

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

State University of New York at Buffalo

BRIEF: International Student Satisfaction with the UB Experience

The purpose of this brief is to examine the learning experiences of graduating international students during their enrollment at UB, as well as their satisfaction with these experiences. The data presented here ($N=914$) are taken from the Spring 2007 Senior Exit Survey described in an earlier brief¹. As in previous analyses, weighting procedures are used (based on gender, academic achievement, and minority status) to better reflect the responses of all graduates. The survey contains questions about general learning experiences and experiences within the academic major. For respondents with two majors (16.0%), two sets of major-specific items are asked. The analyses here include items only for the primary major.

*Table 1: Academic Experiences of International and Domestic Graduates
(Percentages Indicate How Many Students Experienced Often or Very Often)*

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>All Respondents (N=914)</i>	<i>Domestic Students (N=809)</i>	<i>International Students (N=105)</i>
<i>Coursework Experiences and Activities</i>			
Applied mathematical skills	57.4	57.6	57.3
Applied scientific principles and methods	48.7	48.8	47.6
Completed assignments with other students <u>outside of class</u> *	53.3	54.8	41.3
Completed culminating senior experience (yes/no response only) ^a	13.0	12.3	18.4
Created original ideas and/or products*	49.9	51.1	40.2
Evaluated by ability to speak clearly and effectively	37.8	37.0	44.1
Evaluated by ability to write clearly and effectively	58.7	59.3	53.9
Examined ethical issues and values	44.8	45.0	43.1
Received prompt oral/written feedback from instructors*	62.1	63.9	48.0
Used computers to complete assignments*	87.2	88.3	79.6
Used problem-solving skills	73.2	74.0	67.0
Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas/information from various sources	65.8	66.5	60.2
Worked with other students on assignments <u>during class</u> *	46.2	47.7	35.0
<i>Faculty Activities and Behaviors</i>			
Had a faculty member encourage your ability to learn on your own	42.6	43.5	35.3
Had a faculty member use innovative technology to facilitate learning*	48.8	50.2	38.6
Had a faculty member who came to class <u>unprepared</u>	12.2	12.5	8.8
Had a faculty member who communicated <i>ineffectively</i> in class*	29.2	30.5	19.8
Observed professors actively engaging students during class	65.2	66.1	58.4
<i>Student Behaviors</i>			
Experienced classroom behavior by students that was disruptive to learning*	30.2	31.7	18.6
Observed student dishonesty when completing assignments or exams	16.2	16.7	11.8

Notes: * Indicates a statistically significant difference between international and domestic students.

^a This was a yes/no item, and the percentage indicates those who responded yes.

Academic Experiences at UB

Graduates were asked to indicate how frequently they had experienced each of the academic items listed in Table 1 during their undergraduate course work -- never, sometimes, often, or very often. (The culminating senior experience item was a yes/no item.) There were many areas of similarity for international and domestic students. However, international graduates are less likely to report frequently working with other students inside and outside of class to complete assignments. They are also less likely to report frequently creating original ideas and products, using computers to complete their assignments, and receiving prompt feedback from instructors. In terms of faculty behaviors, international graduates are less likely to report faculty members frequently using innovative technology to facilitate learning, but they are also less likely to report frequently experiencing a faculty member who communicates *ineffectively* in class. With regard to student behaviors, they are less likely to report frequently experiencing disruptive classroom behavior.

*Table 2: Supportive Behaviors Exhibited by Professors in Major/Department
(Percentages Indicate How Many Students Experienced Often or Very Often)*

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>All Respondents (N=914)</i>	<i>Domestic Students (N=809)</i>	<i>International Students (N=105)</i>
Emotional support and encouragement	24.5	25.1	20.4
Feedback on academic work outside of class time	31.4	31.1	33.7
Help achieving professional goals	41.1	41.5	37.8
Intellectual challenge and stimulation*	54.8	56.4	43.9

Notes: * Indicates a statistically significant difference between international and domestic students.

Satisfaction with Major Program

Graduates were asked to provide information about interactions with faculty within the major program and to rate satisfaction with various aspects of the program and/or department. International graduates did not differ from domestic graduates in the frequency with which they experienced emotional support and encouragement from program faculty, feedback on work outside of class, and help in achieving professional goals (Table 2). International graduates, however, were much less likely to report frequently being intellectually challenged by faculty.

As shown in Table 3, international and domestic graduates were very similar in their satisfaction with various aspects of the major programs and departments. The two groups differed significantly on only two items: availability of practicum/internship experiences and overall quality of assistance provided by the department. For both items, international graduates were less likely to report being satisfied or very satisfied. When asked to rate how difficult they perceived their major program to be, around 15.0% of both groups said that it was too easy. Domestic students were more likely to report that the major program was at the appropriate level of difficulty (56.9% compared to 45.5% for international students). International students were more likely to report that the major program was too difficult (39.4% compared to 27.5% for domestic students).

*Table 3: Satisfaction with Major/Department
(Percentages Indicate How Many Students are Satisfied or Very Satisfied)*

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>All Respondents (N=914)</i>	<i>Domestic Students (N=809)</i>	<i>International Students (N=105)</i>
Academic advising	63.6	63.6	62.9
Availability of classes required for graduation	66.7	67.2	63.6
Availability of faculty	71.1	72.0	64.3
Availability of practicum/internship experiences*	48.7	50.4	36.8
Career counseling advice	53.0	53.2	52.2
Clarity of program requirements	74.4	75.3	68.0
Encouragement to pursue graduate/professional study	47.2	47.5	45.3
Faculty interest in personal welfare	47.0	48.3	37.6
Opportunities for useful non-classroom experiences	47.7	48.1	44.8
Overall quality of assistance provided by department*	61.9	63.4	51.0
Quality of courses	70.8	71.6	64.9
Relevance of coursework to expected career	60.9	61.1	58.9
Usefulness of texts and course materials	55.8	55.7	56.1

Notes: * Indicates a statistically significant difference between international and domestic students.

Overall Satisfaction with UB

Graduates were asked to rate overall satisfaction in five specific areas (shown in Table 4) and to indicate if they would choose UB again if given the opportunity to repeat the undergraduate experience. Domestic students were more likely to report that they would definitely or probably attend UB again (84.3% as compared to 72.8% for international students). However, in the five areas of student satisfaction, international and domestic students were quite similar. The only significant difference was for satisfaction with general education courses. A greater proportion of international graduates reported satisfaction with these courses (52.0% as compared to 41.6% for domestic students).

*Table 4: Overall Satisfaction Ratings
(Percentages Indicate How Many Students are Satisfied or Very Satisfied)*

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>All Respondents (N=914)</i>	<i>Domestic Students (N=809)</i>	<i>International Students (N=105)</i>
Amount of contact with faculty outside of class	41.5	41.7	40.0
Availability of campus social activities	55.5	55.8	52.5
General education courses*	42.8	41.6	52.0
Overall college experience	79.3	80.2	74.0
Overall quality of instruction	64.6	65.5	58.4

Notes: * Indicates a statistically significant difference between international and domestic students.

Conclusions

Overall, the academic experiences of international students are very similar to the experiences of domestic students. In addition, the two groups report very similar levels of satisfaction with UB. From the data presented here, it is unclear if these differences are due to cultural differences, differences in educational activities/systems students experience prior to enrolling at UB, true differences in the experiences of international students while they are here, or from some combination of all three. For example, international students report working with other students to complete assignments less frequently than domestic students. Is this because their native cultures emphasize working individually on achievement tasks or because they are more likely to enroll in courses where team work is not emphasized or because they were involved in much more team work before they enrolled at UB so, in contrast, the perceived amount of team work here is less?

Since the number of international respondents is so small in comparison to domestic respondents, these analyses are largely exploratory. In addition, examination of the complexity of the differences between the two groups is beyond the scope of the survey. However, some of the differences may be followed up with focus groups or structured interviews. For example, one inconsistency in the responses of international students that might be further explored in a face-to face setting relates to intellectual challenge. These students are less likely to report that they frequently experience intellectual challenge and stimulation from faculty, but they are more likely to report that their major program was too difficult. In depth information from a few students about the reasons for this discrepant finding may help inform the development of survey items that could be administered to larger numbers of international students.

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¹ The brief is entitled, *Profiles of Graduating Seniors: Differences Between Those Who Entered as Freshmen and Those Who Entered as Transfers*, available at: <http://apb.buffalo.edu/reports/briefs/studentexperiences/index.php>.