

International Student Needs Assessment

April 2011

A questionnaire was mailed to 3,544 international students at UC-Berkeley covering topics that included:

- Demographic Information
- On-going Concerns
- Experiences with campus programs and services
- Experiences with the Berkeley International Office

A total of 793 (22%) surveys were completed and returned.

Summary Findings

Demographic Information of Respondents:

- Gender: Male 56.5 % female 43.5%
- Age: 37.3% were in the 25-30 age range, and 28.6 % were in the 21-24 age range
- Status: 81.6 % reported being single with 92.3% reporting having no children.
- Country of Origin: Countries with the largest respondents include China (17.9%), South Korea (14.8%), India (6.2%).
- Level of Study: 43.3% report being PhD students, followed by undergraduate students (35.8%) and Masters students (16.6%). Among undergraduates 62.3% report being freshmen and 37.7% being transfer students and 67.6% of them were enrolled in the College of L&S.
- Location of Residence: 64.7% report living in Off-campus private apartment or house followed by 11.1% reporting living in university undergraduate residence halls.
- Among the undergraduate respondents, 67.6% were enrolled in the College of Letters and Sciences and 31.2% of the graduate respondents were from the College of Engineering.

Future Plans:

- 42.4% indicated that they intended to return home after completing their studies,
- 41.5% indicated that they plan to remain in the US to pursue practical training, and
- 37.2 % indicated that they plan to remain in the US beyond practical training.

Personal Concerns:

Among undergraduate students, the top concerns were:

- having adequate financial support (51.6%), and
- securing a job in the US after graduation (50.3%)

Other top concerns for undergraduate students were:

- finding satisfactory housing (40.6%) and
- managing their finances (39.3%)

Among graduate students the top concerns were:

- having adequate financial support (57.7%), and
- having adequate financial support from their departments (44.6%)

Social and Cultural Concerns:

Top social and cultural concerns for both undergraduate and graduate students were:

- finding a good balance between school work & free time (42.1% and 40.4% respectively), and
- communicating so that they are understood (29.9% and 32.2% respectively)

Academic Concerns:

Top academic concerns for undergraduate students were:

- keeping up with reading assignments (29.6%)
- participating in academic discussions (25.2%), and
- keeping up with writing assignments (22%)

In addition, 34.3% of undergraduates somewhat agreed that relating to American students in their classes was also of concern, while 31.1% somewhat agreed that accessing academic support services was of concern to them.

Graduate students meanwhile did not exhibit any noteworthy concerns with regard to academic life.

Interactions with Faculty and Staff:

Among undergraduate students:

- 50% indicated that they either agreed or somewhat agreed that relating to their professors were a challenge for them,
- While 45.6% agreed or somewhat agreed that their ability to deal with faculty who were insensitive to their needs as an international student was of concern.

Graduate students did not exhibit any noteworthy concerns related to interactions with faculty and staff.

Family Concerns:

There were no significant concerns exhibited by graduate students.

Safety:

Overall, both undergraduate and graduate students did not indicate any concerns with regard to safety. However, among female graduate students (37.1%) disagree that it is safe to walk on campus at night and as many as 45.5% of the female respondents do not use safety resource services.

Extra-Curricular Activities:

Other than academic department programs (36.8% for undergraduates and 42.1% for graduates) the majority of respondents indicated that they rarely or never participated in most of the campus activities identified in the survey.

Campus-wide services:

Among campus wide services, undergraduate students agreed that the following departments were among the top which provided good services:

- Office of the Registrar (41.2%)
- Career Center (32.4%)
- University Housing (29.6%)
- Tang Center (28%)

There were similar responses regarding these departments ability to understand their needs as international students. Meanwhile, among graduate students the following offices were listed among the top which provided good services:

- Office of the Registrar (43.8),
- Tang Center (38.3%), and
- Payroll (34.3%)

They also indicated similar responses regarding these departments ability to understand their needs as international students.

SHIP Insurance:

Among undergraduate and graduate students, 93.4% and 93.7% respectively indicated that they have SHIP insurance, and while the majority of them indicated that they knew how to use SHIP benefits, 79.8% and 75.5% respectively indicated that they would like to learn more about how to use SHIP benefits. Among graduate students who do not carry SHIP insurance for their spouse 47.3% (26) indicated that health insurance was too expensive. Similarly, 4 respondents (50%) who indicated that they did not have insurance for their kids is because it was too expensive.

Experience with Berkeley International Office:

In terms of how BIO communicates with students there was a distinct similarity between undergraduate and graduate students. The majority of students (57.9%) reported using the BIO website between 1-5 times and 78.8% indicated that it was easy to find what they were looking for and 63.7% found the information helpful sometimes.

The majority:

- (68.1%) read the weekly office newsletter (Friday News), and
- 70.5% read the mass e-mails that are sent out to them.

Of those who did not read mass e-mails, 59.8% read e-mails from a staff member. The majority (89.7%) of respondents indicated that follow-up e-mails is an effective way to communicate with them and 79.5% indicate that the number of e-mails is just right.

All respondents indicated a stronger preference for communicating with staff via:

- e-mail (52.2%)
- phone (35.4%), and
- in-person (34%)

Most students visited BIO for matters related to:

- obtaining a signature or a document (67%)
- immigration and visa questions (59.9%), and
- academic matters (32.7%)

There was not much difference between undergraduate and graduate students with respect to their responses except that undergraduate students sought more help about academic matters (40.9%) than graduate students (27.2%).

Overall, students agree or somewhat agree that:

- BIO is physically accessible (78.8%)
- BIO was an advocate for them (76.3%), and that
- BIO staff is interested in their needs as international students (81.8%).

They agree or somewhat agree that staff at the front desk is:

- friendly (83.5%),
- respectful (83.7%), and
- helpful (82.6%)

They agree or somewhat agree that advisors are:

- courteous (78.7%),
- helpful (77.3%), and
- provide useful information (77.2%).

While the responses were rather similar and there is a high level of satisfaction, it appears that overall undergraduate students did not share the same level of satisfaction with the services of BIO as graduate students.

Comments or Suggestions for additional Programs and Services:

There were a total of 124 written responses. A total of eight themes emerged from an analysis of the comments that were provided. The following is a summary of the eight themes:

(1) General satisfaction:

Twenty six respondents indicated general satisfaction and appreciation for the programs and services provided by the Berkeley International Office.

(2) Operating Hours and Access to advising staff:

There were 18 comments related to access to the office. The majority of those respondents (10) suggested that the office be open longer while the others (8) expressed concern for the length of time it took to wait for an advisor during drop-in hours.

(3) Financial Aid/Scholarships/Internships:

Nine respondents expressed a need for the Berkeley International Office to be more of an advocate for accessing financial aid for students and/or providing more effective advising around financial aid issues.

(4) General Advising Services:

There were nine comments about advising services. Six respondents provided examples of specific types of advising that would be desirable for them and suggested that their needs were not met while three respondents felt that there must be more responsiveness towards their e-mails or follow-up with their cases.

(5) Academic Advising:

Five respondents commented about the need for more personalized academic advising while two expressed a need for writing/editing workshops.

(6) Program Delivery:

Ten comments were made around timing of programs and different programs that could be delivered. Three of those comments suggested that the programs be offered at different times because of class commitments and the time it takes to get to BIO. Other comments suggested programs for American students to learn about international students, events for families, programs to meet Americans, and programs to help students to network with each other.

(7) Communications:

Nine comments were made around the area of communications. Two respondents felt that the e-mail frequency was just right but suggested keeping them shorter while two others suggested that there were too many and suggested ranking ordering them by importance. A couple of respondents wanted to see more information on the web site such as events and workshop details and one comment suggested that it be easier and simpler to navigate. Three respondents appeared confused by the BIO acronym.

(8) SHIP Insurance:

Four comments were made about the SHIP insurance with concerns related to the need for insurance for dependents, the cost of insurance and more information related to how to use it.