



# International Student Satisfaction Report

Prepared by Dr. Gonzalo Bruce

James F. & Dorine D. Harter  
Office of International Education

## Spring 2013





## Executive Summary

International student satisfaction is at the heart of Emporia State University's (ESU) international recruitment efforts. International students come to Emporia State University mainly seeking value in education and a safe campus environment. ESU meets the students' needs and expectations by introducing students to the U.S. academic life and enjoying opportunities to meet and interact with people, make new friends, and connect with academic advisors. International students reviewed the Office of International Education (OIE) on several fronts. Students appreciate and are active in the campus events and programs intended to promote internationalization. International students prefer communicating directly with the OIE and are less keen in using the website to find resources and information. Finally, international students appreciate the role the OIE plays in maintaining students' status relative to their student visa. This year students rated the OIE higher in terms of maintaining fluid communication and keeping a friendly attitude toward students compared to last year.

International students share a positive experience in the classroom. They appreciate their professors for being available and for being genuinely interested in students' academic success and cultures. The positive rapport with the faculty had a positive influence on students' readiness to undertake academic work. In addition, students generally felt their grades were commensurate to their intellectual ability and efforts.

International students find many ways to become involved on campus. Student involvement is marked by identifying and participating in one or more recognized student organizations as well as becoming actively involved in campus programs and events. Last year's finding revealed students used and felt mostly satisfied with the services provided by the WAW Library and the Student Recreation Center. This year's results not only confirmed this finding but also suggested students are using other campus resources more frequently. The international student experience at ESU varies depending on several factors such as the school or college of affiliation, gender, and the academic purpose while at ESU. However, overwhelmingly, students indicated ESU and the City of Emporia were friendly to international students and would recommend ESU to their friends.



## Introduction

The international student satisfaction survey is an annual collaboration between the Office of International Education (OIE) and Information Technology (IT). The OIE adheres to international enrollment management tenants which postulate current students' satisfaction is the most effective recruitment tool to attract prospective students. Using new technologies and social media, prospective students ask currently enrolled students for candid and honest opinions about their experience at ESU. These opinions have the capacity to influence students' enrollment decision.

The annual international student satisfaction survey was designed to monitor how Emporia State University (ESU) is serving and meeting the needs of its international constituents. Another goal is to identify areas in which ESU can continue improving services to better meet international students' needs and expectations. The survey was first launched in Spring 2012 and this report corresponds to its second edition. Where possible and applicable, results were compared and contrasted with that from last year.

For the first time, this year the survey included items that allowed collecting qualitative feedback from students. Qualitative data offered valuable in-depth information and complemented qualitative indicators. In addition, this year the survey included some demographic data such as gender, country of origin, age, and academic purpose at ESU. The demographic data offered opportunities to design an international student satisfaction model and compare groups. This addition improved the survey as it allowed a more accurate depiction of students' satisfaction across sub-populations.

## Population and Methodology

The survey was conducted in an electronic format and sent via web link to all international students who were enrolled in Spring 2013. About 487 students received the initial invitation as well as reminders to complete the survey during four weeks in March, 2013.

About 120 students completed the survey, which represents a response rate of roughly 24.6 percent. Respondents were mostly female students (68 percent) with an average age of 23.4 years old. In terms of class, the largest group was graduate students (33 percent), followed by freshmen (17 percent), seniors (15.7 percent), and juniors (14.8 percent). In contrast, there was a small representation of sophomore students (4.6 percent). In terms of academic goals, most respondents were degree-seekers (81 percent). Similarly, most respondents were affiliated to the College of Arts and Sciences (36.1 percent) and the School of Business (32.4 percent). Not surprisingly, the Teachers College and the School of Library Sciences and Information Management had the smallest representation (12 and 2 percent, respectively). Most respondents joined ESU in the past four years and 33 percent have been at ESU for only one year. Finally, respondents were from 15 countries with China having the largest representation (59.8 percent), followed by South Korea (16.3 percent).

The survey analysis consisted of mostly frequencies and descriptive statistics. To compare groups, the analysis used simple t-tests (two-tailed). An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model was constructed for assessing overall international student satisfaction using students' characteristics and demographic data as independent variables.



## **Motivation to study at Emporia State University**

International students choose ESU for several reasons. Chief among them is value (affordability v/s quality) (61 percent). Other important factors that attract students are safety (39.7 percent) and academic quality (35.5 percent). Relative to last year, students rated safety and academic quality higher (4 and 5.5 percent, respectively). Through qualitative responses, students mentioned other motivations to come to ESU with indirect implications on value. For example, scholarships, institutional partnerships and alumni connections.

Consistent with last year, factors that have less weight on students' decision to come to ESU are campus size (11.6 percent), the presence of other international students (10.7 percent), campus location and innovative academic programs (9.1 percent). A couple of changes from last year's survey include students' more favorable rating to the innovative nature of academic programs (increase by 6 percent). Similarly, students felt more positive about the presence of other international students (increase by 3 percent) and campus location (increase by 1 percent).

## **Emporia State University and international students' expectations**

Students rated from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent) on how ESU has met their needs/expectations in areas deemed critical for students' adjustment to U.S. colleges. Students felt mostly satisfied with their ability to meet other international students. Other areas in which they felt largely satisfied were ESU's ability to introduce students to the U.S. academic life and their experience with academic advisors (mean=3.1, respectively). Finally, students felt positive about having access to campus resources and the ability to enroll in courses that secure academic progress (mean=3.0).

Areas that continue to be challenging are: 1) creating opportunities for international students to integrate more closely with American peers, and 2) providing more opportunities for immersion in the U.S. culture. However, the standard deviations suggest students share different experiences in their ability to meet American students, academic advising, and opportunities to meet other international students.

## **The Office of International Education**

### *International student services*

Respondents rated the OIE from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent) on the services offered to international students. Students were mostly satisfied with the OIE's role in maintaining students' visa status (mean=3.14). They also appreciated the OIE role in developing campus-wide events to promote internationalization (mean=3.02) and the OIE collaboration with the Accounting Club to help international students file taxes (mean=3.0).

The OIE plays an important role in developing campus programs and events designed to foster community and raise awareness on cultural diversity. About 77.5 percent of students' ratings were favorable to OIE's programs and events. Similarly, students said they liked participating in campus programs and events (85 percent). Looking more carefully at students' involvement in events with an international focus, attention must be given to strategies aimed at increasing involvement and satisfaction



among junior and senior students. Relative to other class groups, graduate students appear to be more involved in and more satisfied with campus events and programs.

### *Communication with international students*

International students' preferred method of communication with the OIE is e-mail. Students say the OIE sends e-mails that are relevant to them (97 percent). Similarly, when students have specific questions, the OIE staff provides prompt and accurate answers (97 percent). Another way students obtain information is visiting the OIE in person. Students say they are regularly greeted by a friendly staff (80 percent) and students enjoy visiting the OIE (73.5 percent). However, male students reportedly have a better experience when visiting the OIE relative to their female counterparts and the difference is significant ( $p < .01$ ). In contrast, students are less likely to consult the OIE website when they need specific information. Consistent with last year's results, only 36 percent of respondents visited the OIE website for specific answers.

Relative to last year, students reported greater satisfaction with OIE's ability to communicate relevant issues (increase by 11 percent). Similarly, the OIE was rated a more welcoming place for international students relative to last year (increase by 4 percent).

## **The Campus Experience**

### *In the classroom*

International students have a positive experience at ESU and this experience is marked by students' ability to connect with the faculty. Students said the faculty is often available for them (97.4 percent). Similarly, faculty members are genuinely interested in the students' academic success (96.5 percent) and their cultures (85.2 percent).

For the most part, students feel comfortable following presentations and classroom discussions (92.1 percent). Similarly, they enjoy participating in class (93.8 percent). International students are aware about and leverage their capacity to contribute in classroom discussions by offering fresh perspectives from their countries (90.3 percent). Finally, students feel prepared to undertake academic work at ESU (95.6 percent) and indicate their grades are commensurate to their academic ability and effort (95.6 percent).

Through qualitative responses, students offer a more in-depth account on their classroom experience. One student said the first months at ESU were particularly hard and could have used more help from professors. However, later the same student admitted feeling progressively more comfortable. Another student said to rely more on textbooks in course with strong quantitative focus. However, overwhelmingly and most recurrently, students said to enjoy and appreciate their professors.

### *Campus involvement*

Most international students identify with recognized student organizations (88.7 percent). In addition, most students participate in one or two student organizations although the proportion is smaller (79.1 percent). Compared to the last year, more respondents were active on campus (increase by 12 percent) and more students participated in OIE events (increase by 8 percent).



Campus involvement offers international students opportunities to connect and establish friendships with peers. The survey suggests it is slightly easier for international students to meet other international students (87.7 percent) than American students (78.6 percent).

An area for growth consists of increasing awareness of the role that the Associated Student Government (ASG) plays on campus. Reportedly, 45.6 percent of respondents said to be unfamiliar with the ASG, a slightly higher proportion compared to last year.

#### *Campus resources: frequency of use and satisfaction*

International students rated from 1 (never) to 4 (regularly) how often they used ESU's campus resources. Consistent with last year, international students most frequently use the William Allen White (WAW) library (mean=3.6), the Student Recreation Center (mean=2.9) and Registration (mean=2.8). Conversely, students appear to use less frequently the Center of Student Involvement (mean=2.1), Career Services (mean=2.15) and Student Wellness Center (mean=2.5). Not surprisingly, a greater variance was reported in the use of the Hornet Express, Hornet's Nest, the Student Recreational Center, the Center for Student Involvement and Career Services. There are several factors that affect the use of some campus resources. For example, whether the student lives on or off-campus; plans to work in the U.S. or is inclined to physical activity.

The data suggest a trend that supports students are using more frequently other campus resources. For example, comparing to previous results, students used the Writing Center more frequently (increase by almost 12 percent) this year. Similarly, students ate at the Hornet's Nest and the Hornet Express more often (increase by 20 and 18 percent, respectively).

Students who said to use the campus resources were asked to rate these services from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). Students were mostly satisfied with the WAW library (mean=3.25), the Student Recreation Center (mean=3.12), the student advising center (mean=3.11), and Career Services (mean=3). Conversely, students were less satisfied with the Hornet's Nest (mean=2.7), the Writing Center (2.8), Assessment & Teaching Enhancement Center (mean=2.9) and the University bookstore (mean=2.9). Looking at differences among sub-populations, senior and graduate students report greater level of satisfaction with Career Services relative to other students (69 and 83 percent, respectively). Similarly, male students reported greater satisfaction with the Student Wellness Center (88 percent) than their female counterparts. Finally, graduate students report great satisfaction with the services provided by the Graduate School (90.9 percent).

Comparing results from last year, students remained highly satisfied with the WAW Library and the Student Recreation Center. This year students felt more positive about the services provided by the Student Advising Center and Career Services. Areas that continue to be challenging for international students are the Writing Center and Dining Services; more specifically, the Hornet's Nest.

#### **The overall ESU experience**

Students like Emporia State University because it is a friendly university (95.8 percent). They feel the same way about the City of Emporia (96.7 percent). Overall, students feel safe in Emporia (99.2 percent) and find it easy to meet people and make new friends (80 percent). Looking at specific groups, it appears



freshman students and female students have more difficulty in meeting people and connecting with friends.

Given the overall experience, students said they would recommend ESU to their friends (85 percent). However, the ESU experience appears to be different across genders. International male students are more likely to recommend ESU relative to their female peers and this difference is significant ( $p < .5$ ).

The results suggest room for growth particularly in the areas associated with local transportation. Although 77.3 percent agreed that getting around Emporia was easy, students' experience is different across gender. Female students are significantly more limited in their ability to move around compared to male students ( $p < .05$ ). Another area for further consideration consists of students' ability to identify activities to do on or off campus. Only 64.1 percent agreed it was easy to find things to do on or around campus.

Through qualitative responses, international students offered feedback on areas in which ESU can strive to better meet their social and academic needs. On the social realm, students mentioned six themes:

1. *Access to bigger cities.* This point was particularly relevant to some ethnic and religious groups on campus, like Saudi Arabian students, for whom access to specific groceries to meet dietary needs is important. Another student made the point that most international students are used to and hence enjoy bigger cities.
2. *Interaction with American students.* Some students indicate greater interaction with American students would help them improve their English and gain greater cultural understanding.
3. *More activities.* Some respondents simply asked for more on-campus activities.
4. *Campus food.* Some respondents noted dining services caters mainly to American students and does not take into consideration international students' dietary habits and taste.
5. *Residence halls.* Some students said they were challenged to find a place during holidays and breaks when residence halls and Dining Services were closed.
6. *Operation Hours - Student Recreation Center.* Some students mentioned they would like to see the SRC operation hours expanded to holidays and breaks.

In the academic realm, students' suggestions ranged from more proactive advising to more space for studying on campus during off-hours. Respondents said they would like academic advisors to offer students early advice at various points of the student's college career. Another challenge was the School of Business academic offerings during the summer, which is limited to online instruction. Finally, having library space available 24 hours was particularly important to students, especially during exam week.

Most students felt ESU was a good place for international students. Students praised their professors for being knowledgeable, helpful and friendly. Some also commented about the friendships they have been able to establish while at ESU. A few students offered some constructive criticism. For example, one suggested increasing the diversity among the international student population would lead to greater cultural integration and exposure to the English language.

## International Student Satisfaction Model

To better understand international student satisfaction at ESU, the analysis focuses on students' demographic characteristics as independent variables (IV's). The report operationalizes student satisfaction as outcome or dependent variable (DV).

### *Dependent variable*

International student satisfaction is a complex dimensions for measurement and assessment. In effect, international student satisfaction in any U.S. campus responds to a combination of both social and academic factors. After a careful analysis of the various survey items, the international student satisfaction index was comprised of eleven items that touch on specific academic and social indicators (Table 1). These items offered adequate level of consistency among each other ( $\alpha=.852$ ). Consequently, the international student satisfaction index was created as outcome measure after combining these items into one continuous level variable.

### *Independent variables*

The report uses six independent variables (IV's), which consist of students' demographics and dimensions to assess the effect on international students' experience at ESU. Most of the IV's are binary (dummy) variables with the exception of age. The following variables were considered.

- Female v/s Male
- Undergraduate v/s Graduate
- Degree seeking v/s non-degree seeking
- Chinese nationality v/s other nationalities
- Affiliation to the Business School v/s students in other schools or colleges
- Age

### *Analysis*

This analysis explores the association between student satisfaction and specific student characteristics. Due to the exploratory nature of the model, the analysis consisted of two-tailed tests. Table 2 represents the effect of students' characteristics such as gender, undergraduate/graduate status, academic objectives (degree v/s visiting), nationality, college or school affiliation and age on student satisfaction.

The model intercept of the OLS regression model predicts a student satisfaction of 2.8 when the student is male, graduate students, non-degree seeking, not affiliated to the Business School, from countries other than China and of zero years of age. In the model, student's academic purpose has a significant effect on student satisfaction. International students who seek a degree from ESU are 0.276 more satisfied than students who come for a short-period. Similarly, gender has a significant effect on student satisfaction. Female students are .223 more satisfied than male students and this effect is significant ( $p<.5$ ). Finally, the affiliation to a college or school has a significant effect in predicting international student satisfaction. Students who are affiliated to the Business School are .246 less satisfied relative to students who are enrolled in other schools and colleges ( $p <.5$ ). Indicators that appear not to be significant in the model are undergraduate v/s graduate status, country of origin, and age.





Looking at standardized coefficients, the independent variables have a modest effect on determining student satisfaction. Affiliation to the School of Business has the strongest, yet negative effect on student satisfaction ( $\beta = -.287$ ), followed by degree-seeking status ( $\beta = .251$ ), and being Female ( $\beta = .236$ ). Looking at the  $R^2$ , the model predicts roughly 20.9 percent international student satisfaction at ESU.

## Discussion and Implications

International student satisfaction is the cornerstone of ESU's efforts for recruitment and retention. According to the survey results, students have a markedly positive experience at ESU. The survey results reveal value is the most important driver for international students to choose ESU. Once at ESU, students find more than value and affordability. They discover a friendly University surrounded by a friendly and safe community. Students connect well with their professor and overall, they enjoy a positive experience in the classroom.

Areas where the ESU experience for international students may improve consist of providing more opportunities for cultural immersion, more opportunities to meet American students, more opportunities to get around Emporia, and visit bigger cities. By looking at sub-populations among international students, improvements can be made to address specific needs of freshman students who report lower satisfaction levels compared to other class groups. This may be explained among other things by the length of time spent at ESU.

Female students who seek a degree from ESU and who are enrolled in colleges/schools outside the Business School appear to have a better ESU experience. Consequently, more attention must be given to the experience of male students. Surprisingly, in many items male students reported greater level of satisfaction compared to their female peers. More analysis is needed to determine in which aspect the experience of male student does not compare to that the female peers. In addition, more attention must be given to visiting students. Maybe due to the short time visiting students spend on the ESU campus, their experience does not compare to that of degree-seeking students who have more time to adjust to the campus. Finally, the experience of international students in the Business School requires further analysis and consideration. Factors that have less weight in predicting students' satisfaction are the undergraduate/graduate status, the country of origin and age.

Comparing results from last year, it is encouraging to learn international students are using more frequently the various campus resources available to them. However, some offices can improve their efforts in reaching out to international students. Such is the case of the Center of Student Involvement and Career Services. It is worth noting that results on this finding may be skewed due to respondents' intention to be in the U.S. for a short-term. Nevertheless, students who do use these services indicate adequate level of satisfaction.

Another implication uncovered by the survey is the way international students prefer to communicate. International students prefer direct communication, either face-to-face or via e-mail. This finding has several implications for the OIE and other units trying to reach out to international students. It also invites re-thinking some website designs and content to ensure international students feel attracted to this source of information.



### **Limitation of the study**

Survey research is often limited by the nature of the data and sample size. In this particular sample, this study had a large representation of female, graduate students and degree-seeking students. Similarly, there was a large representation of students from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Business School while two colleges had a small representation. Finally, sophomore students had a very small representation on this survey. These limitations require caution in the interpretation and ability to generalize the findings in the study.

**Table 1**

<i>Academics indicators</i>	<i>Social indicators</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Results commensurate to student's efforts and ability</li> <li>- Feeling prepared for academic work</li> <li>- Ability to engage with professors outside the classroom</li> <li>- Classroom and group discussions</li> <li>- Faculty genuinely interested in the students' culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Friendly campus</li> <li>- Feeling safe</li> <li>- Opportunities to meet people and make new friends</li> <li>- Opportunities to do things on or off campus</li> <li>- Getting around campus easily</li> <li>- Recommending ESU to friends</li> </ul>

**Table 2**

OLS regression of student gender, undergraduate status, degree seeking, China as country of origin, affiliation to the Business School and age on international Student Satisfaction

	b	$\beta$
Degree Seeking	0.276* (0.131)	0.251
Female	0.223* (0.106)	0.236
Undergraduate	0.058 (0.116)	0.068
Business School	-0.246* (0.096)	-0.287
China	0.181 (0.101)	0.216
Age	0.000 (0.015)	-0.001
Constant	2.801 (0.412)	
R2	0.209	
S.E.E.	12.064	