

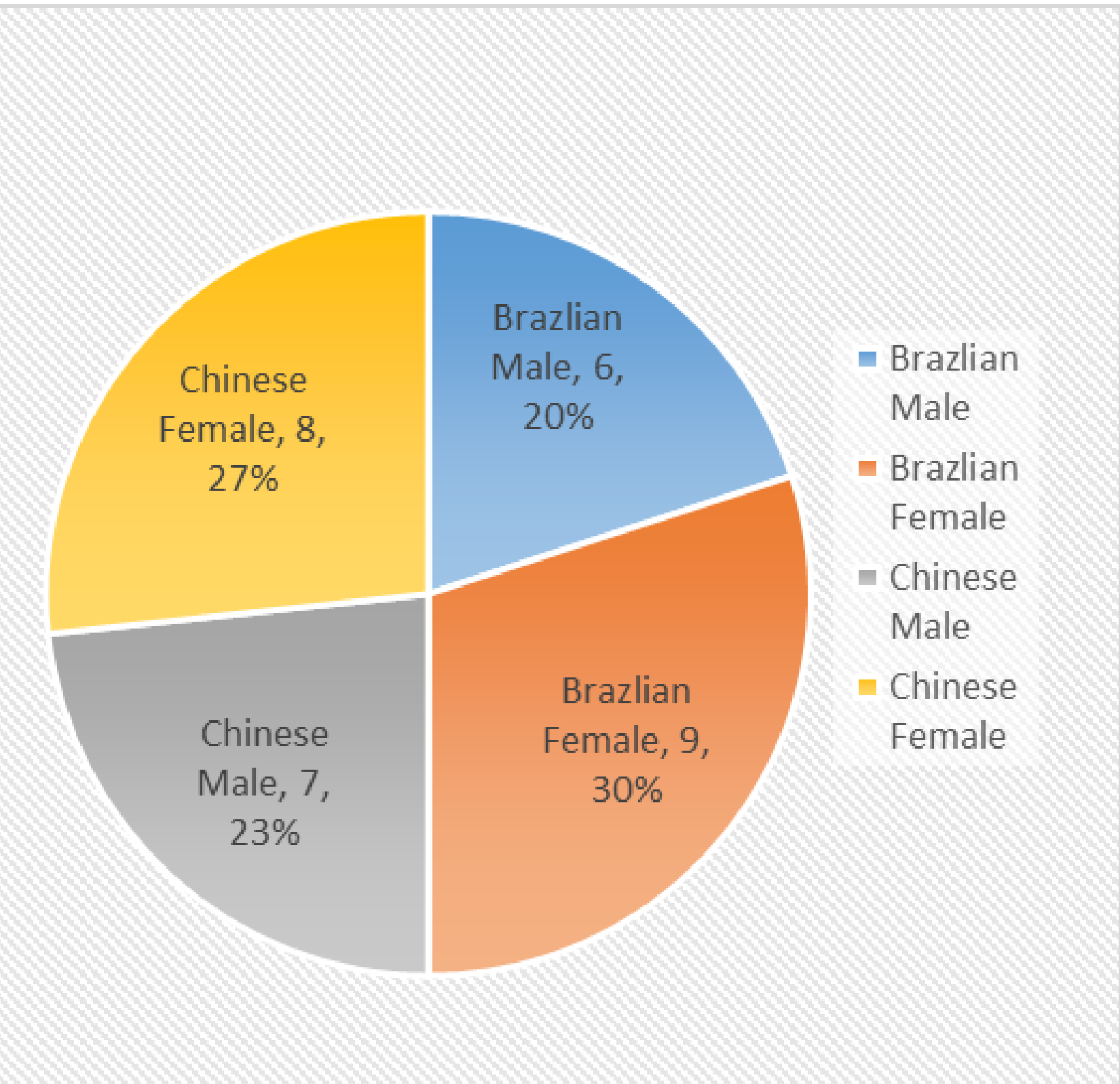
# International Students' Social Networks and Academic Achievement

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## Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of international students come to study in the U.S. They contribute to the American economy and to cross-cultural conversations and friendships. Yet, little research exists on whether the foreign background of these students impedes the “cultural capital” – the everyday, informal learning and social competencies (Bourdieu 1984) – required of students to do well in an American university context. My study explores international students’ experiences at UNH and, in particular, how they negotiate its academic and social environment.



## Objective:

At UNH, there are approximately 924 international students. My research focuses on two of the largest groups: those from China and Brazil.

## Method:

- Qualitative research design
- Personal, semi structured interviews (with open-ended questions); all interviews were recorded, and subsequently coded for recurring themes
- Two comparison groups: 15 Brazilians + 15 Chinese = 30 interviewees
- The personal interview gave me flexibility to discover international students’ personal experiences and to probe students’ different perspectives

## Study Question: Do international students have the cultural capital to do well at UNH?

## Findings:

1. The majority of interviewees did not know much about UNH before coming here.
  - Ex.1: “I have no idea how [this] university would be, I try to google UNH online and I saw some pictures before I left China.
  - Ex.2: “I do not think I am the person to make [this] decision. The reason why I come in America is there is a study board program that Brazilian government provide.”
2. American professors’ lectures are similar to lectures in Brazil/China; variation is mainly due to the professor’s personality than the education system.
  - Ex 3: “UNH has better equipment. And everything is kind of different. But regarding the professor, I think they are the same.”
  - Ex 4: “I think the teaching is kind of the same. And professor are similar, too. The style of learning, I would like to say that I like U.S.”
3. Grading system is different; in the U.S. there are too many assignments, quizzes, exams, or group projects. Students also feel they are required to learn by themselves.
  - Ex 5: “Being a very intense class, it is a good thing. Sometimes, we need to be pushed, I think the homework, assignments are good, and they really made me study.”
  - Ex. 6: “There is no homework in Brazilian College. We only have mid-term and final exams.”
4. 7 of 30 interviewees – 3 Brazilians, 4 Chinese – indicated that they have close American friends; for others, the interaction with Americans is confined to school work.
  - Ex 7: “It is kind of hard to make friends from class here. I have plenty of friends [who say] they get ignored. One time, I have a chemical engineering class, I supposed to bring some paper ahead for this class, however, I forget, and I asked the guy who sit next to me to borrow, like share. However, that guy showed that he did not want to help. So, I talked to the professor eventually...”
  - Ex 8: “I think the most challenging factor is language. I can read, write, but I am not good at speaking. I am too shy to talk.”

## Conclusion:

- ❖ Prior to arriving in the U.S., international students usually know very little about the university; many experience personal, social and academic challenges especially during the first few months.
- ❖ American professors tend to link the class content with daily life more often than Brazilian/Chinese professors, but there are no too many differences between them.
- ❖ International students have a hard time figuring out ways to become friends with American students and to blend into the local community; they do not know what sorts of UNH-resources might be helpful in this regard.
- ❖ Internationals students who has a close relationship with an American student are also more likely to interact with their professors and do well in class.

## Interview Guiding Question Sample:

- What made you decide to come to UNH?
  - Can you tell me a bit about your experiences here?
  - What are some of the biggest differences between UNH and college back in China/Brazil?
  - Is there anything about the style of teaching and learning here at UNH that you like? What are these things?
  - What are some of the things you do not like to find difficult about the style of learning and teaching at UNH? Classroom presentations? Assignments?
  - Do you interact much with any of your professors? In class? Outside of the classroom/office hours, etc.?
  - Do you interact much with U.S. students? When? Where? Are you friendly with any American students?
  - Do you feel a sense of belonging here at UNH? Why/why not?
- .....