

International Undergraduate Student Experience: Inside and Outside the Classroom

Office of International Affairs
Center for the Study of Student Life

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, the National College Health Assessment II, and the Ohio State Student Involvement Survey gathered at The Ohio State University Columbus campus between 2009 and 2012 were analyzed to compare academic and co-curricular experiences of international and domestic undergraduate students.

Findings include international undergraduates have more frequent interactions with faculty and academic staff, less satisfaction with their academic experience, and more involvement with identity-based organizations than domestic undergraduate students. Also, international undergraduate students had a lower sense of belonging, a more negative perception of campus climate, and were less confident to assume leadership roles than their domestic counterparts.

Recommendations based on the analyses include:

- Conduct collaborative research and assessment of international students' needs and experiences
- Develop services and programs based on students' needs and research evidence
- Develop programs to promote cross-cultural awareness, dialogue, and integration
- Provide adequate resources and staffing for research and programming

PREAMBLE

The Ohio State University will implement a \$500 per semester surcharge for all incoming international undergraduate students beginning in autumn 2013. The surcharge is consistent with fees charged to international students at other U.S. universities. The Office of International Affairs, the primary central unit that provides international student support services and programs, will use revenues from the surcharge to develop and fund new initiatives to enhance international students' experiences at Ohio State. These initiatives include, but are not limited to, pre- and post-arrival support services, academic advising and cross-cultural adjustment beyond the federally mandated orientation currently provided, as well as outreach and engagement programs to create a strong, diverse, and internationally engaged community among all faculty, staff, and students at Ohio State.

In response to these initiatives mandated by the surcharge, the Office of International Affairs (OIA) and the Center for the Study of Student Life (CSSL) have jointly developed a research agenda to investigate the experience of international students at Ohio State, inside and outside of the classroom. The research group includes Cindy Xinquan Jiang (Senior Research Associate, OIA), Kirstan Duckett (Research Analyst, CSSL), and D'Arcy Oaks (Associate Director, CSSL). The researchers aim to take an integrative approach to study international students' academic experiences, co-curricular experiences, and how the intersection of academic and co-curricular experiences lead to student success defined by specific learning outcomes. The research findings, as a critical element in evidenced based decision-making and programming, will help to inform OIA and the larger university community to develop and sustain effective and meaningful programs and services for the fastest growing student population on the Ohio State campus.

INTRODUCTION

This brief examines international undergraduate students' experience at Ohio State using existing data, with comparisons to trends at other institutions. In addition to revealing findings, this brief will help

identify needs for data collection and analysis as well as future directions for researching international students' experience and assessing programs and services associated with understanding their experience on and off campus.

This brief explores:

1. How the academic experiences of international undergraduate students compare to the experiences of domestic undergraduate students.
2. How the co-curricular experiences of international undergraduate students compare to the experiences of their domestic counterparts.

METHODS

The authors used Ohio State data from multiple sources, including national surveys, an Ohio State survey, and enrollment data from Ohio State's Office of Enrollment Services. Ohio State Columbus campus data from three national surveys were used: the National Survey of Student Engagement 2010 (NSSE 2010), the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership 2012 (MSL 2012), and the National College Health Assessment II (NCHA 2012). Data from the Student Involvement Survey 2009 (SIS 2009), an Ohio State survey, was also used.

- The National Survey of Student Engagement 2010 (NSSE 2010) collected information about student participation in programs and activities at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities around the country.
- The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership 2012 (MSL 2012) was administered to over a hundred U.S. colleges and universities, with aims to measure the leadership development of college student and its relationship to college experiences.
- The National College Health Assessment 2012 (NCHA 2012) collected information about health risks, needs, and behaviors of students at colleges and universities across the country.
- The Student Involvement Survey 2009 (SIS 2009) collected information about student participation in social and academic activities and student utilization of university services and resources at Ohio State.

Table 1. Survey Samples

Survey	Term Administered	Sample Size	Response Rate	n= Domestic Respondents	n= International Respondents
NSSE	SP 2010	19,273 [♠]	22.0%	3943	297
MSL	WI 2012	4,000 [♠]	21.5%	722	31
NCHA	SP 2012	10,000 [♠]	15.3% [Ⓢ]	895	94
SIS	WI 2009	10,000 [♠]	19.6%	1883	60

[♠]All enrolled 1st and 4th year students; [♠]Random sample of all ranks of students; [Ⓢ]Overall response rate is reported but only Columbus campus, undergraduate students are included in this report

We compared the responses given by international students to the responses given by domestic students using Chi square tests on cross tabulations and T-tests for mean comparisons for each of the surveys above. Both of these tests are used to determine if the differences between the two groups are statistically significant, rather than simply due to chance. Statistically significant differences are indicated throughout the report with p-values.

SNAPSHOT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT OHIO STATE

International student enrollment at Ohio State increased by 7.9% to a record high of 6,032 students in autumn 2013. A national increase in the number of “new” international students, those enrolling for the first time at a U.S. college or university in fall 2012, indicates that this growth trend is continuing across the country, according to the 2012 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange released by the Institute of International Education. Ohio State ranks tenth in total enrollment among U.S. institutions hosting international students. Currently, international students constitute close to 10% of total student enrollment at Ohio State while the national average remains at 4%.

The steady growth in international enrollment over the past five years is largely driven by strong increases in the number of students from China, particularly at the undergraduate level. Chinese student enrollment increased by 20% overall (compared to the national average of 23%) and by 30% at the undergraduate level (compared to the national average of 31%). The total number of international undergraduate students has increased from 1,073 in 2007 to over 3,000 students in 2013 (see Figure 1), with international undergraduate students outnumbering international graduate students for the first time.

Business, Arts and Sciences, and Engineering enroll the majority of international undergraduate students (see Figure 3). Ninety percent of international undergraduate students use personal and family resources as their primary source of funding for their education at Ohio State, while less than 10% of them use university resources as their primary source of funding (see Figure 4, International Undergraduate Needs Assessment 2013). It is estimated that international students at Ohio State contributed over \$159 million in tuition and fees in 2012-2013 (based on tuition and fees of \$26,445).

Figure 1. Ohio State International Enrollment Trends 2005-2012

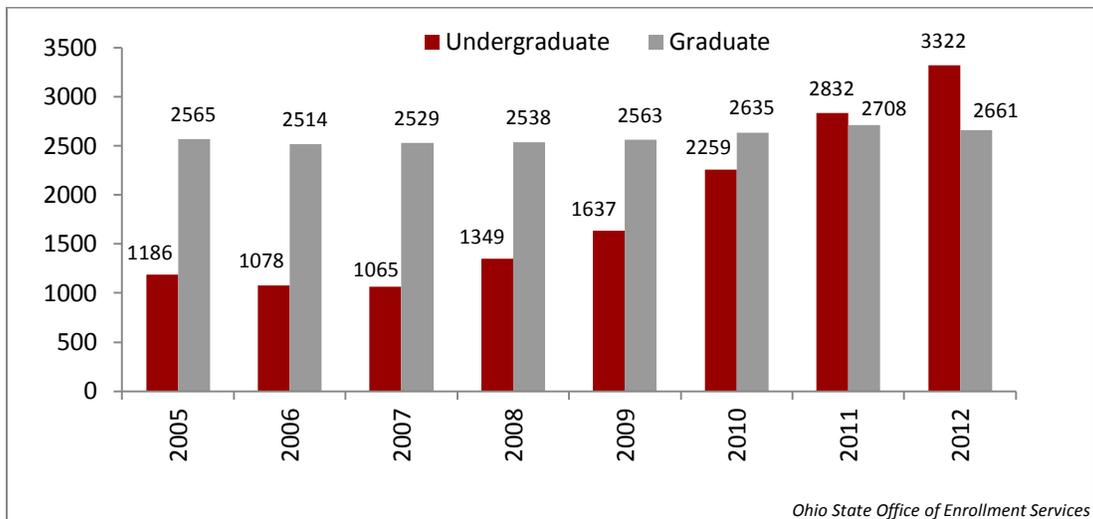


Figure 2. Ohio State International Undergraduate Top 10 Countries of Origin (AU '12 N=3,322)

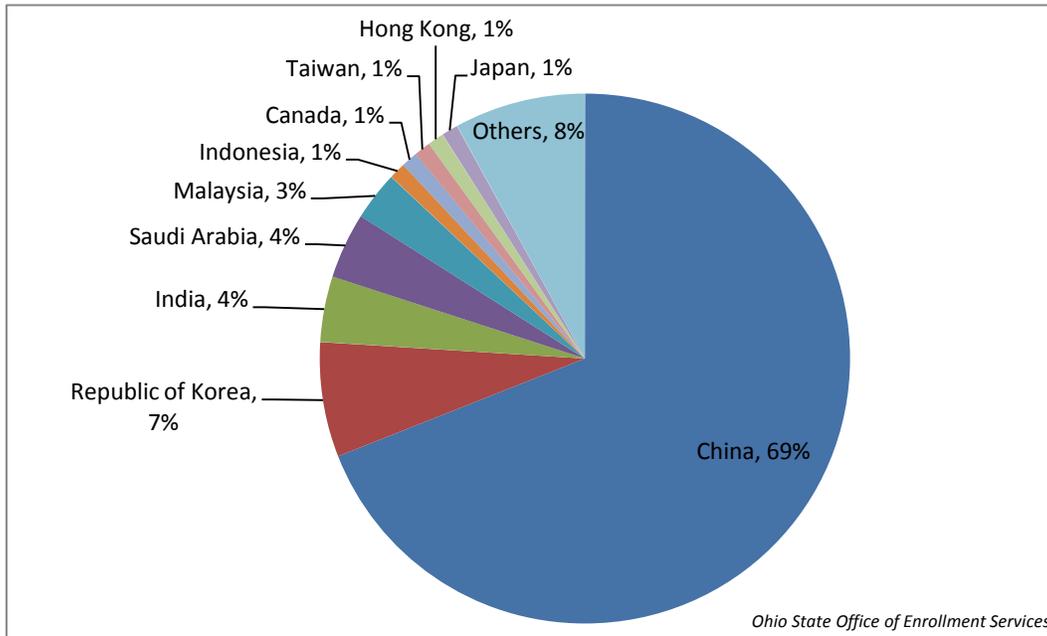
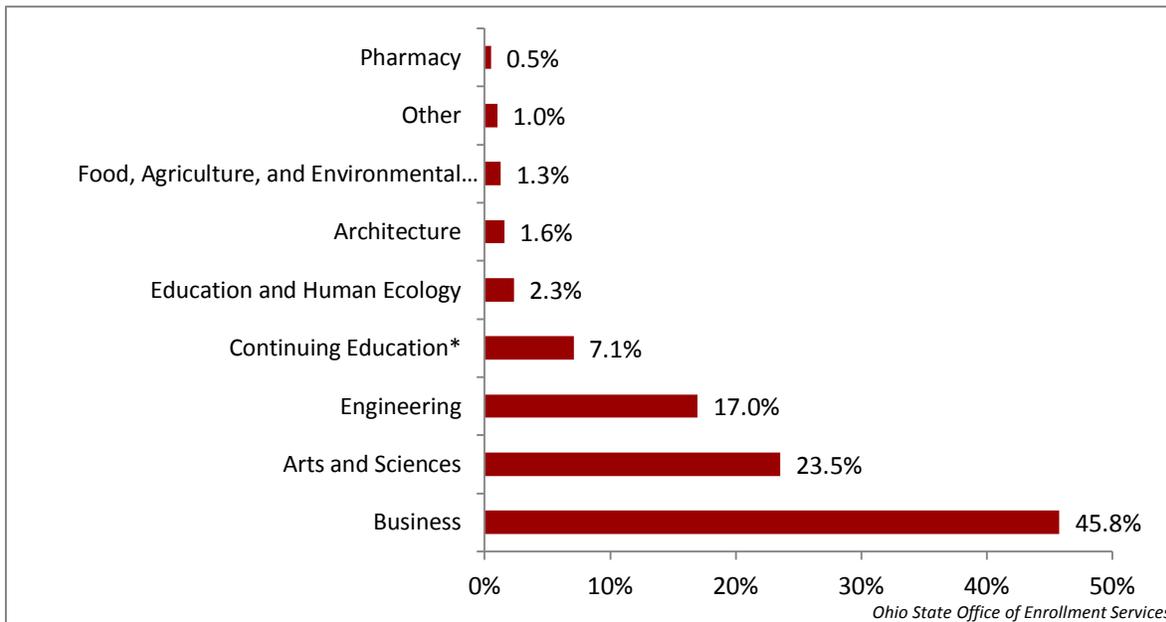
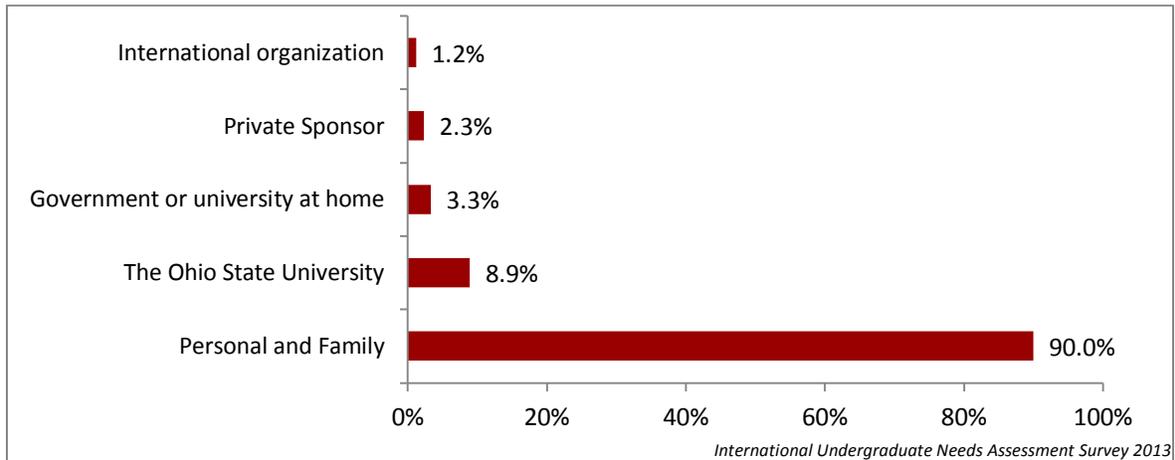


Figure 3. Ohio State International Undergraduate Student Enrollment by Major (AU '12 N = 3,318)



*Continuing education represents students who are in Optional Practical Training (OPT) status.

Figure 4. Ohio State International Undergraduate Students Primary Source of Funding



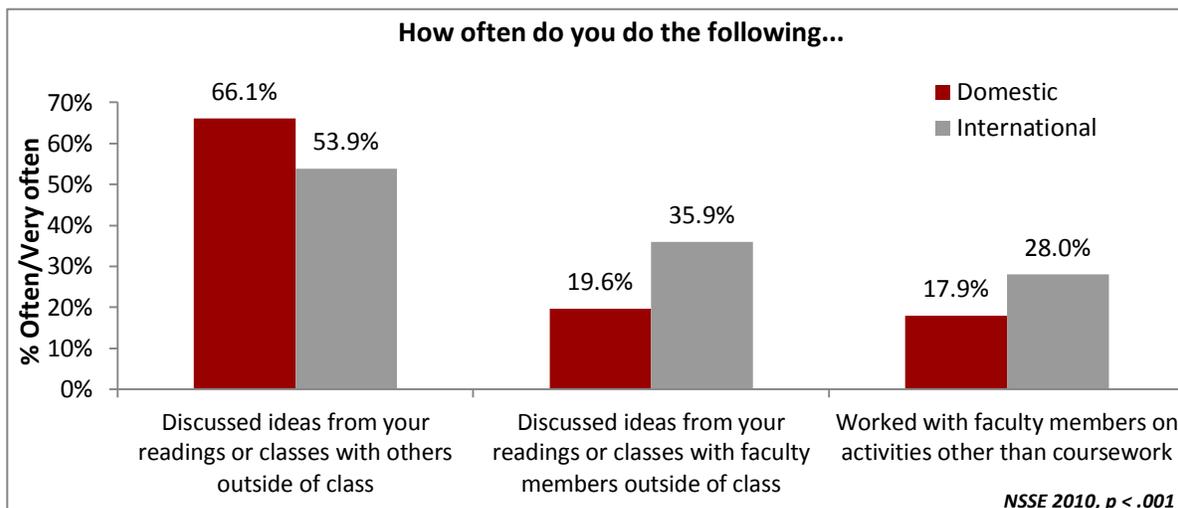
KEY FINDINGS

1. INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY AND ACADEMIC STAFF

NSSE 2010 data reveals that international students tend to interact more frequently with faculty and academic personnel regarding academic issues (Figure 5). Further, while a similar proportion of international and domestic students have engaged in a research project with faculty outside of the course or program requirements, more international students (42.4%) plan to do so in the future than domestic students (25.4%) ($p < .001$).

Both international students and domestic students reported similar frequencies of interaction with others regarding academic coursework outside of the classroom. Figure 5 below shows that domestic students reported a slightly higher frequency of discussing ideas from class or readings with others (e.g., students, co-workers, family) than international students. NSSE 2010 also revealed that international students reported working with classmates outside of class just as frequently as domestic students.

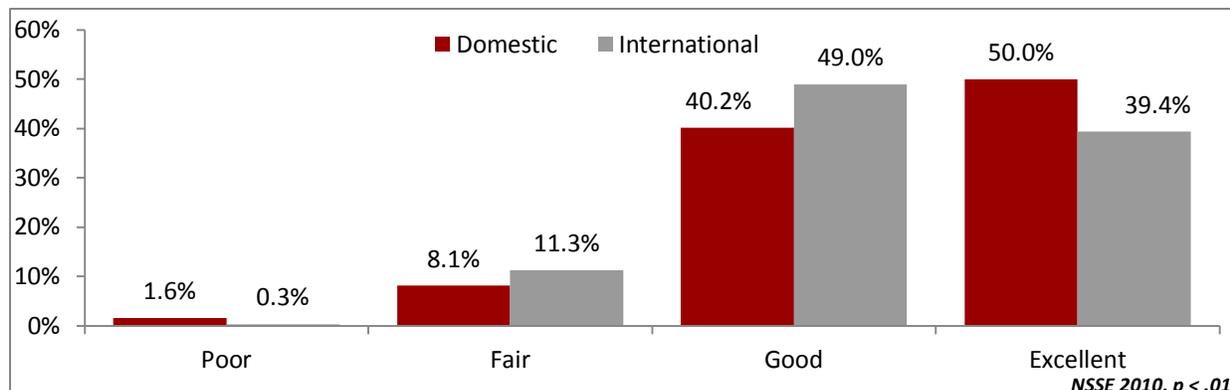
Figure 5. Interactions with Faculty and Others



2. SATISFACTION WITH ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

When asked to evaluate their educational experience, domestic students were more satisfied than international students, as shown in Figure 6 (NSSE 2010).

Figure 6. Overall Rating of the Entire Educational Experience



Data from the NSSE 2010 survey also show that international students were less likely to report they would choose Ohio State if they could start over again. Sixty percent of domestic students reported *definitely yes* when asked if they would go to Ohio State if given the chance to start over while only 38 % of international students reported the same ($p < .001$).

It is worth noting that student's perceptions are not always closely tied to their academic success in terms of retention and graduation rates. International students at Ohio State have similar retention and graduation rates to other students as shown in Table 2. Additionally, international students reported receiving higher grades than domestic students (NSSE 2010, $p < .001$).

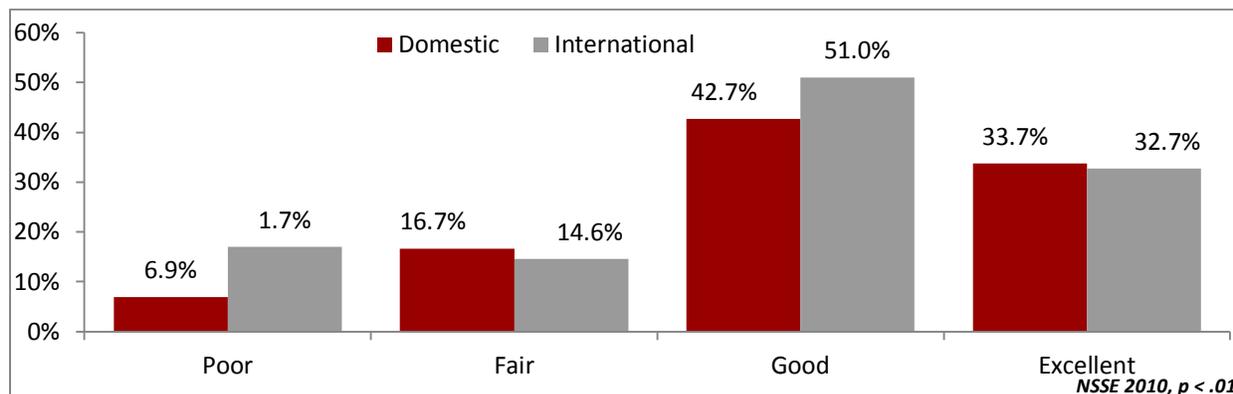
Table 2. Retention and Graduation Rates		
	1-year Retention	4-year Graduation
All	92.5%	61.4%
International	92.7%	59.4%

1-year retention rates are for all undergraduates. 4-year graduation rates are the percent of Fall 2008 cohort who graduated with a bachelor's degree by 2012.

Data source: Ohio State Office of Enrollment Services

When asked to evaluate the quality of academic advising received, international students were generally more satisfied than domestic students (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Overall Rating of the Quality of Academic Advising



NSSE 2010 data show that international students spent more hours per week preparing for class; 35.5% of international students spent more than 20 hours per 7-day week preparing for class while only 24.8% of domestic students reported the same ($p < .001$). While it appears that international students prepared slightly more for class, data from NSSE 2010 revealed that international and domestic students reported making presentations just as frequently and, as shown in Table 3, international students were slightly less likely to ask questions or contribute in class.

Table 3. Participation and Preparation for Class

How often do you do the following....	Domestic (Mean)	International (Mean)
Come to class on time	5.38	5.66**
Take notes in class	5.41	5.69**
<i>SIS 2009; Scale Never (1) – Occasionally (2)– Sometimes (3) – Often (4) – Very Often (5) – Always (6)</i>		
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	2.85	2.61***
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	2.2	2.73***
<i>NSSE 2010; Never (1)– Sometimes (2) – Often (3) – Very Often (4)</i>		
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$		

3. INVOLVEMENT WITH IDENTITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Overall, international and domestic students did not differ much regarding the amount of time spent in co-curricular experiences. According to data from NSSE 2010, they spent a similar number of hours per week participating in activities outside of classroom, with the largest proportion of students spending 1-5 hours per week on these co-curricular activities. More specifically, according to the Student Involvement Survey 2009, international students reported participating in campus events and activities at rates comparable to domestic students. International and domestic students also reported similar rates of interaction with student peers in non-academic settings. The existing data does not reveal, however, if they interacted with peers from diverse backgrounds or with other international students from their country.

International and domestic students' overall engagement in student organizations was comparable with domestic students. However, we found a significant difference in the types of organizations in which they were involved (see Table 4). International students were more likely to be involved in student groups based on identity and/or nationality by a significant margin. This finding is consistent with other research based on data collected from NSSE surveys and Wabash study (Jiang & Brown, 2008). It was found that students primarily associated themselves with others from their countries or similar cultural backgrounds experienced a push-and-pull effect of those associations. On one hand, these organizations provide the necessary support network and sense of belonging for international students, especially when they first arrive on campus. On the other hand, such organizations may create a cultural bubble for these students over time and further isolate them from integrating into the larger campus environment.

Table 4. Student Group Participation

Have you been involved in the following kinds of student groups during college?	Domestic (% Yes)	International (%Yes)
Campus-wide Programming	9.8	22.6*
Identity-Based	12.3	41.9***
International Interest	10.9	38.7***
Religious	19.3	3.2*
Sports- Intramural	37.7	12.9**
Sports-Clubs	11.5	25.8*

MSL 2012
p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

There are 107 active student organizations/clubs at Ohio State Columbus campus that are either categorized as “Ethnic/Cultural” or use the adjective “international” in the purpose statement or club’s title. In addition, there are 941 total active student organizations/clubs at Ohio State Columbus campus presently; it is not clearly to what extent these organizations have or encourage international student membership.

International students participated more in club-based sports activities than in intramural sports. Intramural sports are team-based competitive groups, while sports clubs are groups designed to serve individual interests in different sports and recreational activities with varying opportunities for competition. According to data from the MSL 2012, there were no significant differences between groups with regard to other organizations such as academic, arts/theatre/music, service, and social fraternities/sororities.

As shown in Table 5, NSSE 2010 data show international and domestic students worked similar hours per week, but at different locations. International students worked mostly on campus as the immigration regulations prevent those with F1 visa status from working off campus. However, some international students did report working for pay off campus. It is not certain if these were authorized internships or other types of unauthorized employment.

Table 5. Working for Pay per Week

Hours per 7-day week spent:	Domestic (Mean)	International (Mean)
Working for pay on campus	2.14	2.62***
Working for pay off campus	2.40	2.13*

NSSE 2010; scale from 1-8 where 1 = 0 hours per week and 8 = More than 30 hours
p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

4. SENSE OF BELONGING

International students reported a lower sense of belonging with their peers and campus than domestic students (MSL 2012). A smaller proportion of international students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt accepted as a part of the campus community (54.8%) than domestic students (68.3%) ($p < .05$). Similarly, fewer international students reported that they feel they belong on this campus (54.9%) than domestic students (73.8%) ($p < .05$).

International students at other large research institutions have also reported lacking a sense of community and belonging in the United States. Social and cultural integration have become a priority for many institutions with a larger international student body. At Ohio State, it has become even more important as the university positions itself as an international campus. In order to become a truly global university, Ohio State should strive to provide an environment where students from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds can engage with each other in both classrooms and co-curricular activities.

5. PERCEPTION OF CAMPUS CLIMATE

In general, international students perceived campus climate less favorably than domestic students. Table 5 shows that international students reported higher levels of discriminatory climate both inside and outside of classrooms among peers, faculty, and staff. Similarly, data from the NSSE 2010 indicated that international students were more likely to report their relationships with other students as negative when compared to domestic students ($p < .001$).

Table 5. Perceptions of Discrimination

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your experience on your current campus:	Domestic (Mean)	International (Mean)
I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at people like me	3.45	2.90**
I feel there is a general atmosphere of prejudice among students	3.85	3.07***
Faculty have discriminated against people like me	4.41	3.74**
Staff members have discriminated against people like me	4.40	3.52***

MSL 2012; Scale of 1-5, 1=Strongly agree and 5=Strongly disagree
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Both international and domestic students generally feel Ohio State is a safe place. However, international students gave lower rating for physical safety than their domestic counterparts, according to data from the NCHA 2012. The survey found that on a 1-4 scale from “Not safe at all” to “Very safe”, the international student mean for how safe they feel on campus during the daytime was 3.67 while the domestic student mean was 3.89 ($p < .001$). There was no difference between feelings of safety in the community surrounding the school at night. It is not clear if students’ perception is based on their perceived discriminatory climate or if it is in relation to general threats to safety at a large university.

Table 6. Feelings of Safety

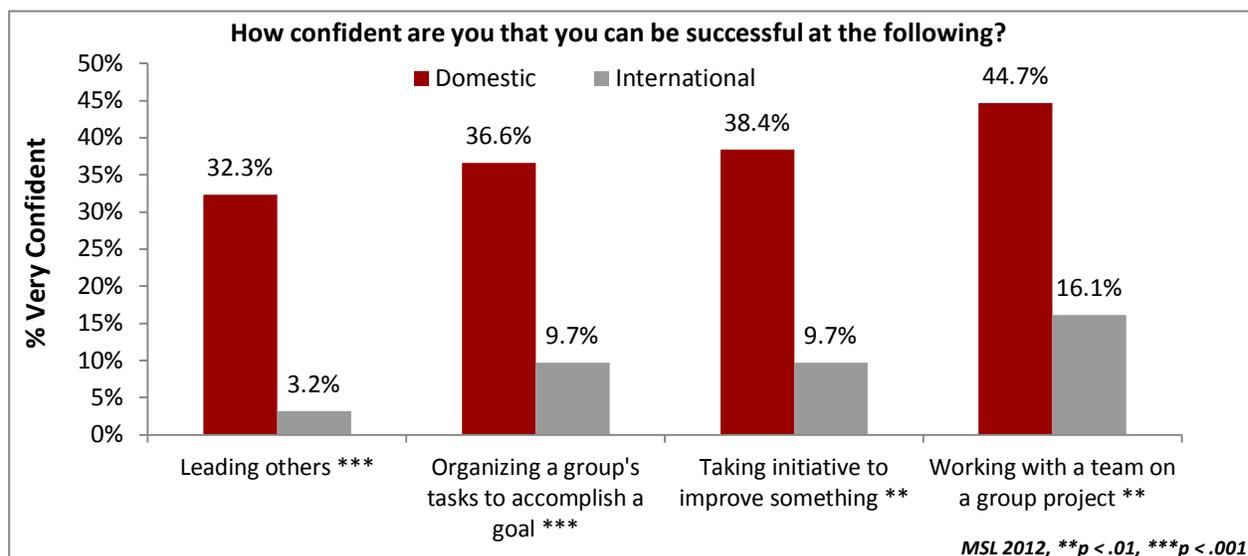
How safe do you feel:	Domestic % Not safe at all	International % Not safe at all
On this campus (nighttime)	3.0%	7.4%***
In the community surrounding this school (daytime)	0.7%	6.4%***

NCHA 2012; Scale of 1-4, 1=Not safe at all to 4=Very safe
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

6. LEADERSHIP EFFICACY

International and domestic students reported similar rates of participation in most leadership training and education experiences, but international students reported less confidence in their actual ability to lead (MSL 2012, see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Leadership Confidence



The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, which strives to measure and understand factors contributing to socially responsible leadership, posits that students should engage in leadership for the sake of social change, advancing a greater purpose, or the betterment of a collective whole. According to the MSL, students who engage in social change behaviors are more engaged with socially responsible leadership. Despite having lower leadership confidence, international students were more likely to engage in social change behaviors than domestic students (see Table 6).

Dugan and Komives (2007) stated that enhancing students' capacity for socially responsible leadership may lead to increased civic engagement, character development, and academic performance. They asserted that graduating students with these skills will help to address what others "have identified as a lack of leadership capacity and emerging leadership crisis" (p. 8). Leadership development is an important area for international students for similar reasons and should be investigated further.

Table 6. Social Change Behaviors

Social Change Behavior	Domestic (Mean)	International (Mean)
Communicated with campus or community leaders about pressing concern	1.69	2.13*
Took action in the community to try to address a social or environmental problem	1.82	2.29**
Acted to raise awareness about a campus, community, or global problem	1.87	2.55***
Took part in a protest, rally, march, or demonstration	1.40	2.10**

MSL 2012; Scale from 1-4, where 1= Never and 4=Often

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations that warrant mentioning. First, the data used to compare international and domestic students relied on proportions of students from these populations. Because the samples for these data sources were not stratified we cannot ensure that adequate numbers of international students responded to meet representation criteria. Therefore, any generalizations based on these data should be made with caution. Second, because of changes in the way international student status was asked, some of the data is more than three years old, and may not represent the current experiences of international and domestic students. In addition, there could be cultural differences in how students perceive questions, which could contribute to differences. Finally, the survey data does not provide us with the nationalities of the international students who responded, which prevents the examination of variations within the international student community.

CONCLUSION

The key findings discussed in this report are preliminary. Nevertheless, the findings do suggest that international undergraduate students have different needs and concerns than domestic students, and thus their experiences both inside and outside of the classroom require further attention and research.

With continuously increasing international undergraduate enrollment, there is a growing sense of the importance of understanding and enhancing the international student experience at Ohio State. This report is an important first step for the Office of International Affairs and the Office of Student Life working toward this direction collaboratively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

▪ **Conduct collaborative research and assessment of international students' needs and experiences**

The findings presented in this brief are based on very limited data available at Ohio State regarding international students. As such, it hardly provides a comprehensive understanding of this particular body of students. Moreover, we know little about academic interactions and experiences of international students and how they engage with the campus community outside of the classroom. Therefore, we recommend that colleges and departments, the Office of International Affairs, and the Office of Student Life act quickly and collaboratively to address the paucity of data on international students. More research is needed to investigate the institutional context and experiences that contribute to academic success and cross-cultural adjustment of international undergraduate students as their numbers have increased dramatically in the past five years. Efforts for data collection will ensure that faculty and administrators have a better understanding of institutional and students' needs. Robust data will also help create programs and services that meet international students' needs.

▪ **Develop services and programs based on students' needs and research evidence**

Ohio State should develop programs in critical areas and services at critical times for international students. For example, as the first year experience is key to college success, we recommend putting a special emphasis on international students' first year on campus by identifying needs and developing programs through research and collaboration. Efforts should be made to create a lasting partnership between the Offices of International Affairs, Student Life, and First Year Experience to ensure the unique needs of international undergraduate students are met and supported during the first year.

- **Develop programs to promote cross-cultural awareness, dialogue, and integration**

We recommend assessing the current status of co-curricular programs for international students to determine programs that promote academic success and social engagement of international students. Special attention should be given to developing ways to promote integration through the co-curricular programs and activities. Existing programs that promote cultural understanding for all students and staff, such as Open Doors (a bias-interruption program) and Inter-Group Dialogue Courses (class promoting discussion and understanding of group identities) could be expanded appropriately to address cross-cultural topics and issues.

- **Provide adequate resources and staffing for research and programming**

Finally, we recommend that adequate resources and staffing be allocated to support research and assessment for international students. Current data limitations regarding international students at Ohio State can be addressed if there are enough staff members who are devoted to research activities related to international students. Additionally, resource allocation and staffing should align with programming needs mentioned previously.

NEXT STEPS

Two studies are planned to further examine international undergraduate students. First, we will explore international student wellness, across the university's nine dimensions of wellness (aesthetic, career, emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual). Second, we will study the international student first-year experience and the impact of first-year programs on student success as broadly defined.

RESOURCES

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