

**University of Vermont
Student Research Conference**

Jeff Bukowski

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Advisor: Cynthia Reyes, Ph.D.

The Grammar of Social Identity: Perceptions of Self Through Higher Education from
Students Who Have a Refugee Story at One Community College

ABSTRACT

Nearly three million refugees have been resettled in the United States since 1975 with 41,599 resettled in 2010 alone, which is more than any other nation in the world. The Refugee Act (1980) created the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program in the United States to assist with the effective resettlement of refugees by helping these individuals to develop English language skills and achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival in the United States. While this program addresses important issues facing refugees, the short-term nature of the support at the federal level often overlooks the long-term needs of refugees resettled in a community. For many refugees the way they learn about and adapt to United States culture depends on their access to and involvement with services, systems, and education. While much attention has been given to connections between K-12 education and acculturation processes for immigrants and refugees, there is little focus on the impact of higher education. Using Ogbu's typology of the voluntary and involuntary minority as a catalyst for discussing identity, this narrative inquiry investigated the unique perceptions of self held by students who have a refugee story by examining their higher education experiences through the sociological framework of the grammar of social identity.