2017-2018 - Synthesis of International Undergraduate Student Needs

Overview

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus has put significant effort into understanding the international student experience. Over the past decade, our graduate international student population has remained fairly consistent, while the undergraduate international student population has increased from 500 to more than 2,600. Understandably, with this extent of change, there are many questions facing the campus. During the past several academic years, multiple research projects were conducted to better understand the needs and challenges of international undergraduate students.

This report synthesizes data from multiple projects, and highlights key findings around 5 main topic areas to identify needs and challenges that international undergraduate students are facing.

Sources of Data

1. International Student Barometer (ISB)
2. Listening Sessions Partnering with UMN Departments (LS)
3. Survey of Student Experience in the Research University (SERU)
4. Office for Orientation & Transition Experiences Surveys (OTE)
5. OTE Tell Us about Yourself Survey (TUAY)

(NOTE: The letter after each study is the abbreviated symbol to indicate the sources of studies for the following findings)

Key Findings

(NOTE: low satisfaction refers to <80%)

1. Career Concerns and Work Opportunities (ISB, LS)
(1) Low satisfaction with opportunities for work experience/work placements as a part of student’s studies.
(2) Low satisfaction with advice and guidance on long-term job opportunities and careers received from faculty and staff.
(3) Career connection/mentorship with alumni is desired from current students.

2. Arrival Experiences (ISB, OTE, TUAY)

For Freshmen only:
- Low satisfaction with class registration for (e.g., too late to register for desired courses, not familiar with U.S. education/academic system, lack of guidance from academic advisors. Sat down with peer mentors or academic advisors helped a lot to register classes).
- 67% of TUAY freshmen respondents are concerned about registration for courses.
- 68% of TUAY new transfer respondents are concerned about registration for courses.

For both Freshmen and New Transfer:
- Low satisfaction with making friends with domestic students.
3. Housing & Living Experience (ISB, LS)
(1) Low satisfaction with cost of housing and cost of living (food, drink, transportation and social).
(2) Low satisfaction with opportunity to earn money while studying.
(3) Low satisfaction with internet access at my housing.
(4) Low satisfaction with availability of financial support/bursaries, etc.
(5) Low satisfaction with campus dining services.
(6) 61% ISB respondents felt comfortable managing finances.
(7) Lack of off-campus housing.
(8) Top housing/living challenges from ISB:
   a) Leasing terms and contract (37%);
   b) Building community/connection around living area (34%).

4. Academics – Major/Career Exploration (ISB, LS)
(1) When starting at the U as first year student, students wish to know more about:
   a) My interests, skills, and strengths (55%);
   b) Career information for majors of my interest (50%).
(2) Over 70% TUAY (both freshmen and new transfer) respondents are concerned about doing well in class and workload.

5. Campus Climate & Safety (SERU, ISB, LS)
(1) 49% SERU respondents thought that student of their immigration background are respected at the U.
(2) After 2016 presidential election:
   a) 56% ISB respondents are concerned about future employment options in the US (e.g. OPT, H1B, etc.)
   b) 45% ISB respondents are concerned about additional changes to visa and immigration regulations;
   c) 14% ISB respondents experienced verbal harassment due to race/ethnicity/religion/nationality;
   d) 3% ISB respondents experienced physical harassment due to race/ethnicity/religion/nationality.
(3) Students hope to have more access to UMPD resources and platform to address their race and diversity concerns.
(4) Student’s family/parents are worried about safety on and off campus, and concerned about travel and experience at border.

Top Needs Identified by International Students (based on 2017-2018 data)

1. To better prepare career/graduate school planning and development after graduation.
2. To improve freshmen’s experience with course registration.
3. To build meaningful friendships with domestic students, particular for first year students.
4. To build connection with campus community at housing or living area.
5. To improve student’s campus climate experience.
6. To reduce student’s anxiety about safety issues.

Questions? Or want to review your college/unit-level data? Please contact Xi Yu (yuxx637@umn.edu), Evaluation Specialist, at International Student and Scholar Services.