S. Most importantly, it allowed them to pursue their studies in the United States. The participants addressed their feelings of feeling prepared for the visa and immigration processes. Some felt they were well-prepared while others felt the need for more guidance along the way.

The final theme, “suggestions for future international students,” was appropriately listed as the last theme to tie all themes together. The two participants with feedback suggested that the onus is on the international students to be prepared for their visa and immigration processes. They stated that the international students should research what is required for the visa application and interview and finally what is required to apply for entry to the United States.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Implications

It has been over 75 years since international education became a prevalent component in higher education. International education gained traction in higher education to further explore and exchange cultural ideals after World War II (Sylvester, 2002; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Beydoun, 2018; Jibeen & Khan, 2015). In fiscal year 2022, the Department of State issued over 41,000 F-1 visas to international students from the 46 predominantly Muslim countries (United States Department of State, 2022). Therefore, institutes of higher education have had time to create and revise policies as necessary to accommodate and enroll international students according to the federal regulations. This study explored whether Muslim international students felt impacted by Islamophobia throughout their immigration journey to the United States. The participants were all self-identified Muslims and not necessarily from predominantly Muslim countries. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews, the findings demonstrated that the participants did not feel their religious identity as Muslim affected their immigration process to become a bona fide international student in the United States. The research questions explored were:

- Did Muslim international students believe Islamophobia impacted their immigration process to the U.S.? If so, how?
- What was the effect of former President Trump’s executive orders on Muslim international students’ ability to study in the U.S.?

Immigration regulations have long demonstrated exclusion towards various immigrant groups as evidenced in the literature review. This study sought to discover whether Muslim international students faced additional barriers throughout their immigration journey because of
their religious identity. The findings for this study discussed that the participants did not believe they faced additional scrutiny because they were Muslim; they believed the scrutiny was more due to their area of study or country of origin.

**Discussion**

The findings in this study highlight the experiences of a sample of international students in the United States who entered under the previous President Trump administration’s controversial Executive Orders concerning nationals of certain countries, but further research is needed to obtain a wider population sample for more rounded results. Four main themes were identified in the study: 1) reasons for studying in the United States, 2) preparedness for the visa process, 3) preparedness for the immigration process, and 4) feedback for prospective international students. Several key discussion points emerged from the findings in this study. Reviewing the totality of the themes and discussions provides a foundation for policymakers and practitioners working with future international students.

**Providing ample information in meaningful ways**

Several participants indicated that they did not receive a vast amount of information to guide them through the visa and immigration process. They stated that they received limited information but had to do a lot of research on their own. The F-1 student visa is a category with regulations applicable to any person in F-1 status (Study in the States, 2022). Using these regulations as a template, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) could serve as the main resources for new students.

The colleges and universities could refer new students to the Study in the States website to serve as a main resource for their visa and immigration journey to the U.S. This could provide uniformity for all international students to receive the same information from the same source in
the same manner. It may also offer an avenue for IHEs to become more uniform in their interpretation of the immigration regulations. New student orientation is notoriously packed with a multitude of information concerning immigration regulations, school policies, academic processes, and campus services (Kuh, 1991; Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Kilinc & Granello, 2003). By using the Study in the States website as a main resource, this allows the institutes of higher education to remodel the orientation to be more effective for new students. The new student orientation could review maintenance of status regulations to refresh the students but could shift the focus to be on campus policies and services to set up the students for success.

**Combating Islamophobia**

Islamophobia has a variety of definitions but Van Driel (2004) defines Islamophobia as “…an irrational distrust, fear or rejection of the Muslim religion and those who are (perceived as) Muslims.” Khaled Beydoun (2018) expands this definition with additional components and defines Islamophobia as “… the presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable, a presumption driven by the belief that expressions of Muslim identity correlate with a propensity for terrorism” (p. 23). Islamophobia is built upon unfounded prejudices and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by misinformation, politics, and the media. Beydoun offers three components of Islamophobia: private, structural, and dialectical.

Private Islamophobia is defined by the acts of individual citizens towards Muslims; they are informed by policy or media, but the acts are carried out by private citizens. Examples of these acts may be racial slurs, mass protests or rallies, or even violence against Muslims (Beydoun, 2018). Structural Islamophobia moves from the private citizen’s prejudices to institutions. Specifically, Beydoun defines structural Islamophobia as “…the fear and suspicion of Muslims on the part of institutions – most notably, government agencies – that is manifested
through the enactment and advancement of policies” (Beydoun, 2016). Examples of structural Islamophobia are the PATRIOT Act or NSEERS, policies that perceived Muslims as threats to national security. These policies were both driven by government agencies that predominantly targeted people of Muslim identity or Arab or Middle Eastern countries of origin (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2002), with the exception of North Korea. Finally, Beydoun (2016) defines dialectical Islamophobia where popular views about Islam and Muslims inside and outside the U.S. borders are shaped, reshaped, and confirmed by the state. These three new components of Islamophobia by Beydoun create a broader and more inclusive definition of the term and lean into his goal of creating a comprehensive framework and legal definition of Islamophobia.

Combating Islamophobia is an overarching ideal of this study. One of the primary reasons for this study was to discuss Islamophobia and bring light to the subject for further discussion and research. The literature review addressed the media’s role in perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices toward Islam and Muslims (Hamza et al., 2009; Bayoumi, 2006). One aspect of Islamophobia includes countries of origin, such as those included in the NSEERS program (except North Korea). The countries in NSEERS included Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2015). A company, Define American (2023), aims to combat the conversation about immigration through media, focusing on what it means to be ‘undocumented.’ They have worked with TV shows and films to help personalize the stories or roles of immigrants. Define American uses the sixth tenet of Critical Muslim Theory – counter storytelling – to amplify the voices of the undocumented and other
oppressed populations (Define American, 2023; Abdullah, 2013). The company believes in the power of storytelling to lift the voices of immigrants.

**Maintaining supportive campus environment for Muslim international students**

Campuses are responsible for ensuring that international students maintain their student visa status. Muslim cultures may be greatly different from American culture and create an additional component of adjustment for Muslim international students (Akhtar, 2011; Asvat & Malcarne, 2008; Berry, 2005). College and university officials can be supportive towards Muslim international students by advocating if their visas are delayed such as what happened with Sadia. Sadia felt that if the program administrators understood more about the visa process, delaying her admission to the next semester may not have been such a hurdle. Other ways to be supportive are practicing kindness and empathy towards Muslim international students as they face different or additional obstacles adjusting to campus and the U.S. IHEs can show support through events such as “International Night” or showcasing events during the annual International Education Week (University of Notre Dame, 2023; University of Detroit Mercy, 2023; University of Utah, 2022; Global Wake Forest, 2023; Meyers-Tuimavave, 2023). Another exemplar is inviting the outside community to attend cultural events to learn about the different countries representing the college or university. These events provide opportunities for conversations and learning to occur.

All students should feel safe from harassment or targeting on campus. There are plentiful ways colleges and universities can support Muslim international students, as mentioned, but a strong indicator of support is the type of language used by administration and what is allowed on campus. For example, how harassment and racial slurs are handled may reveal the level of support an administration truly allocates towards international and Muslim students.
Implications for Practice

Through the dialogue generated during the participant interviews and conversations, the following four ideas emerged: supporting international and Muslim students from administration level to ensure the safety and security of the students. Second, staffing of international student and scholar offices to provide robust services for Muslim and international students while also maintaining an acceptable workload for the staff. Third, the difficulty predicting the future of international education creates challenges for education but also maintains the importance of IHEs to advocate for international education; and last, creating mentoring for smaller IHEs. Mentoring programs for smaller IHEs would offer the smaller institutions opportunities to create and expand their network of colleagues to provide expert services to the Muslim and international students they enroll.

Supporting international and Muslim students from the Administration Level

There are a variety of ways university administrators can support the international community. A noticeable way is by being cognizant of the language being used on campus. Disparaging or harmful rhetoric on campus can create an unsafe environment for Muslim and international students. It is crucial that administrators determine the climate and type of language that will be accepted on their campuses.

A recent example of creating and facilitating a campus climate of language include two pro-Palestinian student groups at Columbia University (Nast, 2023; Ticer-Wurr, 2023) because they “…repeatedly violated University policies related to holding campus events, culminating in an unauthorized event... that proceeded despite warnings and included threatening rhetoric and intimidation (Columbia University, 2023). The Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) student groups held a rally condemning the attacks on Palestine by
Hamas (Nast, 2023) when a passerby who was not affiliated with either student group yelled racist and antisemitic harangues and an organizer retorted using their bullhorn (Nast, 2023; Walsh, 2023). The university suspended both groups for the fall semester and required them to “demonstrate[e] a commitment to compliance with University policies and engaging in consultations at a group leadership level with University officials” (Columbia University, 2023). This caused nearly 200 faculty members to walk out in support of the two student groups (Cruz & Fahy, 2023; Forgash, 2023). In their walkout, they read statements supporting the groups and advocating on their behalf. The administration also reinforced a 10-day notice period before having events holding more than 25 attendees (Otterman, 2023). This 10-day notice requirement was renounced by student groups who believed it violated free speech protections afforded to them (Otterman, 2023).

Suspending the two student groups signaled the administration’s short leash on students groups and made some Palestinian students feel “…as if their tragedy didn’t matter” (Cruz & Fahy, 2023). This is an example of campus administrators facilitating a climate on campus where international students may not feel safe because of how the world politics entered the campus environment and certain phrases (such as “from the river to the sea”) were considered antisemitic or inciteful (Alonso, 2023; Walsh, 2023). Administrators could have been in constant communication with the student groups to not only ensure their safety, but open the lines of communication about rules and policies surrounding protests or events. This would have been an opportunity to strengthen their relationship and gain insight to concerns the students faced on campus.

While the exchange of ideas is a fundamental value of American higher education and the freedom of speech on college campuses essential to achieving that goal (Combs, 2018), the
administration’s stance on what language is acceptable sets the expectations for civil discourse on campus. Setting the parameters of what is allowed can offer a guide and clear boundaries of what is and is not tolerable. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2014), Freire posits that dialogue assists in not just the learning, but the knowing. Dialogue allows conversations to occur and explore matters that may be difficult to discuss, but also helps participants learn the language of those in the conversations. Freire attested to this, stating, “often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address” (Freire, 2014, p. 96). Freire intimates that administrations can become disillusioned or unfamiliar with the language or needs of the students.

**Providing consistent information nationwide to international students**

Colleges and universities provide information to newly admitted international students to notify them of the immigration and visa requirements to become bona fide international students. Since regulations are interpreted differently from one institution to another, this means that policies and procedures are practiced differently (NAFSA, 2023). Institutes of higher education (IHEs) nationwide can provide consistent information using the studyinthestates.gov website, this will provide unilateral consistency for all students to receive same information presented the same way with the same language. While IHEs continue their freedom to interpret regulations and create policies that align with institutional mission and compliance with student regulations – e.g., maintenance of status, less than full-time study (reduced course loads) and employment (Curricular Practical Training or “CPT,” Optional Practical Training or “OPT,” and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math OPT or “STEM OPT”), they would all be providing the same information in the same manner to the masses (U.S. Department of Homeland Security,
Beyond the pre-arrival information, colleges and universities can offer their information sessions or regulatory information through modern and technologically savvy mediums. Examples of this include engaging manners using social media (TikTok, Instagram, X, etc.) online, not just pages of text with the expectation of students reading and memorizing dense governmental speak. Currently, universities have snippets of their orientations online such as Rutgers University (Rutgers, 2024), University of Alabama at Birmingham (Into_uab, 2024), and Vanderbilt University (Vanderbilt University, 2023), but the researcher has not found any actual orientations facilitated using social media. They can also explore the capabilities of their student information systems (e.g., Sunapsis, Banner, PeopleSoft) to create quizzes or modules to test students’ understanding of content before assisting with applications for OPT or STEM. These are a few examples that can be executed by international student and scholar offices to ‘keep up with the times’ and better engage with the international community. Although these also require staffing resources to create and post the content, advisors should already be available for the students to seek counseling on immigration matters.

**Staffing of international student and scholar offices**

Another way colleges and universities can support international and Muslim students is by providing adequate staffing to the international offices. International students must have access to see their international student advisor to obtain expert and accurate information about their immigration and visa regulations so they can remain in valid F-1 student status (Miller, 2023; Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2022). This means that international student and scholar offices must have enough advisors available to answer student inquiries or advise on complex situations
affecting the students. Without access, the students may be left to seek answers on their own and find incorrect information that will hinder their student status or future opportunities. Staffing resources must typically be cleared by administration or considered in the budgets, so the support ultimately must come from the administration to serve international students. Further, if institutions seek to enroll international students, they must provide resources for the students to be successful, including international student advisors.

The international student and scholar offices can use their expertise to provide campus-wide trainings on topics such as hiring international students, taxes, or employment in general. Since the international student offices are the experts in the immigration regulations, the trainings provided may provide the most accurate and current information on processes and rules concerning the topics (University of Illinois Chicago, 2024; Rutgers University, 2019; Illinois State University, 2023; NYU Office of Global Services, 2023). Several universities such as the University of Illinois Chicago (2024), Rutgers University (2019), New York University (2023), and Illinois State University have their available trainings for students and campus community listed on their websites. The trainings can offer insight to issues facing international students that others on campus may not be aware of and ultimately advocate for international students and scholars on their campus.

**Create mentoring programs for smaller colleges and universities**

Another proposal for practitioners is to create mentoring programs for the smaller colleges and universities or those with smaller international student populations who may not be as well-versed in F-1 immigration regulations as institutions with larger populations. This could be a formal or informal mentoring program, but would provide the advisors from smaller schools someone to contact when they have questions or scenarios they want to discuss. Mentoring is
beneficial to the mentor and mentee. A professional new to the field can “…benefit from the encouragement, counsel, and shared experiences of a more experienced person” (Hansman, 2013, p. 15). The mentor can share their experiences, ask thought-provoking questions, and provide opportunities for the mentee’s contemplation (Hansman, 2013). The mentor provides their expertise or experience with the mentee’s scenario and offers suggestions or advice and the mentee can use the advice as a building block of their current knowledge. The mentee gains confidence through the building of knowledge and experience, and can mentor future professionals when they feel equipped enough to do so (Hudson, 2013; Grima et al., 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). Finally, mentees can benefit from the emotional and psychosocial support received from their mentor, provided the relationship is open and trusting (Hudson, 2013).

Mentoring is also a form of professional development that can provide the mentor insight into their coaching roles and skills, also building professional confidence through the role of mentoring someone.

NAFSA (Association of International Educators), the professional organization for international educators, has knowledge communities designated for professionals focusing on different aspects of international education (study abroad, international students, enrollment, etc.), and regional chapters separated by geographic areas (NAFSA, 2023). Each region elects its own chair and team that includes members of their various knowledge communities. They also typically hold an annual regional or bi-regional conference that includes training and panelist sessions for international educators. The mentoring programs could be created within each region, state, or even cross-region to provide different perspectives, but most importantly, could be provided to those whose institutions may not financially support the staff’s membership to the NAFSA organization.
The region or state teams (or other interested parties) can create a sign up for those interested in mentoring and those interested in being mentored and send out to the designated areas or schools in specified areas. The interest form can include the number of years in the field, what they hope to gain, roles, other professional qualifications or interests, or even how engaged they want to be in the mentor program. When they have received their designated acceptable number of participants, they can best pair the mentor and mentee based on similar interests and responses. The couple can then schedule their own meetings and form their relationship organically. Allowing the relationship to grow and mature on its own will alleviate pressure from outside parties’ interference.

Implications for theory

Critical Muslim Theory (CMT) was created from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and designed to address the tenets of CRT as they applied to Muslims (Abdullah, 2013). CMT is a new sub theory under the overarching CRT and one of several others such as LatCrit, TribalCrit, and AsianCrit (Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Brayboy, 2005). All of these variations of CRT aimed to discuss the populations’ specific experiences with colonization and racism. CMT focuses on the identity as Muslim rather than race and strives to eliminate oppression addressing the study of power to speak to control, decision-making influences, and how special interest groups are affected (Abdullah, 2013). The theory seeks to understand experiences as Muslims and to analyze them through the lens of CMT.

Critical Muslim Theory was the appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it explored the experience of Muslim international students who are a religious minority and whose stories are not a part of the mainstream media (Noor et al., 2022; Espinoza, 1990; Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). Their counterstories aimed to reveal the silencing or oppression of
Muslims (Abdullah, 2013). Although none of the participants’ student visas were ultimately denied, their stories bring light to demonstrate the experience of Muslim international students at a PWI public university in the northeast under the Trump administration’s ‘Muslim bans.’ The significance of these students’ experiences provide a first-hand example of counter storytelling, a part of Critical Muslim Theory. The participants were citizens of predominantly Muslim countries: Iran, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (USCIRF, 2023). Even though Pakistan and Bangladesh were not mentioned in the Executive Orders, it could have been different outcomes if they had been included. The students’ experiences as those ‘otherized’ by the Executive Orders symbolizes the counter storytelling tenet of CMT. An interesting result was that none of the participants expressed belief that their Muslim identity played a role in their visa or immigration journey. While this was not an expected revelation, it was noteworthy, considering the research evidencing Muslims were often targets of restrictions. One possibility was that the participants did not feel completely safe enough to discuss if they did feel their religion was a factor in their process. Another possibility is that these participants’ experience was different from others who had encountered difficulties during their journey.

Limitations

There are some limitations of this study that must be addressed. The results of this qualitative case study are not generalizable but could be transferable (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). The case study results may possibly be replicated if additional participants were included had extremely similar circumstances as the participants in this study (Stake, 1995).

First, the sample size of the total Muslim international students in the United States is small compared to the total population. A study including Muslim international students at universities across the United States would have likely yielded higher participation and more
diverse student experiences. The results of this study only include Muslim international students (self-identified, not necessarily from Muslim-majority countries) whose first semester at the research site was from fall 2017 to fall 2020 to reflect the bounded specifications of a case study.

Second, this study was focused on a medium-sized public state university in the Northeast. The results from the participants do not reflect the experiences of other Muslim international students at private or large universities. Further, as the researcher was the research vehicle collecting and analyzing the data, subjectivity could be minimized but not completely eliminated. The results of this particular study only represent the seven participants’ experiences during the specific time of the research and may not be indicative of others’ experiences in their journey to becoming international students. Finally, and fortunately, none of the participants had their student visas ultimately denied or revoked, which may have provided more data or more rounded discussions for findings. A possible limitation could have been that the participant responses were not as truthful as they wanted to be due to the perceived negative views on Muslims. This may have caused their responses to be more neutral or restricted them from feeling they could be as open as they preferred. The researcher did inform the participants that they could speak as freely as they felt, as it was meant to be an open conversation and their identity would be protected.

**Future research**

There is a multitude of literature available on the subject of international education that address its importance, issues international students face on campus, or immigration regulations affecting international students (Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Quinton, 2019; Lee, 2010; Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Beydoun, 2018). However, there
is little research available focusing on the experiences of Muslim international students and the specific barriers posed to them throughout their immigration journey to the United States.

Another merited research focus is comparing Muslim international students’ experiences at private and public institutions. Student experiences may be markedly different because the monies funding the institutions are different; private universities may have different staffing resources than public institutions, differently shaping the students’ experiences. An additional facet to this research focus would be to do a regional and nationwide study to compare and contrast the differences in experiences by region or as a whole.

This topic is crucial for universities to address considering the current state of affairs in countries such as the State of Palestine (Alianita & Zulfa, 2023; The British Broadcasting Corporation, 2023; The Center for Preventive Action, 2023), Yemen (Al Jazeera, 2023; Alghobari, 2023; Chen, 2023), Lebanon (Al Jazeera, 2024; Davison, 2023), and Syria (Al Jazeera, 2024; Fabian & Staff, 2024), and how these issues may affect international students’ abilities to study in the U.S. Universities must understand how the world political scene can impact prospective international students but also the current campus community. How will institutions address ongoing geopolitical unrest? How can they invite civil discussion in and outside the classroom? What types of support may be needed for specific populations of the campus community during war or natural disasters? These are examples of areas to investigate or even do a climate survey to obtain insight on the campus’s viewpoint to determine how to best move forward during tense times.

While claims exist that the Israel-Palestine war is not a genocide (Burga, 2023; Psaledakis & Lewis, 2024; The Economist, 2023), there are a plethora of others who strongly suggest a genocide is happening (Burga, 2023; Psaledakis & Lewis, 2024; United Nations Office
of the High Commissioner, 2023). Perhaps the most notable is the charge of genocide in the International Court of Justice of the United Nations (United Nationa, 2023; Roelf & Sterling, 2023; Corder, 2024). While Palestinians may be predominantly Muslim (United States Department of State, 2023), the civil and political unrest in the state may play a major role in prospective students’ mobility. The geopolitical tensions in the surrounding areas may affect the ability for prospective international students to obtain student visas and travel to the United States. Finally, exploring whether religion played a role in the foundation of these civil and political violence and investigating any connections to Muslim international students’ interest in studying in the United States could provide new knowledge and data that could assist IHEs in their internationalization outlooks and planning.

Ultimately, the implications for Muslim international students can also be applicable to different populations that are “otherized.” One example is the Chinese international students because of the TikTok legislation currently pending (Cohen, 2024; Freking et al., 2024; Shapero, 2024). TikTok is owned by ByteDance, the parent company, in China (Shapero, 2024). The TikTok proposed ban allegedly stems from concerns by the U.S. administration about technology services in the U.S. that may affect national security and the privacy of Americans’ personal information by foreign entities (Shapero, 2024). If this proposed ban is approved by legislation, it could affect the perception of Chinese international students solely because of their country of origin and cause them to be “otherized” indirectly as a result of political pretenses.

Conclusion

The goals of this study were to examine the effects of the policy changes by the Trump administration on Muslim international students who first arrived to the United States from fall 2017 to fall 2020 during the Executive Orders (‘Muslim bans’) and to influence policymakers to
recognize their biases and discrimination in their policy decisions. Specifically, this study focused on the immigration journey of seven Muslim international students at a predominantly white public institution in the northeast. The immigration journey included from the point of admission to the university until they arrived in the U.S. and were admitted as F-1 international students by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Customs & Border Protection (CBP) officer.

During President Trump’s tenure, he enacted Executive Orders were enacted that severely restricted the admission, readmission, and issuance of student visas for people from certain predominantly Muslim countries (Trump, 2017a). This study sought to explore the effects of the Executive Orders on participants’ immigration journeys to the research site. While the participants all received their student visas to enter the U.S. and were able to study at the research site, this study adds new literature to the subject. There is existing literature available on international students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009), but an absence of scholarship focusing on the immigration aspect of becoming international students.

The findings of this study demonstrate that while the Executive Orders affected many students, scholars, and permanent residents (Rivas, 2018; Flannery, 2017; Mitchell & Vara-Orta, 2017), there were also Muslim international students who did not believe they were affected because of their religious identity. As the researcher analyzed the data throughout the study, themes and subthemes developed. These themes included reasons for studying in the United States, preparedness for the visa process, preparedness for the immigration process, and suggestions for future international students. It is poignant that the participants did not believe their identity as Muslim restricted their visa or immigration process to the United States, since
the Executive Orders were specific to Muslim-majority countries. However, Pakistan was not included in the Executive Order (Trump, 2017a), which was a majority of the participants’ country of origin.

The findings are then addressed and reviewed for readers and policymakers to consider. First, providing information in meaningful ways to students. One way to engage students with dense information could be to offer modules through the institution’s student information system instead of sending long emails or documents text-laden for the students to decipher. Another option may be through videos to provide face time and a sense of personalization or storytelling to understand the information. Immigration regulations can be difficult for professionals to understand, so keeping that in mind for new international students can guide the method of delivery. The next category is combating Islamophobia. Another goal of this study, combating Islamophobia includes the media’s portrayal of Muslims and their characters (Hamza et al., 2009; Bayoumi, 2006). A company called Define American addresses the media’s portrayal of immigrants and undocumented people. It works with TV shows and films to humanize the characters of immigrants or other oppressed populations (Define American, 2023). This work can help change the mainstream media’s depiction of immigration. The last category addressed is maintaining a supportive campus environment for Muslim international students. Universities can practice this by advocating for the students in case of visa delays or showcasing events that highlight the international student presence on campus and celebrating International Education Week.

Another way to begin to create inclusiveness is to start normalizing things that are different, such as ethnic or religious minorities. Adding Muslim literature, quotes, or articles around campus can create a presence. Perhaps someone will read them and continue learning or
have discussions with their friends and family that will initiate momentum of learning more about Islam. Universities can have more film screenings of films about Islam or different cultures more frequently on campus. Imposing the presence can begin to become less unusual and eventually become more “typical” so as to release the stigmas attached to the topics.

The researcher hopes that this study will be a productive addition to the academic literature focused on Muslim international students, Islamophobia, and immigration. It is another hope that future scholars will add to the body of literature on these topics to impress their importance in academia and policymaking. Finally, it is crucial that lawmakers and the general public become work to become more accepting of each other regardless of our religion, origin, appearance, or identity and apply this acceptance in policymaking. We should not have to teach people that it is important to care about others.
References


Al Jazeera. (2024, January 2). *Israeli army launches attacks on targets in Syria and...*


origin. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*, 27(1), 59-73. https://doi.org/10.2190/iq.27.1.e


*Baby names*. (2022, October 24). Islamic Relief USA. https://irusa.org/


Blake, A. (2016, December 21). *Trump says we've known his Muslim ban an database plans 'all along.' But we still don't - not really*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-
fix/wp/2016/11/17/the-evolution-of-donald-trump-and-the-muslim-database/?utm_term=.75d7bba279ab


Colvin, J. (2023, November 6). *Trump returns to site formerly known as Twitter, posts his mug shot shortly after Georgia surrender*. AP News. https://apnews.com/article/trump-twitter-tweets-return-4f594b9f72c68a309758e19be9cdce0f


Freking, K., Hadero, H., & Jalonick, M. C. (2024, March 13). House is likely to pass a bill that could ban TikTok, but it faces an uncertain path in the Senate. AP News.
https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-house-vote-china-national-security-8fa7258fae1a4902d344c9d978d58a37


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.03.011

Global Wake Forest. (2023, October 26). International education week.
https://global.wfu.edu/global-wake-forest/center-for-global-programs-studies/international-education-week/

https://doi.org/10.1108/cdi-05-2012-0056


http://works.bepress.com/samuel_museus/91/


Myers, M. D. (2009). *Qualitative research in business & management*. SAGE.


https://am.nafsa.org


from https://www.nafsa.org/Professional_Resources/Browse_by_Interest/International_Students_and_Scholars/Executive_Order_Entry_Ban_Litigation_Updates/


Penn State Dickinson School of Law. (2010). *Administrative processing*. http://pennstatelaw.psu.edu


Publishers.

Pew Research Center. (2019, April 1). *10 countries with the largest Muslim populations, 2015
and 2060.* https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-
largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/ft_19-03-29_muslimchristianpopulations_muslim/

Poyrazli, S., & Lopez, M. D. (2007). An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and
homesickness: A comparison of international and American students. *The Journal of

gaza-state-dept-says-2024-01-03/

Qiang, Z. (2003). Internationalization of higher education: Towards a conceptual

University Press.

Raybould, P. (2017, May 10). *Student ambassadors in international student
recruitment.* https://www.hobsons.com/resources/entry/blog-the-role-of-student-
ambassadors-in-international-recruitment


Rizzo, M., & Ehrenberg, R. (2003). Resident and nonresident tuition and enrollment at flagship state universities. *College choices: The economics of where to go, when to go, and how to pay for it*, 303-353. https://doi.org/10.3386/w9516


Rutgers. (2024). *We enjoyed welcoming everyone at our international student orientation!* TikTok - Make Your Day. https://www.tiktok.com/@rutgersglobal/video/7325548260242771242


Southern Poverty Law Center. *Update: More than 400 incidents of hateful harassment and intimidation since the election.* (2016, November 15).


Trump, D. J. (2020, January 31). *Proclamation on improving enhanced vetting capabilities and processes for detecting attempted entry*. The White


University of Detroit Mercy. (2023, November 15). International night returns for all on Nov. 16. Detroit Mercy Campus Connection.


University of Southern California. (2019). USC Graduate Admission. https://gradadm.usc.edu/lightboxes/international-students-country-requirements/

University of Utah. (2022). ISC international night. https://getinvolved.utah.edu/event/8589554


USCIRF. (2023, November). Did you Know...Muslim constitutions. https://www.uscirf.gov/publications/did-you-knowmuslim-constitutions


Appendix I

1. What made you decide to study in the United States?

2. Were you prepared by the University for your visa application process? If so, how?

3. How did you prepare for the visa interview?

4. Please tell me about the visa interview – from the time you arrived to the time you left the embassy or consulate.

5. During the process of applying for your visa, did you feel your identity as Muslim affected the decision about your visa application? If so, how? What about after the visa interview?

6. How did you prepare for the encounter with the Department of Homeland Security when you arrived in the U.S.?

7. Please tell me about your meeting with the Customs and Border Protection officer. Did you feel your identity as Muslim affected your interaction with the officer? If so, how?

8. Were you referred to secondary inspection? If so, please share the account during secondary inspection.

9. Do you believe your identity as Muslim affected the process of becoming an international student in the U.S.? If so, how?

10. Can you share an experience when you felt discrimination during the application process?

11. What do you feel can be done to improve the process for international students?

12. Is there anything you think is important that you would like to share?
Appendix II

Recruitment invitation

Dear Sherif:

Thank you for agreeing to send my invitation for participation email to the international students at New York University. Below is the message for the students. If you have any questions, please call me at 808-216-9839 or email: sbeyer@uno.edu. I appreciate your kindness in helping me with my research.
Take care,
Sheri.

My name is Sheri Beyer and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration Department at the University of New Orleans. I am currently conducting a single case study on the perceived role of Islamophobia on Muslim international students whose first semester at your institution was between fall 2017-fall 2020. Specifically, I am interested in the experiences the students had from admission to NYU to your entry to the U.S.

I am reaching out to determine whether you are interested in participating in my study. All of your information will be kept strictly confidential. For example, your name will not be used in the study, nor will your current or former places of employment be identified. Your name will be changed to “respondent A,” “respondent B,” etc. In addition, if other names are mentioned, those individuals will not be identified.

If you agree, your participation will consist of one interview (approximately 1-1.5 hours each) conducted via FaceTime, Duo, or Zoom.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 808-216-9839 or sbeyer@uno.edu. In addition, you may contact my advisor, Dr. Christopher Broadhurst at cbroahu@uno.edu.

Respectfully,

Sheri Beyer
Ph.D. Candidate,
Higher Education Administration, University of New Orleans
Appendix III

Consent Form

Dear ____________:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Christopher Broadhurst in the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration, at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to report on the perception of Islamophobia experienced by Muslim international students in their journeys to the U.S.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve one, 1-1.5 hour interviews over a 1-2 month period. If you choose to participate, your information will be kept strictly confidential. For instance, your name would not be used in the study, nor will your current or former places of employment be identified. In addition, if other names are mentioned, those individuals will also not be identified. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is expanding the literature on the effects of Islamophobia on Muslim international students.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 808-216-9839 or via email at sbeyer@uno.edu.

Sincerely,

Sheri Beyer

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

__________________________  ______________________________  __________
Signature                  Print Name                           Date

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Ann O’Hanlon, Chair of the PhD program at the University of New Orleans at 504-280-7386 or unoirb@uno.edu.
Appendix IV

✓ Are you an international student?
✓ Was your first semester fall 2017-fall 2020?
✓ Do you self-identify as Muslim?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES, PLEASE CONSIDER PARTICIPATING!

- Participation will take approximately 1-1.25 hours total (to complete 2 interviews)
- Contact: sbeyer@my.uno.edu

You will receive a gift card to the place of your choice upon completion of the interviews.
VITA

The author, Sheri Beyer, was born in South Korea and adopted to a family in rural Minnesota. She obtained her Bachelor’s degree in International Studies from Hawai‘i Pacific University and Masters of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Being an adoptee, the immigration field was a natural and unintentional field for Ms. Beyer. After 11 years in higher education working with international students and scholars, Ms. Beyer changed to the corporate immigration law field working for boutique and big law firms in the U.S. She realized her passion to advocate for otherized populations and her travels around the world and passion for social justice led her to this dissertation topic. She currently works at Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP as a Senior Client Services Consultant.