

**Voices from around the World: International Undergraduate
Student Experiences**

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Abstract

This paper explores how students adjust to life at universities outside their home countries. Much of the current body of research was conducted prior to the 9/11 tragedy and focuses primarily on studies within a single U.S. institution. This project expands the boundaries by including multiple institutions from around the globe post-9/11. The authors describe international undergraduates' educational experiences. Further analyses examine whether differences exist among the following: 1) students attending U.S. or non-U.S. institutions, 2) those who hail from different regions of the world, 3) native or non-native speakers, 4) the sexes, 5) students who lived in the host country prior to enrolling or those who did not, and 6) those living on- or off-campus.

Voices from around the World: International Undergraduate Student Experiences

There is a substantive body of literature addressing the issues surrounding the success of international students at American universities. When attending U.S. institutions, international students can face a number of challenges and a great deal of stress, particularly in academic situations, (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Wan et al. (1992) question whether institutions in the United States effectively assist their international students in making the cross-cultural adjustment. They found that students whose home educational system was perceived as unlike that of the U.S. experienced more stress than students whose home educational system was perceived as more similar. Having good English language skills seems to play a role in lessening the stress felt by international students (Wan et al., 1992), as comprehension of lectures can be especially difficult for students from non-English speaking countries (Tompson & Tompson, 1996).

Two additional sources of stress involve the creation of new social networks and the adjustment to a different set of societal values and expectations. American universities may foster a culture that is very different from what international students would experience in their home countries, such as American students addressing their professors in a less formal manner and sometimes even speaking without having been called upon (Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Having a strong social support network seems to improve international students' abilities to cope with this stressful situation (Wan et al., 1992). Students see this as critical, but they tend to find developing those networks especially difficult (Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found that the number of strong network bonds that international students had with other students from their culture or similar cultures was positively related to a high self-esteem. In addition, "the establishment of strong ties with Americans has an independent, positive effect in promoting (an

international) student's self-esteem, regardless of the number of strong ties developed with other coculturals" (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).

Many of the problems that international students experience may stem from their attempts to adjust to university life using strategies that would be effective in their own country but prove to be ineffective in the United States (Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Furthermore, international students from different cultures/countries experience different problems, and students from cultures that are dissimilar to American culture tend to experience more problems than do students from cultures that are more similar. All of these factors make it very difficult to address all international students' needs (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995).

The current body of literature addressing issues surrounding the success of international students, while substantial, consists primarily of studies within a single institution, rarely examines the experiences of international students at non-U.S. institutions, and tends to refer to studies conducted prior to September 11, 2001. This paper aims to shed light on how students adjust to life at universities outside of their home countries. As much of the current body of research was conducted prior to the 9/11 tragedy and focuses primarily on studies within a single U.S. institution, this project expands the boundaries by including multiple institutions from around the globe post-9/11.

Method

In the spring of 2001, the International Board of Overseers at Tufts University commissioned a survey of the international students enrolled at Tufts University. The purpose of the survey was to determine areas in which international students had difficulty adjusting to American college life, ways in which Tufts University was a good place for international students, and how the institution could improve its programs and services for international students. Developing the paper survey was a collaborative effort between the Office of Institutional Research,

the International Center, and several members of the Board. The survey was administered during the spring 2002 semester. Based on the results of this survey and a desire to better serve the international student population, Tufts implemented a number of changes (Terkla, Roscoe, & Elish-Andrews, 2002).

In the fall of 2003, the International Center and the Office of Institutional Research determined that an updated version of the survey should be administered to the current international student population. The 2002 version of the survey was the basis for the current survey, but the 2004 version featured a number of changes. Questions that were no longer relevant were removed, some questions were re-formatted to yield more usable and hearty results, and some new questions were added to explore current issues of interest as well as to evaluate the impact of the changes made by the University after the 2002 administration. The resulting web-based instrument contained 137 closed-ended items, 27 open-ended survey items, and 16 “if other, please specify” fill ins, and was administered to the Tufts University international student population during the spring 2004 semester.¹

In order to interpret the results of the survey most effectively, it was hoped that a variety of comparisons could be drawn beyond the simple contrast of the 2004 Tufts results to the 2002 results. In this vein, a number of Institutional Research professionals from institutions around the world were invited to participate in this project. Boston College, George Washington University, the National University of Ireland, Galway, Northeastern University, RMIT University (Australia), and the Universiteit van Amsterdam (The Netherlands) all chose to take part in the study. Each of the participating institutions was given a copy of the Tufts’ 2004 instrument. They were asked to retain a certain set of questions that were universally relevant (a total of 75 closed-ended items, 16 open-ended items, and 6 “if other, please specify” fill ins). They were then allowed to delete any of the

¹ A copy of the 2004 Tufts International Undergraduate Student Experience survey is available upon request.

other questions that were not relevant to the international student population on their campus, to add questions that captured information of particular interest to their campus, and to a very limited extent amend the pre-existing required questions. All surveys were administered in English, but in the case of surveys administered outside of the United States, the spellings and phrasing were adjusted to reflect the English conventions used by the country in which the institution was located. All efforts were made to maintain comparability of the data while satisfying each institution's needs for questions relevant and meaningful to their campus. One staff member in the Tufts Office of Institutional Research developed all of the institutions' surveys using the same web-survey software package, with the exception of Northeastern University's.² All of the web-surveys had the same formatting in order to maintain a consistent look and feel and to avoid opportunities for bias that would hinder the comparability of responses between institutions.³ The only differences in appearance between the surveys were in the logos/university seals at the top of each instrument and the introductory text, which were institution-specific. The five additional surveys that were administered via the web (Boston College, George Washington University, the National University of Ireland, Galway, RMIT University, and Universiteit van Amsterdam) contained, on average, 115 closed-ended questions, 24 open-ended questions and 14 "if other, please specify" fill-ins for an average total of 153 survey items.⁴ Northeastern University's telephone survey contained 49 closed-ended questions and 4 open-ended items, for a total of 53 survey items.⁵

When each institution was ready to administer their instrument, an administrator from that institution sent an email to their international students inviting them to respond to the survey. The email explained the reason for the survey and/or how the results would be used, provided a hotlink

² Northeastern University determined that their population was not a good match for using a web-based survey format. Therefore, the web-based International Student instrument was revised for telephone survey purposes.

³ Copies of surveys are available upon request.

⁴ Individual respondents often did not see a number of these items, as branching logic skipped them over questions that were deemed not relevant to them as determined by responses to prior questions.

⁵ Northeastern University's telephone interviewers also recorded the respondents' gender and class year; however, these were not counted as question items as the interviewers recorded them without posing the item to the respondent.

to access the survey, and gave information about how to contact someone in case of technical difficulties or general questions.⁶ In all cases, at least one email reminder was sent and data was collected until responses dropped off so much that it was obvious that students had stopped responding. The surveys were active for varying lengths of time (a mean of 46 days, with a range of 30-72 days). Overall, data collection was conducted over a 24-week/four and a half-month period due to the variations in academic calendars between the institutions.⁷

Northeastern used NUPULSE, a telephone-based student opinion survey service, to collect data from international students. Through the use of computer-assisted telephone interviewing software (CATI), the interviewers would call a group of students from a list of designated names. If after three attempts they failed to contact an individual on their list, they would drop down to the next eligible name on the list and try contacting that person. Typically, there were eight student interviewers administering the CATI each evening for four evenings.

Participants

A combined total of 2,558 international students responded to the surveys, yielding an overall response rate of 22.1%. The response rates for individual institutions varied substantially, from 11% at the National University of Ireland, Galway to 43% at Northeastern University. The definition of “international” used by each institution varied slightly. For purposes of this analysis, “international students” are defined as individuals who do not hold sole citizenship in the country in which their institution is located.⁸ When employing this definition, the population base was reduced slightly to 2,225 cases.

⁶ At Tufts, a link to the survey was also posted on TuftsLife.com, a popular campus informational web site frequented by students.

⁷ Northeastern University is not included in these numbers as the participants were contacted by telephone and were not able to go to a web site to access the survey at their convenience.

⁸ If individuals hold dual citizenship in the country in which the institution is located as well as another country, they are included in this analysis.

The international students in our sample hailed from 128 different countries. More men (57%) than women elected to respond to the surveys.⁹ For most respondents (76%), the language of their academic program was not their first language, and this proportion was approximately equal for students attending U.S. and non-U.S. institutions. The majority of respondents (53%) reported being fluent in two languages, while an additional 43% were fluent in 3 or more languages. The average number of languages in which the respondents were fluent was 2.6, with the maximum being eight languages.

Approximately 27% of the students indicated that they had lived, prior to matriculation, in the country where their institution was located. Of these, approximately 42% indicated that they had attended high school in the country where the university was located. Significantly fewer international students who attended non-U.S. institutions had lived and/or attended high school in the country where their institution was located than had those attending U.S. institutions. Twenty-four percent of international students who attended non-U.S. institutions indicated that they had lived, prior to matriculation, in the county where their institution was located, compared to 46% of those attending U.S institutions. Non-native speakers were more likely to indicate that they had lived in the country where their institution was located or had attended high school in that country. Eastern Europeans were the most likely to indicate that they had lived or studied in the country where their institution was located, while those from Africa were the least likely to have had this experience.

Results¹⁰

Overall, respondents were positive about the various educational experiences they have had at their university. Approximately 65% of the international students indicated that they liked or

⁹ There were no differences between U.S. and non-U.S. institutions or between native and non-native speakers with respect to the proportions of males and females responding to the surveys.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise specified, tests of statistical significance were assessed at the $p < .001$ level.

were enthusiastic about the institution that they were attending.¹¹ A somewhat higher percentage of students attending U.S. institutions indicated that they were “enthusiastic” about their institution than were students at non-U.S. institutions. Ninety percent of all respondents were satisfied with the undergraduate education they were receiving. Of these, most said they would select that institution again if given the opportunity (88%). Moreover, the vast majority of satisfied individuals (92%) would recommend the institution to other international students. Students attending non-U.S. institutions were somewhat more critical of quality of the education they were receiving than were students at schools in the U.S. A slightly higher percentage of students attending non-U.S. institutions than those attending U.S. institutions indicated that they were dissatisfied with their undergraduate education or that they would not recommend the institution to other international students. Despite this however, a similar proportion of students at U.S. and non-U.S. institutions said that if given the opportunity to begin again, they would select the same institution (81.0% vs. 78.1%, respectively). There were no significant differences between native and non-native speakers with regard to levels of satisfaction with their institutions, or their desire to attend again. However, non-native speakers were somewhat more willing to recommend the institution as a good place for other international students, although this result was only significant at the $p < .05$ level. Moreover, there were no significant differences between student from various regions of the world¹² with regard to levels of satisfaction with their institutions, desire to attend again, or recommending the institutions as a good place for other international students.

International students were asked to identify factors that made their adjustment to college life problematic (See Table 1). Students experienced varying degrees of difficulty with various tasks

¹¹ Students were presented with four response options: 1) I don't like it, 2) I am more or less neutral about it, 3) I like it, and 4) I'm enthusiastic about it.

¹² Respondents were grouped by home country into eight regions of the world: Africa (N=88), Asia (N=1,289), Eastern Europe (N=62), Middle East (N=81), North America (N=130), Oceania (N=8)¹², South & Central America (N=94), and Western Europe (N=225) (See Appendix A for region groupings). Grouping respondents in this way enabled analyses to determine whether the students' region of the world had an impact on their experiences as an international student elsewhere.

(i.e. writing papers, speaking in class, or understanding slang) as well as with interactions with different groups of individuals (i.e. faculty, students from the host country, or other international students). For many, the cost of living near the institution, dating host country students, and being far away from friends and family was very difficult. For others, writing papers, getting used to college food, and getting involved in club sports/teams presented difficulties. Respondents reported the least difficulty with meeting and making friends with other international students.

Table 1	
Item	Experiencing Difficulty
Cost of living near the institution ^a	87.3%
Dating host country students	64.7%
Being away from friends ^a	62.9%
Being away from family ^a	57.2%
Writing papers ^a	54.1%
Getting used to college food	49.6%
Getting involved with club sports/teams	48.7%
Dating someone not from your culture	48.5%
Making host country friends ^a	47.9%
Understanding slang	42.1%
Meeting host country students	41.0%
Gaining access to faculty or staff members ^a	34.2%
Speaking in class ^a	33.2%
Becoming familiar with host country culture ^a	29.7%
Living with a roommate	26.5%
Becoming familiar with college life	24.1%
Speaking with faculty or staff members	22.5%
Getting used to host country food ^a	20.7%
Making international friends ^a	9.7%
Meeting international students	7.9%

^a Indicates items that were included on the Northeastern University CATI.

Students at U.S. and non-U.S. institutions showed different patterns of difficulty in adjusting to life at their institutions (See Table 2). The items for which international students attending non-U.S. institutions experienced much more difficulty than did those attending U.S. institutions were with respect to getting involved with club sports/teams, understanding slang, and making host country friends. Conversely, a higher proportion of international students attending U.S. institutions experienced difficulty with living with a roommate, getting used to American food, and getting used to college food. Overall, very little difference was seen with respect to speaking in class or becoming familiar with college life.

Table 2		
Item	Experiencing Difficulty	
	U.S. Institutions	Non-U.S. Institutions
Cost of living near the institution*	79.6%	88.5%
Being away from friends*	55.1%	66.0%
Dating host country students*	48.4%	68.0%
Writing papers*	44.3%	58.2%
Living with a roommate*	44.2%	23.3%
Getting used to host country food*	35.9%	15.2%
Dating someone not from your culture*	33.1%	51.3%
Making host country friends*	30.0%	54.5%
Getting involved with club sports/teams*	24.3%	53.8%
Becoming familiar with host country culture*	22.0%	32.7%
Meeting host country students*	21.6%	44.4%
Understanding slang*	18.5%	47.1%
Gaining access to faculty or staff members*	18.2%	40.2%

* Significant $p < .001$

Respondents whose language of instruction was not their native language were far more likely than native speakers to experience difficulty with a variety of language related issues, such as understanding slang, writing papers, becoming familiar with the host country culture, and making non-international friends (See Table 3). Getting used to college food was also significantly more difficult for non-native speakers. On the other hand, native speakers experienced more difficulty

meeting international students, gaining access to faculty and staff members, being away from family, speaking with faculty or staff members, and making international friends. However, relatively little difference existed between the responses of native and non-native speakers relating to being away from friends and living with a roommate.

Table 3		
Item	Experiencing Difficulty	
	Native	Non-Native
Dating host country students*	55.1%	67.9%
Writing papers*	39.1%	58.3%
Understanding slang*	19.5%	51.2%
Making host country friends*	37.9%	51.0%
Becoming familiar with host country culture*	18.8%	33.2%
Getting used to host country food*	13.5%	23.1%
Meeting international students*	12.2%	6.3%

* Significant $p < .001$

Regarding the difficulty of making various adjustments, nine of the twenty items showed statistically significant differences between students from the eight world regions. One of the interesting findings was that students whose home countries were in Africa or Oceania indicated that they experienced significantly more difficulty being away from their family than did those from Western Europe (See Table 4). International students whose home countries were in Africa or Oceania reported experiencing the most difficulty living with a roommate as compared to students from the other regions of the world, whereas respondents who were originally from Asia reported relatively little difficulty. However, those respondents from Asia tended to experience significantly more difficulty understanding slang than their counterparts from other regions, while international students whose home country was in North America reported the least amount of difficulty. The cost of living near their institution was significantly more difficult for international students from Africa and Oceania than it was for those from North America and Western Europe. It appears that a students' region of origin may be a better indicator of adaptability to their new college

environment than being a native speaker of the program of instruction. This being said it is important to note that some items seemed to receive fairly consistent ratings between regions, such as the difficulty of speaking in class, speaking with faculty or staff members, meeting international students, and making international friends.

Table 4								
Experiencing Difficulty	Percentages							
	Africa	Asia	Eastern Europe	Middle East	North America	Oceania	South & Central America	Western Europe
Writing papers*	30.4%	60.5%	60.5%	72.7%	50.5%	25.0%	49.2%	52.6%
Understanding slang*	33.9%	49.1%	23.5%	35.8%	15.6%	0.0%	37.5%	26.3%
Getting used to host country food*	13.5%	14.4%	36.7%	41.1%	15.2%	33.3%	32.0%	32.1%
Getting used to college food*	50.0%	42.4%	66.7%	63.6%	24.1%	50.0%	68.8%	62.5%
Living with roommate*	46.2%	23.0%	24.2%	44.4%	24.1%	60.0%	43.8%	26.0%
Dating host country students*	64.1%	76.4%	45.5%	61.4%	36.2%	66.7%	58.8%	35.1%
Dating someone not from your culture*	42.9%	59.5%	15.2%	34.1%	32.7%	100.0%	28.0%	23.1%
Being away from family*	78.3%	56.5%	59.5%	75.8%	61.2%	83.3%	69.3%	43.0%
Cost of living near your institution*	92.1%	89.4%	87.0%	84.4%	78.0%	100.0%	91.2%	77.1%

* Significant $p < .001$

When the data was analyzed by gender, five out of the twenty items (25.0%) revealed significant differences in responses between the sexes. It was found that female international students reported experiencing somewhat more difficulty with being away from family and friends, meeting host country students, making host country friends, and speaking in class (See Table 5). In general, females reported more difficulty with nearly all of the items than did their male counterparts. However, males did report somewhat more difficulty than females with dating someone not from their culture, dating host country students, and getting used to college food, although these trends did not reach a statistically significant level. Making international friends, gaining access to faculty or staff members, getting involved with club sports/teams, and understanding slang tended to be about equally as difficult for males and females.

Table 5		
Item	Experiencing Difficulty	
	Male	Female
Being away from friends*	59.0%	68.0%
Being away from family*	52.2%	63.5%
Making host country friends*	42.9%	54.3%
Meeting host country students*	35.5%	47.9%
Speaking in class*	27.3%	41.0%

* Significant $p < .001$

As might be expected, those who had lived in the host country before enrolling at their institution tended to report less difficulty adjusting to being an international student at their institution. (See Table 6). This trend was significant for three of the twenty items (dating host country students, being away from family, and understanding slang). However, there was another item for which responses differed significantly. Those who had lived in the host country before enrolling at their institution reported significantly more difficulty with meeting international students than those who had not lived in the host country prior to matriculation.

Table 6		
Item	Experiencing Difficulty	
	Lived in Host Country Prior to Enrolling	Had Not Lived in Host Country Prior to Enrolling
Dating host country students*	56.3%	68.5%
Being away from family*	48.9%	61.5%
Understanding slang*	33.3%	45.4%
Meeting international students*	11.8%	6.4%

* Significant $p < .001$

Students living on-campus reported less difficulty in adjustment on 16 of the 20 items, and this trend reached a statistically significant level for meeting host country students and making host country friends. (See Table 7).

Table 7		
Item	Experiencing Difficulty	
	On-campus	Off-campus
Meeting host country students*	20.5%	44.1%
Making host country friends*	20.4%	53.6%

* Significant $p < .001$

Another goal of the study was to determine how international students spend their time. In this vein, students were presented with a series of 32 activities and were asked how often they had participated in each during the 2003-2004 academic year (See Table 8). The activities in which respondents tended to spend a considerable amount of time were using the computer for pleasure, spending time with friends, and studying. Students tended to spend much less time participating in community service projects, talking with an academic dean, attending religious services, talking with Career Services, talking with someone from the International Center, or attending cultural events.

Table 8		
Activity	Mean	N
Use a computer for pleasure (internet, chat, online, games)	3.30	1,939
Spend time with friends	3.10	1,937
Study	2.99	1,938
Watch television/movies	2.95	1,937
Made friends with students from a country different from yours	2.84	2,173
Made friends with students whose religion was different from yours	2.80	1,928
Discussions with students about "academic topics"	2.71	1,932
Made friends with students whose race was different from yours	2.68	2,154
Made friends with students whose family background was very different from yours	2.64	2,164
Group project assignments	2.63	2,167
Made friends with students whose academic interests were very different from yours	2.47	1,939
Read for pleasure	2.46	2,167
Made a class presentation	2.43	2,169
Made friends with students whose non-academic interests were very different from yours	2.41	2,169
Discussions with students whose beliefs differ from yours	2.23	2,161
Travel	2.22	1,930
Exercise/go to the gym	2.18	2,172
Work	2.13	1,937
Cultural events/locations in the institution's city (museums, theater, concerts)	2.11	2,161
Play sports	2.07	2,164
Made multimedia presentations	2.07	2,163
Visited informally with an instructor after class	2.05	2,178
Extracurricular activities	2.05	1,917
Made an appointment to meet with a faculty member	2.04	2,178
Go to clubs	1.94	2,123
Cultural events, concerts, or art exhibitions	1.83	2,164
Talked with staff in the International Center	1.50	1,789
Participated in a community service project	1.47	1,927
Talked with staff at Career Services	1.43	2,020
Religious services	1.42	2,164
Talked with an academic dean	1.36	2,019
Participated in a community service project with a faculty member	1.22	1,926

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

The location of the international students' institutions (U.S. vs. non-U.S.) seemed to have more of an impact on the types of activities in which they participated than did whether the students

were native or non-native speakers. Participation levels in 25 of the 32 activities were significantly different between students who attended U.S. and non-U.S. institutions, while only 8 activities showed differences in participation between those who were native and non-native speakers. International students attending U.S. institutions tended to be more likely to engage in social interaction, spending more time making and hanging out with friends, participating in extra-curricular activities and community service projects, attending cultural events/concerts/art exhibitions, and going to clubs (See Table 9). International students at non-U.S. institutions tended to spend more time with activities that might tend to provide somewhat less social interaction such as reading for pleasure, working, making multimedia presentations, and watching television/movies. However, the location of the institution did not seem to have an impact on responses relating to making a class presentation, playing sports, or participating in a community service project with a faculty member.

Table 9		
Activity	Mean	
	U.S. Institution	Non-U.S. Institution
Use a computer for pleasure (internet, chat, online, games)*	3.50	3.27
Spend time with friends*	3.46	3.04
Made friends with students whose religion was different from yours*	3.25	2.73
Made friends with students whose academic interests were very different from yours*	3.23	2.35
Study*	3.21	2.96
Made friends with students from a country different from yours*	3.03	2.78
Made friends with students whose family background was very different from yours*	2.97	2.54
Made friends with students whose race was different from yours*	2.96	2.60
Discussions with students about "academic topics"*	2.87	2.68
Made friends with students whose non-academic interests were very different from yours*	2.81	2.29
Extracurricular activities*	2.64	1.95
Discussions with students whose beliefs differ from yours*	2.54	2.14
Exercise/go to the gym*	2.49	2.09
Travel*	2.43	2.19
Go to clubs*	2.34	1.83
Cultural events/locations in the institution's city (museums, theater, concerts)*	2.23	2.08
Cultural events, concerts, or art exhibitions*	2.23	1.71
Read for pleasure*	2.22	2.53
Visited informally with an instructor after class*	2.15	2.02
Made an appointment to meet with a faculty member*	2.14	2.01
Participated in a community service project*	2.00	1.39
Talked with staff in the International Center*	1.90	1.43
Religious services*	1.60	1.37
Talked with staff at Career Services*	1.54	1.40
Talked with an academic dean*	1.50	1.31

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

* Significant $p < .001$

Native speakers were more likely than non-native speakers to travel, participate in extracurricular activities, exercise/go to the gym, and go to clubs (See Table 10). In addition, native speakers tended to report making friends more frequently with students who were different on a variety of dimensions (including academic interests, non-academic interests, family background, and religion) than did non-native speakers. Non-native speakers were more likely than native speakers to speak with Career Services, work, participate in a community service project with a faculty member, speak with staff in the International Center, and play sports. The respondents' primary language seemed

to have very little impact on participation in other academic or social activities such as reading for pleasure, attending cultural events, visiting informally with an instructor after class, making an appointment to meet with a faculty member, participating in a community service project, attending religious services, or talking with an academic dean.

Table 10		
Activity	Mean	
	Native	Non-Native
Made friends with students whose family background was very different from yours*	2.76	2.61
Made friends with students whose non-academic interests were very different from yours*	2.53	2.38
Discussions with students whose beliefs differ from yours	2.30	2.21
Travel*	2.36	2.18
Exercise/go to the gym*	2.30	2.14
Extracurricular activities*	2.18	2.01
Go to clubs*	2.07	1.90
Talked with staff at Career Services*	1.33	1.47
Participated in a community service project with a faculty member*	1.15	1.25

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

* Significant $p < .001$

Twenty-four of the 32 items regarding the frequency of engaging in various activities revealed statistically significant differences between groups when analyzed by the students' regions of origin. In general, students who were originally from Asia were significantly less likely than students from most other regions to talk with various staff at their institution, make friends of various types, engage in cultural activities, discussions with others, or recreational activities such as exercising/going to the gym, extracurricular activities, going to clubs, or traveling (See Table 11). However, Asian students studying abroad were significantly more likely than most other groups to have been involved in group project assignments, made multimedia presentations, attended religious services, used a computer for pleasure, and watched television/movies. Students from South and Central America were significantly more likely than other groups to engage in the majority of activities listed such as talking with various staff at the institution, making friends of various types, attending religious services and cultural

events, clubbing, and using a computer for pleasure. North American students studying abroad were less likely to have talked with staff at Career Services, completed group project assignments, made multimedia presentations than were those from other regions of the world.

Table 11								
Activity	Mean							
	Africa	Asia	Eastern Europe	Middle East	North America	Oceania	South & Central America	Western Europe
Talked with an academic dean*	1.51	1.32	1.30	1.34	1.36	1.33	1.69	1.33
Talked with staff at Career Services*	1.48	1.43	1.70	1.57	1.24	1.50	1.59	1.28
Talked with staff in the International Center*	1.66	1.44	1.59	1.72	1.58	1.17	1.74	1.57
Made friends with students from a country different from yours*	3.08	2.77	3.05	3.09	2.83	2.86	3.30	2.93
Made friends with students whose academic interests were very different from yours*	2.73	2.35	2.57	2.67	2.71	2.29	3.07	2.59
Made friends with students whose non-academic interests were very different from yours*	2.51	2.30	2.44	2.57	2.47	2.29	2.79	2.53
Made friends with students whose family background was very different from yours*	2.90	2.53	2.95	2.87	2.74	2.71	3.17	2.67
Made friends with students whose race was different from yours*	3.02	2.61	2.53	3.01	2.61	2.86	3.21	2.61
Made friends with students whose religion was different from yours*	3.00	2.76	2.88	3.12	2.77	2.86	3.20	2.68
Group project assignments*	2.78	2.70	2.44	2.64	2.17	2.14	2.62	2.42
Made multimedia presentations*	2.27	2.16	2.00	1.99	1.69	1.57	2.02	1.84
Religious services*	1.39	1.43	1.10	1.49	1.61	1.43	1.68	1.17
Cultural events, concerts, or art exhibitions*	1.97	1.61	2.30	2.01	2.30	2.14	2.30	2.23
Discussions with students whose beliefs differ from yours*	2.36	2.10	2.50	2.34	2.58	2.00	2.54	2.39
Participated in a community service project with a faculty member*	1.14	1.27	1.08	1.24	1.11	1.29	1.20	1.08
Cultural events/locations in the institution's city (museums, theater, concerts)*	1.97	1.97	2.49	2.18	2.39	2.43	2.64	2.42
Exercise/go to the gym*	2.24	2.01	2.49	2.58	2.34	3.14	2.48	2.45
Extracurricular activities*	2.18	1.93	2.19	2.30	2.44	2.57	2.43	2.16
Go to clubs*	2.09	1.72	2.25	2.03	2.16	2.17	2.44	2.17
Spend time with friends*	3.01	3.04	3.21	3.19	3.30	2.86	3.25	3.21
Study*	3.14	2.93	3.25	3.10	2.95	2.86	3.27	3.08
Travel*	2.03	2.17	2.08	2.27	2.64	2.14	2.43	2.30
Use a computer for pleasure (internet, chat, online, games)*	3.34	3.36	2.84	3.21	3.30	2.57	3.41	3.09
Watch television/movies*	3.09	2.99	2.67	2.99	2.95	2.29	2.96	2.69

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

* Significant $p < .001$

When analyzed by gender, it was found that females were somewhat more involved in 20 out of the 32 activities (See Table 12). Statistically significant differences between males and females were revealed for 10 of the 32 items. Males were significantly more likely than females to play sports, make multimedia presentations, and visit informally with an instructor after class. Females were significantly more likely than males to spend time with friends, study, read for pleasure, have discussions with students having different beliefs, travel, and attending cultural events. Males and females tended to report similar activity levels with respect to using a computer for pleasure, making friends with students whose country, religion, or race was different from their own, discussions with students about “academic topics”, working, exercising/going to the gym, making an appointment to meet with a faculty member, going to clubs, attending religious services, participating in a community service project with or without a faculty member, and talking with either an academic dean, staff in the International Center or at Career Services.

Table 12		
Activity	Mean	
	Male	Female
Spend time with friends*	3.03	3.18
Study*	2.91	3.10
Read for pleasure*	2.35	2.61
Play sports*	2.27	1.81
Discussions with students whose beliefs differ from yours*	2.18	2.30
Travel*	2.15	2.32
Made multimedia presentations*	2.14	1.98
Visited informally with an instructor after class*	2.09	1.99
Cultural events/locations in the institution's city (museums, theater, concerts)*	2.06	2.19
Cultural events, concerts, or art exhibitions*	1.74	1.96

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

** Significant $p < .001$*

Those who had lived in the host country prior to enrolling were somewhat more involved in 23 out of the 32 activities than those who had not lived in the host country prior to enrolling at their institution. (See Table 13). However, this trend was only statistically significant for five out of the

32 items regarding activities (Talked with an academic dean, Talked with staff at Career Services, Participated in a community service project, Exercise/Go to the gym, Extracurricular activities).

The items with the greatest difference in responses between those who had and had not lived in the host country prior to enrolling were Exercise/go to gym, Participated in a community service project, and Extracurricular activities.

Table 13		
Activity	Mean	
	Lived in Host Country Prior to Enrolling	Had Not Lived in Host Country Prior to Enrolling
Exercise/go to the gym*	2.35	2.08
Extracurricular activities*	2.16	2.01
Participated in a community service project*	1.62	1.42
Talked with staff at Career Services*	1.51	1.39
Talked with an academic dean*	1.45	1.32

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

* Significant $p < .001$

As might be expected, students living on-campus tended to be more involved than those living off-campus (See Table 14). Twelve items received significantly different responses based on students' residential location. Students who lived on-campus were more likely to indicate that they had made friends with individuals with dissimilar family and religious backgrounds, as well as, different academic interests. Conversely, students who lived off-campus were more likely to indicate that they participated in group projects, made class presentations, and read for pleasure.

Table 14		
Activity	Mean	
	On-campus	Off-campus
Spend time with friends*	3.46	3.21
Use a computer for pleasure (internet, chat, online, games)*	3.46	3.13
Made friends with students from a country different from yours*	3.27	2.92
Made friends with students whose religion was different from yours*	3.25	2.81
Made friends with students whose family background was very different from yours*	3.24	2.75
Made friends with students whose academic interests were very different from yours*	3.24	2.60
Made friends with students whose race was different from yours*	3.19	2.68
Made friends with students whose non-academic interests were very different from yours*	3.00	2.45
Group project assignments*	2.23	2.69
Made a class presentation*	2.17	2.64
Read for pleasure*	2.15	2.53
Made multimedia presentations*	1.72	2.09

Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often

* Significant $p < .001$

Discussion

The findings presented in this report are similar to those reported in the literature. Overall, international students attending the participating seven institutions tended to like their institution, were satisfied with their education, and would recommend their institution as a good place for international students. However, international students did experience difficulty adjusting to the cost of living near their institution, dating host country students, being away from family and friends, and writing papers. Various factors such as gender, prior experience living in the host country, whether the language of instruction was the students' native language, the location of the school, the student's region of citizenship, and the location of the college residence had a significant impact on the responses to some items.

Our findings suggest that the experiences of international students differ somewhat across continents. Respondents attending non-U.S. institutions reported more difficulty getting involved with club sports/teams, understanding slang, and making host country friends, while those attending U.S. institutions reported that living with a roommate, getting used to American food, and getting

used to college food were somewhat more difficult. Those attending a U.S. institution tended to engage in more social interaction such as spending time making and hanging out with friends, participating in extracurricular activities and community service projects, attending cultural events, and going to clubs. Those attending non-U.S. institutions tended to engage in less social activities such as reading for pleasure, working, making multimedia presentations, and watching television/movies.

In addition to the location of the institution, it was found that the students' region of origin impacted their experiences while studying abroad. Students from Africa and Oceania reported the most difficulty adjusting to being away from their family, living with a roommate, and the cost of living near their institution. Respondents originally coming from Asia tended to have the most difficulty understanding slang. Students from Asia were less likely to talk with staff members at their institution, make friends of various types, engage in cultural activities, have discussions with others, or engage in recreational activities such as exercising/going to the gym, or extracurricular activities. Students from South or Central America tended to be the most active in activities, such as talking with various staff members at their institutions, making various types of friends, attending religious services and cultural events, and clubbing.

As might be expected, non-native speakers were likely to experience difficulty with language related tasks such as understanding slang, writing papers, and making non-international friends. Interestingly enough, native speakers found meeting and making friends with international students, speaking with faculty or staff, and being away from family more difficult than did their non-native speaker counterparts. Native speakers had a greater tendency to travel, participate in extracurricular activities, exercise/go to the gym, and make more friends of various types.

The respondents' sex seemed to have a minor impact in select areas. Females tended to report more social network difficulties than did males. That is, females found being away from

family and friends, meeting host country students, and speaking in class significantly more difficult than did males. Interestingly, males found dating someone not from their culture, dating host country students, and getting used to college food somewhat more difficult than did females, but these trends were only nearly significant. Females were more likely than males to spend time with friends, read for pleasure, have discussions with students having different beliefs, travel, attend cultural events, and study. Males were more likely to play sports, make multimedia presentations, and visit informally with an instructor after class.

Those who had lived in the host country prior to enrolling at their current institution reported significantly less difficulty with understanding slang, dating host country students, being away from their families and meeting other international students. Moreover, they were significantly more likely to engage in exercising, extracurricular activities, participating in community service projects, and talking with staff at Career Services or an academic dean than their counterparts who had not lived in the host country prior to matriculation.

Where international students were living while attending their current institution also played a small role in their responses. Students living off-campus reported somewhat more difficulty meeting and making friends with host country students than did those living on-campus. In addition, they were less likely to report spending time with friends, making friends with a wide variety of other types of students, and using a computer for pleasure. Therefore, it seems that this factor plays a small, but nonetheless, consistent role in the international undergraduate experience.

Overall, the location of the respondents' institution (U.S. vs. non-U.S.) tended to have the most impact on the responses (78% of the items regarding involvement in activities and 65% of the items related to difficulty in adjusting being significant between the two groups), while region of citizenship also had a powerful impact (75% of the items regarding involvement in activities and 45% of items related to difficulty in adjusting being significant between groups).

Certain items tended to elicit similar responses regardless of the students' gender, region of citizenship, native language, whether they attended a U.S. or non-U.S. institution, whether they had lived in the host country prior to enrolling, or were living on or off campus. These factors related to the difficulty of speaking with faculty or staff members, becoming familiar with college life, making international friends, and frequency of spending time at work. Therefore, it appears that some aspects of the international student experience are universal.

Hopefully this paper has moved the study of international students' experiences forward by expanding the analyses to include a larger heterogeneous population -- international students from several U.S. and non-U.S. institutions. This paper describes how international students adjust to life at universities outside of their home countries. It appears that international students' experiences are fairly similar across the continents and that many of the differences can be attributed to the regions of the world from which the students hail. Thus, it seems that it might be beneficial for institutions to consider developing targeted strategies to address the needs of specific sub-groups of international students. Furthermore, it is quite plausible that newly developed strategies based on these findings could be easily applied at another institution with reasonable success.

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Appendix A
Number of Respondents by Country/Region of the World¹³

Africa	<i>N</i>
Algeria	1
Angola	2
Botswana	12
Comoros	1
Egypt	2
Ethiopia	2
Ghana	2
Kenya	5
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1
Mauritius	38
Morocco	2
Nigeria	5
Somalia	1
South Africa	3
Sudan	1
Togo	1
Tunisia	1
Uganda	2
United Republic of Tanzania	1
Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	4
TOTAL	88

Asia	<i>N</i>
Bangladesh	24
Bhutan	1
Brunei Darussalam	3
Cambodia	1
China	224
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1
Hong Kong	58
India	218
Indonesia	187
Japan	31
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1
Macau	4
Malaysia	196
Maldives	1

¹³ There are many ways in which one could group countries, and each could cause controversy for its own reason. To our knowledge, there is no single accepted way for American institutions to do so. These categories were developed utilizing established categories by our colleagues in Australia and the Netherlands, between which there was substantial amount of agreement in categorization.

Mongolia	1
Myanmar	6
Nauru	1
Nepal	3
Pakistan	10
Philippines	5
Republic of Korea	41
Samoa	1
Singapore	122
Sri Lanka	32
Taiwan	30
Tajikistan	1
Thailand	50
Viet Nam	36
TOTAL	1,289

Eastern Europe	<i>N</i>
Albania	3
Belarus	1
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1
Bulgaria	11
Croatia	3
Georgia	2
Hungary	2
Kazakhstan	1
Latvia	2
Lithuania	1
Poland	9
Republic of Moldova	1
Romania	2
Russian Federation	9
Slovakia	3
Slovenia	2
Ukraine	3
Yugoslavia	2
Macedonia	4
TOTAL	62

Middle East	<i>N</i>
Afghanistan	1
Armenia	1
Bahrain	2
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	7
Iraq	1
Israel	10
Jordan	7
Kuwait	3

Lebanon	5
Oman	8
Saudi Arabia	5
Syrian Arab Republic	1
Turkey	22
Turkmenistan	1
United Arab Emirates	6
Uzbekistan	1
TOTAL	81

North America	N
Barbados	1
Bermuda	1
Canada	36
Dominican Republic	1
Haiti	4
Jamaica	2
Trinidad and Tobago	4
United States of America	81
TOTAL	130

Oceania	N
Australia	7
Fiji	1
TOTAL	8

South & Central America	N
Argentina	3
Belize	1
Bolivia	1
Brazil	14
Colombia	22
Costa Rica	1
Ecuador	2
El Salvador	5
Guatemala	1
Honduras	2
Mexico	19
Panama	3
Paraguay	1
Peru	1
Suriname	7
Venezuela	11
TOTAL	94

Western Europe	N
Austria	2

Belgium	9
Denmark	2
Finland	2
France	23
Germany	54
Greece	7
Ireland	6
Italy	14
Luxembourg	1
Malta	1
Netherlands	6
Norway	23
Portugal	2
Spain	6
Sweden	20
Switzerland	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	42
TOTAL	225