



International Graduate and Professional Student Experiences at UCLA

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CONTENTS:

Table with 2 columns: Content Title and Page Number. Includes Executive Summary (1), Introduction (2), Demographic & Background Character- (2), Interactions with Others (4), Wellness (6), Campus Climate (7), Academic Progress (8), Assessment of Skills & Abilities (10), Employment (11), Housing (11), International Student-Specific Issues (12).

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of international graduate and professional student experiences. Key comparisons and areas of difference with domestic graduate and professional students are presented and specific international student issues are addressed. Highlighted findings include:

- Interactions—International students tend to perceive fewer opportunities and as a result report interacting less frequently with others in settings such as sharing a meal or socializing and interacting in class. However, international students tend rate the quality of their interactions more positively than domestic students.
Wellness—In general, international students report slightly more negative mental health compared to domestic students but did not differ significantly from domestic students in terms of physical wellness measures.
Campus Climate—International students reported more positive campus climate compared to domestic students.
Academic Progress—International students report greater concern about their academic progress.
Self-Rated Skills and Abilities—International students rate their research skills higher than domestic students but report lower skills related to writing papers and making an oral presentation.
Housing—Satisfaction with housing was lower among international students.
International Student Specific Issues—The most frequently encountered challenges include meeting/socializing with domestic students; acclimating to American culture; issues related to visa, immigration laws, or work authorization; and English proficiency.

Survey Administration & Overall Respondent Demographics

Survey Administration

The 2010 Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey was administered online in Spring 2010 to all graduate and professional students at UCLA. The survey was designed with a Student Affairs focus and included items related to: perceptions of progress, mental health/wellness, use of time, financial concerns/resources, interactions with others, campus climate, self-ratings of skills, ethics in academia, international student issues, post-graduation plans, sense of community, and improvement of graduate/professional experience. For more information about the survey instrument see: http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/data/efforts_gradsurvey.html.

Overall Respondents

A total of 4,067 students responded to the survey (41% response rate). The sample was representative of the overall graduate and professional student population in terms of race/ethnicity. Female respondents were slightly over-represented compared to the overall graduate and professional student population (53% vs. 48%), as were Asian students (24% vs. 19%). The sample was representative in terms of degree objective and major field. Additional information about the survey results can be found at: http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/data/efforts_gradsurvey.html.

Introduction

This report summarizes findings from the 2010 Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey for international students. Key differences and similarities between international and domestic graduate/professional students are highlighted. In addition, findings from items specific to the international student graduate/professional experience are summarized. Topic areas discussed include:

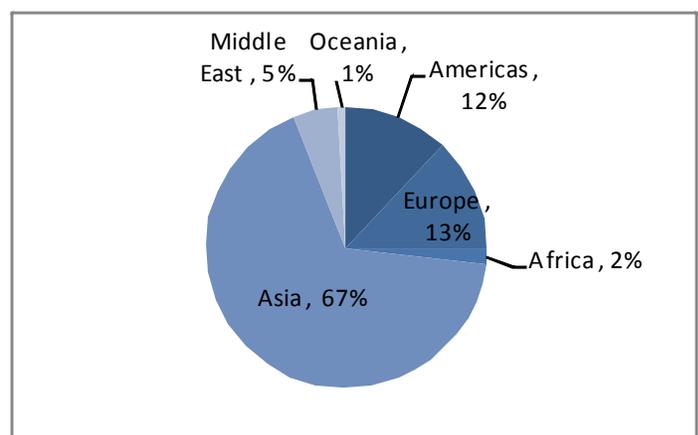
- Demographic and Background Characteristics
- Interactions with Others
- Wellness
- Campus Climate
- Academic Progress
- Self-Assessment of Skills and Abilities
- Employment
- Housing
- International Student-Specific Items

International Students' Demographic and Background Characteristics

Demographics

Among international student respondents, 66% (N=372) were male and 34% were female (N=193). Approximately 89% reported being heterosexual, 10% reported being homosexual, and 1% reported being bisexual. The majority of international student respondents were single (67%), while 32% were married or living with a domestic partner, and 1% were divorced or separated. Nearly 20% reported having dependents. Figure 1 displays the world location of origin for respondents. The majority of respondents, 67%, were from Asia.

Figure 1. World Location of Origin (N=565)

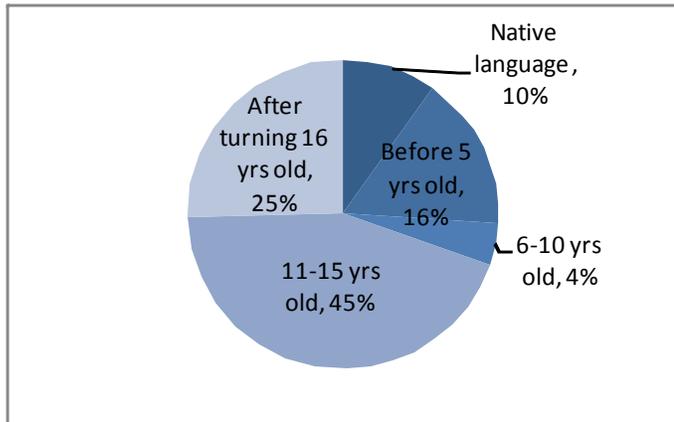


Background Characteristics

English Acquisition

Most international students reported learning English when they were between 1-15 years old. Figure 2 displays the percentage of respondents who learned English at various times in their lives.

Figure 2. Age Learned English (N=506)



Visa Status

Nearly 85% of international students were in the US on a student visa (N=479). Other visa types were exchange visitor (8%), temporary worker of distinguished merit and ability (4%), intracompany transferee (<1%), business—temporary (<1%), spouse or child of alien classified as L1 (<1%), and Other (2%). Of the students who reported studying at UCLA on a student visa, 13% reported that their UCLA education is being sponsored by their government.

Major and Degree Objective

Table 1 displays the major field of international student survey respondents. The most popular major field among international students was Engineering (36%) followed by Management (11%) and Physical Science (10%).

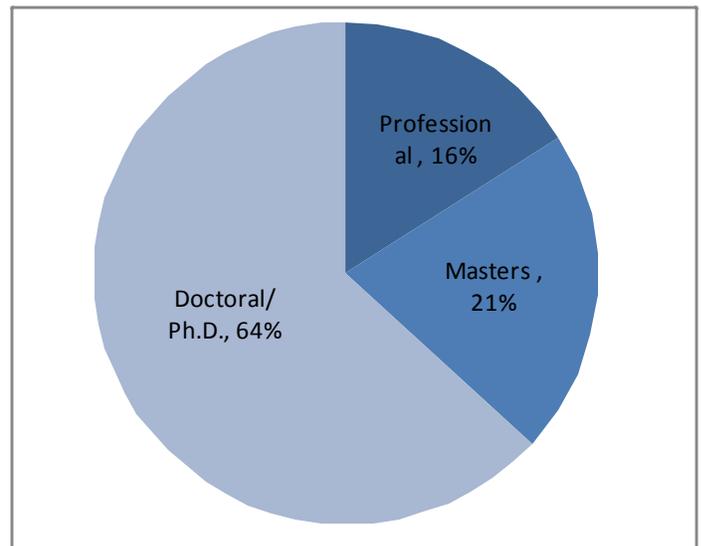
Degree Objective

Figure 3 displays the degree objectives for international students. The majority of international students' degree objective at UCLA was a doctoral/Ph.D. degree (64%).

Table I. Major Field

Major Field (N=565)	Percentage
Arts & Architecture	2%
Dental, Law, or Medical School	4%
Education & Info Studies	2%
Engineering	36%
Health Science— Academic	3%
Humanities	3%
International Institute	<1%
Life Science	4%
Management	11%
Physical Science	10%
Public Affairs	2%
Public Health	6%
Social Science	9%
Special Fee	7%
Theater, Film, & TV	2%

Figure 3. Degree Objective (N=565)



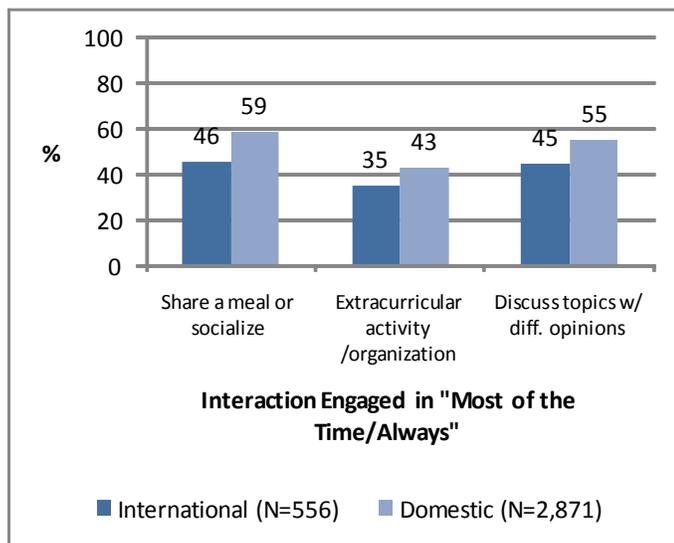
Interactions with Others

Interaction with others at UCLA was measured by a bank of items related to interactions such as sharing a meal or socializing, interacting in class, discussing academic work or research outside of class, interacting as part of a UCLA-based extracurricular activity or organization, discussing topics among those with differing opinions, and discussing different backgrounds. Respondents were asked to indicate their a) perceived frequency of opportunities to engage in interactions, b) extent of engagement in interactions, and c) extent of engagement in interactions with others who were different (e.g., by race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political orientation, gender). In addition students were asked to rate the overall quality of interactions with people at UCLA who were different from them.

Opportunities to Engage

Overall, international students differed from domestic students in a few areas related to their perceived opportunities to engage in interactions with others at UCLA. Figure 4 provides a summary of the key differences.

Figure 4. Opportunities to Engage in Interactions



A smaller percentage of international students perceived opportunities to engage in the following activities “Most of the Time” or “Always”:

- Share a meal or socialize with other people at UCLA (46% - Intl. vs. 59% - Domestic)

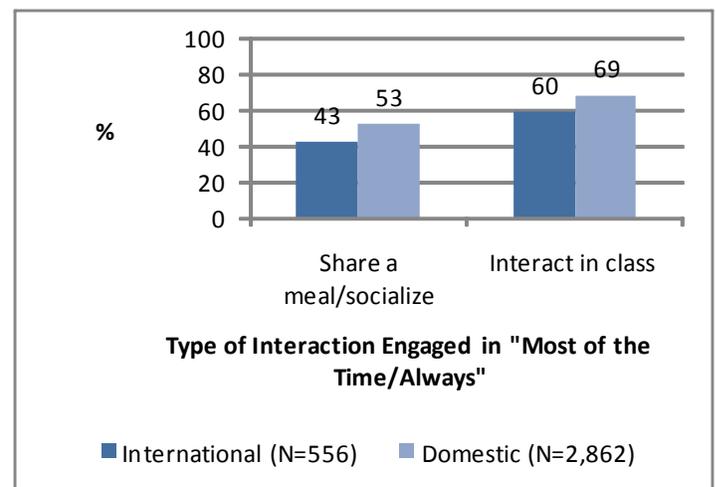
- Interact as part of a UCLA-based extracurricular activity or organization (35% - Intl. vs. 43% - Domestic)
- Discuss topics about which they had different opinions with other people at UCLA (45% - Intl. vs. 55% - Domestic)

International students reported similar perceived opportunities as domestic students to engage in interactions in class, discussions of academic work/research outside of class, and discussions of different backgrounds.

Engagement with Other People at UCLA

While for the most part, international students perceived similar opportunities to engage in interactions as domestic students, they differed in their actual engagement in activities. Figure 5 summarizes the key differences between international and domestic students.

Figure 5. Engagement in Interactions

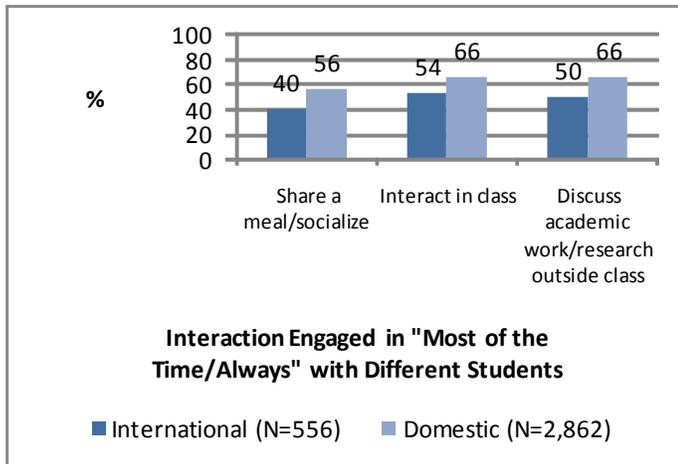


International students were less likely than domestic students to engage “Most of the Time/Always” in the following activities with people at UCLA:

- Share a meal or socialize (43% - Intl. vs. 53% Domestic)
- Interact in class (60% - Intl. vs. 69% - Domestic)

The differences in frequency of interactions were further magnified when comparing international with domestic students for certain types of interactions with people who were different from them. Figure 6 summarizes the key differences.

Figure 6. Engagement in Interactions with Different Others



Compared to domestic students, a smaller percentage of international students reported engaging “Most of the time” or “Always” in interactions with others who were different from them in the following situations:

- Share a meal or socialize (40% Intl. vs. 56% Domestic).
- Class interaction (54% Intl. vs. 66% Domestic)
- Discussions of academic work or research outside of class (50% Intl. vs. 66% Domestic)

Previous research, particularly among studies conducted by UCLA’s Office of Residential Life (ORL) have documented gender differences in frequency of interactions among undergraduates. Consequently, gender differences in interactions were explored among graduate/professional students’ interactions. Among domestic students, women reported sharing a meal or socializing and interacting in class more frequently than men. However, these gender differences were not evident among international students.

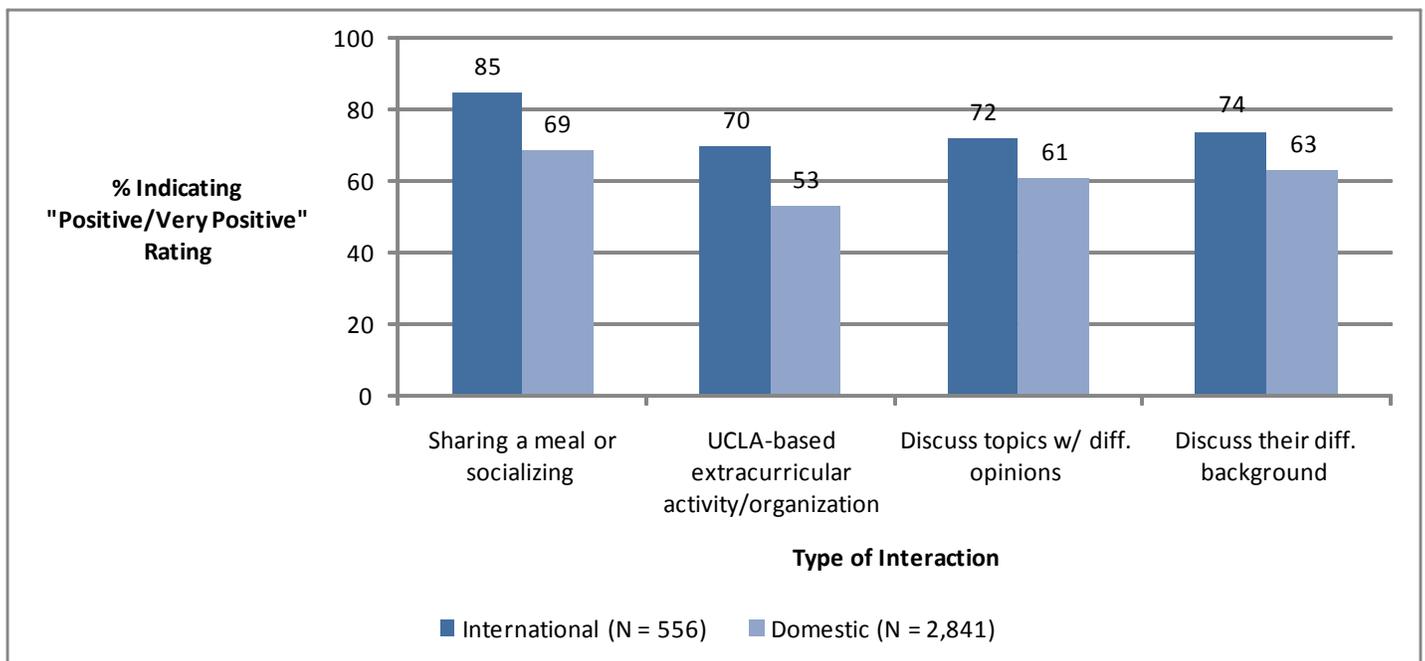
Ratings of Interactions

Survey respondents were asked to rate the quality of their interactions with others at UCLA who were different from them. Figure 7 displays the comparison of interaction ratings for international and domestic students.

Compared to domestic students, international students were more likely to rate the following interactions as “positive” or “very positive”:

- Share a meal or socialize (85% - Intl. vs. 69% - Domestic). Further, among international students, men were more likely to rate this interaction as “positive” or “very positive” compared to women.
- Interact as part of a UCLA-based extracurricular activity or organization (70% - Intl. vs. 53% - Domestic)

Figure 7. Positive Ratings of Interactions with Different Others



- Discuss topics about which they had different opinions (72% - Intl. vs. 61% -Domestic)
- Discuss their different backgrounds (74% - Intl. vs. 63% - Domestic). Men were more likely to rate this interaction as “positive” or “very positive” compared to women among international students.

However, no significant differences were found in ratings of interactions related to academic work such as class interactions and discussion of academic work or research outside of class.

Wellness

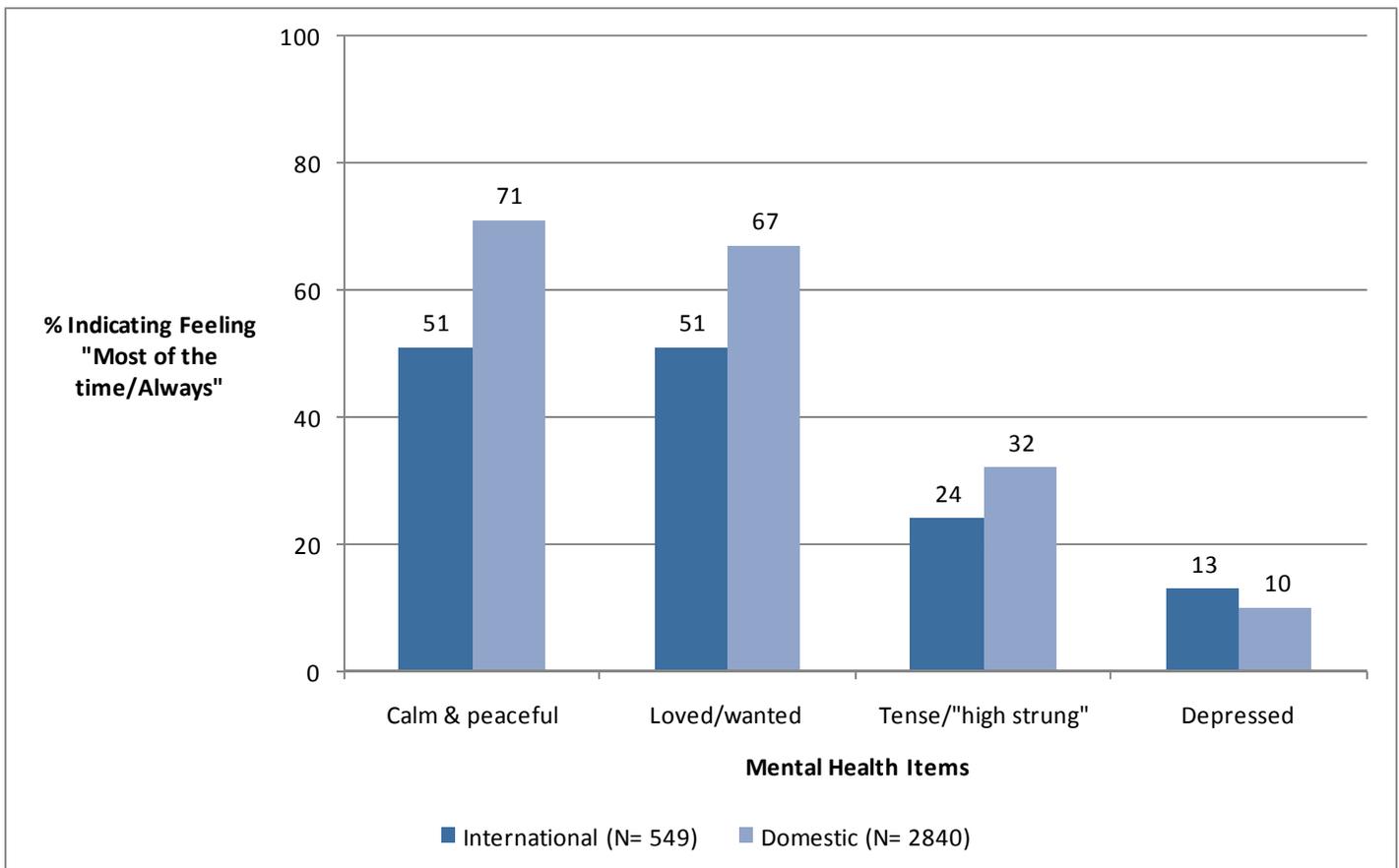
Mental Health

Mental health was measured via 17 items designed to assess anxiety, depression, psychological distress, positive affect, and well-being. Some key differences emerged in mental health between international and domestic students. Figure 8 summarizes

the key differences.

Compared to domestic students, a greater percentage of international students reported feeling depressed (13% - Intl. vs. 10% - Domestic) “most of the time” or “always.” A smaller percentage of international students also reported feeling calm and peaceful (51% - Intl. vs. 71% - Domestic) and feeling loved or wanted (51% - Intl. vs. 67% - Domestic). Surprisingly, fewer international students also reported feeling “tense or high strung” (24% - Intl. vs. 32% - Domestic). However, the colloquial nature of the term “high strung” may not have been easily understood by international students. Further complicating the findings, when asked whether feeling depressed, stressed, or upset had slowed their progress, international and domestic students did not differ.

Figure 8. Mental Health



Physical Wellness

In terms of physical wellness, international and domestic students did not differ in terms of their reported hours per week in the past year that they had spent sleeping and participating in physical exercise, fitness activities, or sports. In addition, no differences were found in the impact of a disability or chronic illness on the academic progress of international and domestic students.

Campus Climate

Campus climate was assessed via items related to general respect for graduate students, support from department and faculty, relationships with other graduate students, and connections with those outside of their department. In general, international students reported more positive perceptions of the climate in their program and at UCLA than domestic students. Even in instances where there were

significant differences between international and domestic students, ratings of climate items tended to be positive/high (80% or above). Table 2 summarizes the differences.

In reference to respect for graduate students in general, a greater percentage of international students agreed or strongly agree that:

- Graduate students in their program are respected regard less of their gender (96% - Intl. vs. 92% - Domestic).
- Graduate students in their program are respected regardless of their religious beliefs (97% - Intl. vs. 91% - Domestic).
- Graduate students are respected regardless of their political opinions (95% - Intl. vs. 83% - Domestic).

International students also perceived some aspects of department/program climate more positively than domestic students. A greater percentage of international

Table 2. Campus and Department Climate

Item	International % “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” (N=537)	Domestic % “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” (N=2,789)
Graduate/professional students in my program are respected regardless of their gender.	96%	92%
Graduate/professional students in my program are respected regardless of their religious beliefs.	97%	91%
Graduate/professional students in my program are respected regardless of their political opinions.	96%	83%
My graduate/professional program supports my research professional /goals.	93%	83%
Students in my graduate/professional program are treated equitably and fairly by faculty.	86%	80%
Rapport between faculty and students in my graduate/professional program is good.	92%	85%
Morale of graduate/professional students in my graduate/professional program is good.	93%	82%
I have sufficient opportunity to interact <i>socially</i> and make connections with people at UCLA outside of my department.	52%	38%
I have sufficient opportunity to interact <i>academically</i> and make connections with people at UCLA outside of my department.	53%	37%

students agreed or strongly agreed that:

- My graduate/professional program supports my research/professional goals (93% - Intl. vs. 83% - Domestic)
- Students in my graduate/professional program are treated equitably and fairly by faculty (86% - Intl. vs. 80% - Domestic)
- Rapport between faculty and students in my graduate/professional program is good (92% - Intl. vs. 85% - Domestic)
- Overall, the morale of graduate/professional students in my graduate/professional program is good (93% - Intl. vs. 82% - Domestic)

In terms of encouragement and opportunities for interactions outside of their department, while the overall percentage among both international and domestic students was low (ranging between 37% - 53%), a greater percentage of international students reported such opportunities. For example, 52% of international students reported having sufficient opportunity to interact *socially* and make connections with people at UCLA outside of their department compared to 38% of domestic students, and 53% of international students report having sufficient opportunity to interact *academically* and make connections with people at UCLA outside of their department compared to 37% of domestic students.

Perceptions of Academic Progress

Survey respondents were provided a list of various factors and asked to indicate the extent to which each of the factors had affected their academic progress within the past year (i.e., slowed, did not impact, or improved academic progress). Table 3 (page 9) displays the key differences between international and domestic students in terms of factors reported to “somewhat” or “significantly improve” their progress.

International students were more likely to report that the following as improving their academic progress:

- Work commitments/responsibilities (39% - Intl. vs. 13% - Domestic)
- Availability by faculty (55% - Intl. vs. 40% - Domestic)
- Graduate program/professional school’s structure or requirements (49% - Intl. vs. 32% - Domes-

tic)

- Other graduate commitments that are not program requirements (e.g., conferences, publications, etc.) (44% - Intl. vs. 28% - Domestic)
- Course scheduling/availability (44% - Intl. vs. 20% - Domestic)
- Personal relationships (e.g., spouses, significant other, parents) (41% - Intl. vs. 30% - Domestic)
- Family obligations or responsibilities (27% - Intl. vs. 10% - Domestic)
- Others’ attitudes towards their race, ethnicity/ nationality (41% - Intl. vs. 6% - Domestic)
- Others’ attitudes towards their gender (12% - Intl. vs. 6% - Domestic)
- Others’ attitudes towards their religion (10% - Intl. vs. 3% - Domestic)
- Others’ attitudes towards their sexual orientation (9% - Intl. vs. 3% - Domestic)
- Ethics related to authorship or collaboration (16% - Intl. vs. 6% - Domestic)

With regard to factors that were reported to slow academic progress, 43% of international students (N=218) reported that their housing situation “significantly” or “somewhat slowed their academic progress” compared to only 24% of domestic students (N=637). There were no other variables reported to significantly slow students’ academic progress that were significantly different between international and domestic students.

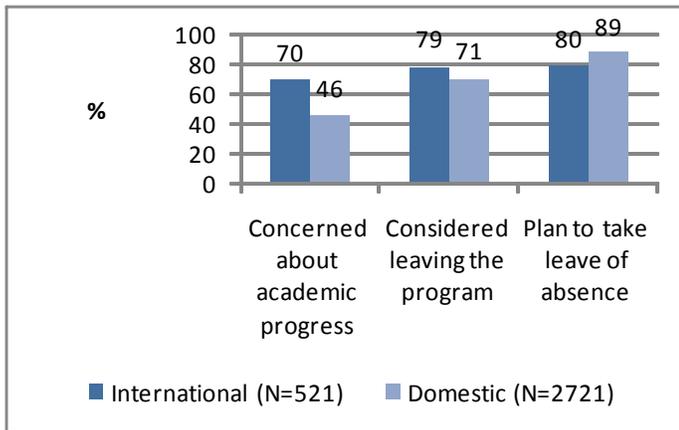
Table 3. Factors Reported to Improve Progress

Item	International % “Somewhat” or “Significantly Improved Progress” (N=506)	Domestic % “Somewhat” or “Significantly Improved Progress” (N=2,673)
Work commitments/responsibilities	39%	13%
Availability by faculty	55%	40%
Graduate program’s / professional school’s structure or requirements	49%	32%
Other graduate commitments that are not program requirements (e.g., conferences, publications, etc.)	44%	28%
Course scheduling / availability	44%	20%
Personal relationships (e.g., spouses, significant other, parents)	41%	30%
Family obligations or responsibilities	27%	10%
Other’s attitudes towards their race, ethnicity/nationality	41%	6 %
Other’s attitudes towards their gender	12%	6 %
Other’s attitudes towards their religion	10%	3%
Other’s attitudes towards their sexual orientation	9%	3%
Ethics related to authorship or collaboration	16%	6%

Academic Concerns

Students' satisfaction with their academic experience is often reflected in their concern about their academic progress as well as their intentions to remain in their program. Figure 9 indicates that a greater percentage of international students (70%) reported being "concerned" or "very concerned" about their academic progress compared to domestic students (46%). International students were more likely than

Figure 9. Academic Concerns and Intentions to Leave

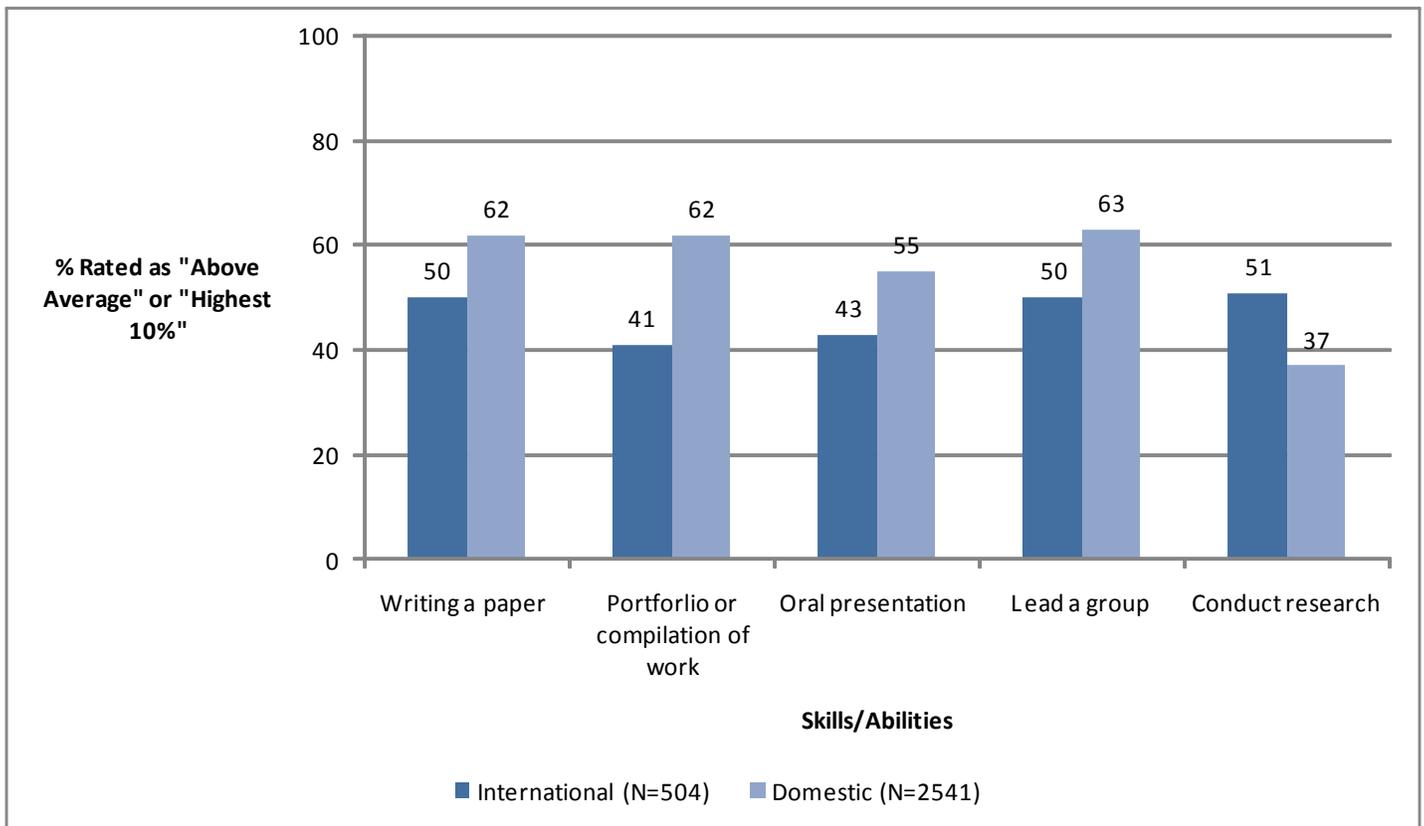


domestic students to report that they have seriously considered leaving their program before completing the degree (79% - Intl. vs. 71% - Domestic). However, international students were less likely than domestic students to consider taking a leave of absence in the future before completing their degree (80% - Intl. vs. 89% - Domestic).

Self-Assessment of Skills and Abilities

Respondents were asked to rate their academic-related skills compared to other people in their field (including peers, faculty, post-docs, etc.) ranging from the "Lowest 10%" to the "Highest 10%." Overall, there were not many significant differences between domestic and international students in their self-ratings of their skills and abilities across various areas including both academic and interpersonal. There were no significant differences in self-ratings of interpersonal skills among international and domestic students. However differences were detected in specific academic tasks. Figure 10 displays students' self-reported skill level on various academic tasks in which there were significant differences between international and domestic students. Of the

Figure 10. Self-Reported Skill Level for Various Academic Areas



differences, a smaller percentage of international students compared to domestic students rated their skill level as “above average” or the “highest 10%” in the following areas:

- Writing a course paper (50% - Intl. vs. 62% - Domestic)
- Preparing a portfolio or compilation of work (41% - Intl. vs. 62% - Domestic)
- Giving a formal oral presentation (43% - Intl. vs. 55% - Domestic)
- Leading a group (50% - Intl. vs. 63% - Domestic)

However, international students were more likely than domestic students to report their skill level for conducting research in their field as “above average” or the “highest 10%” (51% - Intl. vs. 37% - Domestic).

Employment

Survey respondents were asked about their paid employment both on- and off-campus. The range of hours spent in these activities included “None,” “Up to 2 hours,” “3-5 hours,” “6-10 hours,” “11-20 hours,” “21-30 hours,” and “Over 30 hours.” Overall, there were few significant differences between do-

mestic and international students on their self-reported hours of employment in the past year. Table 4 displays the key differences related to employment. Of the students who reported working for pay, a greater percentage of international students compared to domestic students reported:

- Working 0-5 hours a week for pay off-campus
- That their on-campus work was related to their field of study

However, a smaller percentage of international students reported that their off-campus employment was related to their field of study compared to domestic students.

Housing

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the type of housing situation that best described their current residence. Response options included “On-campus,” “University-owned student housing (e.g., Weyburn Terrace),” “Off-campus, University-owned student housing (e.g., University Apartments South),” “Off-campus, non University-owned housing—within walking or biking distance,” and “Off-campus, non University-owned housing—within driving distance.” Significant differences related to housing between international students and domestic students

Table 4. Employment

Item	International (N=503)	Domestic (N=2,668)
Working 0-5 hours a week for pay off-campus	90%	75%
On-campus employment related to field of study	49%	35%
Off-campus employment related to field of study	16%	27%

Table 5. Housing

Item	International (N=504)	Domestic (N=2,673)
Live in non-university owned housing within driving distance	31%	61%
“Satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the cost associated with their housing situation	51%	62%

are summarized in Table 5 (page 11). International students were less likely than domestic students to live in non-university owned housing within driving distance. In addition, international students were less satisfied with the cost of associated with their housing situation compared to domestic students. However, they did not differ in terms of their satisfaction with the location and condition of their housing.

International Student-Specific Issues

A bank of survey items asked specifically about international student challenges, and thus there were no equivalent domestic student comparisons. International students were asked to indicate how frequently they experienced difficulty with various tasks and activities. Table 6 provides a summary of responses from international students. The activities that international students reported difficulty “sometimes,” most of the time,” or “always” were with meeting/ socializing with domestic students (54%); acclimating to American culture (52%), issues related to visa, immigration laws, or work authorization (51%); English proficiency (47%); and finding housing prior to the start of their first academic year at UCLA (45%).

Table 6. International Student Challenges (N=565)

How often have you experienced difficulty with the following?	Never / Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time/ Always
Visa, immigration laws, work authorization	49%	33%	18%
Dealing with the university policies that apply to international students (e.g. min. # of units, time to degree requirements).	61%	27%	12%
English proficiency	53%	31%	16%
Acclimating to American culture	48%	37%	15%
Meeting/socializing with domestic students	46%	34%	20%
Meeting/socializing with other international students	62%	31%	6%
Finding housing prior to the start of your first academic year at UCLA	55%	28%	17%