

I Am Because We Are: Identifying the Factors Influencing the Academic Experiences  
of African Leadership Academy Graduates Enrolled as Undergraduate Students at Duke  
University

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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April 2018

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## Acknowledgements

I am so thankful to have the privilege of acknowledging all the individuals who have been supportive of this academic journey. I am particularly grateful to my advisors, Dr. Deanne Magnusson and Dr. Gerald Fry for their guidance and unwavering support throughout the project. They were my hardest critics and biggest cheerleaders at crucial junctions and for that I am grateful. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Michael Paige and Dr. Chris Johnstone for their insight and support. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Chris Johnstone for connecting me with the ALA staffulty (a reference used for staff and faculty by the ALA family). I am much indebted to the ALA staffulty for their hospitality during my visit. I acknowledge their commitment to the future of Africa as they mentor African youth. I am so grateful to all the ALA graduates who opened up and shared their stories with me and the world. You are all an inspiration – you make me so proud as a fellow African. I would like to thank my 2014 LIIE cohort family for their comradeship and encouragement along the way. I am indebted to my Duke University colleagues who have been an encouragement from the onset, Dr. Zoila Airall for cheering me on from the first day I shared my intention to go back to school with her in 2009 and letting me keep her dissertation in my possession until I finished mine. Dr. Stephanie Helms-Pickett for being a friend and a sister. Chandra Guinn for inspiring me and drawing my attention to the stories of ALA students at Duke University. Dr. David Pittman for being a cheerleader. I would like to thank all my I-House colleagues (old and new) for their support including Dr. Li-Chen Chin. I thank Dr. Eulena Johnsson for tutoring me in statistics during one of my toughest semesters ever. Writing this, I realize that there were so many people rooting for me at Duke. While I cannot possibly name every single person, I want to thank everyone that watched my children, offered to read, and asked how the writing was going from time to time. I am grateful to Dr. Toyin Tofade for her genuine care and encouragement. I would like to thank my darling friend Adwoa for asking all the right questions, praying with me, and reassuring me again and again that all would end well. In the spirit of my research, I say a BIG thank you to my mom and late dad for being champions of access to quality education for anyone that crossed their path. I am so thankful for my siblings (Bro Tope, Ph.D., Sis Yinka, and Sis Oyin) for their encouragement throughout the journey. I am especially grateful to my mom for all the invaluable support she gave me spiritually, mentally, and morally during the journey. I thank my wonderful and lovely boys for being a part of the journey and understanding more about what a dissertation entails than an average kid their age. Peter, Paul, and Praise – we did it! You were exceptionally understanding and impressively accepting of the journey and I am most blessed for it. Thank you, boys, for supporting me individually in your own unique ways and for the collective love you give that forges me on. You are my best inspiration! Last but not the least, I would like to thank my life partner and closest friend for giving me all the room I need to be me. I am because we are, may our path shine brighter and brighter.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. To my mother, Beatrice Abimbola Adeyemi-Bello and my late father, Nathaniel Adeyemi Bello. Having dedicated most of their lives to developing African youth, I write this for them and the generations to come as a testament to the potentials and possibilities of our Africa.

## **Abstract**

At the onset of Africa becoming the most populous continent in the world, there remains a wide gap in literature about the academic experiences of youth representing the vast diversity of the African continent. In an attempt to bridge some of the gap, the focus of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy (ALA) graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. Particularly, the influence of an ALA education on the academic experiences of the study participants in defining and achieving their academic success. Using a qualitative design, it was decided to use Astin's Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model to guide the influence of an ALA education on the academic experiences of the study participants at Duke University. The findings show that due to personal motivation and the academic rigor of an ALA education, the study participants adapted relatively well to the academic expectations at Duke University. On the other hand, the study participants' adaptation to the social environment was more difficult due to less preparedness on U.S racial context and individualistic cultural norms as encountered at Duke University. The findings show that the value based and afro-minded education at ALA played a significant part in giving the participants a clear focus for academic success as crucial to impactful personal and societal change.

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## **Chapter One: Study Rationale**

### **Introduction**

The latest UN World Population Prospects study (2017) projects more than half of the increase in world population will come from the continent of Africa. According to the study, of the 2.4 billion people increase, 1.3 billion will be African. By 2050, the current most populous country in Africa, Nigeria will move to third place from its current seventh place on the most populous countries in the world and Ethiopia and Congo joining the list in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> positions respectively. The study further projects that by 2100, eight countries will account for over half of the world's projected population increase with six of the eight countries being African. The eight countries listed according to the size of their contribution to global population growth are Nigeria, India, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Uganda, Ethiopia and the United States of America. From 2017 to 2050, it is expected that half of the world's population growth will be concentrated in just nine countries: India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Uganda and Indonesia - ordered by their expected contribution to total growth (UN Population Prospects, 2017).

This is a significant demographic shift since only Nigeria is currently one of the top ten most populous nations in the world. These population projections signal more youth, possibly larger African economies leading to possible economic growth and impacting student mobility. A recent Open Doors meta-analysis of student mobility

reflects the increase of international students on U.S campuses with the growth of world population (Open Doors, 2015). The mobility of students worldwide is perhaps the most visible form of cross-border higher education, and one that has been monitored over the years. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), in 1980 the population of internationally mobile students was about 1.1 million. The number increased slightly to 1.3 million in 1990 but by 2009 had tripled to 3.4 million. The Open Doors study (2015) finds that the number of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities has grown significantly over time. This population grew from 26,000 in the 1949-50 academic year, roughly doubling each decade to reach 286,000 in the 1979-80 academic year, then increasing by 33 percent each decade between 1979-80 and 2009-10 to reach 691,000. Between academic year 2009-10 and 2014-15, the number of students further grew by 41 percent to a record high of 975,000. Similarly, international students' share of total enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities increased from one percent in 1949/1950 to five percent in 2014-2015 (Open Doors, 2015). In 2016/17, for the second consecutive year, U.S. colleges and universities hosted more than one million international students, reaching a record high of 1.08 million. This also marks the eleventh consecutive year of continued expansion of the total number of international students in U.S. higher education (Open Doors, 2017). On a country-to-country basis, there is some relationship between country population and their representation on U.S colleges.

According to the most current data from UN World Population Prospects, the top ten countries in the world by size are China, India, United States, Indonesia, Brazil,

Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Russia, and Mexico. All of the countries with the exception of Pakistan are on the 25 countries of origin for international students studying in the U.S (Open Doors, 2017). The international student report from the Institute of International Education (2017) reflects international students coming to the U.S from these countries by size: China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Brazil, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, and Mexico. China and India currently leads world population size as well as international student enrollment on U.S colleges and universities. A study conducted by ICEF Monitor in 2013 places the United Kingdom and the United States in the third place as a study abroad destination for African students, commanding a 9.7% share each. The African countries with the largest proportions of students are; Morocco: 42,800 international students (11.3%), Nigeria: 38,851 (10.2%), Algeria: 22,465 (5.9%), Zimbabwe: 19,658 (5.2%) Cameroon: 19, 506 (5.3%), Tunisia: 19,506 (5.1%) (ICEF Monitor, 2013). African students presence will likely grow given the relationship between student mobility, country population, and economic growth as seen today with China and India on U.S college campuses (Open Doors 2015). A 2015 study by the Institute for International Education finds that the U.S is still a top destination of study among international students. As recently as 2010, Africa had the highest outbound student mobility ratio of any region in the world (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2011), Nigeria in 2010-11 sent the most students to American colleges and universities. In 2010-11, 7,148 Nigerians were studying in the United States. In 2010-11 Kenya ranked second, sending 4,666 students to the United States. Ghana ranked

third with 2,900 students at U.S. colleges and universities. Zimbabwe, South Africa, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Ethiopia each had more than 1,000 students studying in this nation. Zambia, Ivory Coast, Uganda, Angola, Burkina Faso, and Senegal all sent at least 500 students to study at U.S. colleges and universities. The nature of global mobility also establishes that even though quality of life might increase in these African countries yielding to perhaps quality education, students are still bound to come or maybe even come in larger numbers due to population rise and potential economic growth. Using Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa as an example, there has been an exponential growth in the number of Nigerians coming to the U.S to study. According to IIE fact sheet on Nigeria, in the 2014/2015 academic year, 9,494 students from Nigeria were studying in the United States, up 19.9% from the previous academic year. In the 2015/2016 academic year, the number of Nigerian students climbed to 10,674 (IIE, 2016). According to IIE, Nigeria is the fourteenth leading place of origin for international students coming to the United States to study (2016). The majority of Nigerian students in the U.S. study at the undergraduate level. An estimate calculated by IIE based on information from Open Doors and the U.S. Department of Commerce in the 2013/2015 academic year sums up Nigerian students in U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$301 million to the U.S. economy. Nigerian students in the U.S. have been on a general upward trend since the 1990s despite some small decreases. With an increase of 5% to 6,222 students in 2007/08, Nigeria replaced Kenya as the only African country in the top 20 places of origin for international students and remains in that position for 2014/2015, with more than 9,000 students in the United

States. If national population is an indicator of student mobility as described above, this comes as no surprise since Nigeria has moved up from the 9<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world to 7<sup>th</sup> place. An added factor is the economic power that Nigeria holds as one of the largest economies in Africa (Quartz Africa, 2016). As the tendency rises for student mobility due to growing populations and economies, it is therefore important that U.S colleges gain insight about how to support emerging populations from these nations.

As global demographic shifts take place between now and 2050, U.S universities need to begin working on implementation plans to support new populations. A starting point could be to understand the needs of these students that are currently underrepresented populations on U.S. college campuses including students from African countries. It is important to understand what current diverse international students' experiences can teach us in higher education about facilitating conducive learning environments for these emerging student populations. There is reasonable amount of literature on the experiences of international students; Andrade (2006) identifies factors that influence the adjustment and academic achievement of international students as primarily attributable to English language proficiency, culture, academic skills, and educational background. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) highlights problems international students could face at large public universities such as adapting to a new culture, English language problems, financial problems and lack of understanding from the broader University community. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found that students are more in need during their initial transition after arrival to the

U.S. and that they experience a number of barriers related to academic life, health insurance, living on or off campus, social interactions, transportation, and discrimination in their attempts to adjust. Unfortunately, most of the literature generalizes the experiences of international students with little to no differentiation of national origin or U.S contextual issues such as race and its implications on the experiences of international students.

In an attempt to contribute to literature about the experiences of emerging international student populations, this study focuses on the academic experiences of a group of African international students enrolled at Duke University. In particular, Duke University international students that graduated from the prestigious African Leadership Academy in Johannesburg, South Africa. For the purpose of this study, academic success is conceptualized by the seminal work of Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, (2006) as a multidimensional construct of academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance. The term satisfaction speaks to the personal characteristics and strategies that students use to facilitate their success in an academic setting (Kuh et al., 2006). According to Kuh et al. (2006), satisfaction represents the students' sense of belonging and loyalty to the institution. Bean and Bradley (1986) assert that student satisfaction seems to have stronger effect on grades than grades do on student satisfaction. That is, academic success is more likely when students' "fit" into the academic environment or feel a sense of "utility" of their education beyond college.



Hence Bean and Bradley (1986) encouraged further investigation of factors that influence satisfaction among students outside the dominant U.S culture.

This study also addresses the instructional factors that facilitate academic success. Crose (2011) asserts that through the use of varying teaching methods, which he describes, faculty members can assist international students in becoming acclimated to their new cultural environment while also assisting host students in adapting to new cultures being introduced in the classroom. De Vita (2000), Eaves (2009) and Kuh (2009) illustrate learning scenarios and recommendations for engagement and instruction that facilitate academic success. Abel (2002) highlights the common themes of language, learning strategies, classroom dynamics, social network/support, and educational assistance as key components of academic success for internationals. In addition to these, Abel adds the choice of instructors and time structure/management as key strategies for advancing academic success. Most of these studies on the academic success of international students generalize the academic success of international students as if they were a single population without cognizance of social and cultural factors that might differentiate the process of adaptation for different international undergraduate students.

Studies that focus on specific populations tend to examine Asian populations, particularly Chinese international students. Even though it is understandable that these studies focus on Asians given their majority in number among international students, it still leaves a void in literature regarding the experiences of other international populations and their academic experiences. It is vital to understand the academic

experiences of the diverse international student populations on today's U.S. colleges in order to facilitate inclusive curricular and extracurricular opportunities that encourage overall academic success. Ogbu (1992) argues that the US educational system's exclusivity of the role of cultural frames in curriculum design hurts academic achievement among certain minority groups. There is not much literature on how Ogbu's assertion holds for highly selective academic settings like Duke University with diverse international student populations. Notwithstanding, it is still important to examine the influence of curricular design and framework at Duke University in relation to students who are not European Americans or a U.S. focused academic training.

The sparse research regarding the academic success of African international students in the U.S. carries implications for the institutions that will be enrolling these populations in terms of institutional and instructional readiness. This chapter has established the increase that is imminent among international students, particularly from the African continent on U.S. college and university campuses. The following section outlines the problem in more detail and contextually frames the study.

### **Statement of the Problem: Rationale for Conducting the Study**

According to Open Doors (2015), the largest increase in the international student population is from China and India, the current largest populations in the world. Thus, there is a general tendency for the undergraduate international student population in the U.S. to increase depending on the rise of population, economic growth, and academic

opportunities within those countries. Nigeria, the most populous and one of the largest economies in Africa is another example. According to a study by the Institute of International Education, Nigerian students in the U.S. have been on a general upward trend since the 1990s despite some small decreases. With an increase of 5% to 6,222 students in 2007/08, Nigeria replaced Kenya as the only African country in the top 20 places of origin, and remains in that position for 2016/17, reaching a new high of more than 11,700 students in the United States (up 9.7% from the previous year). Nigeria is the 12th leading place of origin for students coming to the United States. (Open Doors, 2017). As global population growth takes place between now and 2050, with Africa leading the growth, U.S universities and colleges need to become more attentive and proactive on quality practices and implementation plans to support new populations. According to a study by the Brooking Institute (2014):

“The United States is the preeminent global hub for academic training. In the 2012-2013 academic year the United States hosted 819,644 international students, 21 percent of all students studying abroad worldwide. America’s renowned educational institutions, global networks of students and professionals and high-level research and innovation activities combine to attract hundreds of thousands of students each year”.

The U.S remains a top destination country for international study. UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics predicts that the U.S will remain a strong magnet for students from Sub-Saharan Africa seeking a high-quality education, despite the expansion of higher education in most African countries and competition from other popular destinations for

globally mobile students. Kigotho (2015) found that as of 2014, there were 31,113 students from Sub-Saharan Africa and they comprised 4% of the 886,052 international students in the U.S. According to Kigotho, the top Sub-Saharan African countries of origin are Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Cameroon and Ethiopia (Sub-Saharan is used only to keep the with the language of the author, I do not prescribe to the use of the term<sup>1</sup>).

Given the tendency of global youth to come to the United States to study, it is imperative that U.S universities and colleges are informed and prepared to effectively facilitate conducive learning environments for non-U.S students. Previous research has demonstrated that ethnic minority students in a dominant-cultured campus would experience stress on a variety of levels including social climate stresses, interracial stresses, racial discrimination within group stresses and even more unfortunately achievement stress (Smedley, Myers, Harrell, 1993). A starting point could be to understand the needs of these students that are currently low-density populations or students with non-conforming culture on U.S college campus. In the case of this study, the experiences of current African international students can contribute to scholarship on factors that facilitate conducive learning environments and useful academic for such emerging student populations. Andrade (2010) argues that the growth in varying cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and academic preparation on U.S university campuses, poses a critical stance to support student learning as well as a great

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars attribute the use of the term to a racial divide of Africa rather than a geographical one. According to Mashanda, “the term sub-Saharan Africa divides Africa according to white ideas of race, making North Africans white enough to be considered for their glories, but not really white enough,” (2016). Mashanda, a politics and international affairs scholar at Wake Forest University, further argues that it is a way of saying ‘Black Africa’ and talking about black Africans without sounding overtly racist.”

opportunity to expand pedagogical approaches. That is, institutions must be accountable for serving those they admit and for adjusting methods of instruction and support systems to address learners' needs.

Kim (2014) investigative study of the experiences of a specific black immigrant population (mostly west and east African international students) emphasizes the unfortunate tendencies in higher education to minimize the experiences of non-dominant groups in a singular category. Kim provides critical analysis of why narrowly categorizing the experiences of black students is misleading because it limits understanding of the different experiences of various student communities.

There is very little known about the experiences of African international students, hence, there is a tendency to narrowly categorize their experiences. Manyibe, Manyibe, and Otiso (2013) argue that the growth of African students on U.S colleges necessitates the understanding of their leadership development especially the exposure and experiences that inform their leadership traits prior to college. In the same vein, studying the experiences of African international students will also inform staff, administrators, and faculty about supporting these populations appropriately.

There are several issues that have been identified by scholars as particular to international students such as: social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need (Johnson & Kumar, 2010; Tang, 1993; Volet & Kee, 1993; Ward, 2001). Telbis, Helgeson, and Kingsbury (2014) provide a unique perspective of understanding how self-efficacy affects academic success of international students. However, their study made no reference to countries of origin of students. The authors'

omission is a persistent occurrence of categorizing all international students as lacking language proficiency, which is problematic and biased for scholarship and practice. Wu, Garza, & Guzman (2015) generalize in their study of international student's challenge and adjustment to college that most international students are Asians, while this notion may be true, their study leaves an impression that other international student populations are not as important. Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & (2014), also address adjustment of international students from a generalized perspective. Smith and Khawaja (2011) conducted a substantive analysis of the adaptation process for international students. However, the authors overgeneralize somewhat by categorizing all international students from Asia and Africa into the same vein of language proficiency and academic success. The overgeneralizing of international student experiences from vast regions like Asia and Africa is problematic because it does not capture the diversity within these regions as important variables in studies. For example, in the study referenced above, English proficiency will be different between French speaking vs. English speaking in a region as small as West Africa, hence it is important to identify how students might adapt differently or similarly in terms of language.

Given the multiplicity of ethnicities, languages, races, religions and values present on the vast continent of Africa, there is an existing gap in literature to understand how these differences influence the academic experiences and success of African international students on U.S. college campuses. Several years of research to understand student success show that what students' involvement, sense of belonging, and satisfaction while in college is directly linked to their success namely their retention

and graduation (Kuh et al., 2006). Apart from the time students put into their studies, the way institutions allocate resources to encourage student participation and relevance of programing/services outside the classroom is important to student success (Kuh et al., 2006). Therefore, it is important that U.S institutions can allocate appropriate resources and support to the different populations of students on their campuses.

While U.S institutions must do their part to investigate, create, and maintain environments that are inclusive, there remains the responsibility of individual students towards their higher education readiness. Research has shown the positive impact of pre-college preparation to academic success. That is, it matters to academic success how students prepare before setting foot on institutions of higher education. Several studies have demonstrated the contribution of substantive pre-college preparedness to academic success of college students (Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Dobson & Beaty, 1999; Karcher, 2008). While these studies persist, gaps exist in literature on how substantive pre-college training contributes to certain populations, particularly African international students. In the case of Africa, awareness is burgeoning about preparing youth as change agents for the future of the continent. Examples of entities dedicated to the preparation of African youth are the MasterCard Foundation and African Leadership Academy. The MasterCard Foundation describes its focus as helping economically disadvantaged young people in Africa find opportunities to move themselves, their families and their communities out of poverty to a better life (MasterCard Foundation website). Also, African Leadership Academy seeks to transform Africa by developing a powerful network of over 6,000 leaders who will work together to address Africa's

greatest challenges, achieve extraordinary social impact and accelerate the continent's growth trajectory (ALA website).

Preparing the youth of Africa for the future from a pan-African position is the purpose of the African Leadership Academy, a two-year, advanced level, college preparatory school in Johannesburg, South Africa. African Leadership Academy (ALA) uses a curriculum that develops young African students to see themselves as change agents and leaders for Africa and the rest of the world. According to its 2014 annual report, ALA seeks to transform Africa by identifying, developing, and connecting its future leaders (p. 6). ALA accomplishes its mission by combing the continent for youth who have initiative and provides an an intensive program of intellectual growth and hands on leadership development. ALA provides guidance for these youth through a supportive network throughout their studies towards a transformative impact on Africa.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University.

### **Research Questions**



Pursuant to this statement of study purpose, the following research questions frame the proposed study:

1. In what ways do graduates of the African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University define their academic success?
2. What components of the ALA education do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential to their academic success at Duke University?
3. What sociocultural factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
4. What institutional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most supportive of their academic success at Duke University?
5. What instructional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
6. What personal factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as supporting their academic success at Duke University?

## **Context of the Study**

### ***The African Leadership Academy***

The African international students at Duke University in this study are products of the prestigious African Leadership Academy in Johannesburg, South Africa. The African Leadership Academy (ALA) is a residential program, dedicated to 16 to 19 year olds

from all over Africa, with alumni from anywhere between 43 to 45 African countries (according to the school website). Fred Swaniker, Chris Bradford, Peter Mombaur, and Acha Leke founded the school in 2004. ALA officially opened in September 2008 with an inaugural class of 97 students. African Leadership Academy (ALA) seeks to transform Africa by identifying, developing, and connecting thousands of leaders for the continent over the next few decades. To achieve this goal, ALA teaches a two-year curriculum in African studies and entrepreneurial leadership as well as the usual academic core subjects. During a visit to the school, the current Dean of the academy spoke about the recent addition of Rhetoric and Writing to the original curriculum. According to one the founding principles of ALA as identified in the school handbook (2016),

to create lasting change in Africa, it is necessary to make investments that treat the causes, and not just the symptoms, of under-development in Africa. We believe an undersupply of leadership across all sectors is the root cause of many of Africa's problems. Africa needs strong leaders throughout society, in the spheres of politics, business, health care, education, the environment, and beyond, to create positive change and generate growth and prosperity (p. 10).

By providing a rigorous academic program with Africa's future at its core, ALA implements a proven strategy for college preparedness and success that make its graduates competitive for admission at the most selective universities worldwide. ALA's strategy aligns with previous research that has indicated that secondary school education impacts most, if not all forms and aspects of college success (Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Dobson & Beaty, 1999; Karcher, 2008).

The academy is founded on the philosophy that a new generation of ethical, committed leaders is the key to Africa's development. ALA seeks to become training

ground for these future leaders. Each year, ALA draws the most outstanding students from across Africa to its campus in Johannesburg, South Africa. The school achieves this by holding information and scouting sessions across the continent. As well as recruiting potential students by visiting high performing schools and also scouting for students in different areas with high innovation and leadership potentials. ALA uses three rigorous stages to narrow its applicant pool using essays, face-to-face interview, and questionnaires. Once admitted to ALA, the school uses its curriculum to build a powerful intellectual foundation and develop their leadership capacity through ALA's unique curriculum in entrepreneurial leadership, African studies, and rhetoric/writing. ALA then works with these young leaders throughout their lives as they enable lasting positive change on the African continent (ALA document). By looking at the academic experiences of ALA students at Duke University, the intentional and unintentional outcomes of such rigorous learning will be explored.

The foundational premise of the African Leadership Academy is to prepare future leaders for Africa, hence it is important to understand the values that make African Leadership Academy education unique. The following are the unique educational characteristics of ALA:

- i. Seeking to transform Africa by identifying, developing, and connecting the next generation of African leaders (ALA website)
- ii. Bringing students together from 48 – 52 countries of the African continent to share experiences about their individual and collective cultures
- iii. Leadership formula is potential, practice, and opportunity (ALA Handbook)

- a. Potential: combing Africa for youth, who show the spark of initiative; who see what can be and strive to make it so.
- b. Practice: Young leaders complete an intensive program of intellectual growth and hands-on leadership development.
- c. Opportunity: forming a powerful network of community and collaborators to guide young leaders to transformative impact in Africa.

Because ALA focuses on leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation in Africa, it aligns with culture-specific learning paradigms. According to Manyibe, Manyibe, & Otiso (2013), culture-specific paradigms aid learning while simultaneously preparing students for their college career and beyond. The ALA values exhibit a collaborative and African oriented approach to academic success by emphasizing six key areas that will be explored further in latter chapters. The values are diversity, compassion, excellence, curiosity, humility, and integrity. Hence, I am focusing on three key areas in this chapter – academic success, the role of substantive pre-college training through the African Leadership Academy and its Afrocentric position on social change, as well as the intercultural adaptation process that facilitates the adjustment of these African international students.

Secondly, the African Leadership Academy is founded on the philosophy that a new generation of ethical, committed leaders is the key to Africa’s development. In its 2015 annual report, African Leadership Academy asserts both an African and global mindedness “by empowering and exposing youth to the diversity, complexities, and

opportunities available within Africa and sending them out to the world to bring them back again to contribute knowledge and skills to the development of Africa.”

Graduates of African Leadership Academy often travel outside Africa for college education with the U.S being one of the top destinations. According to ALA administration and school reports, about 70% of ALA graduates attend university/college in the U.S. Given the circumstances related to their coming to the U.S, it is important to understand the experiences of African international students with such substantive pre-college leadership training on US college campuses. Investigating this phenomenon will help staff at academic institutions (both pre-college and college) understand how such international students contribute to the social and learning environment in general and how the learning and social environment impacts their ability to succeed on U.S campuses.

### ***Duke University***

The proposed research site is Duke University. Duke University is a private research university located in Durham, North Carolina, United States. According to the school website, Duke University was founded by Methodists and Quakers in the present-day town of Trinity, North Carolina in 1838, the school moved to Durham, North Carolina in 1892. Duke University is the most selective university in North Carolina and one of the top 20 most selective in the U.S with an acceptance rate of 11.4 percent. Duke University is ranked as the 7<sup>th</sup> best university in the U.S (US News & World Report, 2014). It is a private university and part of the Duke University and

Health System and home to students and researchers from almost every country in the world (US News & World Report, 2014).

Duke University utilizes a semester-based academic calendar and is considered a rigorous academic setting because of its admission rate of 11.4% and graduation rate of 97%. The Princeton Review rated Duke University 98 for admissions selectivity, making it one of the top ten most selective universities in the U.S with a 9% acceptance rate in 2016. Academically, Duke University selects students based on the rigor of their secondary education, their class rank, their academic GPA, their standardized test scores, application essay, and recommendations. According to Princeton Review (2016), non-academic selection criteria include extra-curricular activity, talent and ability, character and personal abilities. During a sit-in on an admission-round meeting (a session where admission officers present their top admission candidates and make a case for their qualifications), I learned that personal stories of resilience and innovation are highly valued as predictors of student success at Duke University and complimentary to high academic performance in pre-college educational endeavors.

The university prides itself on the international presence on campus propelled by its commitment to internationalization and globalization. A new global vision was created for the university in 2013, put forth by a Duke University Global Priorities Committee to review the internationalization efforts of the university since the 1950s and make recommendations for the years to come. In their report, the committee made a summary of the growth in international undergraduate student recruitments and its effect on internationalization and globalization efforts:

In the early 2000s, Duke introduced strategies to strengthen the global dimensions of a Duke education by increasing the percentage of international students on its home campus, developing interdisciplinary foreign language and area centers, enhancing study abroad opportunities and developing partnerships with international institutions. International representation in the undergraduate incoming class has grown from 1.5% in 1992 to 11% in 2012, with students coming from approximately 60 countries. International undergraduate applications tripled in the past 10 years, and the yield grew by more than 10 percentage points. Duke's Talent Identification Program (TIP) has been expanded internationally to identify top students in India and other foreign countries who can be competitive for admission to Duke. International enrollments in Duke's graduate and professional schools have increased each year for the past two decades, reaching 23% across all schools in the fall of 2012; those students came from 88 countries. Duke now has more than 7,000 alumni living abroad and 47 international alumni clubs. (Cite the report, with page number here)

The institution uses its global vision statement to emphasize on growing national economies and on Africa as a world region. In the statement below, the report touches on why Duke University might have a vested interest in reaching out, forming, and establishing relationships with the partners on the continent:

Low and middle income countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean are of great and growing interest to Duke faculty members as locations for research collaborations and fieldwork, to students for thesis research, internships and study abroad programs, and to both for service projects. These countries are experiencing unprecedented increases in demand for higher education, and they have rising research capacity. They are home to a growing number of Duke students and faculty. They are the locations where the four global challenges highlighted by Duke Forward – Global Health; Medical Discovery and Patient Care; Energy; and the Environment – are the most intense and where engagement by Duke faculty and students can make an especially valuable contribution to societal well-being. Western countries have experienced some of the challenges these countries are facing, but solutions to many of them are not readily transferable. As such, these challenges represent not only enormous opportunities to provide assistance but also academic challenges of the first order. They also pose significant academic challenges through the need to understand human and natural interactions across multiple scales, from the truly global to the regional, national and local.

The current entire undergraduate population is about 20% international (including U.S citizens who grew up outside the country) while the graduate population is about 37%. Duke University defines international by country of residence or origin during application. According to the undergraduate admissions report for the class of 2020, the largest address for the class was “outside the country” with a total of 247 students, the second address is North Carolina with a total of 208 students. According to the most recent information on international student enrollment at Duke University (Open Doors 2016), of the 643 international undergraduate students on a student visa at Duke University, only 43 of them are from the African continent albeit a robust representation of the continent from North, East, West, and South. The names and representation of these countries appear in Table 1.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<i>African international students enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University</i>	
<b><u>Country of Origin</u></b>	<b><u># of Students</u></b>
<b>Botswana</b>	1
<b>Ethiopia</b>	1
<b>Egypt</b>	1
<b>Ghana</b>	4
<b>Kenya</b>	11
<b>Lesotho</b>	1
<b>Mauritius</b>	1
<b>Morocco</b>	1
<b>Nigeria</b>	5
<b>Rwanda</b>	1
<b>South Africa</b>	3
<b>Swaziland</b>	3
<b>Tanzania</b>	4
<b>Uganda</b>	1
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	6
<b>Total</b>	44



Source: Duke University Visa Services Open Doors Aggregation (2016/2017)

It is important to point out that the number of African international students that appear in the table above are those issued a student visa by Duke University. It is possible that there might be a few other students who identify as African who do not need a student visa to study in the U.S either because they were born in the U.S. but grew up in Africa or because of a parent who is a U.S. citizen. Out of the 43 African students currently pursuing undergraduate education at Duke University, there are about 10 to 15 students who have had substantive pre-college leadership training like the African Leadership Academy curriculum according to the Duke University Admissions office.

Duke University has a commitment to diversifying its international recruitment efforts with growing interest in students from underrepresented regions including Africa. More African students are being recruited through the Karsh Program and MasterCard Scholars program, both of which are vested in raising global leaders. The Karsh Scholarship Program was created out of a private endowment to Duke for funding international scholars at Duke. Before the creation of the program in 2008, Duke University could not admit international students needing financial aid. International financial aid is still very competitive at Duke since Duke University is only financial aid need blind for domestic students. The Karsh International Scholarship was created to bring together top students from all over the world<sup>2</sup>. The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program unlike the Karsh Program is almost exclusively for

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<sup>2</sup> Karsh International Scholarships cover tuition, room and board, mandatory fees, and demonstrated need that exceeds those costs. In addition the scholarship covers up to \$7000 of funding for research/service opportunities during the three summers prior to graduation. Karsh Scholars may also apply for support for necessities, such as computers.

African international students studying at Duke University<sup>3</sup>. In a recent conversation with Duke Admissions personnel, the administrator pointed out that the university has a growing interest to recruit from Africa. In a recent conversation, the Duke University international admissions team revealed, “Our most important goal, other than obviously maintaining a strong and robust cohort, is increasing the diversity in terms of the composition of that international group, while still responding fairly to the strength of applications,” said Anne Sjostrom, associate dean for Undergraduate Admissions, whose team travels to high schools around the world to promote Duke to prospective undergraduate students. In the past year, Duke University Admissions took bolder steps dedicating a member of the international recruitment team to Africa and traveling to new countries and schools in order to reach a wider pool of students. Duke University also has a program called the Africa Initiative, a faculty-led initiative that brings scholars together from across Duke University and Duke University Health System who have a shared interest, whether through their research or programmatic activities, in the countries and cultures of the African continent.

The Africa Initiative (AI) supports African international students as well. According to the Africa Initiative 2015/2016 annual report, AI contributed to Duke students pursuing studies and extracurricular activities relating to Africa by providing financial support and advertising to the following events: 1) 6th Annual Primate Palooza (Roots and Shoots, Jane Goodall Institute) 2) Duke Business in Africa

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<sup>3</sup> According to the program website, the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program at Duke is open to students from sub-Saharan Africa who demonstrate financial need, academic ability and merit, and demonstrated commitment to improving the lives of others in their communities. Students apply to Duke first, and are then considered for The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program.

Conference (Duke Business in Africa Club) 3) AfriX (Duke African Graduate and Professional Students Association) 4) An African Feminist Perspective with Minna Salami (Africa Conversations Club, Duke). The Africa Initiative continues to be a recognized entity on campus, supporting faculty and students in their quest to understand the continent more deeply and bring their knowledge to both Duke and Durham. The initiative brings a wealth of programming to the community, and continues to be a source of relevant programming, funding opportunities and conferences. Perhaps one of the significance of the “African” presence on Duke University is the creation of such entities as Africa Initiative involving intentional work to represent Africa as an important contributor to the socialization of scholarship.

Similar to the quest of Africa Initiative and African Leadership Academy to portray the diversity that exists within the continent of Africa, the participants of this study are also likely to be from different parts of the continent. The participants for this study will be sophomores and upperclass students who are African Leadership Academy graduates currently enrolled at Duke University. Historically, Duke University admissions recruits and admits anywhere between one to four ALA students to attend Duke every year since 2010. See table below

<b>Table 2</b>	
<i>ALA graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University (2016-2017)</i>	
<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Class</u>
<b>Ghanaian</b>	Senior, Junior
<b>Kenyan</b>	Senior
<b>Moroccan</b>	Junior
<b>Mosotho</b>	Sophomore
<b>Nigerian</b>	Senior, Junior
<b>Zimbabwean</b>	Senior

There are currently 8 students from ALA at Duke University. The nationalities of the students represent the diversity that is central to recruitment at ALA.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms and acronyms will be used often in this research. Certain key terms are reproduced here as provided by relevant and credible sources. While some terms have been synthesized so as to better operationalize them for the purposes of this study.

*Academic Success* – academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance (Kuh et al., 2005)

*African International student* – The Institute of International Education (Open Doors) define an international student as anyone studying at an institution of higher education in the United States on a temporary visa that allows for academic coursework. These include primarily holders of F (student) visas and J (exchange visitor) visas (2016). Based on personal experience as an international educator at Duke University, I will argue that an international student profile has reached beyond the Open Doors definition. These days many students who may not need a visa to study in the U.S due to U.S citizenship identify as “international” because they have spent the bulk of their

developmental years outside the mainstream U.S cultures. For the purposes of this study, an African international is defined as a student that identifies as an African (substantial time and exposure to the way of life in an African country) and temporarily (or not) in the US to study. The term “African” should be remembered for its heterogeneity of languages, religions, races, ethnicities, among other cultural diversity that exist among people of the African continent.

*ICEF Monitor* - is a market intelligence resource for the international education and student travel industry.

*Rigorous academic environment* – Duke uses an innovative curriculum. This innovative curriculum reflects Duke's desire to dedicate its unique resources to preparing its students for the challenging and rapidly changing global environment. The curriculum provides a liberal arts education that asks students to engage a wide variety of subjects: arts, literatures, and performance; civilizations; natural sciences, quantitative studies; and social sciences. It supports a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach to knowledge and fosters the development of students' abilities to read and think critically and in historically and ethically informed ways, to communicate lucidly and effectively, and to undertake and evaluate independent research. (Duke Advising Handbook, 2016)

*Afrocentricity* - meaningful and authentic study of peoples of African descent beginning and proceeding with Africa as the center (Schiele, 1994)

*ALA* – African Leadership Academy. A two-year pre-college leadership institution with a mission to develop future leaders for Africa.

*AI* – Africa Initiative, an entity promoting knowledge about the people, languages, cultures, nations, and civilizations of Africa at Duke University

*Conducive learning environment* – inclusive educational environment that facilitates social, emotional, and psychological support appropriate for academic success (synthesized from Astin’s (1993) definition of environment)

*ALA Entrepreneurial Leadership* – project-based education that is focused on proposing original solutions to challenges and opportunities on the African continent

### **Conceptual Framework**

Alexander Astin’s (1995) seminal work on student development theory, particularly the Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model is the study’s primary conceptual framework. Astin’s input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) is an assessment model that has been proposed as a framework for analyzing the unique effects of students' entering characteristics and college environmental factors on subsequent college outcomes (Astin, 1995). The model could be used in almost any social or behavioral science field (i.e. history, anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology or political science) that study human beings and the environmental influence on their development (Astin, 1993).

## *Input*

The first component of the theory is input. Astin (1993) defines input as characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution. Inputs “refer to those personal qualities the student brings initially to the education program (including the student's initial level of developed talent at the time of entry)” (Astin, 1993, p. 18). Inputs also can be such things as antecedent conditions or performance pretests that function as control variables in research. Examples of student inputs might include demographic information, educational background, political orientation, behavior pattern, degree aspiration, reason for selecting an institution, financial status, disability status, career choice, major field of study, life goals, and reason for attending college (Astin, 1993). In this study, most of the examples of student input listed above as well as the pre-college leadership training that the participants received as future leaders of Africa at African Leadership Academy will be considered. The consciousness of African studies and entrepreneurial leadership instilled in the students of African Leadership Academy is intentional to create a cultural identity that is committed to the value of African mindedness and pride. ALA describes this mission on the school website as such;

African Leadership Academy seeks to enable lasting peace and prosperity in Africa by developing and connecting the continent’s future leaders. Africa’s greatest need is ethical and entrepreneurial leadership. Too often, we only invest in addressing the symptoms of poor leadership in Africa: we give blankets, food, and medicine to those impacted by war, poverty, and famine. But these efforts will never stop unless we develop leaders who prevent wars, entrepreneurs who create jobs, and innovators that develop lasting solutions to the root causes of Africa’s problems. We aim to develop the future Nelson Mandela, the next Wangari Maathai, and the African Bill Gates.

The description above identifies ALA's educational mission as central to social change in Africa, which a major input characteristic that the study participants have undertaken as graduates of ALA. The next component of Astin's model is environment.

### ***Environment***

The second component of the model, environment, is described as the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed. Environment "refers to the student's actual experiences during the educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18). The environment includes everything and anything that happens during the program course that might impact the student, and therefore the outcomes measured. Environmental items can include those things such as educational experiences, practices, programs, or interventions. Additionally, some environmental factors may be antecedents (e.g. exposure to institution policies may occur before joining a college organization). For example, the notion of academic integrity does not necessarily translate as the same from place to place globally. Environmental factors may include the program, personnel, curricula, instructor, facilities, institutional climate, courses, teaching style, friends, roommates, extra-curricular activities, and organizational affiliation (Astin, 1993). In this study, the environment is the interaction of the African Leadership Academy students with the instructional and institutional characteristics prominent at Duke University.



## *Output*

The third and last component of the model is output. According to Astin, outcomes refer to the students' characteristics after exposure to the environment. Outputs "refer to the 'talents' we are trying to develop in our educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18).

Outputs are outcome variables such as posttests, consequences, or end results. In education, outcome measures have included indicators such as grade point average, exam scores, course-performance, degree completion, and overall course satisfaction.

The outcome in this study is the academic success of the participants. In reference to the previous definition of academic success, that is, how the substantive pre-college education of ALA students influences their personal strategies and characteristics at Duke University. Furthermore, how their institutional and instructional experiences inform their academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance. The I-E-O assessment model supports a simultaneous evaluation of the effects of input such as the pre-college leadership education at African Leadership Academy and environmental variables of a rigorous academic setting like Duke University on student success outcomes.

## **Delimitations of the Study**

The study is looking primarily at African Leadership Academy students at Duke University. Hence examining the experience of this population on a single campus would challenge the ability to generalize findings from the study to other academic

environments. The study sample does not include other undergraduate or graduate students with other forms of pre-college leadership education. Even though African Leadership Academy prides itself as recruiting students based on academic merit from all over the continent, it is not clear how much socio-economic status influences recruitment and admission of students given the high cost of education at the school. However, this is an area the study will explore in chapter 4.

The focus of the study is the academic success of African international students with substantive pre-college leadership training study. The study lacks a comparative nature since data is not compared with other African students without substantive pre-college leadership training.

### **Significance of Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it examines the educational experience of African international students in a selective US university. Few studies (if any) have made this contribution. Second, the study focuses on a particular group of students who have had early exposure to rigorous and culture-specific educational paradigm based on entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovation. This study is of importance given Duke's growing interest in recruiting more students from the continent of Africa. The study is also of importance due to the projection of population growth on the African continent and the possible implications of that growth on globalization and higher education in the United States and beyond. The study will contribute to narratives and literature on the lived experiences of African international students, there is currently a gap in studies examining the academic experiences of

African international students. This study is also important because it focuses on a particular group with early exposure to world-class education. This may be an important factor for preparing, recruiting, and supporting future students.

The study is of importance as it can contribute to understanding the components of academic success for underrepresented populations. Byrd (1991) argues that it is not enough to admit the appropriate students, institutions must also provide appropriate services to meet their particular needs in order to serve, retain, and graduate them. Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005), in reference to Asian students, also suggested further study to explore the group differences within the international student by country of origin to understand how and why density affects student engagement on campus. Given the current size of African international students at Duke University, this study can provide insight into the opportunities and challenges that underrepresentation poses among international undergraduate students. While this study is focusing on general themes influencing the academic success of African international students it is still a referential response to a growing need of understanding the peculiarities and disparities among international students.

The study also adds to literature on understanding the experiences of African students on U.S colleges and universities. The culture-specific focus of ALA and the potential subjects of the study can “contribute to relocating the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes” (Asante, 1988). The afro-centeredness is an important component to understand the cultural and social attributes and contributions of the population. Most studies on international

students are limited due to generalizations and overrepresentation of certain populations over others. The study is important due to its potential to contribute to literature about the components of quality education in Africa and how culturally based curriculum influence student success.

The study is also important given its promise to inform policy and practice of staff, faculty, and administrators at Duke University and possibly beyond. Any institution that wishes to make student achievement, satisfaction, persistence, and learning a priority must have competent professionals whose contributions complement the academic mission of the institution in ways that help students and the institution realize their goals (Whitt, 2005). Hence it is imperative that studies abound to understand non-traditional populations to ensure their success on U.S college and university campuses.

### **Summary**

This chapter serves as an introduction to the impending global demographic shift and what it means for internationalization of U.S higher institutions. This chapter also reviewed the premise of the pre-college leadership training in this study as socially constructed to contribute to the future of Africa. The study's conceptual framework, Astin's (1993) input-environment-output model serves as a means to investigate the outcome of the social and intellectual inputs of African Leadership Academy, the interplay of pre-college training and the contextual academic and social environment of Duke University and its impact on the academic outcomes of the student.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The literature analyzed in this chapter are from three complementary bodies of literature related to the pre-college experience of African Leadership Academy graduates at Duke University, their cultural adaptation to life at Duke University and how it informs their academic success. The focus of this study is to identify the academic experiences influencing the academic success of African international students with substantive pre-college leadership education in a rigorous higher education setting. The African Leadership Academy curriculum as previously discussed is an example of substantive pre-college leadership education. This concept builds on the micro-macro prospect of preparing students for world-class education at most selective schools like Duke University to influence global citizenry and contribution to the furtherance of economic development for the continent of Africa. Thus, the first section of this chapter is on academic success.

The second section in this chapter is on Afro-mindedness. Which includes giving attention to the importance of African narratives in all its uniqueness and heterogeneity. Given the African consciousness of the African Leadership Academy curriculum to develop indigenes from all over Africa as students who can make transformative impact on the future of Africa and the world. The third section will consider the intercultural adaptation of these students to their environment and how it influences their academic success at Duke University. These bodies of literature support

a baseline for understanding the academic success of African international students with pre-college leadership training centered on the future of Africa.

### **Literature on Academic Success**

This section explores extensive research on the cultural and social aspect of academic success. Academic success is extensively researched in academia given its centrality to student recruitment, retention, and graduation. The goal of this section is to review literature on academic success pertaining to college education in the U.S and how it relates to international students, particularly those from Africa. On the onset of recruitment, many universities and colleges, particularly selective ones like Duke University, use existing quantifiable academic history such as SAT, ACT, and TOEFL scores to make admission decisions. Having sat on international admission rounds at Duke University, it is undeniable the influence of traditional academic performance such as grades and test scores in predicting the academic stamina of potential students at Duke University. For enrolled students, academic performance is monitored quantifiably by GPA and test grades in most universities and highly so in selective universities like Duke University. Traditionally, some research on academic success has used quantifiable measures of academic performance such as grades and GPAs to determine/define academic success (Trueman & Hartley, 1996; Finn & Rock; 1997). As an example, Duke University has over 300 academic advisors supporting students through course selection and other academic decisions. According to the Duke Institutional Research Unit (2017), the current graduation rate at Duke University is at

94%. With 97.0% of students staying on for a second year, Duke University is one of the best in the country when it comes to freshman retention rates.

### ***Definition of academic success***

Different terms have been used to describe academic success. Some of the most common themes include academic achievement (Pace, 1984; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002), attainment of learning outcomes (Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons, 2002; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), acquisition of skills and competencies (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1980), academic engagement (Cole, Kennedy, & Ben-Avie, 2009), and persistence (Jacobi, 1991; Nora, & Cabrera, 1996; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Traditionally, most research on academic success has used quantifiable measures of academic performance such as grades and GPAs to determine/define academic success (Trueman & Hartley, 1996; Finn & Rock; 1997). As Pascarella and Terrenzini (2005) suggested, grade performance attracts more attention than any other variable as it relates to academic performance. Along the way, other research has risen to unravel the limitations of attributing academic success to GPA and grades alone. Tracey and Sedlacek (1989) countered that academic success is more than academic ability. Jacobi (1991) makes a case for relationships and the impact they have on persisting through college. Research began to find that many saw academic success beyond grades but also the effort to stay in college and graduate.

The theme persistence became synonymous with academic success as a lens to understand the tenacity that affords college education completion. Jacobi (1991) defines academic success (used interchangeably as academic achievement) as a degree

completion. Nora et al. (1996) consider the students' enrollment status as persistence if enrolled and non-persistence if unenrolled after initial enrollment. Pritchard and Wilson (2003) simply define persistence as the successful completion of a college degree. Several years of research to understand student success shows that what students do such as involvement in curricular opportunities, sense of belonging, and satisfaction while in college is directly linked to their success namely their retention and graduation (Kuh et al., 2006). The exhaustive review of literature on student success by Kuh et al., (2006) point to the many facets of academic success. The study and review of academic success narratives and definitions by Kuh et al., (2006) produced a broad holistic framework that encapsulated a broader approach to the diversity of experiential, cultural, environmental, and personal factors that students bring and engage on their educational journey. Kuh et al.'s framework for student success identifies four major components as determinants of student success. The authors identify the first component as pre-college experiences. According to the authors, pre-college experiences are presumed to influence not only the outcomes of college directly, but also students' course taking patterns, formal classroom experiences, and out-of-class experiences during college, which in turn, also shape education outcomes (Terezini et al, 1996). That is, the influences of academic preparation, family background including social economic status are relevant.

The second component of Kuh et al.'s framework involves the actual college experience, which has two core themes of student behaviors and institutional conditions. These themes include time management, personal effort, and interaction



with peers and faculty. For example, the authors report language and academics can impede self-confidence and mental ability. Individuals with underdeveloped language skills report lower levels of academic success and social functioning” (Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011, p. 180). Institutional conditions, the second theme speak more to structural features, policies, and practices. The third component of the framework is student engagement, which involves the relevance and influence of programmatic priorities of the institution to its student population and preferences. The last and fourth component of the framework is outcomes and post-college indicators, which speaks to the readiness of students to interact productively with the outside world upon graduation. The fourth component is a big component of ALA’s learning outcomes to develop future leaders for Africa (ALA Annual Report, 2014) and Duke University’s commitment to global citizenry beyond Duke.

Kuh et al. (2006) define student success as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance. York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) synthesize literature on student success mainly using Kuh et al’s definition to further contribute to the discourse. They presented an amended definition and conceptual model of academic success as inclusive of academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance. Kuh et al.’s (2006) definition of student success is preferable for this study because their research paid attention to student characteristics as differential in determining student

engagement. Kuh et al.'s study considered first generation students, race and ethnicity, transfer students, fraternity and sorority members, student athletes, and international students.

### *Academic success of international students*

The number of international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities increased significantly jumped up in the 2014-2015 academic year according to an *Open Doors* report. International student enrollment on U.S campuses is up 10 percent from 886,052 in 2013-14, to roughly 975,000, according to a new report by the Institute of International Education. Due to increasing numbers of international students on U.S campuses, through the growth of internationalization and globalization, several studies has been done to understand the experiences of international students in U.S higher institutions. When it comes to the factors influencing the academic experiences of international students studying in the U.S, common themes include social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need as the main adjustment issues influencing the academic success of international students. Literature abounds on the difficulty faced by international students on U.S higher education settings. Kim (2011) attributes challenges with class participation and presentations to lack of proficiency in English language. Some studies also point to the differences in cultural norms and values that influence academic settings and interactions with faculty (more on this in the next section).

Another difficulty faced by some international students is the uniqueness of the U.S. learning environment in terms of instruction and testing compared to their home

countries. These learning environmental factors include the use of libraries, group work, and class participation. These difficulties might add up causing stress and mental health issues for students. Hyun et al. (2007) point out that mental state and health of international students is related to their academic success. The aforementioned stressors (also known as risk factors) impact the college experience and outcome of international students. These risk factors could also influence how faculty and staff understand the experiences of international students limiting them only to negative and limiting. According to Telbis, Helgeson, and Kingsbury (2014), the stress caused by community, language, academics, and financial factors can alter students' perceptions of completing their programs of study. The authors argue that a person's confidence in his or her ability is a clear indicator of success or failure.

Responding to the abundance of literature on the risk factors that challenge the academic success of international students, other scholars argue that protective factors such as belongingness and meaning-in-life and promotive factors such as inclusive engagement and co-curricular activities buffer the effects of risk factors on individuals (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). According to these authors, belongingness refers to a sense of connection with one's university, a strong support network, and a balance of academic challenge and support. Meaning in life refers to the belief, sense of purpose, and faith that guides individual lives. Inclusive engagement uses pluralist frameworks for programming and opportunities to reach and involve different groups of students. Also related to belongingness as defined above,

Glass & Westmont (2014) tested the effects of belongingness - on the cross-cultural interaction and academic success of international and domestic students enrolled in eight U.S. research universities. Using resilience-based models that look at protective factors (i.e. belongingness) instead of risk factors (i.e. language difficulty). Glass and Westmont added two new factors that facilitate belongingness (engagement in inclusive curricula and participation in co-curricular activities) calling them promotive factors. They use resilience-based models to determine if risk, protective, and promotive factors impact students' academic success and cross-cultural interaction in the same way for domestic students and international students.

In promoting resilience-based models of acculturation most of which was introduced in the last decade, Glass & Wesmont used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the buffering effects of a sense of belongingness on cross-cultural interaction and academic success, where belongingness refers to a sense of connection with one's university, a strong support network, and a balance of academic challenge and support. Glass & Westmont's (2014) findings indicate that structured classroom experiences increase cross-cultural interaction equally for all students and highlight how co-curricular involvement enhances all students' sense of belongingness. This worldview is bilateral and inclusive of the value of both international and domestic students on college campuses. Another promotive factor for international students is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.

Telbis, Helgeson, and Kingsbury (2014) provide a unique perspective of understanding how self-efficacy affects academic success of international students. Their research studied how self-efficacy influenced response to dealing with adjustment issues such as social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need among international students. Telbis, Helgeson, and Kingsbury (2014) found that international students who scored high on confidence levels in completing their programs of study also scored high on their confidence of their resources. On the other hand, students who scored low in confidence for completing their programs of study also scored low on their confidence of the adjustment issues mentioned above. Hence the knowledge and access to resources could translate to better adjustment for most international students. Social support before and upon arrival to college campuses can help international students navigate the stresses of adjusting to their new academic and social settings.

Research has also shown international students succeeding academically more than their domestic counterparts. There are scholarly findings suggesting a higher participation in effective educational practices among international students in their first year that contribute to enhanced academic performance in comparison to domestic students. Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) found in their comparative study of first year domestic and international students that on a general sense that international freshman students engage more often in effective educational practices than their U.S American counterparts. Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) used data on the 71,260 freshmen and seniors out of which 2,780 students identified as internationals from the National

Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) report. The large sample afforded a rare opportunity to learn about the experiences of a group of students who typically comprise a very small fraction of the student body on most campuses. Using Data from the NSSE is pretty substantial. The credibility of the NSSE has been established through its wide use in college student experience research. Through its student survey, *The College Student Report*, NSSE annually collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students' participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

Another factor that contributes to the experience and performance of international students is their population density in the academic environment. As established in chapter one, there are far more international students from China and India on almost every college campus in the U.S as opposed to Ethiopia or Kenya. According to Zhao, Kuh, & Carini (2005) the potentially negative effects of both high and low density should be further investigated and monitored by campus officials who work with international students. Zhao, Kuh, & Carini (2005) claims that low density may contribute to social isolation and overcompensation on academics while high density could contribute to an inordinate amount of socializing by members of some groups, which can have an adverse effect on academic performance. Given that African international students are usually in low density on most campuses, it is important to review what literature says about their academic success in U.S higher education.

Furthermore, it is clear as established in the previous chapter that the density of populations influences the literature. The following section reviews the literature available on the academic success of African international students.

### *Academic success of African international students*

Most searches on the academic experiences of African international students bring up African American experiences instead. Kim (2014) conducted a qualitative study using a dual socialization framework to explore how Black immigrant students negotiate the challenge of adjusting to a predominantly white institution (PWI) and identifies sources of support that may help these students make academic and social connections to their institution. Kim's study suggests that understanding the bicultural socialization experiences of Black immigrant students is critical to shaping their educational outcomes. As discussed in chapter one, the sparse research regarding the academic success of African international students carries implications for the institutions that will be enrolling these populations in terms of institutional and instructional readiness.

### **Literature on Cultural Identity**

Diversity and inclusion is a popular topic on college campuses today. The U. S. Census Bureau has told us that racial and ethnic groups will become the majority population in the country around 2050. Apart from domestic demographic shifts that diversify U.S. college populations, the influence of internationalization and globalization adds to the "diversity" pool. A reflection of this global shift is the diverse

populations on today's U.S. campuses. As globalization rises, so do populations, knowledge, and intercultural encounters. These encounters could yield recent incidences on college campuses pointing to issues of marginalization, racism, discrimination, and microaggressions. Beyond U.S. minority groups, globalization has also given rise to other international populations that identify outside the dominant European American culture including African international students as extensively discussed in the previous chapter. Casas and Vasquez (1996) predicted the influx of ethnic minorities, namely African Americans, Chicanos/Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans as making up close to half of the nation's school-age youth by 2010. Today, many of those students are on U.S. college campuses. As such, studies must abound to understand and support the emerging populations on college campuses across the U.S. There was a lot of research done in the late 80s to early 90s about the experiences of minority students on U.S. campuses particularly predominantly white institutions (PWI). Many of the findings report the experiences of minorities at PWIs in particular as negative due to racism, discrimination, and marginalization (Nettles, 1988; Allen 1991; Renner 1998). However, when the narrative began to shift in the late 90s to early 2000s, a lot of students attributed their positive experiences on college campuses to the support of cultural centers (Turner, 1994). An environment that is knowledgeable, understanding, and proactive in establishing venues where students can express their differences constructively may, however, prove to be a greater and more long-lasting support to student retention and graduation rates (Jones, Castellanos, and Cole, 2002). While many universities have made effort to recruit underrepresented and international



students to diversify racially, universities in the U.S are still struggling with inclusivity of represented worldviews into programming, policies, curriculum, and instruction. As argued by Schiele (1994), “although there appears to be considerable diversity in the knowledge base of higher education in the United States, the philosophical underpinnings of higher education are shaped primarily by one dominant view” (p.150). Schiele asserts that most U.S educational practices use Eurocentric paradigms that marginalize other worldviews. It is imperative to recognize that the world is multicultural and that both multiculturalism and multicultural education are the “normal human experience” (Goodenough, 1976). The recent surge in student protest and obvious discontent with school leadership by college students reveal the urgency to revisit the practice of student support/success and the cultural competencies it required both within and without. Previous studies show that ethnic minority students in a dominant-cultured campus would experience stress on a variety of levels including social climate stresses, interracial stresses, racial discrimination within group stresses and even more unfortunately achievement stress (Smedley, Myers, Harrell, 1993). Smedley et al.’s findings align with recent demands placed on college leadership by students in 80 colleges for fair representation of diversity and inclusivity school policy, programming, and staffing. Hence, I find it needful that a cultural concept that seeks to explain the experiences of the African people (either by descent or in diaspora) is included in the concepts that guide the unfolding of this study. This section starts off with the concept of cultural identity and narrows down to the existing models and or literature on African consciousness.

### *Developing Cultural Identity*

Erikson (1950) described the process of identity development as one in which two identities that of the individual and of the group merge into one. According to Kim (2008), Erikson thus place cultural identity at the core of the individual and simultaneously in the core of the individual's common culture. Chickering's work on identity development (1969, 1972) and in conjunction with Reisser (1993) created seven vectors that influence students' sense of identity development while in college. This model has been widely used by higher education administrators and faculty as indicative of student growth and projection in achieving goals and overcoming obstacles. However, there remains the question about the relevance of such identity development models to students who identify beyond or outside the dominant sphere. Pascarella and Terezinni (1998) argues the "the absence of studies dealing with identity development among Black (or other minority) students". While there have been other identity development models like the majority, minority, and biracial identity development models, there remains opportunities to explore the identity development of other populations on college campus beyond domestic U.S racial identities as well as the intersectionality of these identities. Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2011) argues that "if higher education is sincere about creating positive learning environments for all students, then each person who works with diverse populations must also value these diverse developmental issues." It is therefore not coincidental that the population in this study, students who graduated from African Leadership Academy are recruited by ALA at a crucial age range. African Leadership Academy enrolls students at a

developmental age (mostly ages 16-19) for identity consciousness as validated by research in higher education (Astin, 1993; Ogbu 2004). The African Leadership Academy imbibes a curriculum that is central to African consciousness. According to the 2017 strategic plan for the school, “Our primary goal is to refine the way we identify, develop, and connect Africa’s future leaders. We do this with a particular focus on ensuring that our young leaders return to build their careers and provide a lifetime of leadership to the African continent, continually applying the mindset, approach, skills, and networks developed at ALA to solve the continent’s greatest challenges.” Part of the way ALA imbibes a curriculum that is central to African consciousness is by bringing together young adults from all over the continent. Thereby exposing ALA students to some of the diversity of cultural dimensions existing within the continent. The student life is built around discovering, engaging, and learning about these cultural differences. In addition, one of the core curriculum of ALA is its African Studies focus. The African Studies classes and co-curricular activities such as seminal readings and cultural exchanges exposes students to the history, geography, and economic opportunities among other things (a latter chapter discusses the cultural education of ALA in more details). After all, De Vos (1990) defines cultural identity as rooted in “the emotionally profound self-awareness of parentage and concomitant mythology of discrete origin” (p.14). Giordano (1974) describes cultural identity as a standing ground that cannot be taken away (p.16). Based on these definitions, cultural identity implies a social affiliation that validates self-perception and self-conception.

### ***Afro-Mindedness***

The Afro-mindedness idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people (Mazama, 2001). For the purposes of this study, I will be using the term Afro-mindedness in place of Afrocentricity. In certain intercultural communication persuasion particularly the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity created by Bennett (1993), ethnocentrism the experience of one's own culture as "central to reality" is deemed as a limited worldview in engaging cultural difference. As such, the term Afrocentricity could be perceived negatively. The section below explains the concept and the importance of affirming African consciousness among people of African descent.

### ***Afro-Mindedness: The theory of social change***

As such, Afro-mindedness (Afrocentricity) seeks to relocate the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes (Asante, 1988). (Afrocentricity) is the redirection of an African frame of reference from one that is irrelevant and oppressive, to a frame that is germane to our African history and culture (Pellerin, 2012). Given the diversity within Africa as represented at African Leadership Academy and the concerted effort to expose African youth to experiences beyond Africa, the ALA leadership curriculum mirrors Asante's argument on involving multiplicity of cultures from an informed stance. That is, Afrocentricity is not color conscious; it is not a matter of color but of culture that matters in the orientation to centeredness (Asante, 2003).

Thirdly, by exposing youth to local, regional, continental, and global cultural diversities, African Leadership Academy exemplifies an academic paradigm that values intercultural competence on both micro and macro levels of culture and context. Given the limitations and challenge of internationalizing curriculum in the US as well as the limited African perspective and experience in intercultural narratives, a critical intercultural perspective seems to be important to navigating and contributing to existing narratives.

The pan-African focus of the ALA educational curriculum speaks to the importance of its centrality in creating an African consciousness in these youths. Asante (1990) defends the importance of aligning African experience from a socially privileged stance, “centrism, the groundedness of observation and behavior in one’s own historical experiences, shapes the concepts, paradigms, theories, and methods of Africology” (p.12). The concept of center (also location, place) occupies, as it could have been expected, a critical place in the Afrocentric conceptual apparatus (Mazama, 2001). Mazama further explains that the concept of center “is fundamentally based on the belief that one’s history, culture, and biology determines one’s identity. That identity, in turn, determines our place in life, both material and spiritual.” In this respect, Afrocentricity places the people of Africa or of African descent as the central agents for meaningful change and movement that is useful for their progress.

### ***Afro-Mindedness: A paradigm for African experience***

Over 30 years ago, Molefi Asante (1980) published *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, followed by *The Afrocentric Idea* (Asante, 1987) and *Kemet*,

*Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Asante, 1990) positing Afrocentricity as an intellectual paradigm in the study of the African experience. The concept of Afrocentricity has been further developed by the writings of Jerome Schiele, Ama Mazama, Linda James Myers, and Maulana Karenga among others. Afrocentricity, Asante (1991) tells us, establishes

a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person...it centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world...As an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of the ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as key players rather than victims...it is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking bonds of Western domination in the mind... (p.172)

Asante (1991) assertions in the paragraph above are twofold. First and foremost, Asante asserts the need for narratives that deliver the victorious experiences of the African people. Secondly the importance of narrating African experiences in a way that is culturally informed and appropriate. According to Mazama (2001), the afrocentric idea rests on assertion of the primacy of the African experience for the African people and its aim is to revive a consciousness that views the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one. Research has proven the distinct cultural differences between people of African descent and European descent (Dixon, 1976; Kambon, 1992) and the tendency to marginalize the African cultural framework and reality (Asante 1987; Schiele, 1990). As Schiele (1996) emphasizes, “Afrocentricity is the only paradigm that not only gives African practitioners the means to effectively and appropriately analyze social situations, but also a sense of connectedness to their core values.” Meanwhile, Karenga (1988) shies away from recognizing Afrocentricity as “the” paradigm for navigating the African experience but defined Afrocentricity as

“essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people” (p.404). Karenga (1988) further describes Afrocentricity as a “building bloc in the conceptual edifice of the Black Studies Paradigm”. Either way, Afrocentricity remains a relevant concept for understanding the experience of people of African descent. However, the term Afrocentricity has the tendency of undermining the core message of the concept. Afrocentricity as a word, can leave a wrong impression given the meaning of other words like it such as, Eurocentricity and ethnocentrism. According to Bennett (1998), ethnocentrism denotes a limited worldview that impedes successful intercultural encounters. Hence scholars need to imbibe culturally pluralistic terms with more positive connotations.

### ***Afro-mindedness and Academic Success***

Schiele (1994) argues that the divergent views on human beings between the Afrocentric and Eurocentric worldviews have significant implications for higher education particularly in the conception of the teacher/student education. According to Schiele (1994), “Afrocentricity would view the classroom of students from a collective and interconnected perspective rather than from a detached and competitive one”. Schiele (1994) prescribes roles for students, teachers, educators, administrators, and the classroom.

Table 3

*Afrocentricity and academic environments*

Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group member rather than individual. Cooperative learner concerned with the collective survival of the class</li> <li>• Cultivate feeling intellect (“I think and I feel; therefore I know”) as much as cognitive intellect (“I think therefore I know”)</li> </ul>
Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying and integrating Afrocentricity in scholarly and professional activities</li> <li>• Integrate Afrocentric content in the class</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Schiele (1994)

As primary socialization agents of societies, the breakdown of how Afrocentricity informs educational settings can inform U.S higher institutions to examine the dominance and marginalization of cultures in the classroom. As a result, a place like Duke University where diversity of cultural dimensions abound must be answerable to its cultural landscape not only in words but in action. Nair (2016), puts it best by challenging higher institutions to “Reimagine multicultural models to a polycultural framework that recognizes that each of us is a composite of many identities, and that we cannot be defined solely by traditional criteria like race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or any other single aspect of the complex beings that we are.” Hence the best investment is not in internationalization or diversity campaigns but in practices and policies that have moved from ethnocentric to ethnorelative both in nature and operation. It is therefore critical that U.S institutions invest more time, thought, strategy, and resources in enhancing the quality of the international student experience by strengthening campus commitments to international students (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015)



## **Literature on Intercultural Adaptation**

Research suggests that international students from countries with cultures that are somewhat similar to the host culture tend to adapt more easily than students who come from very different cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Olaniran, 1996), the intercultural adaptation of international students are essential for understanding their experiences. Many scholars attribute intercultural adaptation to the development of one's cultural identity. Ting Toomey (2005) places "identity negotiation" at the center of "communicative resourcefulness" in intercultural encounters. Along the same line, Imahori and Cupach (2005) highlight the readiness for individuals to negotiate their cultural identity while engaging with individuals from differing backgrounds as a key to being a competent intercultural communicator. Being competent in the context of this study will mean the ability to navigate instructional and institutional facilities with confidence in a polycultural setting like Duke University.

Cross-cultural adaptation theory explains how individuals adapt to new cultures including the tensions and development that take place in the process. Built on the premise that an individual's ability to communicate appropriately to the values of the local culture equals successful adaptation, Kim (2001) describes cross-cultural adaptation as a process of dynamic unfolding of the natural human tendency to struggle for an internal equilibrium in the face of often adversarial environmental conditions (Kim, 2001). This process is described as the acculturation and deculturation process. Kim (2008) defines acculturation as new cultural learning and acquisition of new cultural practices in wide-ranging areas including the learning of a new language.

According to Kim (2008), as new learning occurs, “deculturation or unlearning of at least some of the old cultural elements has to occur, at least in the sense that new responses are adapted in situations that previously would have evoked old ones” She argues that, in the project of cross-cultural adaptation, we are also embarking on a path of personal development, in which we stretch ourselves out of the familiar and reach for a deepened and more inclusive understanding of human conditions, including our own (Kim, 2000). The stretching of ourselves continues the adaptation process primarily when a conflict ensues between the need for acculturation and the resistance to deculturation. Kim (2008) calls this process the “push” of the new culture and the “pull” of the old theoretically identified as the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. Kim asserts that this internal disequilibrium created by such conflicting forces can generate crises in which our mental and behavioral habits are brought into awareness and called into question. Kim’s assertion highlights several issues that have been identified as the main adjustment issues facing international students such as social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need (Johnson & Kumar, 2010; Ward, 2001).

According to Kim (2001, 2008), resilience towards these challenges is what yields intercultural adaptation. These processes will be useful for exploring how graduates of African Leadership Academy enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University engage socially and academically at a rigorous academic environment like Duke University.

## **Academic Success, Cultural Identity (Afro-Mindedness), Intercultural Adaptation and the Input-Environment-Output Model**

When it comes to understanding the academic success of African international students, studies seem to affirm the relationship of their intercultural adaptation to their environment as influential on their academic success as established in preceding sections. The intercultural adaptation process for ALA students at Duke University can be imagined as a negotiation of ideas and identity between ascribed and assumed realities. The intercultural process then it seems is constantly at the middle of the input (pre-college training with a social premise), environment (culture, norms, and values) and output (the success of students including social and academic stamina).

As Asante (1998) prescribes, “the Afrocentric idea is projected as a model for intercultural agency in which pluralism exists without hierarchy and respect for cultural origins, achievements, and prospects is freely granted” (p. xii). The respect for cultural origins as prescribed by Asante aligns with both Astin’s I-E-O model and the negotiation of values and norms that takes place in an intercultural adaptation process. According to Asante’s *Afrocentric Manifesto* (2007), an Afrocentric project requires a minimum of five characteristics: (1) an interest in a psychological location, (2) a commitment to finding the African subject place, (3) the defense of African cultural elements, (4) a commitment to lexical refinement, and (5) a commitment to correct the dislocations in the history of Africa (p. 17,18). The bodies of literature align as a system to make inquiries into the lived experiences of the study participants.

## **Gaps in Existing Literature**

There are little to no distinction between international students in existing literature. That is, most literature on international students does very little to emphasize how cultural identities, alliances and realities frame the experiences of international students. Beyond the generalization of international students as a single population, there is very limited literature on the experiences of African international students particularly in the sphere of academic success. Along the same line, little to no distinction is given on the level of risk factors among international students. One prevailing example is the tendency of most literature to reduce all international students as lacking English language proficiency. A good example is Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury's (2014) overgeneralization and consistent reference to international students as non-native English speakers.

Furthermore, Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury (2014) like many other scholars would have provided more insight on their international student sample by identifying if there were any relationships between gender, age, educational level, or national origin and self-efficacy. Afrocentricity in its comparative nature could be very narrow in its two way European versus African discourse in most literature. In today's global world, the scarcity of scholarly discourse on the interaction of Afrocentricity with other worldviews beyond Eurocentricity is a gap.

## **Summary**

Given the transformative leaning of this study, the specificity of the study sample is in alignment to the goal of amplifying the experiences of underrepresented

populations in literature. The concerted effort to contribute to literature from the worldview of the subjects as prescribed by their African consciousness will inform the quest of the study to understand the personal strategies and characteristics that inform the academic success of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. The inquiry of the study with the pre-college education of the African Leadership Academy graduates at the center contributes to existing gaps on the social leadership attributes that certain African international students bring with them to U.S higher institutions. This study will increase understanding about what certain African international students with substantive pre-college training can teach us about facilitating conducive learning environments for emerging student populations.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. The qualitative design outlined in this chapter is a means to amplify the voices of an underrepresented group of students, to capture the experiences of African international students, particularly, African international students who graduated from African Leadership Academy. The process will provide understanding on how these students construct their cultural identities based on their pre-college leadership training, how they navigate their experiences as African international students and adapt to life in the U.S and Duke University in particular, and how they construct and achieve academic success at a rigorous academic setting like Duke University. The qualitative study design facilitates opportunities to identify the academic realities of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University. In qualitative research, “reality is constructed by the individuals involved” (Creswell, 1998). According to Creswell (1998), “the researcher needs to report these realities, rely on voices and interpretations of informants through extensive quotes, present themes that reflect words used by informants, and advance evidence of different perspectives on each theme (p.76). Patton (2015) puts it thus, “qualitative inquiry documents the stuff that happens among real people in real world in their own words, from their own perspectives, and within their own contexts; it then makes sense of the stuff that happens by finding patterns and themes among the

seeming chaos and idiosyncrasies of lots of stuff” (p.12). The focus of this study is to provide an opportunity for the study participants to share their academic experiences in their own words, from their own perspectives, within their educational contexts. In essence, the qualitative design is most fitting for capturing stories to understand the academic perspectives and experiences of the ALA graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. That said, qualitative inquiry is personal and the researcher is the instrument of inquiry (Patton 2015, p.3). Hence it is important that my approach to the research study is understood since it is part of the qualitative methodology. The next section discusses worldview and value premises as related to the study topic.

### **Statement of Value Premise and Positionality**

Qualitative research emphasizes the role of values in a study. Creswell (1998) states, “in a qualitative study, the investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of the information gathered from the field” (p.28). This section provides some insight into the value premise that guides the study. My entire childhood memories of growing up in Nigeria, West Africa are linked to educational campuses because I lived on one almost consistently up until my departure in 1995 for tertiary education in the United States. My father worked as a high school administrator and my mother as an elementary school principal. The prominent model of secondary education in Nigeria in the late 70s through the mid 90s was to engage faculty and students by providing opportunities for faculty and students to have on-campus housing and interact in several co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in addition to the classroom. Hence, many boarding secondary

school colleges had living quarters for senior administrators and key staff members. Basically, most high schools in Nigeria within the stated timeframe were affordably set up like residential colleges and given the nature of my father's profession, I grew up on high school campuses. There I watched my parents support students outside the classroom by opening our home to students. My parents were strong advocates for their students, believing in the transformational power of quality education and access for all, they did all they could to facilitate a conducive learning environment.

My parents nursed back to health many sick students, fed them when they were hungry, corrected many when they were wrong, coached and supported countless students during difficult times. After my father passed away in 2013, many tributes from his former students centered on my parents care and guidance during their secondary education and how it has contributed to their overall success in life. This legacy of providing conducive learning environments informs my practice as an international educator and academic advisor. Given the heterogeneity of students' cultural identities and experiences on U.S colleges today, I am always interested in how student and academic affairs staff can facilitate instruction and support students beyond traditional and dominant practices such as identity categorization and student development models where student are minimally defined by such things as race, religion, nationality. The Senior Vice President and Dean of Campus Life at Emory University, Ajay Nair (2015) debunks multiculturalism as a transitional move away from our society's historic oppression of marginalized groups. According to Nair, multiculturalism defines individuals primarily by race, religion, ethnicity, or similarly



narrow criteria, by placing each of us in categories that too often disregard our other identities and overlook our shared humanity. In my role as an international educator at Duke University, I serve as an advocate for international students and marginalized populations through programs, workshops, and serving on numerous task committees. One of my primary goals in my role is to help staff and faculty see the limitations of minimizing the multiplicity of cultural identities that exist among international students, due to its negative impact on creativity to develop new and dynamic programs, equity of access to relevant resources, and inclusivity in the classroom and beyond for these students. According to Nair (2015), when the personhood of our students is validated, we can engage as educators, not just administrators, and both affirm identity and teach the great intersectionality among all of us through a polycultural framework. That is, when we begin to learn, understand, and respect the value of our differences as a backdrop to understanding our community, our higher institutions can thrive culturally.

Finally, as an African immigrant who came to the U.S twenty-two years ago at the college age of 18 years old, I have experienced first-hand the misconceptions about the African continent as homogeneous. I have also seen limited literature on the cultural praxis of African experiences in the field of intercultural communication, a field that I have loved since my undergraduate education. Given my value premises as stated above, my worldview to designing research about the experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled at Duke University is constructivist with a transformative leaning. Constructivism is built upon the premise of a social construction of reality (Searle, 1995). Crabtree & Miller (1999) affirms that the close collaboration

between the researcher and the participant is an advantage of the constructivist paradigm because the researcher enables the participant to tell their story. My intent is to find out the constructed meanings these African students hold about academic success based on their individual and collective experiences. Crotty (1998) says humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives (cultural lens).

My transformative leaning is because my primary goal in researching the experiences of these students is to advocate for the value of more literature about their cultural perspectives and how it can improve instruction and student support that makes academic success more inclusive on U.S college campuses. Creswell (2013) alludes to the claim among researchers with a transformative worldview about the lack of advocacy among constructivists (p. 9). I hope to both interpret the social construct of academic success by African Leadership Academy graduates at Duke University as well as advocate for the implications of their stories on the practice of internationalization at Duke University and possibly beyond.

### **Statement of Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions will guide the extensive inquiry into understanding the cultural/individual experiences of these students, their adaptation to life at Duke and how their adaptation supports their academic success at Duke University:

1. In what ways do graduates of the African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University define their academic success?
2. What components of the ALA education do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential to their academic success at Duke University?
3. What sociocultural factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
4. What institutional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most supportive of their academic success at Duke University?
5. What instructional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
6. What personal factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as supporting their academic success at Duke University?

## **Research Participants**

The entire group of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled at Duke University is the study population. The population of African Leadership Academy students at Duke University is currently eight students from six African countries. The students are either sophomores or upper-division students, which provides strong parameters for them to share their experiences with at least a year or more of lived experiences at Duke University. The African Leadership Academy students at Duke

University keep close contact with each other and meet together a few times in the semester. More importantly, the informal gatherings provide opportunity to recruit participants by word of mouth by attending one of their meetings.

### **Study Methodology and Rationale**

The study is qualitative in design. “The researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know, be known, and trusted by them, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed. This material is supplemented (triangulated) by other data such as [artifacts], observations, memos, records, newspaper articles, and photographs” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, p. 1-2). The context, sample, and purpose of the study all point to the value of a qualitative design. According to Patton (2015), the value of a qualitative inquiry is three-fold; to illuminate meaning, to study how things work, and to capture stories reflecting people’s perspectives and experiences (p.12). By giving the study participants an opportunity to share their perspectives on their academic experiences, the focus of the study is a process-oriented explanation based on the analysis of how the pre-college education at African Leadership Academy informs the academic success of these African international students at Duke University. According to Maxwell (2012), process theory tends to see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect them (p. 29). Maxwell (2012) suggests that the strengths of qualitative

research derive significantly from this process orientation toward the world, and the inductive approach, focus on specific situations or people, and emphasis on descriptions rather than numbers that this requires (p. 30). In the premise of this study regarding the academic experiences and definition of academic success, a qualitative design is very fitting because of both the context of “substantive pre-college leadership education at African Leadership Academy” and the “rigorous academic setting at Duke University.” Maxwell (2012) asserts this will fulfill the need to understand the particular contexts within which these students act, and the influence that this context has on their actions (p.30). Understanding the social and professional worlds around us comes from paying attention to what people are doing and what they are saying (Stake 2010, p.2) The qualitative design of the study allows the ALA graduates at Duke University an opportunity to share their academic experiences.

### **Research Design**

Given the specificity and uniqueness of the substantive pre-college leadership education that these students had at the African Leadership Academy prior to their admission to Duke University, a qualitative design will be a better approach to explaining their background and construct of their cultural identity, their adaptation to the Duke University culture, and understanding of their academic success. Moreover, the research questions in the study are best answered qualitatively. The study will use multiple methods for triangulation, complementarity, and expansion to strengthen the credibility of the data. Maxwell (2012) defines triangulation as using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all

support a single conclusion (p. 102). The goal of using triangulation is not to demonstrate that different data sources or inquiry approaches yield the same result, but to test for such consistency (Patton 2015, p.317). In essence, gathering data from the study participants in different ways is an attempt to increase the credibility of the data. According to Maxwell (2012) complementarity and expansion will broaden the range of aspects or phenomena that are addressed (p. 102). The goal of the data collection strategies is to gather the stories of the participants. Through these stories the participants are able to describe their views of reality and this enables the research to better understand the participants' actions (Lather, 1992). The small number of the study participants can further provide deeper insight into the phenomena. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2010) argues thus, "The qualitative idea is not to generalize from the sample (as in quantitative research) but to develop an in-depth understanding of a few people – the larger the number of people, the less detail that typically can emerge from any individual." For the reasons stated above, an information session, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires is used to collect data. The questionnaire is used to gather demographic data of the study participants as well as some open-ended questions. There are two gender-based focus groups conducted and eight individual in-depth interviews. The study participants are all the eight African Leadership Academy (ALA) graduates enrolled as undergraduate students Duke University. The focus group and individual in-depth interview are used with study participants in order to confirm the most important findings that issued from the questionnaire. The focus group is also useful to elucidate some of the enigmatic findings as well as to elicit from the

participants relevant contexts or ancillary factors that may have influenced their opinions regarding their academic experiences. With the permission of the study participants, an audio recorder is used to provide an accurate rendition of the focus group interviews and individual interviews. By using a variety of sources and resources, the qualitative inquirer can build on the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weakness of any single approach (Patton 2015, p.390). Thus, the data collection methods provide a comprehensive perspective on the academic experiences of the graduates of African Leadership Academy enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University.

### ***Information session***

The first strategy for data collection is to hold an information session for potential study participants. The information session takes place during one of the usual African Leadership Academy alumni' social gatherings. The information session provides opportunity to describe the purpose of the study, elicit students' permission to be in the study as well as discuss the incentives for participation. Students are asked to read the study consent form detailing the steps and scope of participation in the study. Students who agree to be in the study are asked to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire helps capture students' demographic information and their definition of academic success as an open-ended question.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire is the first tool for data collection on the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. The questionnaire is designed as a two-page document to collect demographic data such as GPA, date of birth, etc from the student. Using Qualtrics, questionnaire is distributed confidentially and electronically to participants. The responses are saved on the university database to guarantee security measures. The study participants are assured to provide information voluntarily and of the confidentiality of all information provided. Additionally, participants are asked to define or answer a few open-ended questions i.e academic success on the questionnaire. Given the fact that most of the study participants are bilingual, a questionnaire provides the participants the opportunity to process information differently and to provide answers in a written form. The use of a questionnaire also adds weight to the credibility of the data.

### *Focus groups*

The questionnaire is followed by a couple of focus groups. By bringing together people who share a similar background, focus groups create the opportunity for participants to engage in meaningful conversations about the topics that researchers wish to understand (Patton 2015, p. 477). A focus group is a groups' rendition of an event where the interviewee's perceptions and own sense of meaning are the material to be understood (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990). A focus group is used to elicit the views of a group who have common experiences or interests. They are brought together with the purpose



of discussing a particular subject, under the guidance of a facilitator. It is an opportunity to moderate a discussion about some aspect of a case study, deliberately trying to surface the views of each person in the group (Krueger and Casey, 2009). The study participants consist of four identifying females and four identifying males. As such, there are two gender-identified focus groups, one for students that identify as male and another for students that identify as female. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), participants should feel that they are in a group with people of equivalent position. Given, the diversity of national origin and religion among the study participants, a gender-based focus group is useful for eliciting deep reflections and conversations that is void of ease to engage fully. The focus group builds on analysis of data gathered from the questionnaire by using divergent and emergent themes to guide interview questions. Divergent and emergent themes help participants hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what others have to say (Patton 2015, p.475). As such, the focus groups will be facilitated in secure and relaxed spaces where study participants are able discuss freely. Krueger and Casey (2008), emphasizes the use of permissive and non-threatening environment that encourages participants to share perceptions without pressuring participants to vote or reach consensus" (p.4). Thus, the goal of the focus group is to conduct it in a way that helps the study participants share their experiences freely. The focus groups are an hour-long session conducted in secure study rooms in the main library most accessible to the participants. Study participants will sign consent forms prior to the session providing authorization to record the sessions. The sessions are recorded using two

gadgets to capture the conversation and as a backup in case of technology issues.

Ultimately, the focus group conducted in a way that is comfortable and even enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions (Patton 2015, p.475).

### ***Individual in-depth interviews***

The focus groups are followed by individual in-depth interviews with each participant.

The one and half hour-long interviews are used as building blocks to continue on themes that arise from questionnaire responses and focus groups interviews. The one-on-one interviews also provide opportunity to capture individual experiences after capturing some knowledge from the questionnaire and focus group interviews.

According to Patton (2015), a good interview evokes thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and experience not only to the interviewer but also to the interviewee (p.495). The process of being taken through a directed, reflective process affects the persons being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves that they didn't know or at least were not fully aware of before the interview (Patton 2015, p. 495). Thus, the individual in-depth interviews are conducted in secure locations around campus where study participants feel relaxed and focused to share their academic experiences at Duke University. The individual interview sessions are recorded for transcription and data analysis. Building upon the data gathered from the questionnaire and focus group sessions, the individual in-depth interviews also provide opportunity to get a holistic view of each individual student.

### ***Observation***

A visit to the African Leadership Academy is necessary to observe the school setting and culture while interacting with students, staff, and faculty. Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011) conclude that the observation-based researcher is able to provide a rounded account of the lives of particular people, focusing on their lived experiences rather than overgeneralizing and making assumptions based on descriptions alone (p.476). An additional goal of the visit is to collect supporting documents on the vision and mission of ALA's education. Since observational data are constrained by the limited sample of activities actually observed, the visit to ALA also provides better context and understanding to the descriptions of the study participants thereby, a credible analysis and interpretation of their narratives. Observations provide a check on what is reported in interviews; interviews, on the other hand, permit the observer to go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts (Patton 2015, p.390). Also during the ALA visit, in addition to observation, additional documents are collected to crosscheck previous findings and pictures are taken as support documentation of observational experiences.

### **Data analysis and credibility**

Creswell (2013) refers to data analysis as the segmenting and taking apart the data as well as putting it back together (p. 195). The goal is to design a thorough and effective plan to analyze data as soon as they are collected. It is also a crucial process to maintain organization. This section describes the methods and means that is used to organize data.

### ***Memos***

It is important to record reflective notes about what is learned from collected data. In this study, memos were useful for making notes about patterns and emerging issues throughout data collection. Maxwell (2012) says memos can also perform beyond data analysis as a way to reflect on goals, methods, theory, prior experiences and researchers' relationship with the participants (p.105) Memos are also useful for monitoring thought processes and decision-making criteria. Patton (2015) advises on the importance of the analyst staying in touch with personal predispositions, biases, fears, hopes, constraints, blinders, and pressures (p.523). Thus, the memos helped me to be aware of my cognitive and emotional analysis processes while it is ongoing. Memos were very instrumental throughout the process of data collection, particularly during my ALA visit.

### ***Data entry and storage***

Data entry and storage enables data management. The focus groups interviews and individual interviews are recorded for full capturing of data. The data was transcribed from interviews, observation notes, memos and others into word documents, as they are collected. Using rev.com, the interviews were transcribed and stored electronically in the university database for security purposes. As they are collected and transcribed, data were labeled with notation system that will make retrieval manageable. Transcribed interviews were assessed for quality and crosschecked against the audio recording for accuracy. Having additional copies of notes, transcripts, and recordings in a secure database backs up all collected data.

### ***Thematic analysis or categorical analysis***

Thematic analysis is used to categorize emerging themes in the process of data collection. The process begins with the identification of unit segments of data that seem important or meaningful in some way. Maxwell (2012) says this identification can be based on the researchers' ideas of what is important or an inductive attempt to capture new insights (p.107). Even though a transcription service (rev.com) is used for transcribing the focus group and individual interviews, going through each interview recording and reading the transcripts over and over again prove highly beneficial because it intimates me with the data. Being intimate with the data is crucial to being able to identify patterns or themes in the collected data.

The ability to use thematic analysis appears to involve a number of underlying abilities or competencies such as being able to identify patterns in seemingly random information (Boyatzis 1998, p.7). Inductive analysis will be used at the onset of the analysis process to discover patterns, themes, and categories in the data. Findings emerge out of data through the analyst's interactions with the data (Patton 2015, p.542). Manual coding of the data is done to identify themes and categories. The data collection tools are designed to answer the study research questions hence focus group discussions and individual interviews is read over and over to identify themes and categories in responses.

### ***Collective and individual themes***

The collective and individual themes that emerge from data collection is used in the study to sort data for further analysis like member checking or peer debriefing.

### ***Member checking***

This is when data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained. This can be done both formally and informally as opportunities for member checks may arise during the normal course of observation and conversation. Member checking is also a way to establish credibility of data. In order to avoid the confusion that might result from member checking, Creswell and Miller (2000) posited that procedures for trustworthiness, including member checking, should be largely determined by incorporation of three lenses: of the self (the researcher), of the participants, and of the external readers of the final research report. Carlson (2010) maintains these are the three entities for whom the researcher desires trustworthiness approval, and the lenses through which researchers should view and interpret their work. Data should be continually revisited and scrutinized for accuracy of interpretation and for meaningful, coherent conveyance of the participant's narrative contributions. The sequential facilitation of the data collection from questionnaire to individual in-depth interviews provided room for ongoing analysis and ability to cross-check findings. In this study, findings from the questionnaire and the focus groups were shared with participants during the individual interviews to check the credibility of account of the academic experiences. Also, the findings from the study were shared in verbal communication with ALA officials during a visit to the school to check the accuracy of ALA curriculum, policies, and practices as described by the study participants.

### ***Peer debriefing***

Lincoln & Guba (1985) defines it as a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). This process is also useful for data credibility because it can help me uncover implicit biases, perspectives and assumptions on my part. Given the diversity of religion, socio-economic status, gender, and national origin among the study participants, peer debriefing is used to validate responses as intended by the interviewee.

### ***Triangulation***

Depicting research as a triangle, Patton (2015), explains triangulation as a process in qualitative research of drawing the lines and connecting the sides to each other. Schuh (2009), defines triangulation as using multiple sources of data, data collection methods, or both, and multiple investigators to collect data. Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives as to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches, in fact, such inconsistencies should not be seen as weakening the evidence but should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data (Patton, 2002). According to Dezin (1978), the logic of triangulation is based on the premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed. (p.28). In this study, methods and data triangulation were both used. Methods triangulation was used by collecting information

and stories about the academic experiences of ALA graduates enrolled as undergraduate students through different methods such as questionnaire, focus groups, and individual interviews. Methods triangulation was used to gather different sides of the stories and experiences of the study participants in relation to their academic journey. Data triangulation is used to analyze findings at each stage of data collection. It was useful for capturing different aspects of the experiences of ALA graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke and for filling gaps in deposition and observation.

### **Summary**

In collecting data for the qualitative study, different information-gathering tools such as questionnaire, focus groups, observation, and individual in-depth interviews were used to allow multiple methods for triangulation, complementarity, and expansion to strengthen the credibility of the data. The questionnaire is used to gather demographic data of the study participants as well as some open-ended questions. There were two gender-based focus groups conducted and eight individual in-depth interviews. The study participants were all the eight African Leadership Academy (ALA) graduates enrolled as undergraduate students Duke University. The data gathering tools were designed in alignment with answering the study research questions, data collected from the questionnaire, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews are analyzed using coding and thematic analysis. The goal of the data collection strategies is to gather the stories of the participants. Through these stories, the study participants were able to describe their views of academic success, thus contributing to scholarly knowledge about the experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates



at Duke University. The stories of the study participants can provide insight into supporting future African international students at Duke University and beyond. The stories of the participants can contribute to the intercultural awareness of staff and faculty. The stories of the participants also contribute to the limited narratives on underrepresented international student populations. Thus, providing understanding for the components of their definition and construct of academic success as well. Given the current size of African international students at Duke University, this study can provide insight into the opportunities and challenges that underrepresentation poses among international undergraduate students. The experiences of these students might also provide insight into the impact of quality education.

## Chapter Four: Data Analysis

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share the findings gathered from the data collected for the study. The focus of the study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. Given the study design as outlined in chapter three, data is collected qualitatively using focus group interviews, individual in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Data for the study were collected between May 6<sup>th</sup> and May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017. There are three main parts for data collection. The first is a questionnaire distributed electronically. The questionnaire is used to gather demographic information as well as participant response to several open-ended questions. The second phase included the gender specific focus group interviews. The focus group interviews are followed by individual in-depth interviews. This chapter details the findings in an attempt to answer the study's research questions;

1. In what ways do graduates of the African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University define their academic success?
2. What components of the ALA education do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential to their academic success at Duke University?
3. What sociocultural factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
4. What institutional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most supportive of their academic success at Duke University?

5. What instructional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
6. What personal factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as supporting their academic success at Duke University?

The African international students represented in this study are from all over the four main regions of the continent. The table below, (Table 3) provides background information on the participants of the study such as the diversity of national origin, age, gender identification, and academic interests.

### **Participant Profile**

Table 3

*Demographic profile of study participants*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Academic Major (s)</b>	<b>Minor/Certificate</b>	<b>Year</b>
Kenya	Female	23	Public Policy	Arabic	Senior
Morocco	Female	22	Electrical & Comp. Engineering	Computer Science, Education	Junior
Ghana	Female	24	Biomedical Engineering	Religion	Senior
Nigeria	Female	20	Economics	Public Policy	Junior
Ghana	Male	22	Electrical & Comp. Engineering	African Studies	Junior
Zimbabwe	Male	23	Political Science/Public Policy	Economics	Senior
Lesotho	Male	21	Electrical & Comp. Engineering		Sophomore
Nigeria	Male	21	Mechanical Engineering	Computer Science	Senior

The participants in this study are all the African Leadership Academy students enrolled as undergraduate degree seeking students at Duke University in the 2016-2017

academic year. The number of students in this category is a total of eight undergraduate

students ranging from sophomore to seniors. There are no freshmen among the students. All eight students participated voluntarily in the study. Students were originally approached at African Leadership Academy alumni gathering and were informally briefed about the study. Students also provided their email addresses at the gathering, which is the initial informal contact for the study. As described in the last chapter, an invitation is sent to each of the eight African Leadership Academy students to participate in an on-line questionnaire on Duke Qualtrics. A formal solicitation to participate in the study took place by email as well as a link to the questionnaire. All eight African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled at Duke University completed the questionnaire and participated in the in-depth individual interviews.

Despite the number of subjects, the demographic diversity within the group of students is of interest since Southern (Lesotho and Zimbabwe), Western (Ghana and Nigeria), Eastern (Kenya), and Northern Africa (Morocco) is represented. With the exception of one student, all of the participants lived their entire pre-college years in their respective countries. One of the participants was born in Slovakia to a Slovakian mother and a Ghanaian father. The participant moved to Ghana as a toddler and lived on the continent until attending Duke University. Hence all the participants lived an average of 18 years on the African continent until their departure for tertiary education in the U.S.

The students consist of one sophomore, three juniors and four seniors at the time of data collection May 2017. There are equal numbers of men and women participants in the study, consisting of four men and four women. The youngest among the study

participants is 20 years old, while the oldest, a senior, is 24 years old. It is important to note here that all of these students had already completed secondary education in their respective home countries before enrolling and graduating from African Leadership Academy and then embarking on their undergraduate education at Duke University.

At Duke University, students are admitted directly into two colleges, either Trinity College of Arts and Sciences or Pratt School of Engineering. The study participants are equally distributed between both Trinity College of Arts and Sciences and Pratt School of Engineering. Within each of these two colleges are departments that confer degrees by academic majors, minors, certificates, and other accredited programs approved for undergraduate education at Duke University.

At Duke University, undergraduate students in both Trinity College of Arts and Sciences and Pratt School of Engineering have to declare their majors during the second semester of sophomore year. It is not uncommon for Duke students to have additional academic minors and majors, but it is highly significant among the participants of this study since 100% of them have an additional academic major or minor. The additional academic majors and minors are of interest because they lean heavily in two directions; 1.) Cultural Studies such as Arabic, Religion, African Studies or 2.) Computer Science. There is also interest in Public Policy, Economics, and Education.

### **Qualitative Findings**

In this section, findings are presented around the research questions that guided the study. Each section is discussed as they align with emerging themes during analysis and buttressed by evidence from the qualitative data. The bulk of data is from the two

gender-based focus groups, the individual in-depth interviews, and the questionnaire. In addition, I made a visit to the campus of African Leadership Academy in Johannesburg, South Africa at the end of May 2017. The goal of the visit is to observe the school setting and culture while interacting with students, staff, and faculty. An additional goal of the visit was to collect supporting documents on the vision and mission of ALA's education. Finally, the visit was intended to provide better context and understanding to the descriptions of the study participants thereby, a credible analysis and interpretation of their narratives. Below, findings are presented around the research questions that guided the study and themes that emerged.

***Research question one: In what ways do graduates of African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University define their academic success?***

***Theme One: Positive impact on self and society***

The study participants were asked to define what academic success means to them on the questionnaire and the small group interview protocols. The focus group interview protocol also included the question "How do you define academic success?" presented the same way as on the questionnaire in order to solicit more depth and discussion within the group. The focus group discussions reiterated the participants' definition of academic success gathered from the questionnaire. There was no significant difference in definitions between the men focus group and the women focus group. The study participants spoke further about the definition of academic success at their individual interview sessions and again there is further alignment with previous themes as emphasis on learning, good grades, and applicability of educational content to real life

issues emerged. In defining their academic success, the participants in this study were mostly insistent on the applicability of learning to real life issues, in particular the gain of relevant skills and knowledge that are transferable to life beyond college. Out of the eight participants, five of them alluded to the importance of knowledge application to real life issues. That is, academic success is acquiring knowledge as a means to improve personal and vocational prospects as well as a way to contribute to the future of the society. Most of the participants attributed academic success to impactful intellectual growth that informs their personal growth while being informative to transforming lives and communities in a positive way. Here are some of the direct quotes of the participants' definitions:

Ideally, academic success is about your intellectual growth, how much you're learning and especially how you could apply what you learn in order to add a value to the society and make a change (Helene)

Being able to apply in-class knowledge in a real-world setting  
(Balira)

Being able to put (or relate) my academics to practical applications  
(Samuel)

It seems like the only thing we can do is help each other, that's of any value, so I think in order to do that, to have an impact on society you have to learn something. You have to have a specific skill set, and I think to have that skill set you need to learn I guess, so that's what I did, yeah. (Judith)

The majority of the study participants emphasize academic success as equaling acquisition and application of knowledge for a greater good.

*Theme two: Quantifiable academic performance*

Another theme that emerged in the responses of the study participants while defining their academic success is the importance of good grades as a metric for assessing intellectual understanding and retention. A few of the participants in the study made references to the value of gauging academic progress through grades. Some participants feel that grades are an easy way for them to quantify their personal learning goals and measure, their academic success. To these students, obtaining good grades means being actively engaged in their classes.

For me, just from the narrow definition or the narrow perspective, it is also about doing well in class, and doing well across the board, so across all subjects and doing it consistently, which I find is very important at the college level. You're constantly doing midterms, constantly doing finals, you're taking a lot of classes, so it's important to keep up that level of engagement. So it's success in all the classes, not being inconsistent doing well one semester, or doing well in some classes but not others. I just want to be consistently getting good grades and doing well across the board throughout all the semesters. (Tabira)

Also, in terms of grades, one of the participants point to achieving good grades as a marker for personal determination to put in effort and excel:

my definition of success is yeah, do your best to get a good grade, but I don't think success should be judged by being better than everyone else. So that sort of thing. I don't think academic success is being top of your class. I think it's just having, it's doing the best you can. And to me that metric is a good GPA. (Balira)

While still alluding to the value of transferable academic knowledge to real life issues, participants similarly address the value of good grades in defining academic success;

Even though I barely worry about my grades, I think it's important, in the sense that it needs to be some standard of measurement. (Samuel)

Overall in defining their academic success, the participants are consistent throughout the study in emphasizing academic success as measurable through the applicability of



knowledge gained in class to societal needs. They also define academic success as the ability to engage academic content in a way that yields favorable grades and achieving a good GPA. Only one of the study participants reported a 2.9 GPA, the lowest GPA reported among the study participants. One of the participants reflected on why a strong GPA is valued as reflecting academic success:

3.5 I feel like is pretty average. Yeah. If you have huge goals ... Because I feel like academic excellence in terms of your persistence and being, or like determination in achieving, seeking things that are outside academics. I feel like personally, if I'm really going to achieve all of the things that I'm saying outside class that I'm saying I want to achieve, I first have to prove things like maybe academics I can achieve that high standard that I want to achieve. (Sola)

Thus, this person reiterates the sentiments of other participants in equaling academic success to the relevance of acquired knowledge beyond the classroom. Moreover, these findings, particularly the self-reported GPA of the study participants show that high academic performance is intentionally or unintentionally pursued and achieved hence valued and linked to the academic success of the study participants.

***Research question two: What components of the ALA education do graduates of African Leadership Academy view as most influential to their academic success at Duke University?***

The second research question of the study is asked to understand how the participants' prior academic experiences influences their academic experiences at Duke University. The focus groups and individual in-depth interviews both revealed the impact of the ALA values on the study participants. By the end of the interviews, I had

heard the participants mention the ALA values and share their experiences about them so much that I could identify the values myself. It was of added significance that when I visited ALA, the school values were visibly displayed on huge plaques at the entrance of the school.

Participants are further probed to discuss the similarities and differences between ALA and Duke University. Most of the participants feel that attending ALA benefited them academically and provided subsequent opportunities for their academic pursuits including the opportunity to attend a reputable higher educational institution like Duke University.

Given the recorded responses to the adjustment of the participants to the academic life at Duke University, it is important to explore how well their ALA education prepared them for higher education in the U.S and particularly at Duke University. In an attempt to understand the academic contexts of African Leadership Academy and Duke University and how it has informed students' approach to academic success, students were asked about the influence of their ALA education on their academic experience at Duke University. In analyzing the respondents' narratives, one of the most reoccurring themes is the impact of ALA's values.

*Theme one: ALA values*

ALA has six core values, also known as pillars that inform its educational practices and policies. During my visit to the academy, there were six large plaques on the six pillars that make up the lobby of the school. The plaques were of considerable size and each had a picture, a bold depiction of a value and the definition of that value written on top

of the picture. The ALA values include; Integrity, Curiosity, Humility, Compassion, Diversity, and Excellence. The faculty, staff, and students of ALA make frequent references to these values and use them as pointers for social and academic conduct and decision-making particularly in key courses like Entrepreneurial Leadership and African Studies. These values are defined thus in the ALA handbook as well as in the school lobby:

- Integrity:** We are a people of our word, with courage to do what is right.
- Curiosity:** We challenge the status quo and take initiative to pursue new ideas.
- Humility:** We are thankful for our opportunities and are aware of our limitations.
- Compassion:** We empathize with and care for those around us.
- Diversity:** We respect all people and believe that difference should be celebrated.
- Excellence:** We set high standards for our own achievement and celebrate the achievement of others.

These values serve as symbols that the ALA community imbibes with dedication. According to Deal and Peterson (2009 p.33), “symbols represent intangible cultural values and believes. They are the outward manifestation of those things we cannot comprehend on a rational level. They are expressions of shared sentiments and sacred commitments.” One of the participants explained how ALA instilled the values:

Well we had what we called seminal readings. These would be just a week where we read, where we do some readings and then we go and discuss those readings with our advisory group and with other students. Some of the seminal readings were actually around the key beliefs of ALA and always in the those seminal readings, we bring up these values and how important they are. I think also for the values, the entrepreneurial leadership classes also were pretty huge in actually promoting these values to us, because we would talk about these values as key characteristic of a leader, kind of thing. (Balira)

We definitely have it in the entrance of the whole school, like in the main building. There were these values on different walls, and there were actually people's, like students' signatures below these values. (Helene)

So, one of ALA's values that's really important is excellence. Striving to do the ultimate best in everything that you do. But, for example, when we come to Duke, not ... As long as you get good grades, it doesn't matter how much you work to get those good grades. You could use ... someone marking scheme. So it doesn't matter how much effort you put into your job. As long as you get a good grade, you're fine for that thing. And, some people in group settings, even when working in a group settings, you'll still be fine. You'll still get a good grade because other people will do the work for you. But at ALA, everyone was trying to ... Giving their best input in everything that we did, because of that value of excellence and stuff. (Samuel)

The example cited above also demonstrates how ALA uses its core educational values, in this instance, excellence, to substantiate school policies and practices. In essence, this participant walks away attributing “doing the best you can” (excellence) to academic success and how it guides their academic career at Duke. The participants of the study were relentless in making references to the academic, cultural, and personal influence of the African Leadership Academy experience. Most of the participants felt that attending ALA benefited them academically particularly in preparation for academic life at Duke University. According to the participants of the study, one such way is ALA’s emphasis on teamwork.

*Theme two: Collaborative learning*

The participants felt that ALA’s Entrepreneurial Leadership curriculum, which emphasized collaborative academic and business ventures, changed them to think and work more collaboratively thus making them more receptive to team work and group projects at Duke. During my visit to ALA May 2017, the head of department for ALA’s entrepreneurial leadership program, Dave Tait and I discussed the syllabus and learning outcomes of the Entrepreneurial Leadership program. According to Tait, the syllabus of

the Entrepreneurial Leadership program includes a variety of teaching methods, including team-based design challenges, guest speakers, mini-lectures, simulations and games, case studies and experiential learning. He also mentioned that students run a for-profit or non-profit venture on the ALA campus in teams of 5-7 students through the Student Enterprise Program during their second year at ALA. The enterprise program allows ALA students to put the first-year curriculum into practice by simulating real-life business scenarios. Students manage and lead teams of 5-7 students, reporting annually to boards of directors comprised of working professionals and bring their budgets to an Investment Committee to execute a project that has direct impact on the ALA community. The participants of this study reiterated the sense of responsibility and accountability the entrepreneurial leadership (EL) helped them develop and how it benefits their academic career at Duke University:

So, for example, in my traditional high school, the learning was so individualistic. The grade that you got depended on the amount of work you did at home. But, at ALA much of the grading for classes like entrepreneurial leadership was based on team performance. So you didn't just have to look out for your own academic performance. But you also had to make sure the people you're working with get as much benefit from the learning as you did. So, I would say that's one thing that helped me adjust to Duke. (Balira)

One, I think the unique curriculum that they have in Entrepreneurship and African Studies. It does give you a different perspective in terms of learning and approach to learning that you don't usually get in the traditional schools that some of us might have come from. The schools that we went to, there's a huge focus on the very specific traditional studies. You do Math, you do Physics, you do History, you do this class. And then that's it. So their approach in Entrepreneurship and African Studies, I would say mirrors a more diverse approach to school and learning, which is similar to what you find in colleges here. So for example, on college campuses you would find Entrepreneur classes, and you would have majors like African Studies, so that's sort of like a diverse approach to studying through their unique curriculum was helpful. Gives you a

unique way of thinking that might reflect what you might find in college.  
(Tabira)

Even though ALA encouraged some of that with the whole entrepreneurial thing, you had to share some of your opinions – how to do certain things, what you think of certain things and that really helped a lot at Duke. Especially when you need to communicate what you need, like needing help academically or needing to participate in class. I think it is also helpful for subjects that need – I guess a lot of interaction. Even if you are doing something like Math you still need to understand something and ask questions. It helps with communication, learning to ask for help, also on getting some agency over your academics. Again going after the resources you need even when they are not openly given to you. (Helene)

Thus, some of the participants of the study make a contrast between the preparations of a traditional high school in their home country versus the preparation of an ALA education for their higher education pursuit at Duke University. These participants felt that the focus of ALA education, such as the EL program supports their academic experiences at Duke University in a positive way. In alignment with the EL program, the participants also felt the program and the ALA curriculum in general forced them to think more creatively:

*Theme Three: Critical thinking and analysis*

On how ALA achieved its educational mission to help students become critical and analytical thinkers, the participants recounted several ALA rituals that facilitate cultural, academic, and personal engagement. The participants of this study shared such ALA experiences that are embedded in the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities during their time at ALA:

We have a weekly meal and assembly, and one person told you a story every week. It's real interesting to hear about people... And the courage to tell that story, and how very impressive some of the stories are, maybe teaches you to be

humble, or just to see people for who they are. It just gives you a different perspective on life (Ugonna)

So we have this thing called seminal readings where for a week of school, essentially all classes stop. All faculty is, everyone stops doing their work. And then every day you have two readings. So you read for ... Either you read overnight or you read for two hours during the day. And it's always very controversial picks for like books. Things like Animal Farm or The New 10 Commandments or The Myth of Sisyphus. And eventually everyone reads it, and you have discussions. You call them families of six students, and then you meet with [family, and then you read for a certain amount of time. For two hours and just discuss. And the whole idea is it helps students develop new ... similar values, but also maybe not similar values, helps ALA students have similar experiences in terms of how they think and how they interact. And those readings have essentially shaped almost everything I believe in now. It made me question everything I believe in and made me shape ... essentially tear down everything and rebuild it from scratch. (Nina)

Meaning you are in many situations where you had to reflect, to think, and to develop that critical and analytical thinking. Here [at Duke], I feel that being in the engineering track, most of my classes have been quantitative. Meaning it's mainly, it's not something that involves discussion kind of thing. But I feel that in my writing class, in my education classes, then these got me really thinking about different things, like critically thinking and questioning my opinions about different topics. (Samuel)

We always had seminal readings where we used to go over and someone would learn about, like, figures in African history, or then about Aristotle. Different topics every semester, and it was more like an exercise of critical analysis about being able to discuss ideas, and I guess trying to build up what you really believe in and what you stand for I guess. (Judith)

The participants of this study felt that an ALA education facilitated many opportunities like those quoted above to acquire an innovative, strategic, and pluralistic thought process through activities, readings, discussions, and exposure to cultural difference.

Apart from activities on campus, a couple of the participants discussed the opportunities they had through ALA to attend summer programs and workshops in the U.S which gave them further exposure academically:

Also in ALA, I became a better scholar, so I came down to the US in my summer between my first and second year. So that's been for the Aspen Ideas Festival, for a couple of weeks, I think. And it was just a lot of things, too, that the ALA offered that were really special... So, at the Aspen Ideas Festival, they bring together a lot of world leaders, like Jeff Bezos kind of people.. Before, it just be big leaders only, and then one day, Jeff Bezos said, "Okay, if old people be discussing ideas and there are no young ones around, I guess we just feel," so they decided to, every year, select 10 high school kids. Yeah. Mostly US, but in Italy, also, with their connections, they got them certain to bring 3 ALA kids. (Samuel)

The study participants also reflected heavily on how exposure and engagement with different cultures and peoples within the continent of Africa helped them develop confidence, which translated to how they related to peers and faculty at Duke University.

*Theme four: African knowledge and awareness*

According to the Dean of ALA, the African Studies curriculum is designed to help ALA students develop an understanding of Africa's history, a sense of belonging to the broader African community, and a sense of ownership for the continent's future. ALA helps students achieve a broader connection by also recruiting students from 43 to 45 African nations. ALA also uses the school rituals to disseminate knowledge and awareness about the continent. Some of the participants in this study reflected on the immense knowledge and understanding they gained from seminal readings, cultural exchanges, and friendships with other students. During my visit to ALA, I noticed that the dining hall held over 40 flags representing countries within the African continent. The Monday assemblies always constitute a piece on "Africa this week" as recounted by study participants and as witnessed during my visit. ALA also distributed students into their groups and residential spaces by meticulously matching students from



different countries. The study participants share how ALA facilitated their knowledge, understanding, and pride in their African heritage:

I feel like it just happened to be natural. Like my best friend used to be from Zimbabwe, and I have another best friend from Madagascar. So I had to learn things about these countries just cause they were my best friends. Also, they try ... They never really put you in the same country as roommates. So they tried diversifying that. (Zina)

I knew almost nothing. I didn't know that Kenya was on the map. I just thought Kenya was a mountain. I didn't even know North African countries were in North Africa, like I never thought of the fact that Morocco was in Africa. So the first person I saw from Morocco I was like, wait why are they on campus? Aren't they like Arab? They're not African. (Samuel)

definitely boosted my knowledge about the African continent, and its different cultures immensely. One thing I will say is I always understood in the back of my head that France colonized a good number of African countries, and therefore, there were you know francophone countries. But it wasn't until I went to ALA that I really realized the sheer magnitude of it. So, it was always fascinating for me to see all those people from Senegal, from Mali, Burkina Faso, from North African countries, or were just like Francophones. So for me, that was like most fascinating thing. (Sola)

These responses also point to a general lack of knowledge on African cultures among the study participants prior to ALA. Thus, ALA provided curricular and co-curricular opportunities that facilitated awareness of African cultures. Such opportunities at times come with a price, the participants reflect on conflicts that ensue between regional African countries. According to the participants, these conflicts usually center around who and what countries count as African:

So yeah, there's also a big fight that happens. Pretty much once a year. The conflict between North Africans and Africans. There's always gonna be ... Or Sub-Saharan Africans. Big conflict. A lot of times it evolves into a critical situation where we need to have big intervention. But yeah, in that sense, just educating myself. We also have this ... We used to have this ... Competition. The soccer tournament. Everyone was cheering against the North African team. It

was Morocco. But I think some technically were like they weren't really African. You guys should go back to where you're from. And along the lines of you're not African enough to be Africa. (Nina)

One of the participants speaks to how ALA facilitates discussions around African identity in an attempt to help students explore cultural difference and engagement:

We do African studies and one of the first questions we ask is always, what does it mean to be African? Does it mean to be born in Africa? Does it mean you love the continent, does it mean your blood is African? So your father's French, I moved to the African continent, I lived there for 10 years, does that make me African? If my mother's African, does that make me African? And it's a really good question (Judith)

As seen above, the dynamic of ALA's everyday interaction among students generate exposure to difference in values, norms, and thinking because of the diversity of the school population. Hence ALA education engages students in difference of national origins, religious persuasion, among other forms of cultural dimensions. In talking to ALA faculty and leadership, a reoccurring theme from our conversations was the intentionality they put behind challenging students to embrace difficult scenarios. As previously discussed, this is facilitated through the curriculum especially the EL program, which challenges students to think outside the box and become more strategic and innovative thinkers. The study participants also point to ALA's cultural diversity as equally beneficial in supporting their academic success because it helped them reach beyond the familiar.

*Theme five: Intercultural awareness and understanding*

The study participants identify below ways an ALA education exposed them to diversity beyond national origin. The study participants also felt that this exposure prepared them for life at Duke University, helping them navigate difference. In some

instances, study participants criticize Duke's shortcomings in engaging cultural diversity with the same versatility as ALA. Below, study participants share vivid examples of how ALA helped them gain awareness of difference and respect for multiplicity:

how purposeful they are to pushing their mission and vision is, they're just using a way that is different from Duke. So it's in like such a way that, again like, learning about diversity becomes something like in my head, I was just like, obviously before you wouldn't think about it, but now we are more conscious of it and we're proactively try to be a person that understands more about diversity, understand more about people's cultures. So that effect on me was more pronounced because they were being purposeful in the values they're trying to teach me, and the culture they were build on the school. (Helene)

I did get into trouble sometimes, because personally I did not know ... The idea of homosexuality was very strange to me. So, I ended up probably saying things that are considered homophobic in ALA. But truly, I was learning that, and so things that I said in ALA I wouldn't probably say at Duke anymore. Yeah, I saw things in a different lens. Yeah, so ... Culturally, I learnt about ... Homosexuality is one example. Growing up in a very traditional Christian home, yeah, I ... Had a different opinion of it. ALA helped me see it through the human lens, to call it. (Samuel)

I guess, it forced me to challenge my beliefs. It was one of my first instances dealing with diversity. Cause if you're born in Nigeria ... I lived in a camp, so I lived in church campground. Everyone's Christian, everyone's black, everyone is the same. So you grew up around this. Everyone also always knew everyone around you. So you around the same. So for the first time in my life, had to live with North Africans had to live with east Africa had to live with people who were Atheist, people who were homosexual, people who ... Just a lot of things that were very very hard. And ALA doesn't ... Actually that's a lie ... I was gonna say ALA doesn't shy away from diversity, because in some instances, ALA actually hides a lot of things, shelters a lot of people. But in other instances, they force you to interact with everyone else. (Sola)

The study participants' reflection speaks to the effort ALA put into making sure students are given countless opportunities to value diversity beyond race and ethnicity. Thus, ALA strategically uses different means to achieve its core values, one of which is

diversity. Another way students are exposed to diversity is through the faculty. ALA has faculty from different parts of the African continent as well U.S Americans. ALA students are exposed to new styles of communication and learning, which the study participants suggest support them to adjust better to some U.S American expectations around class participation by the time they arrived at Duke University.

*Theme six: ALA's U.S American influence*

The co-founders of ALA, Fred Swaniker and Chris Bradford are both products of U.S tertiary education with the latter being a U.S American and the former being a Ghanaian descent who grew up in different parts of Africa. During my visit to African Leadership Academy, all but one of the ten faculty members I engaged had an American education. The faculty and staff of ALA are about half citizens of different African countries and half U.S American citizens (conversation with ALA Dean). A couple of the study participants, puts it thus:

I think I definitely learned a lot of being practical about interacting with faculty from ALA. (Balira)

I certainly think ALA's style of education is influenced that American style of education, and that's probably done purposefully. Probably, I think that's how the educators they have in mind. They want there to be discussion based sort of classes, when there's a lot of engagement. It appears a lot of engagement with the faculty. Again the whole emphasis on faculty and teachers being people who are engaged with you over the long term, as opposed to just having a formal relationship of teaching. (Tabira)

That is, the ability and capacity to engage with faculty as practiced in U.S classrooms was facilitated at African Leadership Academy because many of ALA faculty themselves were used to such learning strategies because of their American education. However, this does not translate into an U.S American curriculum. In a conversation

with the Dean of ALA during my visit to the school, ALA faculty comprises mostly of people who underwent a U.S American tertiary education, ALA uses the British Cambridge A' levels curriculum, and the school infuses its own focus of Entrepreneurial Leadership, African Studies, and the newly added Rhetoric and Writing. According to the Dean of ALA, the Rhetoric and Writing was added due to feedback from alums struggling with academic writing in college. The next research question examines the sociocultural factors that support the academic success of the study participants at Duke University.

***Research question three: What sociocultural factors do graduates of African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?***

The sociocultural factors that the coding of responses generated is the diversity at Duke, the opportunities and challenges they presented for a conducive learning environment. In describing the cultural climate of Duke University, most of the participants pointed out the diversity of the institution but not necessarily inclusive.

*Theme one: Disjointed diversity*

In comparison to ALA, participants feel that Duke University might be overlooking opportunities to balance and support its assumed diversity. Given that most of the study participants came from predominantly black African nations, the deep influence of race on U.S American socialization was new to them.

Duke is a very diverse place with people from vast cultural and economic backgrounds, for the most part I have felt safe and happy studying at Duke.

However sometimes small acts of racist graffiti have made me feel disconnected from the institution. (Samuel)

I think that there are definitely different cultures represented at Duke, but I feel that cultural diversity is not celebrated as much. (Helene)

It is very diverse but I think most students are still struggling to understand and relate with the diversity. (Balira)

Even though the participants were exposed to the racial diversity of the African continent at ALA, it was a well-managed setting with an afro-minded curriculum and several programs in place to support students as they became exposed to cultural differences. At Duke, the participants felt ill prepared and unable to manage racial difference in U.S context, particularly the segregation outside of the classroom and in social contexts. In terms of blackness at Duke University, participants reflect on their realization that it is beyond skin color and steeped in shared experiences. Participants reflect on how differing experiences and worldviews minimized their capacity to relate to their African American colleagues. In essence, participants initially assumed that shared racial identities would be a unifying factor:

Yeah, I think I agree with much of what [he] said, because coming from Africa, initially I thought I would automatically click with African-American students. But our experiences are vastly different. So, you find out that ... sometimes you lean more towards other white students than African-American students. (Tabira)

Freshman year, most of my African-American friends really had issues with me, always hanging out with white kids. Because it's like, "Oh, yeah, he's a traitor," they say. So, I'm confused. In the sense that, I have friends on both sides, and that's what I would have done in Ghana, because I wasn't trained to have a different perception about people based on their skin color. I would have seen a white person as a visitor to my country because none of the people are predominately white in my country. And I would have seen a black person as a family member. And maybe I would be more kind or hospitable to him, but

relate more to a family member. And, that's what I think probably I came here thinking the same. But with time, I realized that no, it's not the same. Maybe I should treat them differently in America. (Samuel)

That is, within the U.S and Duke University sociocultural context, many African Americans embrace their racial identity as being black and expected the same of Black African international students. The participants had a lot to say about negotiating their assumed identity as Africans versus a projected identity as a black person in the Duke University context. It seems like many of the participants were faced with the reality of racial categorizations in the U.S and were impacted by the weight of race and racism as it plays out in the U.S context.

But it make me cognizant of the fact whereas I didn't really think about it before, or at least before I came in, you sort of now ... I engage in one way or the other here. Black political issues, or black race issues. You sort of don't think about it that way when you're coming to Duke. But now, being in America you have to recognize that racial politics does play a huge role. And you don't have to go out there and protest and dedicate your life to working for these political groups, but at least I'm not more cognizant of it, and I feel very comfortable having a conversation about it when it comes up. Whereas before it wasn't something that was high on my priorities, or at least something that I think about. (Judith)

For me, I feel like I belong to a certain group of people. But in another sense, I don't feel like I belong. But like, in certain settings, I feel like, "Okay, I belong in this place." For example, in let me say, like ... A class group setting, there are certain people who make you feel you belong in small groups. But in a broader sense, from the way that things go, like politics and stuff, I don't feel I belong. Because ... I feel like there's a lot of hate and stuff, and racism and profiling that goes on in a broader sense in the US. That doesn't necessarily go on in class settings and at Duke. But ... yeah, that's why I feel like I don't belong. (Sola)

The study participants also feel that Duke students are segregated along the lines of domestic versus international. Including the tendency for professors to use only U.S examples in class. The study participants question how Duke University defines its

diverse landscape when White culture seems dominant. Below study participants are quoted reflecting on the lack of engagement between domestic and international students, citing examples of how there is little to no interaction between different demographic populations:

Okay. Again, going back to ... There are 14 percent of international students. It's still very few to actually say that the environment is diverse. I feel that, yes, there are these people, but I don't know about these people. I don't know about their cultures as much as I would have wanted. In that sense, I would think that even though there is that little bit of diversity in those 14 percent, I don't know as much about them. I went to World Duke, I went to Spring International, I went to the Chinese New Year, so I'm definitely getting to know a little bit more about these cultures, but I just feel that the whole vibe of Duke is not going towards, "Oh, we're very diverse. We want to know about other people cultures. (Sola)

One example is that in World Duke, there was few attendants, and most of the people who were attending were international students. American students, who are the dominant part here, they're not interested in getting to know other cultures.

It was just surprising to me to see that most of the people who were watching the international show were actually international students. Also, if you go to the African showcase, or if you go, you see that most of these students are actually African students, or students who have African, yeah. When you go to the Chinese showcase, you will see that most of the students who are there are actually Chinese students, Asian students, or people who have close Asian friends. In that sense, I feel that it's not that people here are seeking to know other cultures, unless if they come across it somehow. (Tabira)

Thus, the study participants lament the lack of engagement among domestic and international students. The examples shared above point out the cultural opportunities and programming facilitated by international students to share cultural knowledge with the Duke Community. Unfortunately, the student reflections depict the gaps in cultural exchange at Duke University.



### *Theme two: Liberalism*

Another theme that emerged in analyzing the responses of the study participants on sociocultural factors that influence their academic experiences at Duke is the tendency of the institution to take politically liberal stances on social issues.

Some of the participants felt a political belonging to Duke University because of their personal convictions and political affiliations. Other participants felt protected socially by Duke's political leaning. The study participants speak to the "political shelter" Duke University provides by proclaiming its interest in cultural difference:

After staying at Duke for a little bit, I traveled to California, and then people could easily ... People could say very mean things to you, but you just have to keep it to yourself. I mean, you have to handle it in a different way. But Duke, the least thing someone says, everyone just jumps on that person. So it gave me that perception that, "Oh, Americans are very liberal," or "No one would ever say something mean to you." But then I went to the outside world and I realized, no, it's a little bit different from what I see at Duke. In the sense that it got to the point that I felt I was creating my idea of America from Duke, which was completely different in some parts of America right now. (Samuel)

But even at Duke, I've been more sheltered because it's a more liberal campus from some people might experience in some other colleges in another part of the country. (Balira)

And, then politically, I guess it does strike me as a very liberal campus. Which, from a political standpoint, it's great for me, because I think I fit into that, just my political leaning. I don't know if there's any downsides for when I go out into the real world. But otherwise, at least that has made me comfortable. I can't imagine being on a campus where let's say my political views wouldn't have fit in. I feel like I would have felt weird and out of place. (Zina)

Even though participants appreciated Duke University's efforts and openness about welcoming cultural difference, some of the study participants felt the political leaning of Duke University was too liberal. In the comment below, one of the participant talks about Duke University being "conservatively" liberal which leaves little to no room for

any political reasoning or persuasion outside of liberalism. A couple of the participants speak pointedly to the quasi effect of Duke's liberalism on its conservative population.

But in terms of politics, I also feel like it's ... It's liberal, but it's kind of so liberal that it's ... It's conservatively liberal. All you have to be is liberal. You can't have conservative point of view. And I think that's troublesome too. It doesn't mean restricting people from saying conservative things, they're not conservative. They're not ... At heart ... That's why sometimes you see racist graffitis, because sometimes people may appear to be liberal during the day, but they're conservative. So, I feel like, as much as we strive to be liberal, we should also put space for the fact that some people are conservative. (Nina)

In the Spring of 2015, Duke University attempted an Adhan (Muslim call to prayer) from the historic Duke Chapel. The Adhan was not to happen from the Duke University Chapel as originally planned because of resistance from alumni and donors. The incident made headlines on many national news outlets from CNN to NPR. Mike Schoenfeld, a spokesman for Duke University is quoted in a Washington Post story on the incident thus, "We heard from alumni and friends on all sides of the issue, many of whom had thoughtful questions and comments about the role of Duke Chapel in the life of the university that deserve serious consideration" The women small group interview session generated a rich discussion on the incident and its implications for Duke's diversity and liberalism:

This idea of liberalism but there are very secular values that are pushed on everyone. I think like LGBT right, not just like rights or transgender rights. You can decide on some things without being a bigot kind of thing. Like when they were doing the Muslim call to prayer in the chapel you can't decide on that. I personally disagreed with it. I love Muslims, I mean I have a lot of Muslim friends but I thought it's a Christian place so why are you doing a Muslim call to prayer. But everyone was feeling like if you are saying that then that means you are trying to (silence Muslims?) [inaudible]. I think its very, there's this air of say whatever you want, it has to be the right thing or you are a bigot. (Judith)

Another female participant in the small group session, a Muslim, expresses her delight at the prospect of the Adhan and her disappointment when it was cancelled;

I mean for me in general, obviously I wasn't expecting that there was going to be anything like call of prayers but, when there was, I was like yeah great, look at Duke they are having like call of prayers this is like amazing because I didn't like expect that. But then, when that was cancelled, then it got me like questioning the whole diversity, religious diversity and everything that like Duke talks about. Does the diversity really exist or its just all talk kind of thing. (Helene)

A third participant in the same small group session, also a practicing Muslim agreed with the first comment on the Adhan:

The decision to have the Adhan be called from the chapel, I think it was just a bad one. I think it was Duke's response to trying to be perceived as diverse and inclusive and Duke..the thing about diversity though is that is its important that you have a critical mass and that's not the case/keys? And the decision to have the Adhan come from the chapel is like, honestly doesn't make a lot of sense. I agree with J. (Nina)

Thus, the study participants reflect on the mixed messages Duke University employs around diversity. These discussions affirm the tension that exists in pluralist settings especially when there are no institutionalized systems in place to engage difference as the study participants experienced at ALA. The study participants strongly feel that Duke University is neither inclusive nor appreciative of its cultural landscape. The study participants also feel that when Duke does try, it could lean on the extreme thus causing more polarization as in the case of the Adhan cited above in the Spring of 2015. The next research question explores the institutional and instructional factors that the study participants consider most supportive of their academic success at Duke University.

*Research questions four and five: What institutional and instructional factors do graduates of African Leadership Academy view as most supportive of their academic success at Duke University?*

When probed about the instructional factors that they perceive as most supportive of their academic experiences at Duke University, a lot of themes coded from the institutional support section re-emerged. Thus, both institutional and instructional factors are discussed together in this section. Participants attribute most of their instructional and institutional support to relational resources such as their scholarship programs, academic advising, “ALA family”, and academic resource centers. While more than a third of the participants suggest they do not have any academic mentors at Duke University, most of the participants mentioned individuals including faculty, resources, and centers that have been beneficial. All these resources have a tendency to cater to students’ needs on an individual basis, making it possible for students to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships.

*Theme one: Smaller communities co-curricular support*

The participants of this study refer to instructional outlets that yield deeper personal connections and relationships as most influential to their academic success. One of the most trusted systems among the study participants is their ALA family. All of the participants speak to the sense of community they feel and often use among each other. The “ALA family”, all ALA graduates at Duke, is considered an institutional and instructional resource both for navigational and social capital. Outside their ALA

family, the study participants credit their scholarship programs as highly supportive of their academic success at Duke University.

our program directors. They do try to have monthly meetings with us to check in on how are we doing. And, even though if I am not in meeting with the groups, I've made an effort when I can if I'm passing by to talk to some of our program directors. B.W was the program director until last year. J.C was one of the program coordinators. But you know I would just like pass by and just like talk to them about what's going, and they're great to talk to, and they were very supportive, very encouraging (Tabira)

I have my scholarship program, which is very useful as the first stop for me when I need anything. That was my first interaction when I came to Duke, I had this program first before. (Ugonna)

In general, there is also the director of my scholarship. We meet with her once a semester (University Scholars Program), so she's like very helpful. Also, she's a caring person too. She cares if you are adjusting very well or if you are worried or overloaded kind of thing. She has been also very supportive in terms of using the resources of the scholarship (Helene)

The other two institutional things that I lean on specifically are the Baldwin Scholars program and the Robertson scholars program. The Robertson feels more natural and the Baldwin because the director will check in. She's also one of the few people, her and the general manager for the chronicle are people who are friends. (Nina)

All of the study participants are members and recipients of academic scholarship programs at Duke University. Another resource that is overwhelmingly valued among the study participants is the Duke University Academic Resource Center:

Because in ALA, I did a lot of writing, and so when I came to Duke my freshman year, I realized I'm doing a lot better in classes that are writing focused than they are in math and engineering. Some of my friends at my scholarship, then said, "Oh, we think you very good in material more than you are in engineering, based on your academic records." Because probably I will get A\* in a writing class, and a B or C sometimes in modern engineering. And I was kind of getting stressed and confused, because I felt like I really like particular things, But there's some little things that they [Academic Resource Center] told

me that I thought made a difference, and helped me out of that confusing state. (Samuel)

One, the Academic Resource Center at Duke. Again, if you do go to the Academic Resource Center, they match you up with a mentor, who's supposed to help you with let's say, come in every semester. Then you set goals about the classes you're trying to take, and you sort of schedule out what you need to do to be successful in this classes and that class, for example. Kind of figure out your weekly sort of studying period. And you sort of lay it out. They help you just add more structure to how you study and how you approach, so that you know that you're on track, and the mentor keeps you on track to figure out your academic goals. (Tabira)

I don't think I've really fully utilized outside class institutions that are supposed to help you at Duke. But definitely the Academic Resource Center is one institution I would say actively seeks out and helps students because they even send you emails about meeting up with mentors and stuff. (Balira)

The Academic Resource Center is really helpful. Especially there's a guy, I think same person helps, I don't know what his name is, B?, is extremely helpful in the sense that he goes out of his way to help you in whatever way he could. Just like that one guy I could always trust in anything at all. And so, I also opened up with him. Whether what I did is good or bad, I told him, because he gives me that sense of belonging. (Judith)

Participants of this study also mention faculty as useful for their instructional support.

Along with the influence of high performing academic environments, supportive relationships, faculty and co-curricular programs that enhance their academic achievement is also valued including academic advisors and faculty:

Yeah, so my freshman year academic advisor was really good, she helped me come up with a schedule, she was just perfect for me because she was also a planner like me. (Ugonna)

my academic advisor was like super super helpful to choosing classes and like figuring out how to go about exploring the things that I'm potentially interested in. Yeah, my academic advisor was great like I wouldn't explore the classes I will be taking until I meet with her and we figure everything together. (Nina)

I do have good relationships with some of my professors, some of whom have written my recommendations. That's how I've been applying to jobs and

different schools going forward. Yeah I think they're pretty supportive, one of the most prominent for me. (Tabira)

My professor M, he's the person who founded Engineering World Health, that was the program that I went with DukeEngage, to go to Tanzania, so I also talked to him about life choices, like to become an engineer. (Judith)

I would say coming to Duke, I've realized that people are quite passionate about what they do. Here people are really passionate about what they do. That also motivates you to approach them and talk more on things even outside class (Nina)

C.P., a faculty member who teaches a class on engagement in West Africa “Yeah, it's the class with him, and he kind of gave me a new perspective on Africa. A lot of things that were so common that I did not really pay attention to ... It felt good to see it from a different lens. So that got me very interested, so I keep signing up for all these classes, and then I realize ... It wasn't planned, but I realize now I have a minor in African Studies. (Samuel)

S.R [faculty] She's very encouraging, and she's ... I don't know, I feel like I have a sense of belonging whenever I take a class with her. Yeah. Because, also, she sends me messages about my performance, and what she think I did wrong, what I did right, and help me a lot to do really well in her class. (Helene)

These examples are quoted to emphasize the common theme of the relational factor that the study participants claim as important for their curricular and co-curricular engagement. A few of the study participants allude to their cultural conditioning as dissimilar to the U.S class context which encourages relationships with faculty beyond the classroom. Participants across differing academic majors, confess that they tend not to engage faculty beyond what is necessary. A female senior who is Somali/Kenyan, a male Mosotho sophomore, a female Nigerian junior all speak to the challenge of befriending faculty:

Speaking up in class that I do, outside of class not particularly. Erm cause being a public policy major, you don't really do office hours. I mean you can, I personally don't. I think part of it is definitely a cultural thing. In a way there's a

very distinct relationship between teacher and a student. And facilitating a relationship is not a natural. (Nina)

“Actually, yeah, and I think this is just me as a person, coming from Nigeria, typically professors just go and teach and just leave you. I don’t really get into the habit of forming personal relationships with my professors. I can’t really think of any professor that I feel like we have a personal relationship with outside of class, which I think is probably going to be a problem for me in the future, when it comes to grad school and stuff, but yeah.” (Ugonna)

Well, I’m personally not real good at engaging with professors outside of class. I wouldn’t say I’ve personally engaged with any professor that has taught me in class. But, I have certainly engaged with other people that I’ve applied to jobs for. I think part of the reason I have difficulty engaging with professors is that, even at ALA, there was this forced engagement. So, as [he] said, they would be like, Tuesday’s where you had like, lunch with a faculty member was your advisor. But, here it’s more of like, you have to actively seek out ... Engage with your professors, which is a skill that I’ve not yet learned. (Balira)

The comment above refers to the structured engagement ALA facilitates for its classrooms hence they do not have much trouble participating in the classroom but struggle with engaging faculty beyond the classroom walls. However, one of the participants speak to how they push themselves against their cultural orientation of what a student-faculty relationship entails in their home country to adapt to the Duke University student-faculty relationship expectation:

So I have to tell myself you need to do this, and then its going to lead to this, and then lead to this particular thing (goal) which I think is unfortunate but I think is a result of growing up specifically in Kenya where there are specific guidelines. It’s a hierarchy. Your teachers were not approachable. You and can’t just walk up to them and say you have a problem. You have to be particular about the problem – particularly academic problem and an academic problem with a degree of difficulty. (Nina)

Some of the participants, particularly the female participants in engineering, talked about ways their ALA education helped them develop skills to interact and build relationships with faculty;



Even though ALA encouraged some of that with the whole entrepreneurial thing, you had to share some of your opinions – how to do certain things, what you think of certain things and that really helped a lot at Duke. Especially when you need to communicate what you need, like needing help academically or needing to participate in class. I think it is also helpful for subjects that need – I guess a lot of interaction. Even if you are doing something like Math you still need to understand something and ask questions. It helps with communication, learning to ask for help, also on getting some agency over your academics. Again going after the resources you need even when they are not openly given to you. (Helene)

especially the tough classes and there's a lot of people in these classes that feel the same way. And they teach these classes pretty quickly so a lot of people study the materials again after classes. I think it depends on the class. But I think I definitely learned a lot of being practical about interacting with faculty from ALA. (Judith)

One of the female participants, an engineering major, shares how she did a faculty led program her freshman year that helped her develop confidence engaging faculty:

When I came to Duke my freshman year I did the focus program which puts you with a group of people and you take similar classes together so there was more incentive to communicate with the professors. (Judith)

The FOCUS program is a first semester, first year program that constitutes a learning and residential cohort of less than twenty students. Each cohort is appointed one or two faculty members that serve as academic facilitators for FOCUS courses and programs. Overall, more participants shared that they tend to befriend or engage faculty outside of the classroom on a need to do basis. The study participants also speak largely to classroom size as a main factor for participating in classes. The participants generally prefer small to medium sized classes because they feel it facilitates meaningful interactions that are manageable. In the myriad of academic resources available to students to engage faculty outside of the classroom such as flunch (a student/faculty lunch program described below), a few of the participants speak to the challenge of

navigating the resources but speak to the value of many programs and opportunities including flunch as highly supportive of their academic success and a means to spending time with professors outside of class

*Theme two: Duke's meritocracy and academic resources*

Both institutionally and instructionally, the study participants largely describe Duke University as a meritocracy in comparison to ALA. At Duke, the study participants feel students are responsible for seeking out and capitalizing on resources and inadvertently, academic resources are not equally distributed because you can only acquire based on your social capital and network reach.

If you work hard, you put in the effort and you're passionate, you can achieve good things and they're good opportunities for you here, so that's great. It's also, I think it's very hard to break in if you're not looking to it, you won't just come in, you're a freshman, and just not try and everything will just work out and be all rosy, no, you have to put in effort. It just goes back to that thing where if you need something and you need help and you seek it you'll find it here. It's definitely a very work hard and American Dream type of situation is going on here. I think Duke is a good place for people who know what the opportunities are here for you, so if you don't know you don't know, no one will tell you that, "Okay, there's this" (Ugonna)

There are so many programs, so many ... If you're interested in research there's so many funding opportunities, there's all of these things, exist here, but I feel like only a few people know what's going on. Like reach out to alumni, so people don't know that, okay, there's an alumni network, that there's a directory where you can just type in on one particular opportunity and all these people who are Duke Alumni will come up. (Nina)

I talked to a couple of people, I like to know that this is the best place for me, anyway ... You have to know that these are the resources that are here for you, and then seek it out before you can get it. That comes with also like, "Okay, who do you know, who are you talking to, who's telling you about things?" If you have a good advisor, you have a good financial aid counselor, you have all of these good people who are actually looking for your interests, have your best interests at heart, you'll just be flying through this place, just utilizing. There are some people who come here, freshman year, is new, you don't know, they just go to class and come back

and don't do other things other than class, which I think is just ... It's not the best.  
(Sola)

I think that's definitely the culture of Duke, is work hard and it'll come to you, obviously that doesn't work for everybody but for the most part I think that's ... Both academically and socially too. If you worked hard in terms of like if you joined a group and you're committed to that group it will pan out, it will become a network for you, it will become like a family for you. That's what happened for me with Duke Africa, where functionally I was like, "I like this, I'm going to go and attend events, I'm going to seek these people out and we can like in a good place." They might take you in, so I feel like that's typically the culture here, just all around, if you went to your professor and you're like, "I need this," they're probably going to, they're not going to turn you away. It's definitely the seek and you shall find, okay, "Ask and you shall receive," probably not, probably not.  
(Tabira)

During individual interviews, some of the participants mention the impediments of using certain institutional resources such as the Counseling and Psychological Services and the Career Center as tied to the lack of context policy makers and institutional practices might lack on the African student experience. The participants of the study reflect on how lack of context show up in the classroom, in CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) outreach, the Duke Career Center and other institutional services. Another impediment to extra-curricular involvement on the part of the study participants is the intensive academic demands the study participants feel placed on them institutionally.

*Theme three: Academic competitiveness*

Despite the familiar and motivating value placed on the academic rigor of a Duke education, participants feel that the pressure to excel academically can be so great that it be ill motivated particularly among fellow students:

I feel that it was mainly from seeing my peers in my classes have that competitive drive, I sort of developed a competitive drive as well. But, obviously sometimes, the downside evident. That you don't want it to get too competitive, or you don't want it to pressure you too much. So, that's part of the culture. Overall, I don't think it's necessarily unhealthy. I think the competitiveness just helps you stay on your toes. (Tabira)

But here, at Duke, with the whole environment of people just seeking grades and kind of thing, it's sort of made me just focus more on academics and push back a little bit on clubs. At some point, I start seeing many of the clubs pretty pointless, so I'm like, "What if I join a club, what are we going to do? Okay we're going to plan for this event, or we going to," ... I just didn't see as much value in those clubs to me and to my development. (Ugonna)

Thus, students prioritize their academic performance as primary and priority for their academic success at Duke University. The next section addresses the final question of the research study by exploring the personal factors that the study participants emphasize as contributing to their academic success at Duke University.

***Research question six: What personal factors do graduates of African Leadership Academy view as supporting their academic success at Duke University?***

Among this particular group of students, several themes emerged in the coding of their responses related to their childhood, demographics, and their academic journey from their home country high schools to their time at Duke University. In this section, emerging themes include resiliency traits of the students, an interest in social change, early exposure to quality education, and the influence of family and friends on their educational choices and motivation.

The study participants applaud the contribution and impact of family on their academic goals and achievement. Prior research addresses the importance of family support to the academic success of college students, in particular, in such cases as

international students from cultures that tend to be collectivistic in nature. In the case of African international students, there are high expectations from multiple sources in regard to their academic achievement. The African students' urge to succeed academically is motivated by the sense of "multiple accountability" to self, family, friends and even their larger community (Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997). Constatine et. al (2005) found in their study of Kenyan, Ghanaian, and Nigerian international students in the U.S that these students highly regard the validation of family. In alignment with these findings, the encouragement and support of family and friends seem to be a factor that motivates most of the participants of this study to succeed academically.

*Theme one: Family influence*

The study participants attribute their academic success to the encouragement of family and close acquaintances that believed in their academic prowess earlier on in their lives thus, pushing them to strive better:

I also just want to make my parents proud, just because, first my parents have sacrificed a lot for me and siblings.... so my parents will raise hell so we have everything that we want, especially in academics, so that I can go to good schools and have the best books. (Ugonna)

Then there was this other teacher who was from Zambia in my primary school who used to teach me Math and Sciences. He would write small things that a person did to show that commitment to work. If he would give an assignment, perhaps I'd go an extra mile and read my sister's books who was in a higher level than me for presentation. He motivated me to keep on doing that and keep on working hard. That's one thing that also helped me pursue excellence in my academics. (Balira)

At least, again throughout my entire primary school and all of my high school, part of it was that external drive from my nanny, just wanting to make her proud. (Tabira)

With the apparent support of family, friends, and educators early on in their lives, the motivation of making family and teachers proud drove many of the study participants to work harder to achieve better academic performance. The early influence of family and close acquaintances to value academic performance encouraged the study participants to push harder. According to the study participants, their academic performances inadvertently opened doors for them to attend quality, and at times, the best schools in their respective communities prior to ALA.

*Theme two: Early exposure to valuing high academic performance*

Most of the study participants were thus, thrust into academically competitive settings that helped them develop further exposure to academic opportunities that motivated their academic interests. Part of these opportunities included access to high performing schools in their home countries. Study participants talk about caliber of the schools they had attended prior to ALA as high performing in comparison to other schools in their community.

Around that time. Lesotho High School, I'd say, in Lesotho it's the most academically rigorous school in Lesotho, even in the whole country, yeah. People there mainly focused on academics. It's more academic based than like entrepreneurship, leadership. People who do best in class are the ones who get most access to opportunities basically. (Balira)

It's a public school. It's a boarding school. The school itself is called the Moi Forces Academy Lanet and it's in Nakuru. It's about a three hour drive from Nairobi, yeah. The national schools are, usually within the public education system for secondary school, they're national schools. They're just the type of schools that are ... they're bigger. They're usually older. They have more funding. They have a bigger legacy in general, but there's not a lot of actual institutional difference between the secondary school, which is a national school and a provincial school. I think parts of it was just to put stature into those particular schools because they we're the best performing schools. (Nina)

But I think the school in general is good, I think it prepared me very well to ALA in terms of academics, whether it's about getting used to equal amounts of workload to the math and physics parts, because I think we have, in Morocco, a good math and physics program. Also, in terms of English, I guess, and languages, I think the workload was good. They prepared me to be able to manage more workload. (Helene)

Thus, the study participants share the quality of their academic settings prior to ALA as of high caliber. According to study participants reflections and information gathered from ALA admissions, ALA scouts all over the continent for students including high performing schools such as those described above by the study participants. Six of the study participants recount being drawn to ALA because of the academic reputation as well as its premise for social change and leadership.

*Theme three: Interest in social change and leadership*

Most of the study participants liked the premise of personal and societal impact. Participants were drawn to an ALA education because of the prospect of making contributions to the future development of their home countries and Africa in general.

I was enthralled by the idea of being surrounded by brilliant individuals that wanted to do more for their respective communities and for the region. (Samuel)

Get training that could help me to play an active role in the development of my country and the African continent. (Helene)

leadership skills for social change (Judith)

As quoted above, the study participants give very clear reasons for attending African Leadership Academy. The reasons stated above align well with the intended learning outcomes of the school as shared by the Dean of the academy, which develop young leaders from across the continent with demonstrated leadership potential, a passion for Africa, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a track record of community service. Also, to

provide young leaders with the knowledge and inspiration they need to take action as agents of positive change on the African continent as well as connecting them to high-impact networks of resources that will empower them to create transformative social change on the continent and beyond. The students' ability to clearly recount their reasons for attending ALA shows the sustained impact of the ALA academic approach and practice on the participants. Given the learning outcomes desired by ALA, the school, as well as Duke University go to great lengths to select the students they consider most likely to adapt to the academic demands of the institutions. The study participants all recount the tenacity required of them while applying to ALA, in particular, the self-motivation required of them to excel academically in both settings.

*Theme four: Resilience and self-motivation*

The demand of the application process into ALA is pretty telling on the grit of the study participants. The students recount the amount of time and effort it took to complete the ALA application process. Their grit serves as a personal factor that seems to help them seek out new opportunities. One of study participants recollects the arduous process of applying to ALA and his persistence and resourcefulness in achieving his aim;

The [ALA] application process was honestly very tough. First of all, at my home we didn't have a laptop or a computer. I'd first have to go to the internet café. The first round application is extra easy and a list of the duties that you do in school. First of all I had to go to the internet café, copy down the questions on my notebook, then go and write them down at home and then whenever I get a chance, go to the internet café and type down the things that I had written in my notebook. Some off my friends, I had a friend who had like a neighbor who had a laptop. Sometimes he would help me out with his laptop. That's the first round applications. The second round applications were an even longer essay and interview. (Balira)



When I got in I was very grateful for that because I hadn't thought ... Even the caliber of people that I had applied with, I didn't think I would get in, which is one thing that taught me that ALA was not like, from the study, taught me that ALA was not solely academic. It was not based on academics, because people I had applied with were people who had completed their form five before me and had got very good grades that topped in the country. That was one thing that it had taught me. Eventually I got in and I was very grateful for that. (Samuel)

At Duke, the study participants' resilience and self-motivation is a factor that helps them navigate resources that contribute to their academic goals.

I spent like a year trying to get into that lab, taking classes with the professor, you know, emailing them. Trying to like, modify my CV to fit their needs, stuff like that, so like, I learned a lot of persistence at Duke. (Judith)

Obviously the thing with me is I'm a planner, so I will plan my life, I like to know, Okay, so this is my GPA, this is where I want to be, this is the schools I can attend, this is what I must get on my schedule type of thing. I already knew that, okay, I want to go to a good school, if I was going to leave my country and go somewhere I have to go to a good school... Obviously, I told you earlier, I plan, I know what I'm going to do in five years from now. (Ugonna)

Thus the students in this study show a personal factor of pushing and planning ahead to facilitate their academic goals. Overall, the academic goals of the study participants are tied to their motivation to contribute to societal change that is positively impactful.

Hence the study participants value high academic settings as beneficial to personal and societal needs.

## **Summary**

The participants of this study defined academic success from a collectivistic perspective that puts personal academic achievement as integral and necessary for communal development. The primary goal of the study participants is to achieve academic success as a contribution to the future of the African continent. The study participants profess

their academic success is less measured by quantifiable standards such as grades and GPAs. The influence of an ALA education is invaluable to the academic success of the study participants. The findings highlight the advantage of being exposed to different learning contexts and a strong value-based education particularly those that are cognizant of future learning opportunities.

The findings also show the value of being exposed to African heterogeneity and cultural diversity in general as important to self and cultural awareness. The study participants consider racism, extreme liberalism as contending to their mental wellbeing at Duke thus interfering with their ability to fully engage U.S American students co-curricularly and extra-curricularly. Nonetheless, the study participants also view their encounters with race and racism on Duke University campus as increasing their ability to understand the experiences of their African American colleagues and other students of color. The findings of this study indicate that the study participants preferred relational resources both within and outside the classroom.

While the study participants applaud the academic expectations at Duke as a motivational factor for their academic work ethic, they also condemn the tendency for academic competitiveness to result in academic perfectionism as a result of those expectations. Finally, the study participants attribute a lot of their academic success to the early influence of family and other close acquaintances such as nannies and teachers. The early motivation from these individuals encouraged them to value the importance of quantifiable and measurable academic success. The study participants feel that their drive to achieve academic success attracted them to both ALA and Duke

University because of the academic reputation of both schools. All of the study participants profess ALA as responsible for their perspective on academic success as central to social change particularly in Africa.

## Chapter Five: Interpretations and Implications for Practice

### Introduction

The focus of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. The preceding chapters provided background information for the study, starting with the rationale for the study as centered around the dearth of literature on the academic experiences of international students from Africa. The gap in literature needs addressing as the UN population projections (2015) foresee Africa as becoming the most populous continent by 2050. The second chapter reviewed relevant literature on academic success, cultural identity/afro-mindedness, and the adjustment patterns of international students. The third chapter discussed in depth an outline of the study design. The study findings are discussed in the preceding chapter. The key findings from the data analysis are revisited in the current chapter, with special attention to implications for practice. As the future looms with the possibility of Africa becoming the most populous continent between 2050 and 2100 (*UN Population Projections*, 2015), there is need to explore the prospects and impact of African youth on globalization. Currently, there is a dearth of literature on the academic experiences of African youth on U.S American campuses, particularly those studying in the U.S as international students. More often than not, the bulk of existing literature generalizes the experiences of international students with little to no room for the growing diversity among international students studying in U.S higher institutions.

Hence, as global demographic shifts take place between now and 2050, U.S

universities need to begin working on implementation plans to support new populations that could be emerging. A starting point could be to understand the needs of these students that are currently underrepresented populations on U.S. college campuses. It is important to understand what current diverse international students' experiences can teach us in U.S higher education (particularly international education) about facilitating conducive learning environments for emerging student populations. The key findings from the data analysis of the study are revisited in the current chapter, with special attention to implications for practice. The alignment of the study findings with Astin's Input-Environment-Output theory (1993) is followed by sections regarding directions for future research and the limitations of the study. The current chapter concludes with a section on implications for policy and practice of internationalization within higher education and summary remarks. The questions that guided the study are:

1. In what ways do graduates of the African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University define their academic success?
2. What components of the ALA education do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential to their academic success at Duke University?
3. What sociocultural factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
4. What institutional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most supportive of their academic success at Duke University?
5. What instructional factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as most influential in supporting their academic success at Duke University?
6. What personal factors do graduates of the African Leadership Academy view as supporting their academic success at Duke University?

Using qualitative methods, all the African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled at Duke University were recruited to participate in the study.

### **Research Design**

In collecting data for the study, three information-gathering tools is used – a questionnaire, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews. Having designed the data gathering tools in alignment with answering the study research questions, data collected from the questionnaire, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews were analyzed using coding and thematic analysis.

The questionnaire is used to gather demographic data of the study participants as well as to respond to several open-ended questions. There were two gender-based focus groups conducted and eight individual in-depth interviews. The study participants are all the eight African Leadership Academy (ALA) graduates enrolled as undergraduate students Duke University. The focus group and individual in-depth interview protocols are used with study participants in order to (a) confirm the most important findings that issued from the questionnaire; (b) explain some of the enigmatic findings; and (c) elicit from the participants relevant contexts and/or factors that may have influenced their opinions regarding their academic experiences.

Student responses from the individual in-depth interviews enhanced the questionnaire and focus group findings, adding depth, insight, clarification, and new ideas. The results of both types of collection and analysis processes are described in the paragraphs that follow. Then the data is carefully explored for areas where future

research is needed to offer insights into the findings and implications for Duke University and internalization of higher education in the U.S. The study also offers insight into the impact of preparedness for African international students before embarking on higher education in the U.S and possibly other educational contexts outside of their home countries.

## **Findings and interpretations**

### *Discussion of findings related to research question one*

The questionnaire results revealed that the most consistent definition of academic success among the study participants is the ability to retain knowledge that is positively impactful on their communities. Findings from the focus groups and individual interviews reiterated the same definition among the study participants.

Primarily, most of the study participants valued academic success as a means to improve their future and the future of their communities, specifically their African communities. The scholarly definition used for academic success in this study is academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance (Kuh et al., 2005). The definition of academic success by ALA students enrolled at Duke University aligns with the seminal work of Kuh et., 2005 as an attainment of their educational objectives to increase both their personal and communal prospects after college. It also aligns with the important work of Nebedum-Ezeh (1997) that the African students' urge to succeed academically is motivated by the sense of "multiple accountability" to self, family,

friends and even their larger community. The second theme that emerged from the study is the value placed on academic performance by the study participants.

Almost half of the study participants felt that good grades and a strong GPA of 3.0 and higher is a necessary measure of academic progress and evaluation of acquired knowledge. The references to GPA and good grades are consistent with traditional measures of academic success. Traditionally, most research on academic success has used quantifiable measures of academic performance such as grades and GPAs to determine/define academic success (Trueman & Hartley, 1996; Finn & Rock, 1997).

### ***Discussion of findings related to research question two***

In discussing the influence of an African Leadership Academy education, the study participants commend it as highly beneficial for most of their social and academic adjustment to Duke University. The study participants overwhelmingly credit the collaborative nature of ALA's core curriculum of Entrepreneurial Leadership (EL) and African Studies. Moreover, ALA's diverse student body and faculty facilitate exposure and engagement with cultural difference, which the study participants find supportive of their transition to the academic context at Duke University. With focus on inculcating the six ALA core values, the study participants highlight the opportunities ALA creates for them both inside and outside the classroom to think critically. Also supportive of their Duke education is the academic rigor of the ALA education as well as the tendency of the majority of ALA faculty to imbibe U.S American learning strategies due to their U.S American educational background. Additionally, the study participants attribute their definition of academic success to ALA, which gave them



academic/vocational direction and purpose for a greater good to positively impact their African communities. Finally, the findings reflect the pride of the study participants as Africans, which the students allude to the African focus of the ALA curriculum. These findings are not prevalent among previous literature on international students coming from Africa. Previous studies dwell heavily on the risk factors international students from African countries experience while adjusting to U.S higher institutions as well as being ill-prepared for a U.S higher education context. Contrary to the main findings of this study, the work of Nebedum-Ezeh (1997) revealed that African students experience expectation and adjustment difficulties upon arrival in the United States because of inadequate predeparture orientation in their home countries and inadequate help when here. According to Nebedum-Ezeh (1997) African students, driven to achieve despite hardship often seek out admission to U.S. institutions on their own. While the participants of this study experienced a level of difficulty adjusting to their new academic environment, it is reported at a level that is expected among all freshmen regardless of their background.

### ***Discussion of findings related to research question three***

The study participants were faced with the concept of race and racism in the U.S within the context of Duke University. Primarily, they struggled with projected identity of blackness within the Duke University community. The students in this study lamented the feeling of disconnect they often experience towards the cultural perspective and experiences of their African American colleagues. The study participants also feel that Duke University (staff, faculty, and students) is not maximizing the diverse student

population as a sociocultural asset. While the idea of liberalism makes them feel welcome at Duke University, the study participants feel the university is complacent about inclusiveness by placing more value on rhetoric than programming. The study participants also talk about extreme liberalism at Duke University, which according to the participants could drown out moderate views. The study participants blame their inability to form and or nurture relationships with domestic students at Duke University on these sociocultural factors. Previous studies highlight the role race may play in the cultural adjustment of African international students. In particular, Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian international college students generally have grown up in cultures in which being Black is the norm (Bagley & Young, 1988). Phinney & Onwughalu (1996) argues that because most Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian international students have been reared in racially homogenous contexts, they are less likely to have had negative experiences related to discrimination or racism prior to coming to the United States. However, upon coming to the United States, race may become a highly salient issue for many of these students as a result of living in a predominantly White society (Adeleke, 1998), and racial discrimination may lead to or exacerbate their cultural adjustment difficulties (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Mori, 2000; Winkelman, 1994).

#### ***Discussion of findings related to research question four and five***

In identifying the institutional and instructional factors that support their academic experiences at Duke University, the study participants describe the academic rigor of Duke University as a factor that both align and misalign with their ALA values. On both institutional and instructional levels, the study participants describe Duke University as

a reputable academic environment, which aligns with the academic reputation of ALA and thus supporting their motivation to learn and perform well. According to the study participants, they value the high academic demands put on them at Duke University because it reinforces their ability to perform their best – an ALA value of excellence. The study participants note the abundance of academic resources at Duke University that support their effort to put in their best. In particular, the study participants value the relational opportunities through their scholarship programs, academic resource center, relationships with faculty, and college advising. On the other hand, the study participants feel that Duke University students often mistake academic perfectionism for academic excellence. That is, while academic competitiveness is needed for high academic performance, the participants in this study feel it is unhealthy when the motivation is driven by selfish ambitions to outperform others. Both institutionally and instructionally, the study participants largely describe Duke University as a meritocracy in comparison to ALA. At Duke, the study participants feel students are responsible for seeking out and capitalizing on resources and inadvertently, academic resources are not equally distributed because access is based on your social capital and network reach. The study participants attribute the diminished use of institutional resources such as career services, CAPS, etc by students from African countries on these factors. Previous studies substantiate the findings of this study by proving the preference of students of African descent as preferring services that are communal in nature. Based on the findings of Markus and Kitayama (1991), Black-African international students' perception of societal norms and expectations and interpersonal relationships could lead

to acculturative stress as they have to adjust from the interdependent worldview of their home environments to the independent worldview of life in the United States

### ***Discussion of findings related to research question six***

In aggregating personal factors that support the academic experiences of the study participants, the early influence of family/educators, and competitive academic environments as motivators for academic success is consistent and highly priced. The study participants point to the encouragement from their parents, guardians, and primary school teachers very early in their academic career as influential in their pursuit of academic excellence. The participants also recount their early interest in academic excellence as consequential to subsequent exposure to high performing academic environments and opportunities. Also prevalent among the study participants is their personal resilience and motivation, which must have facilitated their admission into a school like ALA and subsequently admission into Duke University based on their personal motivation to succeed. One of the most compelling personal factors that support the academic experiences of the study participants is their interest in contributing to meaningful societal change. This factor is significant, given its relevance to the premise of ALA as raising leaders for impactful change for Africa.

### **Findings and Conceptual Framework**

Alexander Astin's (1995) seminal work on student development theory, particularly the Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model is the study's primary conceptual framework. Astin's input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) is an assessment

model that has been proposed as a framework for analyzing the unique effects of students' entering characteristics and college environmental factors on subsequent college outcomes (Astin, 1995). In this section, findings are presented in alignment with the study's conceptual framework, Astin's (1991) Input-Environment-Output process, and an analysis of what these findings imply for the internationalization of higher education. These findings are presented particularly in relation to the academic experiences of international students studying at Duke University.

### ***Input***

The first component of the theory is input. Astin (1993) defines input as characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution. Examples of student inputs might include demographic information, educational background, political orientation, behavior pattern, degree aspiration, reason for selecting an institution, financial status, disability status, career choice, major field of study, life goals, and reason for attending college (Astin, 1993). In this study, most of the examples of student input listed above as well as the pre-college leadership training that the participants received as future leaders of Africa at African leadership Academy were considered. The consciousness of African studies and entrepreneurial leadership instilled in the students of African Leadership Academy to create a cultural identity that is committed to the value of African mindedness and pride is also considered. The findings of this study emphasize the value of pre-college preparation as impactful to academic success beyond academic readiness. The findings show that while students might be ready academically, there are certain aspects such as social readiness that might impede a sense of belonging to the

social sphere of the academic environment. For example, 90% of the participants of this study were unready for the part race plays in co-curricular and extra-curricular programs. Social unpreparedness thus become a factor that could influence a robust academic experience. On the other hand, the findings of this study show that personal factors such as self-motivation, resilience, and interest in social change made up for gaps in preparedness thus positively impacting the students' motivation to succeed academically. The second component of Astin's I-E-O model is environment.

### ***Environment***

The second component of the model, environment, is described as the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed. Environment "refers to the student's actual experiences during the educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18). Additionally, some environmental factors may be antecedents (e.g. exposure to institution policies may occur before joining a college organization). In this study, the environment is the interaction of the African Leadership Academy students with the sociocultural, instructional, and institutional characteristics prominent at Duke University. The findings of this study show Duke University as an academically rigorous and resource rich environment encouraged the study participants to work harder academically. The environment also exposed them to new levels of diversity beyond their ALA education while challenging their interdependent cultural and academic orientation. Academically, the study participants appreciate the resources and rigor of a Duke University education. Socially, the study participants feel the environment could be sometimes unwelcoming due to racial and political issues.

Overall, the environment is considered to be supportive of facilitating their academic and vocational goals.

### *Output*

The third and last component of the model is output. According to Astin, outputs refer to the students' characteristics after exposure to the environment. Outputs "refer to the 'talents' we are trying to develop in our educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18).

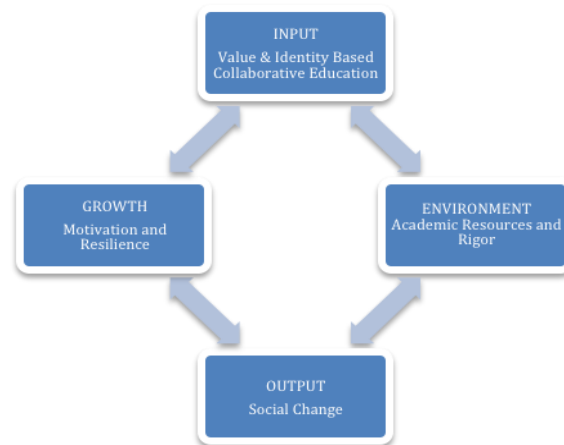
Outputs are outcome variables that may include posttests, consequences, or end results. In education, outcome measures have included indicators such as grade point average, exam scores, course-performance, degree completion, and overall course satisfaction.

The outcome in this study is the academic success of the participants. Quantifiably measuring the academic success of the participants in the study, 90% of the study participants have a GPA that is 3.0 or higher while 70% of the study participants have a GPA that is 3.4 or higher at Duke University. Out of eight study participants, only one reported a GPA of 2.9. Based on the influence of an ALA education and a resource rich Duke University environment, the study participants reported a higher value for social change and academic success that is tied to a greater good. Thus, generating an output that aligns with the parameters of academic success as defined by the study participants.

Figure. 1 below seeks to explain the process and alignment of the I-E-O model as uncovered by this study. The finding of this study suggests the value of pre-college preparedness as vital to the college experience among the study participants. Beyond their academic preparedness, a value and identity based education at African Leadership

Academy sustained their motivation to succeed and contribute to a larger good despite conflicting sociocultural and institutional factors encountered at Duke University.

*The academic experiences of ALA graduates at Duke University*



**Fig. 1: Astin’s I-E-O Conceptual Framework**

The figure above depicts the ongoing interaction between the value and identity based education the study participants received at ALA and its transformational nature in helping the study participants negotiate their academic success at Duke University and possibly beyond. Thus, the findings of this study align with Astin’s I-E-O model (1993). In the case of the participants of this study, the input of an early exposure to academic excellence and an ALA education can serve as a catalyst to thrive academically even in value conflicting environments.

**Environment and internationalization**

The findings of this study highlight the role of the educational environment in supporting international students. The biggest outcomes of active recruitment of



undergraduate students from different parts of the world as done by Duke University results in a very diverse pool of students from different communication, social, and relational socializations. The influx of international students also adds to the racial diversity of the hosting environment. Given the complications around race in the U.S, a lot of universities including Duke University could be unprepared to support black international populations. According to Glass, Wongtrirat, and Buus (2015), black international students from Africa may find themselves the unwitting victims of America's unresolved history of racial discrimination and ambivalence toward African Americans (p.96). As suggested by the findings and literature that guided this study, the needs of international students will vary by their cultural socialization. Despite the diversity of origin within the continent of Africa, the participants of this study shared a commonality that reflect a communal approach to learning due in part to their pre-college education at African Leadership Academy. The premise of the African Leadership Academy as developing future leaders for Africa is in and of itself collectivistic in nature. The collectivistic premise of an ALA education is a reflection of an Afro-minded approach which thinks of the role of the environment as two-fold; i.) as conducive to the collective ii.) as collectively supportive of the individual. For centuries, the Igbos of southeast Nigeria and the Yorubas of southwest Nigeria have used the proverb "it takes a village to raise a child". The proverb points to the responsibility and active participation placed on the community. Along the same lines is the Ubuntu concept of the Nguni people of southern Africa. In whole, the Ubuntu concept says, "*Ubuntu ngumtu ngabanye abantu*", that is a person is a person through

other people. Thus, as recruitment of African international students grows, an implication for internationalization of U.S higher education communities is to understand and incorporate the cultural values of these students when and where possible both in instructional and institutional support. There needs to be strategies and practices of racial inclusivity as well as of collectivistic approaches to learning as prescribed in the implications sections of this study.

### **Implications**

In examining the contributions of the findings of this study to literature on the academic experiences of international students with a pre-college education from African Leadership Academy, the implications for higher education and internationalization at Duke University is discussed in this section. Additionally, implications for ALA are discussed. Despite the contextual references to Duke University and ALA, the implications discussed below can be tailored to different settings with similar educational objectives and populations.

#### ***Implications for Duke University***

The findings of this study suggest the need to imbibe more support for international students with collectivistic approaches to academic achievement. In this study, the participants found the most useful academic resources tied to “small communities” either within their ALA family or their scholarship offices. Thus, the university should consider small community hubs with high social capital of how the academic resources are facilitated and distributed. An example of such community hub is the Duke FOCUS

program. Unfortunately, it only exists in the first year and first semester to a limited number of students. The findings of this study indicate the need for such hubs in different forms beyond the first semester. The university should invest more resources in onboarding international students with little to no exposure to U.S American learning contexts. Academic Advising, Academic Resource Center, and the International House should collaborate to offer workshops and outreaches to international students with little to no exposure to U.S American learning contexts. As Duke University undergraduate admissions increases its reach to recruit less socioeconomically privileged students as potential Duke undergraduate students, faculty should also be encouraged and supported to use more pluralistic pedagogies in their syllabi and classrooms.

you don't realize that you also need to write in a certain way like you know, from an academic perspective, I always to in a flowery way. And my professor didn't like it at first, and couldn't understand what was wrong with my writing, and I couldn't really understand the feedback they're trying to give when they say like, "Yeah I like what you're getting at, but your writing could be tighter." That was the feedback I used to get a lot. I did not understand what that meant, like your writing to be tighter. Okay, not sure where to go from here. (Tabira)

I feel like Duke is designed for someone who have had a US high school. Yeah. And then, ALA does, for instance, the has a British education system, and so for a school that is not designed, maybe your calculus class focus on something different from what a US student would focus on. Yeah. So when the teacher start grading your paper, they realize that the weakness is not you, not being dumb, but there's some background that you could work on. (Sola)

The Office of Faculty Advancement at Duke University can help faculty develop relevant content and strategies to reflect pluralist or ethnorelative strategies that is inclusive of Duke's cultural landscape. This can be achieved longitudinally as part of the onboarding requirements for new Faculty and as a review process for seasoned

faculty members. Ogbu (1992) argues that the US educational system exclusivity of the role of cultural frames in curriculum design hurts academic achievement among certain groups.

In a gathering with the Duke University Office of Institutional Equity's summit of campus diversity leaders, the new president of Duke University, President Vincent Price reflected on the social segregation among Duke's population thus highlighting the extent of this sociocultural factor and how prominent it is given the new presidents' awareness of the sociocultural challenge. The International House, Center for Multicultural Affairs, and Mary Lou Williams Center, and the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity can collaborate on workshops to engage students of African descent and African American students to better understand the historical and experiential circumstances that influence their perspective on identity and relationships. Duke University already has a lot of student affairs and academic centers that can facilitate more co-curricular opportunities for students to engage better. The collaborations have to involve both student affairs and academic units to have greater impact on both classroom and outside classroom engagement opportunities. The university can also expand first year programs such as the FOCUS program with its design of bringing first year and first semester students together as a learning and living cohort. These findings show the benefits of early involvement in the "multiple accountability" factor for international students from collectivistic cultures or collaborative learning models such as at ALA. Thus, Duke University and U.S higher education internationalization models needs to assess motivating factors amongst

international students and how they can inform existing factors such as those focused on the individual.

### *Implications for African Leadership Academy*

The influence of an ALA education is invaluable to the academic success of the study participants. This finding shows the advantage of being exposed to different learning contexts and a strong value-based education particularly those that are cognizant of future learning opportunities. The finding also shows the value of being exposed to African heterogeneity and cultural diversity in general as important to self and cultural awareness. Nonetheless, ALA has further opportunities to help Black African students prepare better to study in the U.S. The racial context of the U.S requires better understanding on the part of black ALA graduates that are U.S bound for higher education as recommended by study participants:

I think it'd be helpful to help students understand the cultural differences, I think. Something, I think was mentioning about, like, the level of friendliness. It's very easy to interpret it as being, like, "We really don't care about you," and it's just their culture. They're not as friendly as Africans, generally are. (Helene)

Tell them about the racial divide, some people are really shocked when they come and see the kind of racial tension in America, so I think that'd be a part of like, cultural education of what Americans are like. (Samuel)

While the majority of ALA faculty is almost split half African countries nationals and European Americans, I met an African American faculty during my visit. ALA could employ both their African American and European American faculty with experience facilitating discussions on race to lead sessions with Black African ALA students with

an interest in a U.S higher education. ALA could further support students by bridging gap in certain subjects like math and foreign languages for a U.S higher education.

So that learning was just like different for me. Students here are expected to take languages throughout high school, so even if they end up taking Spanish, like "I'll just study for it and do over the exam." I was just like wild by the time I came into Duke and tried to take French 101, cause I just didn't know how to approach it, in a completely different language altogether. I didn't know how to study for it, I didn't know how to do well. (Tabira)

The findings of this study show that readiness in both subject areas differ from country to country within Africa; hence ALA needs to find ways to help students bridge those gaps in preparation for higher education in the U.S.

### ***Implications for the field of international education***

More often than not, emphasis seems to be on bringing international students to campus without values tied to why the university is doing so and what it means for the cultural landscape and how to facilitate the engagement of populations involved. While many universities have made effort to recruit underrepresented and international students to diversify racially, universities in the U.S like Duke University are still struggling with inclusivity of represented worldviews into programming, policies, curriculum, and instruction. As argued by Schiele (1994), “although there appears to be considerable diversity in the knowledge base of higher education in the United States, the philosophical underpinnings of higher education are shaped primarily by one dominant view” (p.150). The experiences of the study participants at ALA show the effect of a diverse value based learning environment. That is, when there are values guiding diversification there is more intentionality given to creating spaces and programs that

maximize the diversity. As shared in the previous and current chapter, the study participants gave ample examples of the concrete ways ALA facilitates engagement among its diverse student population based on two of the schools' values – diversity and compassion. An environment that is knowledgeable, understanding, and proactive in establishing venues where students can express their differences constructively may, however, prove to be a greater and more long-lasting support to student retention and graduation rates (Jones, Castellanos, and Cole, 2002). Thus, the field of international education needs to hold practitioners and policy makers more accountable for the unavoidable implications of internationalization such as diversity. There needs to be better planning and groundwork for supporting diverse populations particularly around race and religion. The field of international education also needs further research about the experiences of black international students on U.S campuses given the racial context. The findings of this study show some disparity in the experiences of the black African students and the white African student.

### ***Implications for leadership***

One of the most compelling personal factors that support the academic experiences of the study participants is their interest in contributing to meaningful societal change. This factor is significant, given its relevance to the premise of ALA as raising leaders for impactful change for Africa. The findings of this study show some correlation between intercultural effectiveness and leadership. This is so because both demand unlearning and learning. The study participants had to unlearn certain acquired perspectives of Africa, academic success, and the U.S cultural context to learn new

perspectives of the same. In intercultural education, Kim (2008) defines acculturation as new cultural learning and acquisition of new cultural practices in wide-ranging areas. According to Kim (2008), as new learning occurs, “deculturation or unlearning of at least some of the old cultural elements has to occur, at least in the sense that new responses are adapted in situations that previously would have evoked old ones” She argues that, in the project of cross-cultural adaptation, we are also embarking on a path of personal development, in which we stretch ourselves out of the familiar and reach for a deepened and more inclusive understanding of human conditions, including our own (Kim, 2000) Thus, the findings of this study highlight the importance of cultural frames for societal change and leadership. The study findings point to the benefit of self-awareness and cultural awareness as paramount for leadership and societal change.

### **Researcher Reflections**

*Individualistic versus collectivistic.* According to the findings of this study, Duke University reflects a Eurocentric, individualistic approach to the academic success of its undergraduate students from the study participants’ perspective. The findings show that Duke students are expected to independently create agency for their own academic success. The independent approach to academic success at Duke University is contrary to the imbibed approach of the study participants as products of an ALA education.

First and foremost, this study suggests the importance of mental and cultural preparedness. The findings also suggest that more work is needed on internationalizing the curriculum, policies, and practices at Duke University and possibly beyond. Ogbu (2004) makes a case for a global perspective that incorporates other worldviews into the



US higher education worldview. Schiele's (2006) argument mirrors Ogbu's argument about the narrowness of U.S educational curriculum and the need to make it inclusive of other paradigms. Thus, emphasizing the growth and scholarly work that is needed in the field of international education to engage the reality of recruiting international students with non-US centric values on U.S college campuses.

### **Limitations of the study**

The findings should be considered in light of several potential limitations. First, although the sample size is consistent with other qualitative investigations, the generalizability of the findings to other African international undergraduate students studying in the U.S is cautioned. Given the unique pre-college education of the participants of this study, there are certain characteristics of their pre-college preparation that are peculiar. Second, this study is limited to the extent that it is based on one set of researchers' interpretations of one set of data pertaining to the academic experiences of African international students at Duke University who have also attended African Leadership Academy.

Even though the researcher attempted to account for her biases and expectations in the context of analyzing the generated data, it is possible that the researchers' perceptions uniquely influenced aspects of the investigation (i.e., research questions), which might have inadvertently influenced the collected data. To this end, it is important that other investigators replicate and extend the study on the factors that influence the academic experiences of students of African descent studying as international students in the U.S. Further investigation is needed given the diversity of

identities within the continent and also because of the imminent rise of youth population from the continent. Further research can also shed light on the influence of early access to quality education on academic success and what roles other variables such as socio-economic status play. As a result, additional categories and domains could emerge, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the academic experiences of African students studying in the U.S. The findings also may be limited because the data analysis was done combining the entire national and gender subgroups represented among the study participants into one larger group of African international college students.

Although some unique culture-specific issues associated with each subgroup might have been overlooked, it is important to note that international students from the continent of Africa do share some fundamental cultural similarities (Essandoh, 1995). Ultimately, these findings will still provide a lot of insight into understanding the themes and factors that are salient for inclusivity in academic environments where international students from the African continent are concerned.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Future research is needed that further examines the qualitative domains and categories identified in this study. In particular, additional information about international students from African countries is needed. There is need to further investigate the pre- and postsojourn experiences, prejudicial or discriminatory experiences, and academic successes of international students from African countries so

that faculty, staff, and administrators could better maximize the presence of these populations on U.S campuses.

It would also be important that future researchers explore the extent to which traditional pedagogies used by faculty and co-curricular programs are consonant with the needs, goals, and experiences of international college students from African countries. In addition, examining the efficacy of culture-specific motivating factors for the academic success of international college students from African countries is important. Especially as they relate to African-centered worldviews and principles, and how they can inform faculty and practitioners about the types of support that would be most effective for these populations of students. Furthermore, research is needed on orientation and post orientation opportunities that create communities for African international students to develop a sense of belonging to their campuses.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In an effort to contribute to the dearth of literature on the academic experiences of international students from African countries, this qualitative study provides insight into the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduate students at Duke University. The findings of the study reflect the impact of access to a value and identity-based quality education as fundamental to the definition of academic success among ALA graduates. The findings show that while the students adapted relatively well to the academic expectations at Duke University due to the academic rigor of ALA, the value based and Afro-minded education at ALA played a significant part in helping the study participants resist the opposing values around

identity and academic success paradigms encountered at Duke University. The findings show that an ALA education gave the participants a clear focus for academic success and social change. In essence, an ALA education supported a mindset of academic success in the study participants as integral to the successful future of a collective community. In many African communities, there is value placed on the important role of the collective community in supporting the success of the individual. And in return, there is also value placed on the responsibility of the individual to contribute to the progress of the collective community. This idea is tied to the functioning of different layers of being within the African consciousness. There is a saying of the Nguni people of southern Africa that captures this essence of collectivism, “Ubuntu ngumtu ngabanye abantu”, which translates in English to, “A person is a person through other people”. This saying reveals a worldview that we owe our selfhood to others and fully explains the concept of an ALA education and the approach of ALA alums towards academic success at Duke University as a pathway to community agency and social change.

ALA helped me think about my future, so the broader terms being how can I play a bigger impact in my home country of Zimbabwe? Can I play a bigger impact on the continent? ALA really helped me realize that yeah, in a smart way, you're gonna pursue an education and go far because of education. You can always refocus that education to achieving something deeper and something more meaningful. (Tabira)

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## Appendix A

### Invitation for Study Participation

Subject: Share your academic experiences at Duke University as an ALA graduate

Dear student,

Greetings. I am personally inviting you to be in a research study of the academic experiences of African international students with pre-college education at African Leadership Academy. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled at Duke University. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a graduate of African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University.

My name is Seun Bello Olamosu, a graduate student in the Department of Organization, Leadership, Development and Policy at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. I am also the Associate Director for Intercultural Development and Outreach, International House Duke University. I am conducting this study. The study is being conducted to contribute to the narrative on the experiences of African international students in the US. The study hopes to contribute to how institutional, instructional, and personal factors may shape academic experiences and outcomes. You will also receive a \$15 Amazon gift card by participating in the focus group and a \$25 Amazon gift card for participating in the individual interview session.

Let me emphasize here that participation in the study is voluntary, you will not be penalized in any way if you choose not to participate. If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to meet with Seun Bello Olamosu two times in addition to completing a questionnaire. First off, you will participate in a focus interview for approximately an hour and a half to answer questions related to your academic experiences at Duke University. As a follow up to the focus group activity, you will be asked to do an in-depth individual interview for approximately an hour and half. These discussions will be recorded, hence a condition of joining the study is agreeing to be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

All the interviews will be conducted in private settings and behind closed doors. I hope you will consider the opportunity to reflect on your academic experiences and help contribute to literature on the experiences of African international students. If you want to be in the study, please indicate a time and day you can meet to obtain an official consent from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Seun Bello Olamosu

## Appendix B

### Consent and information sheet for research

I Am Because We Are: Identifying the Factors Influencing the Academic Experiences of African Leadership Academy Graduates Enrolled as Undergraduate Students at Duke University

You are invited to be in a research study of the academic experiences of African international students with pre-college education at African Leadership Academy. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled at Duke University. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a graduate of African Leadership Academy enrolled at Duke University. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Seun Bello Olamosu, a graduate student in the Department of Organization, Leadership, Development and Policy at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Seun is also Associate Director for Intercultural Development and Outreach, International House Duke University. The study is being conducted to contribute to the narrative on the experiences of African international students in the US. The study hopes to contribute to how institutional, instructional, and personal factors may shape academic experiences and outcomes. You will also receive a \$15 Amazon gift card by participating in the focus group and a \$25 Amazon gift card for participating in the individual interview session.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to meet with Seun Bello Olamosu two times in addition to completing a questionnaire. First off, you will participate in a focus interview for approximately an hour and a half to answer questions related your academic experiences at Duke University. As a follow up to the focus group activity, you will be asked to do an in-depth individual interview for approximately an hour and half. You will be asked questions about your lived experiences at African Leadership Academy and your adaptation to life at Duke University. This discussion will be recorded, hence a condition of joining the study is agreeing to be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

**Confidentiality:** Both the focus group interviews and individual interviews will be conducted in private settings and behind closed doors. In focus group situations, I hope you feel free to freely contribute, but it is ok not to share information you do not feel comfortable doing so in a group setting. The records of this study will be kept private. Information that will make it possible to identify you or anyone else as a subject will

not be included. Research records of the focus group and individual interviews will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The tape recording and the subsequent data files will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation. All information will be kept on an encrypted-protected laptop with access only to the researcher.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the African Leadership Academy or Duke University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Seun Bello Olamosu. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me at 919 696-7310 or [seun.olamosu@duke.edu](mailto:seun.olamosu@duke.edu) or [bello047@umn.edu](mailto:bello047@umn.edu). You may also contact the academic advisers for this research study, Dr. Deanne Magnusson, at 612-626-9647 or [magnu002@umn.edu](mailto:magnu002@umn.edu), and Dr. Gerald Fry, at 612-624-0294 or [gwf@umn.edu](mailto:gwf@umn.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or the academic adviser, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; 612-624-1650. You are also encouraged to contact the Duke University Campus IRB at 919-684-3030 or by email at [campusirb@duke.edu](mailto:campusirb@duke.edu)

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*



## Appendix C

### Understanding the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy Students enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University

#### Questionnaire

Prepared by

Seun Bello Olamosu

University of Minnesota

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey to gain some insight on your experience as an African international student at Duke University. The questionnaire is part of my research on your academic experience. My name is Seun Bello Olamosu, Associate Director at the International House and I am interested in your knowledge and experience as an African International student at Duke University. Participation in this project is voluntary and you may choose to not answer or stop participating at any time. The data collected from this survey will be used to inform services and support provided to other students.*

*The data will be reported in aggregate; you will not be identifiable. The survey takes approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. We thank you in advance for your time and careful responses. If you have concerns or questions about this evaluation, please contact Seun Bello Olamosu ([seun.olamosu@duke.edu](mailto:seun.olamosu@duke.edu); 919-684-2512).*

<b>Undergraduate Demographic Information</b>
--

1. What is the primary reason you chose to study at Duke University?

- My high school felt highly of Duke and encouraged me to come
  - My family encouraged me to come
  - The academic reputation and opportunities of the university
  - I received a good financial aid package or scholarship
  - Other, please explain
2. What college at Duke were you admitted to?
- Trinity
  - Pratt
3. If you are currently a junior or senior at Duke, what is your academic major?
4. List additional majors, minors, and certificates you are pursuing.
5. What is your desired cumulative GPA?
6. What is your current cumulative GPA?
7. Do you have a (academic) mentor at Duke? (someone who has spent time showing you how to cope at Duke outside of their official duties) Please explain.

<b>First Year Experience</b>
------------------------------

8. Did you attend the International House orientation for international students? If so, which part was most helpful?
- Meeting other international students.
  - Having the support and experience of a IHOP (International House Orientation Peer).
  - Getting to know about campus resources and services available to me.
  - The support I received prior to the orientation from I-House staff and/or community members.
  - Other, please explain.

9. Did you attend the university wide orientation week events for incoming freshmen? What do you remember about the experience?
10. The best part of being a freshman was
- Living on east campus with other freshmen.
  - Meeting with my academic advisor.
  - Trying new things in a new environment (Meeting new people, trying new food, and taking new courses).
  - Other, please explain.
11. The most challenging part of being a freshman was
- Adjusting to the academic culture at Duke University.
  - Living in the dorm.
  - Making friends.
  - Missing home.
  - Other, please explain.

### **Climate at Duke University**

12. In your own experience, please describe the cultural climate at Duke University.
13. How would you describe your sense of belonging to Duke University?

### **Demographic Information**

#### **Please tell us about yourself:**

14. What is your gender identification?
- Female
  - Male
  - Other
15. What is your age?
16. What year are you?
- Sophomore

- Junior
- Senior

17. Where is your country of birth?

18. How many years have you lived on the African continent?

19. How do describe your identity as an African?

20. What do your parents do for a living?

21. The following sentence best describes my use and command of English

- I learned English at school and have a strong command of it as an additional language.
- English is the official language in my home country.
- It was the only language used by my family.
- Other, please explain.

22. What is the name of the secondary school you attended before ALA?

23. Why did you decide to attend African Leadership Academy?

## **Appendix D**

### **Focus Group Interview Protocol**

#### **Introduction:**

Greetings and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion of your academic experiences. My name is Seun Bello Olamosu and I work at the International House at Duke University. I am attempting to understand how you view your academic experiences and define them. I am also attempting to identify the experiences that have been most influential to you in your academic journey. I have invited African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University.

You were selected because you have certain things in common that are of particular interest to us. You are all African international students. I am particularly interested in your views because you represent a group of African international students with pre-college education based on African studies and entrepreneurial leadership.

Today we will be discussing your background education at ALA and the influences it has on your academic success at Duke University. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

Before we begin, let me remind you of some ground rules. Please speak loudly and clearly, in English, and I ask that only one person speaks at a time. I am digitally recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. If several people are talking at the same time, the recorder will not be able to get all of your comments. We will be on a first name basis today, but in my final report there will not be any names attached to comments. In focus group situations, I hope you feel free to freely contribute, but it is ok not to share information you do not feel comfortable doing so in a group setting. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful. Our session will last approximately an hour.

Now it is time to begin.

Purpose: To identify the factors influencing the academic experiences of African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University  
 People: African Leadership Academy graduates enrolled as undergraduates at Duke University

#	Question	Time
<b>Opening Questions</b>		
1	Tell us the reasons why you decided to attend Duke University.	5'
<b>Key Questions</b>		
2	How do you define academic success?	10'
3	How does your ALA education influence your experiences at Duke? <b>Follow up questions:</b> What similarities or differences, if any, exist between the academic culture at Duke vs ALA?	12'
4	What instructional factors do you consider most beneficial to you at Duke? <b>Follow up questions: a.</b> What instructional strategies have been most valuable for you? <b>b.</b> In what ways do you engage with faculty?	12'
5	What institutional factors have been most supportive of your academic experience at Duke? <b>Follow up questions:</b> Which university units (such as Res Life or Academic Resource Center) have been most useful for you as a Duke student? In what ways does your participation with these units influence your academic success?	12'
6	How would you describe the culture of Duke University?	12'
7	How would you describe your sense of belonging to the school culture?	12'
<b>Ending Questions</b>		
7	Is there anything that school administration can do to improve the experiences of African international students?	5'
	Is there anything that faculty can do to improve the experiences of African international students?	5'
8	Are there any further comments in regards to your experiences at Duke University?	5'

## Appendix E

### Individual Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How did you learn about African Leadership Academy (ALA)?
  - a. Why did you decide to attend ALA
  - b. What are your fondest memories of ALA?
3. How did your ALA education influence your knowledge of the people and culture of Africa?
  - a. What, if any, did you learn about yourself?
4. Tell me about your journey from the final year in high school to being admitted to Duke University
  - a. What processes facilitated or influenced your application, admission, and decision to attend Duke University?
5. What motivates you to succeed academically?
  - a. Given your stated motivations for academic success, in what ways does Duke as an institution help you achieve academic success?
6. What are the similarities, if any, between the academic life at African Leadership Academy and Duke University?
7. What are the differences, if any, between academic life at African Leadership Academy and Duke University?
8. Which individuals have been supportive of your well-being as a Duke student?
9. Culturally, which setting has had the most influence on you? Duke or ALA? Why or why not?
10. What recommendations do you have for staff and faculty improving the academic experiences of African international undergraduate students at Duke University?