International Students’ Perceptions of Food Service at a New Jersey State University

Rebecca Ann Schubert

Montclair State University

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore international students’ perceptions of food service at Montclair State University. Twelve international students were recruited to participate in this quick ethnography. Seven of the twelve participants were males and five were females. Students came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds including Asian/Pacific Islander, African, Hispanic and White, non-Hispanic. Inclusion criteria were that the students must be considered international students by the university and must be able to effectively communicate in English. The students completed a fourteen-question survey questionnaire which asked about demographic data as well as questions about attitudes and beliefs about the role of food in their culture and their satisfaction with the university food service. The students then participated in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with a graduate student researcher. Interview topics included feelings when consuming traditional versus “American” foods, the role of food in their culture and their satisfaction with the university food service. Results showed that food played an integral part in the students’ ethnic identity and that the students were not happy with the current food service. Areas for improvement included the provision of a variety of ethnic foods, increased training for food service staff, expansion of cafeteria hours and a reduction in the price of foods offered.
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FOOD SERVICE
AT A NEW JERSEY STATE UNIVERSITY

by
Rebecca Ann Schubert

A THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Masters of Science in
The Department of Human Ecology in
The Graduate Program of Nutrition and Food Science of
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LITERATURE REVIEW

Current literature on minority satisfaction with institutional food service is limited. Studies have been conducted which examined patient satisfaction in hospital (Watters, Sorensen, Fiala and Wismer, 2003; Hartley and Hamid, 2002; Madhok, Bhopal and Ramaiah, 1992) and nursing home (Crogan, Evans, Severtsen and Shultz, 2004) settings but no studies to date have looked at the perceptions of international college students and culturally acceptable food service on university campuses. This aim of this paper is to review both what is known and not known about this topic in the literature and provide a foundation as to why a study of this type is warranted.

Statistical data provided by the United States Census Bureau (2004) indicates that by the year 2020, 18% of the total population of the U.S. will be Hispanic and 5.4% will be of Asian descent. In previous years minority populations were centered in urban areas but recently these trends are changing with more minorities moving to rural areas (Ridge, 2000). The U.S. Census Bureau also indicates that the percent of Hispanics who completed four years of college or more has been steadily increasing since 1996. These trends are expected to continue and minorities will comprise a larger percentage of the college population. International students also contribute to collegiate ethnic diversity.

Data provided by the Institute of International Education (2004) indicates that since 1950, the percent of international students has been steadily increasing with approximately 600,000 international students enrolled during the 2003-2004 academic year. Currently, New Jersey ranks eleventh in the U.S. for total international students with the majority of students
Students’ Perceptions 4

coming from India, China and Korea. These changes in the university population pose many new challenges to universities across the United States. To meet the needs of a culturally diverse population and possibly retain international students, schools must become culturally responsive. University food service is one area that should be culturally sensitive as provision of culturally acceptable meals may have particular implications for international students.

Immigration to a new country brings with it changes in environment and lifestyle which has been shown to negatively impact the health of immigrants by increasing their risks for chronic disease. Since the U.S. population is shifting so rapidly “the health status of racial/ethnic minorities has become an increasingly important public health issue” (Satia-Abouta, Patterson, Neuhouser and Elder, 2002, p. 1106). Studies have shown that immigration is a risk factor for unhealthy dietary behaviors.

A study conducted by Kenya, Brodsky, Divale, Allegrate and Fullilove (2003) found that black international students had riskier dietary behaviors than their U.S. born counterparts most likely due to the transition to a western diet. The findings indicated an inadequate consumption of fruits and vegetables and high intake of dietary fat in the black international students as compared to the U.S. born black students. The study used the National College Health Risk Behavior Survey with 1,219 college students age eighteen to sixty in a historically Black college in New York City. Two major limitations of this study was that the sampling method was a non-random, convenience sample and that even though the students were black, their country of origin is not known. Students from different ethnic backgrounds may have different experiences and behaviors.

Similar risky dietary behaviors were found among Asian born university students. Pan,
Dixon, Himburg and Huffman (1999) concluded that foreign born students often skipped breakfast, frequently consumed nutrient poor, energy dense snacks and had a significant decrease in vegetable consumption. The study also noted that these changes were more frequently seen in younger immigrants than in older immigrants which puts the international college student at an even greater risk for chronic disease. However, a major limitation of this study was that a food frequency questionnaire (FFQ) was self-administered by the study participants who were expected to rate the frequency of consumption of each food while living in their home country as well as after arrival in the U.S. Since the study participants had resided in the U.S. for at least three months prior to the study the reliability of the FFQ data is questionable.

Dietary acculturation “refers to the process that occurs when members of a minority group adopt the eating patterns/food choices of the host country” (Satia-Abouta et al., 2002, p. 1107). Empirical studies have shown that acculturation to an American diet is associated with an increased risk of chronic diseases including obesity (Cairney and Ostbye, 1999; Himmelgreen et al., 2004; Kaplan, Huguet, Newsome and McFarland, 2004; Lizarzaburu and Palinkas, 2002; Lauderdale and Rathouz, 2000; Singh and Miller, 2004), diabetes (Satia-Abouta et al., 2000; Wylie-Roett, 2002), cardiovascular disease (Lizarzaburu and Palinkas, 2002; Mooteri, 2004; Satia-Abouta et al., 2000) and cancer (Otero-Sabogal, Sabogal, Perez-Stable and Hiatt, 1995; Singh and Miller, 2004) and that length of time spent in the U.S. further exacerbates these risks. The transition from a traditional diet to a western diet brings with it an increase in consumption of foods low in nutrients and highly processed foods (Pan et al., 1999; Papadaki and Scott, 2002) most likely because ethnic foods are either unavailable or too expensive (Nan and Cason, 2004).

Studies have also shown an association between immigration and psychological stress
and mental health problems (Browner-Elhanan, 1997; Kraamer, Luise, Christiane and Tshiang Tshiananga, 2004; Skreblin and Sujoldzic, 2003; Yeh, 2003). According to Kraamer et al (2004) “physical and mental health problems frequently develop among the immigrants because of insufficient use of available medical and mental health resources” (p. 127). Increased stress level can have a negative impact on the students’ academic performance and their overall satisfaction with the college experience. However, “feeling accepted by the host society and being involved with Americans and U.S. culture were related to better mental health” (Mehta, 1998, p. 61). One way to increase feelings of acceptance of international students may be for the university food service to provide culturally acceptable meals.

Research has shown that food choices are influenced by culture (Samolsky, Dunker and Hyank-Hankinson, 1990) and that traditional foods help to ease the transition to a new culture (Story and Harris, 1989). Providing ethnic meals can also help school meals meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans as these foods typically rely more on high quality plant proteins such as whole grains and legumes and less on red meat (Food Management, 1995; Stein, 2004).

Limited studies have been conducted which looked at overall satisfaction in settings where culturally acceptable foods have been served. However, these have focused on hospital and nursing home patients not university students. Madhok, Bhopal and Ramaiah (1992) found that the level of Asian hospital patient satisfaction was similar to non-Asians after the provision of traditional Asian foods in two different hospitals in Middlesbrough, England.

In this study the researchers conducted two surveys. The first was a comparative survey of ‘Asian’ and ‘non-Asian’ recently discharged hospital patients age sixteen or older who stayed more than forty-eight hours in the either of the two hospitals. The second survey looked at
’Asian’ patients to assess their satisfaction after the provision of ‘Asian’ food. The goal of the survey was to determine patients’ experiences and level of satisfaction with hospital services.

’Asian’ patients in the first survey were compared with ‘non-Asian’ and with ‘Asian’ patients in the second survey using SPSS software.

A total of fifty-two ‘Asians’ and fifty-two ‘non-Asians’ were matched for sex, age, specialty of admission and hospital reported similar experiences. Seventy nine percent of the ‘Asian’ participants in the first survey were born in either India or Bangladesh. In the second survey 77% of the participants were born in these respective countries. Ninety-four percent of the ‘non-Asian’ participants in both surveys were born in the UK. The study found that before receiving ‘Asian’ food the ‘Asian’ patients were less satisfied with the food but after receiving ‘Asian’ food their level of satisfaction increased.

Hartley and Hamid (2002) found that upon provision of culturally acceptable meals in the hospital setting, minorities were satisfied 42% of the time. This study was made up of minority hospital patients in the Borough of Brent, UK. The minority population was made up of ninety-eight Hindu, Muslim, Caribbean and Jewish hospital patients. The patients completed an Inpatient Satisfaction Survey. Exclusion criteria were patients who had been in the hospital less than one day, those NPO (ordered nothing by mouth), and those receiving solely enteral feedings. Results showed that only 74% of the hospital patients were aware that multicultural meals were available. The patients who ordered cultural foods reported that they were satisfied 42% of the time. The African-Muslim group was the least satisfied with the provision of Kosher/Halal meals.

A qualitative study by Watters, Sorensen, Fiala and Wismer (2003) used focus groups of
Canadian hospital patients and determined that food choice and variety were very important to the patients and that "nurses thought more culturally appropriate food items should be offered" (p. 1348). There were two phases of this study. In the first phase, nurses conducted focus groups with recently discharged hospital patients to determine patients' expectations and perceptions of hospital food service. This phase included sixteen discharged patients who had stayed in the hospital four or more days and had consumed regular consistency diets. In the second phase, nurses made meal rounds with predischarge patients to talk about their food service experience and satisfaction. This phase consisted of a sample size of 116 individuals, representative of the patient population. Major themes generated from the focus groups were that the patients thought the food quality was better than expected and had improved from past experiences and that they thought that hospital food should be a model for healthy eating. On the other hand, the nurses also noted improvements but still had negative attitudes toward the food service and they felt that menu items should be culturally appropriate.

Crogan, Evans, Severtsen and Shultz (2004) found that nursing home residents wanted the food service to mimick home-cooked meals, wanted the ability to make choices and to tailor the system to meet their individual needs. In this study an interpretive phenomenological approach was used to uncover meaning in a series of 'tell me a story" interviews with twenty nursing home patients. Inclusion criteria included current full-time residence in the nursing home, ability to communicate orally in English, ability and willingness to express feelings or needs to the interviewer, and ability to answer questions posed by the interviewer. Major themes generated from the interviews were that the residents wanted a variety of foods cooked from scratch, the availability of traditional foods and the availability of well seasoned and tasty foods.
Both the Watters et al (2003) and the Hartley and Hamid (2002) studies noted a need for pamphlets describing ingredients and food preparation techniques. For Muslim and Jewish university students who must meet the strict dietary guidelines of Halal and Kosher diets, this has particular importance. The availability of this information may help put them at ease when eating in campus dining halls and also enable them to choose from a larger variety of foods.

It is evident that the lack of empirical studies on the perceptions of international university students on university food service warrants investigation into this topic. Translocated and immigrant students are at risk for obesity (Cairney and Ostbye, 1999; Himmelgreen et al., 2004; Kaplan, Huguet, Newsome and McFarland, 2004; Lizarzaburu and Palinkas, 2002; Lauderdale and Rathouz, 2000; Singh and Miller, 2004), diabetes (Satia-Abouta et al., 2000; Wylie-Roett, 2002), cancer (Otero-Sabogal, Sabogal, Perez-Stable and Hiatt, 1995; Singh and Miller, 2004) and cardiovascular disease (Lizarzaburu and Palinkas, 2002; Mooted, 2004; Satia-Abouta et al., 2000) as well as psychological stress (Browner-Elhanan, 1997; Kraamer, Luise, Christiane and Tshiang 2004; Skreblin and Sujoldzic, 2003; Yeh, 2003).

Provision of culturally acceptable foods may help to decrease morbidity associated with chronic disease and may contribute to a positive overall experience as an international student. This qualitative study will provide the framework for future researchers to develop detailed qualitative and quantitative studies to gain further insight into the needs of this population. Future research may be used to make improvements to existing university food service programs and help to reverse the trends of chronic disease in immigrant populations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing the literature, many questions remain to be answered. What is still not
known is:

- Will the availability of a culturally diverse campus food service help international students feel more welcome in university settings and help ease their transition to the United States?
- Can a culturally sensitive food service have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of international students?
- Are international students satisfied with the current food service?
- Does the university need to make improvements to its food service and if so what changes would international students like to see implemented?

The purposes of this qualitative study are three-fold. The first goal is to generate answers to these unexplored questions and help university food service providers to plan culturally acceptable menus that will meet the needs of the international student population. The second goal is to enable future researchers to develop a quantitative survey questionnaire to address these issues with larger numbers of international students from different universities in order to be able to generalize the findings. The third goal is to aid nutrition educators in the development of comprehensive, theory-based nutrition education programs aimed at promoting the health of international students.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethnography

As defined by Handwerker (2001), ethnography refers to the “processes and products of research that document what people know, feel, and do in a way that situates those phenomena at specific times in the history of individual lives, including pertinent global events and processes” (p.7). It is a multi-method approach that uses triangulation of key informants, qualitative text analysis and statistical analysis to generate high quality and reliable data. For this research study triangulation occurred through key informants, a survey questionnaire and text analysis. The goal of ethnography is to find similarities and differences between participants and allows the researcher to see interconnections between key informants.

METHODS

Research Design

A quick ethnographic approach was used to determine how culture affects the importance of food in the participants’ lives and how international students feel about the food service at Montclair State University. According to Handwerker (2001) culture is defined as “the knowledge people use to live their lives and the way in which they do so” (p. 6). We also assume that “cultural differences reflect variation in personal experiences and that culture evolves” (p. 8). People from the same ethnic background share a culture but within that culture exists sub cultures depending on factors such as age and level of education. In this research study, the participants will be from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. However, they share a common Montclair State University culture.
There are two reasons why this research method was selected. The first reason is that there is limited data available on the topic of international students' perception of food service in the university setting. This method will allow for comprehensive, descriptive data to be generated. A more structured approach might not capture pertinent issues or perceptions of international students (Watters et al., 2003). It has been recommended that exploratory methods be used “when one wants to explore processes not yet identified nor encompassed by theory” (LaSala, 1998, p. 586).

The second reason is that this inductive, grounded theory method will allow the researcher to develop a theory after the data are collected and analyzed and will enable future researchers to develop statistical, quantitative methods which will further enhance knowledge on this topic. This information will also aid nutrition educators in the development of effective nutrition education programs targeted at the international student population (Nan and Cason, 2004). After reviewing the relevant literature, it was apparent that a lack of information on this topic warranted a study that could provide descriptive data on international students' perceptions of university food service.

Setting

The study took place at Montclair State University (MSU) which is the second largest university in the state of New Jersey. According the official MSU website available at www.montclair.edu it is located in northern New Jersey in the town of Montclair. There are approximately 15,000 students enrolled at MSU with almost 9% of the students listed as international students. According to the Global Education Office at MSU, the top three countries represented during the 2004/2005 academic year were Korea, Kenya and India.
Sample

This study employed a non-probability, convenience sample of twelve international students attending Montclair State University. Eight of the participants were recruited by word of mouth by the researcher who attended three, weekly meetings of the International Student Organization (ISO). At the meetings the researcher announced the study, its purpose and the requirements necessary to participate in the study. A flyer was distributed with contact information for the researcher to those students who were interested. The international students were then able to contact the researcher to set up individual interview appointments. One of the participants is a classmate of the researcher and she recruited another friend of hers. The last participant was recruited by the researcher at a workshop provided by the graduate school.

Table 1 lists the demographic data for the twelve participants in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years in U.S.</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Live on campus?</th>
<th># Times/week eat on campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>three to four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>three to four</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>three to four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>three to four</td>
<td>Arab/African</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>three to four</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>three to four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>one to two</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>one to two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>one to two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>three to four</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>three to four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>one to two</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>one to two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>three to four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>three to four</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>one to two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>three to four</td>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A breakdown of the study participants revealed that the 58.3% were males and 41.7% were females. Seventeen percent of the sample has lived in the U.S. for one to two years, 50% between three and four years and 33% over five years. Twenty-five percent of the students were white, non-Hispanic, 58.3% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 8.3% Hispanic, and 8.3% African. Seventeen percent of the students live on the campus of Montclair State University while 83% report living off campus.

The two criteria for inclusion in the study were that the student must be considered an international student by the university and must be able to effectively communicate in English. Once saturation of data was obtained no new participants were recruited. By the twelfth interview no new data was obtained.

**Human Subjects Considerations**

Since the study sample was conducted of university students, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required. An application for review was submitted to the IRB along with copies of the informed consent form, the survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interview questions. Once the study was approved, recruitment of the study participants began.

Upon arrival to the meeting with the researcher, each participant was provided with two copies of the informed consent form. All of the information contained in the form was explained in detail to the participants at the beginning of each interview. Once the student agreed to participate, both the researcher and the student signed the consent form. The study participant and the researcher each kept a copy of the consent form. If
the student did not wish to participate, he/she was thanked for his/her time and the
interview did not occur.

The study did involve minimal risks to the participants, however these were more
short-term rather than long-term and each of the risks was outlined in the consent form.
Since a variety of questions including the role of food in culture as well as ease of
transition to life at MSU were asked, these questions may have brought about feelings of
sadness or homesickness for the study participants. The participants may have also felt
disheartened if they believed changes needed to be made to the campus food service and
these changes were not made in a timely manner. Some students may have also felt that
the university would retaliate against them if they did not participate or if they voiced
unfavorable opinions about the food service. Coercion may have led students to
participate even when they didn’t necessarily want to. Each student was assured that
participation is voluntary and that all information would be kept in the strictest of
confidence.

To ensure confidentiality each participant was assigned a code number. This code
number was used on the survey questionnaire as well as on the interview transcript. No
names were used in the data analysis and all surveys and transcripts were kept in a secure
location by the researcher.

Data Collection

Each participant was required to fill out a fourteen-question survey before
participating in the one-on-one, semi-structured interview. The survey was pilot tested
with a group of four international students before use in the study to ensure that the
questions measured what they were intended to and that the students could understand the
questions. The pilot test group did not go on to participate in the study. A copy of the survey is attached in appendix A.

Once the student completed the survey questionnaire the researcher began the interview. A list of the seven, semi-structured interview questions can be found in appendix B. Each interview was conducted in a private location with the researcher. The time commitment for each participant was approximately one hour.

### Data Analysis

Each interview was audiotaped and then transcribed by the researcher. The documents were then imported into Nvivo 2.0 for analysis. Nvivo 2.0 is a widely used qualitative analysis software tool for Windows. It allowed the researcher to code the data and generate themes. It also provided statistical information including how often codes were used and allowed the researcher to cross-reference participant attributes including age, gender and ethnicity with specific codes. This allowed for the researcher to detect similarities and differences among the study participants.

Lower level or general codes were established during review of the first four transcripts. The remaining eight transcripts were then coded into these pre-established codes. It was necessary to combine certain codes and also to divide codes in order to fit important pieces of the data into appropriate categories and to make the best sense of the data.

### RESULTS

The findings from this qualitative study provided information on the following topics:
1) The provision of ethnic foods can help to ease international students' transition to life as an international student at MSU.

2) The lack of ethnic food at MSU negatively impacts dietary acculturation of the international students but the impact on ethnic identity is a topic that needs to be explored further with a larger sample of international students.

3) The international students in this study are not satisfied with the current food service at MSU.

4) International students would like to see changes in the food service including the provision of a variety of ethnic foods, increased training for food service staff, reduction in prices and expansion of cafeteria hours.

After analyzing the interview transcripts and the surveys using QSR’s Nvivo 2.0 for Windows software four groups of themes emerged. They are:

1. Ease transition to new environment
2. Role of food in culture
3. Lack of culturally acceptable foods
4. Areas for improvement

Each group contained multiple themes. These themes are listed in tables two through five and are highlighted below.

Table 2: Ease transition to new environment
Themes:
- Feel at home
- Respect for diversity
Feel at Home

Students stressed the importance of food in easing their transition to life as an international student by highlighting the importance of food in appreciating cultural diversity. In this research study, culture is defined as a shared set of values and beliefs by a group of people. Cultural diversity is defined as the differences between cultures.

When students were asked to respond to the statement: “the availability of foods from my home country in the cafeterias at Montclair State University would help me to adjust to my new environment”, ten of the twelve students either agreed or strongly agreed. Many cited the fact that the availability of foods from their home country would provide them with a sense of being back home. A male student from Turkey said, “I think it’s another way of adjusting myself to the school...to see my food served in the University. It feels I have a place in the University. They give value to my food. Yeah, that’s how I feel about it.”

One student cited difficulties when he came to the university and felt that the availability food from his home country would help to ease his transition. He stated, Well it would be nice you know, because when you first come here I didn’t really have a culture shock or anything I think but you do get slightly homesick especially initial months you don’t really know that many people so if you can find solace in food...when you, if you’ve not had something from your country for like six months or ONE month and then you get to have something that’s close to it it’s nice.
Students also said that the availability of ethnic foods on campus would aid in their adjustment by making them feel more comfortable. Comfort is defined as a lack of stress. Comfort may vary between students of similar ethnic backgrounds depending on the degree to which they wish to acculturate or remain culturally distinct. The students in this study did want to acculturate to some degree but not one student expressed a desire to completely assimilate into the American culture. Retaining ethnic identity was important to each of the students. However, students who do wish to assimilate may not be concerned about the lack of ethnic food and may not feel that it would aid in their adjustment. A female from Columbia praised the school for all it does for international students but cited the food service as one area that is lacking. She said,

They want to provide a nice environment for international students they should also think about food. And I don’t think they don’t do that all. International students come here and they have to live here, on campus, right. They cannot go back home the holidays and stuff like that so…this is a new world for them so they should make them feel comfortable as much as possible and the food is one of the…one of the things that should like…change in order for like for them to feel home or more comfortable.

Respect for Diversity

Students also reported that if ethnic foods were available in the cafeterias on campus they would feel more welcomed and appreciated for their cultural diversity. A graduate student from Taiwan said, “If I have a food of my home country I will feel at
home, you know? I will feel like this school is um...how you say, considerable because they embrace diversity.” Another female student agreed. She said, “Not...not in other sense but in that sense you know it would definitely make me feel more welcome and you know respected because then I would think okay other people know about my country or about my culture and...I’m welcomed you know so...”

Students stressed that the availability of ethnic foods would provide them with a sense of belonging in their new atmosphere. A male student from Nepal said,

I definitely feel good. I feel like I belong here and I feel like they really take care of where you from, people who serve the food, people who provide the food, them campus, wherever, I feel like they really care where you are from and your background.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Role of food in culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Variety of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relaxation/enjoyment of traditional foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family/friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ethnic identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the students were asked to respond to the statement, “food plays an important role in my culture”, all twelve either agreed or strongly agreed. These students went on to discuss some of the reasons why food is so important to them. One student from Armenia discussed how food and cooking are a central part of the lives of Armenian women since they learn to cook at a very young age. She said,
Food is everything. Like in a parties it's a lot of food and we...cook it at home 'cause it's like more respectful when you have people coming over you don't buy it outside you COOK it yourself. And it's not very like respectful to like just order it in or take someone to restaurant. You know if you cook it that's more respectful so everyone cooks all the women, ladies, young girls know how to cook like from very, very, very early age.

Students also said that if ethnic foods were offered they would feel more respected by the university and that the university understood the importance of their culture in their lives and the importance of food in their culture. A female Taiwanese student was unable to articulate the reasons why food was so important and when she was asked to describe the role of food in her culture she said, "Um...the food will...in my culture it's VERY important." When she was asked to elaborate she laughed and said, "Yeah...um...because it's...my culture."

**Variety of Food**

During the semi-structured interview eleven of the twelve the students discussed the importance of food variety in their culture. Students described how during family gatherings including dinners and holidays or festivals many different foods were prepared. One student discussed how in Nepal during the Tihar festival a very large number of dishes are prepared. He said,
When it comes to vegetables like we have like big festivals like we gather around with our family. There is a saying called thirty-two varieties in Nepal. It doesn’t sound that great in English. Thirty-two varieties, we come close to that. We make approximately sixteen varieties of vegetables, different vegetables. If we cook cauliflower, we cook cauliflower. If we cook chicken, we cook chicken, if we cook goat, we cook goat. That’s one of the festivals when uh, how to describe, uh, it’s called Tihar…

Another student elaborated on food variety and said how in the cafeterias on campus there were only a limited number of different types of fruits and in Taiwan it is common to consume fruits after meals. She said, “I would like to serve more fresh vegetables and fruit. Because the fruit, the fruit choice here in cafeteria are only…I think only have bananas and maybe to serve more different kinds of fruit.”

Relaxation/Enjoyment of Traditional Foods

On the survey questionnaire the students were asked to circle a face describing how they felt when they consumed the foods of their home country. They had a choice of a sad face, a neutral face or a happy face. All twelve of the students circled the happy face. When they were asked to elaborate on this many said that when they consumed foods of their own country it was a more satisfying and relaxing experience compared to when they consumed American food. Satisfaction is defined as filling a need or desire.

A male student from India said, “Oh yeah because when my…when I eat the food of my home country it’s like…gives me a feeling of like satisfaction…” A male
student from Greece agreed and said, "When I consume foods from my own county I get a satisfaction. I feel full. I enjoy the food that I eat, that I consumed so it's... I eat to fullfill my... like fill my hunger."

Family/Friends

In this study family is defined as anyone who is blood related or related through marriage. Friends are defined as anyone whom the participant feels close to and/or cares about in a deep emotional way. During the semi-structured interview students were asked to describe a happy memory centered around food that occurred before they came to the U.S. All twelve of the students stressed the importance of family and friends during these stories. One student from Nepal discussed the importance of family in his culture. He said,

...like you gather with family and have different stuff it's like all about eating and having fun with your family so it really matters what you eat... we used to have good food but so more than the food it matters that I was with the family too.

A female student from Armenia talked about the significance of the New Year in her country. She went on to say how special it was that family members and friends visited each other's homes on New Year's Eve. She stressed how different it is from here in the U.S. because it is not so formal in Armenia. People just stop in and visit without having to call first. She said,

And then when it's twelve usually all families sit there and you know the WINE and everything... and then you eat and then you go around
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town and visit your relatives, your FRIENDS and it’s like one
o’clock, two o’clock, three o’clock in the morning and people just go
to each other houses and you don’t have to invite them or you don’t
have to...call and anything like that...you just go on in at the door
and you know it’s like A LOT of people in the streets and in YOUR
HOUSE so I LOVED it. I really miss that. You know just sitting there
and...with your family and eating and then going to you pastors house
and...yeah ‘cause that’s the day that it doesn’t matter. It can be your
pastor...it can be PRESIDENT (laughing), who ever it is you know
you can go to their house and they’ll just get the best with their
best...have prepared for a WEEK (laughing)...and it’s...you
know...but you eat it and it’s a fun day. I miss that.

Ethnic Identity

Food was also closely tied to ethnic identity which is defined as the extent to
which a person identifies with the characteristics of persons from their home country.
Nine of the twelve students said yes to the statement: Eating certain foods provides me
with a sense of ethnic identity. A female student from Columbia clarified this when she
said,

It like it tells us okay you eat this, it’s because you’re COLOMBIAN.
So it reminds you of who you are and where you come from. “Cause
you know in other countries like they’re not going to eat the same
things. So kind of tells you who you are...like your identity.
A student from Somalia described how food is linked to other aspects of his ethnic identity. He said,

...consuming generic foods such as hamburgers and pizza does not incite a feeling of cultural intrigue and diversity. By that I mean when one consumes foods from his/her country, that incites actions that one would do in their home country such as eating together, sitting in a circle, conversing about cultural issues...When one consumes ethnic foods, that triggers a sensation of identity which in turn makes the person more aware of their culture and hence start to practice it.

Table 4: Lack of Culturally Acceptable Foods Available
Themes:
- Religion
- Forced to “Americanize” diet
- Food Taste
- Food quality
- Increase Cultural Awareness of American Students

Religion

Religion provided some specific difficulties for four of the twelve students who were Muslim and Hindu. Due to parameters set on diet by their religion these students had a very difficult time finding foods that would meet their needs when eating on campus.

The lack of food choice and variety was the main problem. One male, Hindu student from Nepal described a time when all the dishes in the cafeteria contained beef
and in the Hindu religion cows are considered a holy animal and are to be prayed to and
not eaten. He described his experience that day when he said,

So once when I went to Freeman Hall the meat section, the grill thing
or whatever, like you know the warm food over there they had
everything beef, like they had like sausages, with beef, they had some
kind of rice with beef and all I could eat that day was pizza and
pepperoni, because I do eat pork. That's a time when I don't like and I
was like oh shit.

A Muslim student discussed a similar experience when he went to the cafeteria
and was unaware that the pepperoni contained pork. He described this specific incident in
detail. He said,

I don't eat pork. And I had to when I first came onto campus, actually
when I first ate...I didn't know pepperoni's were pork here. I didn't
know that pepperoni's was pork. I took a couple of bites and uh, EW
THAT'S PORK! I puked. I went to the bathroom and I puked cause
the idea of eating pork was like aaahhhhh, But ummmm....back
home, the pizza, the por...the, the, the pepperoni, everything is all
Halal.

Forced to "Americanize" Diet

Ten of the twelve students surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with the
following statement: "Montclair should provide a variety of ethnic foods in its
cafeterias." Students felt that they were being forced to Americanize their diet because of
the lack of ethnic food. One student articulated that she is undoubtedly being forced. She said,

Definitely that’s how I feel. I feel like I’m being forced to eat that just because they don’t offer like selection of foods...like different ethnic foods... but it really...it really bothers me the fact that I feel forced to eat that food just because I have no choice.

Ten of the twelve students also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “the availability of ethnic foods in the cafeterias at MSU would increase my overall satisfaction with the school.” Students wanted to make sure it was understood that they were not unhappy just that their satisfaction would increase upon the provision of culturally acceptable foods. One student clarified this and said, “Yeah it’s like um...it added up for it. It’s not that I’m satisfied...not satisfied with the school but it would add it up more in my satisfaction like you feel like...you still have something from behind you know.”

Food Taste

Food taste was an issue frequently discussed by the participants. The most often cited complaints were that the foods are bland, that they are too greasy and that there are too many pesticides used to grow produce in the U.S. The lack of spices used in food preparation was a complaint by the Asian and Indian students. One student felt the foods that he considered American foods (pizza, hamburger, etc.) are tasteless. He said, “Pizzas...burger...the pasta preparation. I find them very bland...bland taste.”
Two of the Asian students said that their favorite food on campus is the Columbia wrap because it’s spicy. One student said, “Columbia wrap...because the Columbia wrap they have uh...it has spicy taste. I like the spicy taste that’s why.”

The students from India clarified that they don’t always necessarily have to have spicy foods but they enjoy foods cooked with traditional spices including turmeric and curries. One male student said,

The thing is good Indian food will not be that strong with regards to spices. We use a lot of spices but if it’s cooked well it will be a nice subtle blend which is not too hot, not too spicy. The perception here is that it’s very spicy.

Greasy/highly processed foods were another complaint made by the students. One student felt that the availability of fried/greasy foods was a contributor to obesity in America. She described how in Colombia people rely on fresh foods prepared healthfully. She said,

I usually ate really healthy...like salads, um...vegetables...not a lot of...and beef everything here is either greasy or fried. So that’s why I don’t like American food too much. That’s why we have obesity. It’s a big issue in this country.

Every student in the study stressed the importance of fresh foods in their culture. Canned or processed foods are rarely used in their home countries. One student said,

Oh yeah cause um...it’s so, it’s so much variety that all the foods are like, what’s the word that I’m looking for...home cooked. That home
cooked feeling you know like here when you eat the chicken fingers
or the burger, or whatever, it’s too processed.

One female student was worried about the use of pesticides to grow produce in
the U.S. She described how much better the produce in her country tasted because it was
grown organically. She said,
Yeah because I don’t know I…the foods in my county it’s more
natural like it doesn’t…they don’t use that much chemicals to
um…grow the vegetables. I’m a vegetarian so um…and then, I don’t
know it just tastes so much better for me than American food. It takes
more time to make it…but it tastes better and you know if I eat it I
feel better and it’s JUST GOOD.

Food Quality

The major issue with food quality articulated by the students was that foods did
not look appetizing and that they were not cooked appropriately. Students said that if the
foods didn’t look good they weren’t going to eat them. One student said,
I mean, if pizzas are hard….if you’re making a cheese steak and it’s
too oily, throw it out and make a new one that looks
nice…appearance is everything really, that looks nice, that looks
appealing. If it doesn’t look appealing I won’t eat it.

He went on to say that he felt that the food service provider could do a good job because
he had seen and tasted food prepared for special occasions such as faculty dinners but
that when it came to the students the same amount of effort was not put in. He said,
have them take a sample of the catering menu, the menu that they prepare for... a big banquet. That food, that food if offered to regular students, they would go crazy cause its really nice food. Really nice food. When Sodexho cooks the food it’s excellent. But when students eat it it’s crap.

Improper cooking was another concern of students. They felt that often times the food was either under or over cooked. One student described a meal of barbequed chicken he had at the cafeteria and said,

Sometimes it comes burnt...like we had barbequed chicken the other day in Blanton, and although on the outside the chicken looked crisp and um, there was a lot of BBQ sauce on it so I kind of took the skin off but then the middle was a little bit red still.

Another student described a particularly poor experience with the pizza he purchased at the “Rat” one day. The Rat is a popular food service that it is located in the student center on the university campus. The Rat provides grilled and fried items as well as pizza in a cash and carry type of atmosphere. The student said,

The worst, is the Rat is...the pizza is hideous. I mean it’s so bad. I’m sorry...the worst thing about the pizza slices in the rat is that when they give it to you and you bite into it it’s like biting into a piece of wood. It’s SO HARD! They really don’t do a lot for pizza. And um, some of the ingredients are terrible. Certain pizzas are awesome
especially when they first come out of the, when they first come out
they’re soft and nice. What happens is they stay awhile and they’re
hard and they’re like, I mean seriously, I hurt the roof of my mouth
sometimes.

Increase Cultural Awareness of American Students

Three of the twelve international students felt that the provision of ethnic foods
would help American students learn about different cultures and help them to become
more culturally sensitive. In some cases the international students were disheartened at
the lack of interest in learning about different cultures displayed by the American student
population. One student said,

I mean I find it AMAZING and beautiful and wonderful the...um,
worlds fair day and ISO, International Student Organization does a lot
of things like that but you CAN BE introduced to other cultures but
what I find very painful is every time it’s the same people and all of
them are international students who already DO know about other
cultures because in our countries we do learn about everyone else
because...you know...so they all need to know that I mean people
who do know it need to know about THOSE, you know I mean...they
not there...and they don’t care. They just go to parties and have the
American beer and that’s all...
Another student agreed and felt that the provision of ethnic foods would enable American students to try new foods, experience something different and expand their worldview. She said,

...let’s say we have a...we have a lot of like um...like uh Caucasian students let’s say they not had a chance to eat like Spanish food or Thai food...but if they live on campus and have that food available at school that would be like an easy way to try different food. You know ‘cause you usually eat different uh...foods from different countries whenever you have a FRIEND from that country and he’ll take you...oh okay let’s go and eat MY food. If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend from different ethnic group...but if you don’t you’ll always be eating...you’ll always be stuck with your own food and like you’ll be...like you don’t know about the outside world too much so it’s...if school offers different foods you’ll be able to kind of see different things.

Table 5: Areas for Improvement Within Food Service
Themes:
- Provide ethnic foods
- Increase staff training
- Decrease price
- Expand hours of operation of cafeterias
Provide ethnic foods

Students were asked during the one-on-one interview what suggestions they would make to improve the campus food service. An overwhelming majority (ten out of twelve) of the students interviewed felt that the university should offer ethnic foods. Students felt that the food service could have a different themed ethnic food night one night per week. One student suggested,

One of the cafeterias I would ask people to cook ethnic food at least one day a week. Just in one cafeteria so that people would you know, go and try the food and make people aware that you know, some kind of ethnic food is being served Thursday or Wednesday or you know, in this cafeteria.

Another student agreed and felt that it would be considerate of the university to offer foods from a variety of cultures because of the large number of international students attending the university. He said,

I think they have a small responsibility. They don’t have to, you know, go OVERBOARD and have…but it’ll be nice because we have a huge international community. So it would be nice to cater to them. I feel that the international students get a raw deal with regards to food…
Increase Training for Food Service Staff

Students would also like to see increased training for food service personnel. Training should include both customer service and food preparation training. Students felt that often times they were treated rudely by the staff and that the staff was not sensitive to their dietary needs or practices. One student complained in detail about the poor service at one of the food service sites. She said,

The service...like the people that serve the food they're always so SERIOUS and they're not like friendly and they're always like in a bad mood. I don't know what's wrong with them. There's only like a few of them that are really nice. You don't have NO idea...they serve you and they give you a plate like that (motioning that they throw the plates). It's so uncomfortable I mean I don't like it.

For the students with dietary restrictions because of religion, the lack of knowledge by the food service staff is particularly worrisome. One student felt that his food choices were significantly limited because he could not risk accidentally eating forbidden foods. He said,

Most of the time I eat...uhhh...what is that? Donut...cause I...there is nothing else to eat...I mean what I supposed to do? I don't know what kind of meat it is...because I'm Muslim and I'm not supposed to eat pork meat...I ask the person, the people there if they work there and they didn't know if it's pork meat or not so they serve the food that they don't know what kind of meat they serve. And uhhh...I
don’t want to risk that. They don’t know what it is. Sometimes they say beef but you can tell that they’re not sure...if it’s beef or not.

Decrease Price

Eight of the twelve students cited cost as a factor that affects their food choices on campus when they completed the survey questionnaire. During the semi-structured interview the expensive price of the foods was a concern indicated by five of the participants. One student in particular felt that she was paying a lot of money for her meal plan and felt that the foods offered to her should reflect that. She said,

That’s one thing I hate about Blanton. They don’t…they only serve you like this much (gesturing small portion with hands). Like the…and then you have to go back like five times to get a descent amount. They give you like…like so little. I mean it’s like I don’t know… And we’re PAYING for that. Like I pay for my meal plan like thirteen hundred a semester.

Students who did not have a meal plan but purchased food with cash on campus also thought the prices were too high for the quality of the foods they were getting. One student was confused about why the prices for the salads are so high. She said,

OH! I want to say another thing. I’m wondering that why the salad price almost is the same, equals cheeseburger. It’s my question. Because in my county if you want to eat vegetable or fruit it costs very low than burger. So that’s why I said the salad costs too expensive. Because when I go to the Costco I can get like the whole
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bag like only three dollars but when I go to cafeteria I can like tiny box and it cost like four dollars or more.

Another student agreed that the salad was too expensive and felt that if the price was reduced she may be inclined to purchase salads from the food service. She said, "They’re VERY expensive. That’s a huge thing ‘cause I think if they weren’t AS expensive I might eat sometimes salad ‘cause salad is salad wherever you go."

She went on to compare the prices on campus to prices in restaurants. She said, 

Okay, I think the first thing is it’s just not fair...I know it has nothing to do with the international thing. It’s not fair, the prices aren’t fair AT ALL. I think they’re not allowed to do that. No seriously…it’s just like really a lot. ‘Cause it’s not good. Okay it’s not good then why is it SO expensive? It’s like the restaurant price.

Expand Hours of Operation of Cafeterias

Different food service sites on campus provide different types of foods and different dining experiences. Some sites provide cafeteria style “all you can eat” buffets while some sites are canteen style and sell grilled and fried items. Students felt that the hours of the “buffet style” cafeterias which provided a wider variety of foods were not convenient. One student said, 

...like their cafeteria...the school canteen like Blanton Hall and all that you have that, I went couple of times, you feel, I saw that at least LITTLE bit more. They had pasta and they have other stuff um...but like the time they open it’s like so limited for two hours and most of
the time it opens around like ten o’clock (am) and close at twelve (noon) so most of the people have class at that time so they really can’t go there. So you’re forced to eat in that...like diner or there’s that like café which don’t have much.

Another student agreed and said,

You eat and then you...and the hours are not convenient at all. Cause you have dinner, the latest you can have your dinner is at seven. So if you eat at seven...By ten you’ll be hungry again and...they have the late night but then that’s even worse food.

**DISCUSSION**

In this study twelve international students attending Montclair State University provided information about the role of food in their respective cultures as well as their satisfaction with the food service on the campus of Montclair State University. Each student provided information via a survey questionnaire and through a one-on-one semi-structured interview.

Students felt that the provision of ethnic foods on the campus of MSU would ease their transition to their new environment. Of the seven students who felt that MSU should provide ethnic foods, four students said they had difficulty adjusting to the foods served and campus and strongly agreed that the provision of ethnic foods would help to ease their transition. They felt that by offering culturally acceptable foods the university would be showing respect for diversity, help them to feel welcome, feel at home and help them feel more comfortable in their new surroundings.
Students said that food was very important in their culture and that variety of foods is a central component. Students went on to describe how when meals were served or families gathered for celebrations there were many different dishes prepared. They also highlighted how they would like to see a wider variety of foods available in the campus cafeterias. Students described feeling more relaxed and having an enjoyable experience when they consumed traditional foods. Of the twelve students who said they were happy when they consumed foods of their home country, nine said that foods provided them with a sense of ethnic identity.

Sharing meals with family and friends is important to international students. When students were asked to share a happy memory about food it always centered around sharing food with family and friends. Students felt that when they consumed ethnic foods they were more inclined to exhibit other cultural behaviors which strengthens their sense of ethnic identity. Some students felt that the lack of ethnic foods, although it did not impact their strong sense of ethnic identity, did make them feel that they were being forced to “Americanize” their diets which many did not find fair. As one student said, “...international students get a raw deal.”

Religious restrictions on diet makes eating on campus particularly difficult for Muslim and Hindu students. Of the four students who cited religion as a factor affecting food choice, all four felt that the school has an obligation to provide foods that meet the dietary obligations of their religion. They also felt that the food service personnel should be aware of the ingredients used in different dishes so as to ensure that the foods met these obligations.
It is apparent that the lack of ethnic foods is a concern of international students. Over the next five years the university is planning to increase student enrollment. Many of these students will be international students. It is imperative that the university meets the dietary requirements and expectations of these international students if it wants to retain these students and recruit future international students. The provision of culturally acceptable foods is one way to increase international student satisfaction, make students feel welcome and respected and ease their adjustment during a potentially difficult time in their lives.

The availability of culturally acceptable foods has the ability to promote and/or maintain the health of this population and help to decrease the risks of future chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Ethnic foods may also help to decrease stress which can benefit the students in their academic endeavors. However, a discussion of this study would not be complete without identifying possible sources of bias and threats to validity as well as authenticity and reliability issues.

BIAS, THREATS TO VALIDITY, AUTHENTICITY AND RELIABILITY

Bias

As defined by Maxwell (1996), bias is “what you bring to the research from your own background and identity...something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it” (p. 27). There are three types of bias to be aware of in this research study. The first is researcher bias or expectancy effect.

The researcher is a graduate student in the Nutrition and Food Science program at MSU and has strong beliefs about the importance of a healthy diet and the availability of
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culturally acceptable foods. After reviewing the monthly menus offered in the campus
dining halls it was apparent that there is a lack of ethnic foods, vegetarian foods and low
fat foods offered. The researcher would like the results of this study to determine that the
current food service is not meeting the needs and expectations of international students in
hopes that improvements will be made.

The second type of bias is selection bias by either the researcher or the study
participants. The study used a small convenience sample of twelve students. By using a
sample of international students the results of this study may show that the campus food
service is not meeting the needs of this population. On the other hand, students who self-
select for this study may be unhappy with the current food service and view the study as a
means to voice their opinions and bring change to the food service.

The third type of bias is response bias or intentional deception by the study
participants. Participants may be afraid to answer honestly for fear of retaliation by the
university. They may also believe that the researcher is looking for a certain outcome
and may answer questions to ensure that these outcomes are realized. Each of these types
of bias has the potential to significantly affect the results and the validity of this study.

Threats to Validity

Validity, as defined by Maxwell (1996) is the “correctness or credibility of a
description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 87). It is
important in a qualitative study to identify possible threats and find ways to minimize
them. In this research study there are three major threats to validity: reactivity,
description and interpretation.
Reactivity is defined by Maxwell (1996) as “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (p. 91). This is particularly important in interviews as what the “informant says is always a function of the interviewer and the interview situation” (Maxwell, 1996, p.91). One way to reduce reactivity is to refrain from asking leading questions.

Description refers to how well the researcher describes what he/she saw and/or heard from the study participants. If the researcher does not accurately describe what was seen or heard the study will lack description validity. As Maxwell (1996) points out, “If your description of what you were observing, or of the interview you conducted, is invalid, then any interpretations or conclusions you draw from these descriptions are questionable” (p. 89). One way to enhance description validity is to audiotape each interview.

The third threat to validity in this study is interpretation. This refers to “imposing one’s own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied and the meanings they attach to their words and actions” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 90). One way to reduce interpretation errors is to ask open-ended questions and paraphrase back what the participant has said. This will enable the participant to let the researcher know if their words were correctly understood and interpreted.

**Authenticity**

Authenticity refers to the data being real. In order to be authentic the data must capture the participants’ true or real feelings and opinions. Just like with interpretation validity, asking open-ended questions and clarifying as needed is one way to maximize
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authenticity. After the interviews were transcribed and coded the researcher recalled three of the study participants to have them review their transcripts for coding accuracy. This helped to ensure authenticity in this research study.

Reliability

As defined by Schutt (2001), reliability occurs when “a measurement procedure yields consistent scores when the phenomenon being measured is not changing...It is a prerequisite for measurement validity” (p. 95). In this research study there are two types of reliability to be concerned with. These are inter-item reliability or internal consistency and inter-observer reliability or inter-rater reliability.

Inter-item reliability refers to using multiple methods to measure the same concept (Schutt, 2001). In this research study participants were asked questions in both survey and interview form that related to the same concept. The responses provided by the study participants during the semi-structured interviews matched the responses provided in the survey questionnaire.

Inter-observer reliability refers to using two independent researchers to code the data for themes. If the two researchers code the data similarly then the goal of inter-observer reliability is realized. In this research study the researcher had an assistant independently code three of the twelve interview transcripts. The codes from the assistant were then compared to the researchers codes for consistency.

LIMITATIONS

The major limitations of this study have to do with the small number of the sample size and the type of sampling method used. For this research study the small
sample size and use of a convenience sample are appropriate because this topic is a new topic in the literature. According to Schutt (2001), “a focus on one setting or a very small sample allows a more intensive portrait of activities and actors” (p. 130). However, the limitation is that because of the non-random sampling method used, the results cannot be generalized the international student population and the use of small sample

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study does have limitations it did meet its goal of exploring international students’ perceptions of the food service at Montclair State University. A model (see figure 1) was developed to highlight the various influences on international student satisfaction with university food service. This model provides the basic foundation for the development of future quantitative studies. The model highlights how the students ethnic identity can either increase or decrease their satisfaction with the food service but that their satisfaction is also modulated by the students’ desired degree of acculturation. For example, students with a strong sense of ethnic identity and a desire to remain culturally distinct may not be satisfied with the food service whereas a student who wishes to assimilate may be satisfied with the current food service. Factors such as religion, food variety and cost also affect satisfaction.

Future studies will expand the knowledge on this emerging topic and enable university food service providers to plan and implement culturally acceptable menus that will satisfy students from various ethnic backgrounds. This information will also help nutrition educators develop comprehensive nutrition education programs aimed at promoting the health of the international university student population. Retaining a
traditional diet is one way to lower obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer risk in translocated populations including international students.

Figure 1: Ethnic identity (independent variable) affects satisfaction with food service (dependent variable) but this relationship is modulated by the desired degree of acculturation (moderator). Various other factors also contribute to international student satisfaction.
References


26.


