Cultural differences between Saudi and American students produce immense challenges to a successful integrative acculturation. Positive experiences can not only enhance the education of international students, but also effect understandings and attitudes of local students, administrators, faculty, and staff. A greater implication of these experiences may be their influence on long term international relationships. Few qualitative studies have been conducted that examine the dynamics of the cultural integration of Saudi students with American students during the acculturation process.

The purpose of this qualitative research, therefore, is to describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students as they integrated with American host students on project-based, team learning assignments. These semi-structured team environments required members to interact, resolve conflicts, contribute to problem solving, and exhibit leadership. Using a phenomenological approach, 10 Saudi students studying at a rural Midwestern U.S. university participated in a series of three semi-structured open ended interviews. These interviews capture the experiences and perceptions of the participants as they interacted with host students within and beyond their project team environment, and revealed experiences within the host community that influenced their team acculturation.
From the rich interview data, findings were derived that added clarity to Saudi acculturation. Prominent findings from this research reveal the encompassing effects of language deficiencies, lack of understanding of the local culture, difficulties adjusting to a mixed gender environment, neo-racism, and incompatibilities in the held values between the Saudi and the host. Most of the Saudi participants found that these barriers were surmountable and could be overcome through resilient thinking and by developing positive and meaningful relationships with their host team members. Findings also reveal the supportive role that the course instructor can play as well as campus interventions (including project based, team learning assignments) that can advantage the acculturation experience.