



# International Student & Scholar Services

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Analysis of International Student Barometer Survey Data

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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## **Introduction**

In October 2012 International Student and Scholar Services invited all international students to participate in an online comprehensive survey called the International Student Barometer (ISB). The ISB is a survey conducted by i-graduate, based in the United Kingdom, and is used by universities across the globe which allows for the benefit of benchmarking.

The ISB gauged students' satisfaction surrounding different aspects of their experiences at University of Illinois. The survey asked a variety of quantitative questions, allowing student to rank their opinions on either a 4 or 5 point scale. It also gave students the opportunity to provide qualitative feedback on 6 different topics throughout the survey. Over 3000 students participated in the survey which a response rate of over 30%.

The purpose of this report is to present an analysis of selected qualitative and quantitative portions of the data that we think will be most relevant to our campus. After discussing the findings of each section we then provide recommendations that we hope will be implemented to improve the experiences of international students at the University of Illinois.

## **Methodology**

For the qualitative portion of this data, we based our analysis on Creswell's (2007) phenomenological approach. According the Creswell, the type of problem best suited for phenomenological research is one where "it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (p. 60). Thus, we chose the phenomenological approach for our qualitative analysis because we were interested in understanding how international students at the University of Illinois experienced the common phenomenon of being an international student at our university.

Creswell's approach discusses analyzing the significant statements and themes to generate a textural description (a description of what the participants experienced); and a structural description (a description of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon) (p. 61). We used these two types of descriptions when analyzing the 6 qualitative data questions presented in the survey. We first created a textural and structural description for each of the six questions; however, we noticed that many of the structural descriptions overlapped for each of the questions. Due to this fact, we decided to write a larger, more comprehensive structural description encompassing the contextual findings for the data as a whole.

In the quantitative part, we had a dataset of 401 variables and 3,488 observations. Most of the variables were categorical data, such as satisfaction and recommendation. Considering this fact, we based our analysis on data visualization, and contingency tables.

Using data visualization, we can visually check the differences, trends, portions and attributes of certain groups. Contingency tables display the frequency distribution of the variables, and we used two-way tables demonstrating the correlation between two values.

### **Comprehensive Structural Description:**

Many international students, particularly undergraduates, when they come to the University of Illinois are leaving their home and their country for the first time. Most arrive at a larger international airport in a big city. They do not know their way around, are forced to rely on their English skills and figure things out on their own. Within the first few days they must focus on getting basic needs taken care of such as housing, food, phone, and bank account. They must rely on friends or university staff to help them meet these basic needs. In addition to these basic needs there are only so many secondary needs (e.g., understanding healthcare, or maintaining their immigration status) that they can focus on. Furthermore, students must navigate the cultural differences between academic rules, university procedures, and social norms, adding stress to an already stressful transition.

Once the semester begins and all immediate needs taken care of, students may start realizing differences between the Champaign-Urbana area and their home. Some of these differences can be hard to understand if you are not familiar with the sociocultural institutions or structures that create them. For example, some students may come from “greener” cities, where there is not as much energy consumption, and people act more sustainably, by taking public transportation, and recycling. Students might think American communities are wasteful because they do not understand why or how the community is different. Differences can cause anxiety. Campus safety is a good example of this. University police send out emails and warning texts to students when there is a safety concern. If you are not familiar with the style of the US legal system, police, crime rates, what is legal and illegal, these messages can be alarming. There is no frame of reference to know if this instance is normal or not. Even social institutions such as health care and insurance differ depending on what country an individual is from, and understanding and navigating these complex systems can be confusing.

The main reason for most to attend the U of I is to gain a college education. Although international students encounter many challenges, the academic reputation of U of I and the quality of education is a significant draw. The U of I is a leader in many majors, especially in STEM fields, which are often majors international students choose. International students expect the academic quality to be high and that, paired with the high tuition they are paying to attend, leads to high expectations in the classroom. Students expect the facilities to be up-to-date, teaching quality to be high, and to learn relevant material that will provide opportunities in the future.

Differences happen not only in daily life, but also in an international student’s academic environment as well. Adjusting to the classroom and department expectations such as in-class participation, writing assignments, not to mention obscure university politics and bureaucracy, can also take international students more time than domestic students to adjust because they are not coming from a similar academic context.

International students must interact with a variety of people as part of the successful transition process, such as students, staff, faculty, strangers, and peers. English rules that govern how one is supposed to speak to another person, can be daunting when English is not the first language. Understanding another’s response can cause just as much anxiety.

Strong English skills, in writing, speaking, and in different environments are essential if a student wants to be able to successfully navigate the American university experience. If a student is academically fluent in English, but cannot understand slang, current events, or pop culture to converse with their peers, or know the best language to communicate a question with another university service, it is logical to say they will struggle more and be less independent than the international students who can communicate successfully in all environments.

Communication struggles paired with the sociocultural struggles mentioned above make interactions nerve racking and stressful. Furthermore, Americans themselves may not have the intercultural skills or training to make it easier. For example, when interacting with the front desk when requesting a particular service, or calling to ask a question on the phone, an international student may encounter prejudice. Staff members interacting with the international student may not have experience communicating with people from other cultures, and may not have the empathy to put themselves in the students' shoes. Support staff may not understand what they are going through and the international student may not be able to communicate in a way that makes them understand. Thus, each may view the other as rude or incompetent.

Even those who can communicate well with others may find their interactions not meeting their expectations. Many international students may come to the US expecting to integrate into US culture and with Americans. This is not the actual experience of most. In reality, though there certainly are exceptions, most American students do not have international student friends and vice versa. Whether it is culture, academic mentality, large numbers of either group, or other perceived differences, international and domestic students rarely find common ground and become friends.

Given these challenges, many international students have high expectations of the international office to help solve these issues, or provide a support system. They hold this office to a higher standard than other offices not as significant to them. Therefore, when they encounter troubles with the ISSS office, they tend to judge it more harshly than they would another campus office.

International identity aside, international students are still students, and experiencing many aspects of U of I just as a domestic student. They stress about money, what to do on the weekend, making friends, and what they will do after graduation. Similar to domestic students it could be their first time on their own, and they are trying to succeed at their academics as well as figure out their social and personal lives. They go through the same developmental stages as most people in late teens to mid-twenties and thus, have many of the same reflections on the university experience.

### **Limitations:**

Now that we've set the context for what international students may be experiencing during their time at UIUC, here are the actual findings of the survey. The survey was divided into different sections for people to rate their satisfaction and explain any qualitative comments: arrival, living, learning, recommendation, advice and support.

It is important to note that the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey, although they generally supported one another, were not always entirely consistent. Based on the quantitative data alone, the overall results of the survey were very positive, whereas the qualitative data reflected a bit more dissatisfaction overall. We think this is, in part, because not everyone answered the qualitative portion and when people answered qualitative questions, it was generally because they were very satisfied or very dissatisfied, not simply neutral. Additionally the quantitative results were measured on a 4 level scale, which forced students to rate a service as “satisfied” or “dissatisfied.” There was no option for a neutral opinion or no opinion.

## Arrival to the University

Students were asked to comment about their arrival experiences at the University of Illinois

### Summary of Relevant Quotes

“I arrived late at night around 12:00 and I was so confusing [sic] about where ISR is even though it was just across the street. Everything was new and I didn’t know anyone. No one told me where to go, how things work. I figured out everything by myself. The second day got better because I met some people but I didn’t really get to know them that well. I finally talked to someone after people moved in, and I feel like everyone already knew each other except me.”

“There was not any agreement with the university for my arrival, I found the way myself. The orientation for me was poor. I needed to know everything...how to register for classes, how to set up the account, and I did not find that information. I made it on my own.”

### Quantitative Results

In this survey, all questions that related to satisfaction are based on a 4-level ordinal scale:

1=Very dissatisfied;

2=Dissatisfied;

3=Satisfied;

4=Very Satisfied.

In this part of survey, students were asked to evaluate their satisfaction of overall arrival experience and of factors related to arrival satisfaction such as “Welcome/Pick-up”, etc. on a 4-level ordinal scale.

#### 1. Overall Arrival Satisfaction

Table 1 Frequency for arrival satisfaction

Level	Frequency	Percent
Very Dissatisfied	29	2.48
Dissatisfied	130	11.11
Satisfied	859	73.42
Very Satisfied	152	12.99

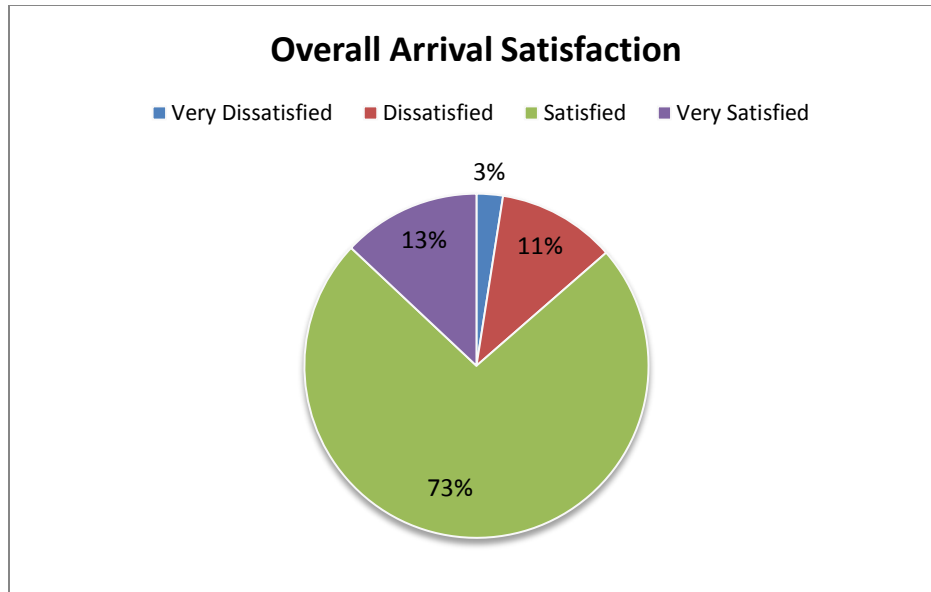


Figure 1 Satisfaction of overall arrival experience (%)

\*Overall, how satisfied were you with the ARRIVAL EXPERIENCE?

One thousand one hundred and seventy students answered the question about arrival satisfaction. Generally speaking, most students were satisfied with their overall arrival experience.

From the pie chart, we can see that about 73% of students were satisfied (green area). About 13% of students were very satisfied (purple area). However, there were still 14% of students who chose dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

## 2. Welcome/Pick-up

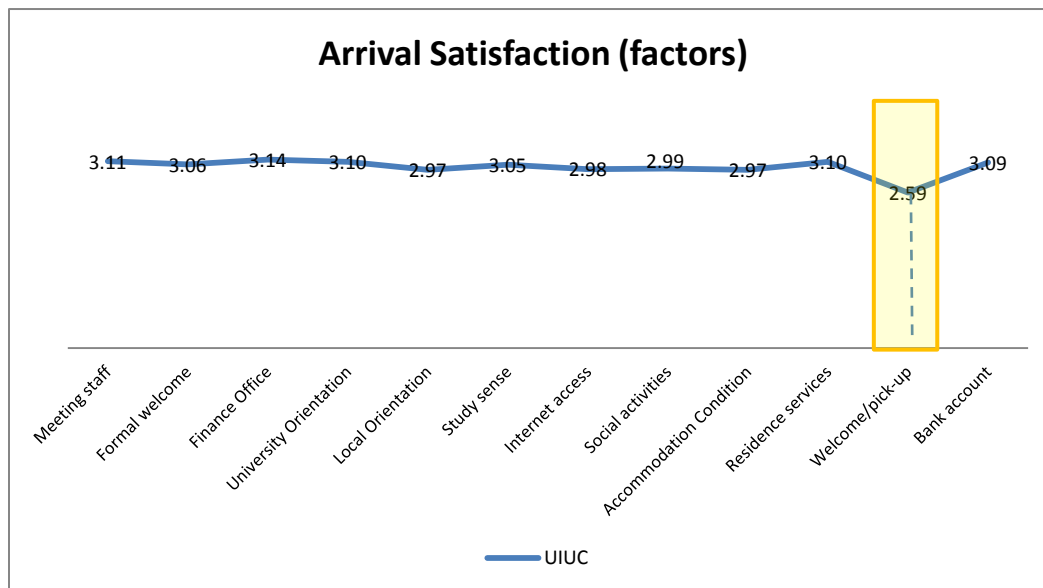


Figure 2 Satisfaction averages for factors in arrival experience part



\*Please rate the statements or factors regarding when you first arrived at the university.

\*\*Satisfaction averages are based on a 4 point scale.

The chart above reflects the average satisfaction values of different factors listed in the arrival satisfaction section. From the chart we can see that “Welcome/Pick-up” has the smallest average value. All other factors have values around 3, only “Welcome/Pick-up” has a value of 2.59, which clearly indicated that among all factors related to arrival experience, students were the most dissatisfied with “Welcome/Pick up.”

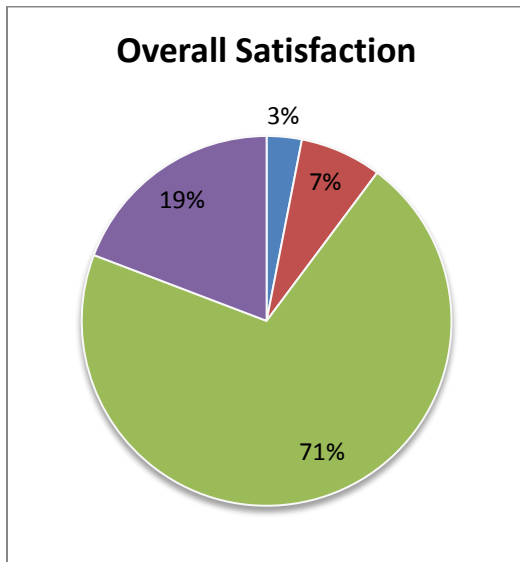


Figure 3 Satisfaction of overall experience (%)

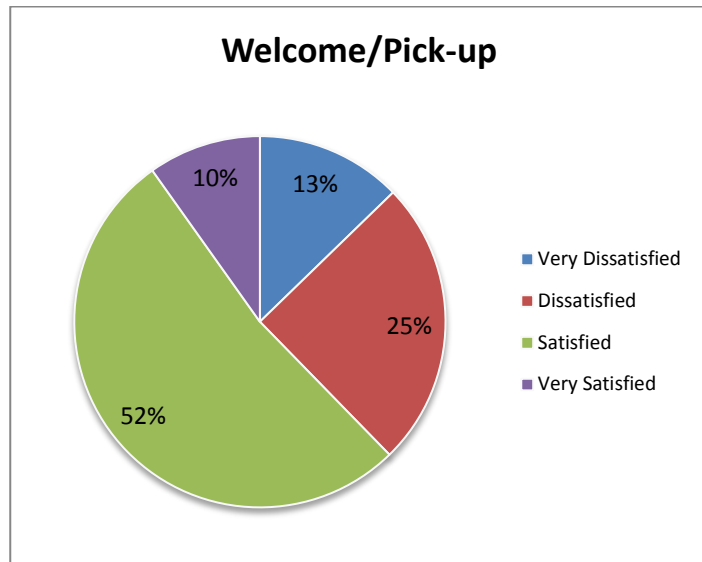


Figure 4 Satisfaction of welcome/pick-up (%)

\*Overall, how satisfied are you with all aspects of your university experience?

To further demonstrate, we compared welcome/pick-up with overall satisfaction.

Above are two pie charts for overall satisfaction and “Welcome/Pick-up” separately. For the overall satisfaction, we can see that about 10% students (blue and red area) who answered the survey were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with their overall experience. About 90% students were satisfied (green and purple area).

However, there were about 38% students (blue and red) who answered the surveys dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the “Welcome/Pick-up” experience. Even though about 60% of students answered that they were satisfied with the “Welcome/Pick up”, this is very low compared to the overall arrival satisfaction (90%).

### Qualitative themes

1. No greeting at airport
2. No transport from Chicago
3. Missing orientation, or not knowing about it

4. Orientation not useful or not interesting
5. Problems/confusion registering for classes
6. Housing situations
7. If they knew someone it was easier to be here.
8. If they had been in the US before it was easier

Overall, arrival and welcome to the university was a weak point in the survey. Students desire some sort of pick up from the airport (most likely O'Hare) and would like have some sort of greeting from the university when they arrive. Many do not hear about ISSS orientation, or do not understand the importance of it until later. Furthermore, many are not engaged in orientation sessions. The arrival experience does not currently seem to be meeting many of our students' needs in terms of welcome and content. Some also experienced trouble with other aspects of arrival such as registering for courses with their academic department, or finding housing (mainly graduate students) when they did not arrive with it arranged. Not surprisingly, many expressed that the transition was easier if they were more familiar with US culture or if they had friends/family who could help them through the experience.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide transportation for students arriving at O'Hare and Champaign airports on most common arrival days
- Create and implement a mandatory orientation for international students.
  - Focus orientation not just on the university but also on US as a whole and cultural adaptation
- Create a "welcome point" in Champaign once students arrive (possibly have people help direct students to housing locations)
- Clarify class registration process campus-wide
- Better communication between different units working with international students

### **Living Comments**

#### **Students were asked to comment about their living experiences at the University of Illinois**

#### **Summary of Relevant Quotes:**

"The eco-friendly environment: They try, but it is possible to make it better, take a look at Europe. In the Netherlands I ride my bike everywhere, and here I sold my bike, because it is dangerous. ...and I found it extremely annoying that people are walking on the bike path all the time!"

"I believe that the best way for us to develop our skills is to put into practice all of them. So if we need to master our English we should write, listen, read, and speak. I feel that I am not speaking as good as I expected. My classmates don't talk too much with foreign students...until now, the only good friends that I made were another foreign students coming from the same program, so my English is kind of

stuck. I know part of that is up to me to make it better, but without any encourage from the people that I deal with every day, it becomes very hard to do that. I always try to do something together, but they seem to don't care anything that comes from me.”

“Housing is expensive considering the city size and quality. Generally I feel safe but students are too often victims of crime near or on campus.”

**Quantitative data:**

In this part of survey, students were asked to evaluate their satisfaction of overall living experience and of factors related to living satisfaction such as cost of living, accommodation cost, safety, etc. on a 4-level ordinal scale.

**1. Overall Living Satisfaction**

Table 2 Frequency of living satisfaction

Level	Frequency	Percent
Very dissatisfied	79	2.53
Dissatisfied	300	9.62
Satisfied	2261	72.49
Very satisfied	479	15.36

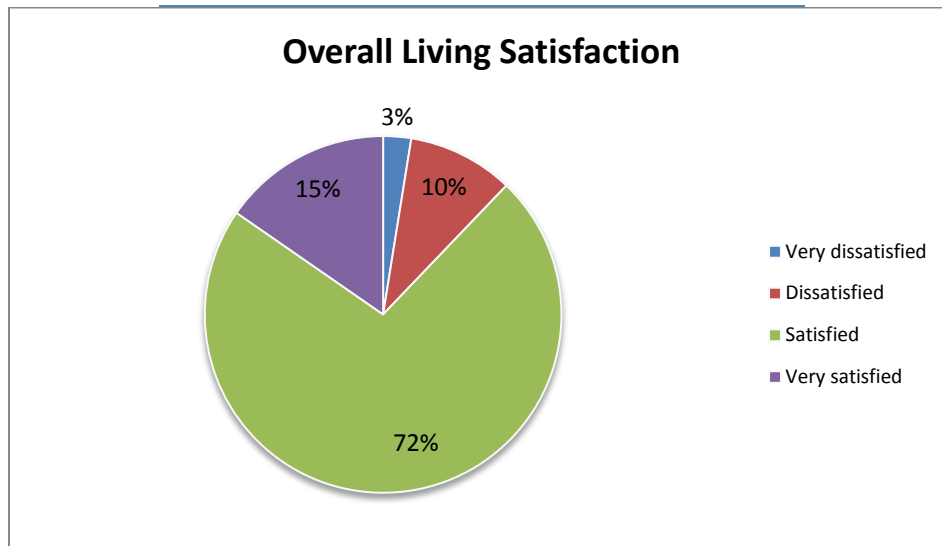


Figure 5 Satisfaction of overall living experience (%)

\*Overall, how satisfied are you with the LIVING EXPERIENCE at this stage in the year?

Three thousand one hundred and nineteen students answered this question in the survey. About 2,261 students said that they were satisfied with the overall living experience, and about 479 students showed a high satisfaction. From the pie chart we can see that about 13% of students were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied (red and blue area) with their overall living experience. And about 87% of students were satisfied/very satisfied (green and purple area).

## 1. Low value factors

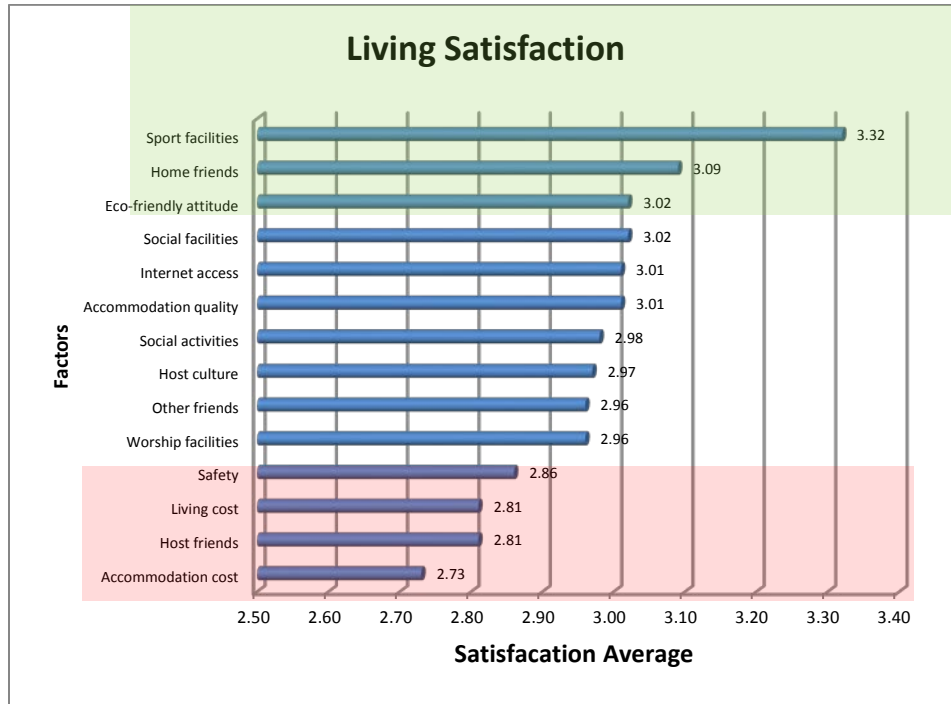


Figure 6 Satisfaction averages for factors in living experience

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with the following living experience?

\*\*Satisfaction averages are based on 4 point scale.

From the chart above, we can see that host friends, safety, living cost and accommodation cost have relatively low average values, which means that students were not very satisfied with those experiences. In contrast, sport facilities (ARC, CRCE) had a relatively high value of 3.32 which shows that most students were satisfied with sport facilities on campus.

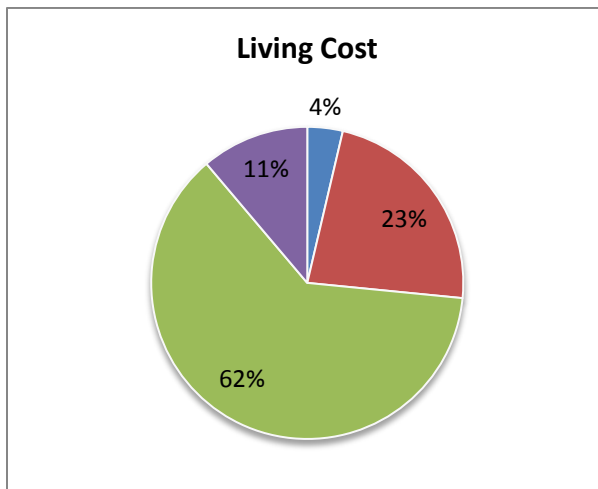


Figure 7 Satisfaction of living cost (%)

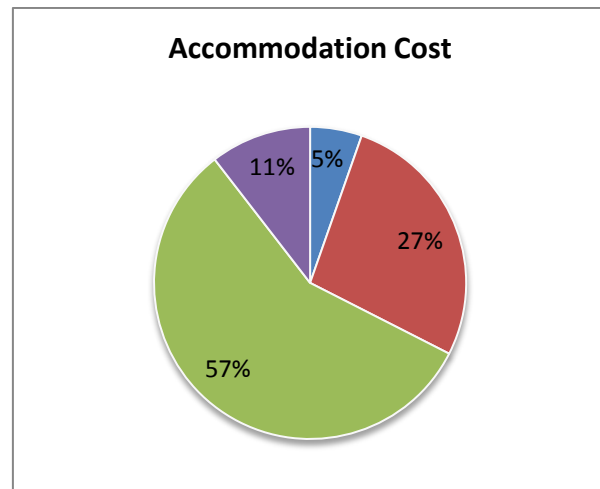


Figure 8 Satisfaction of accommodation cost (%)

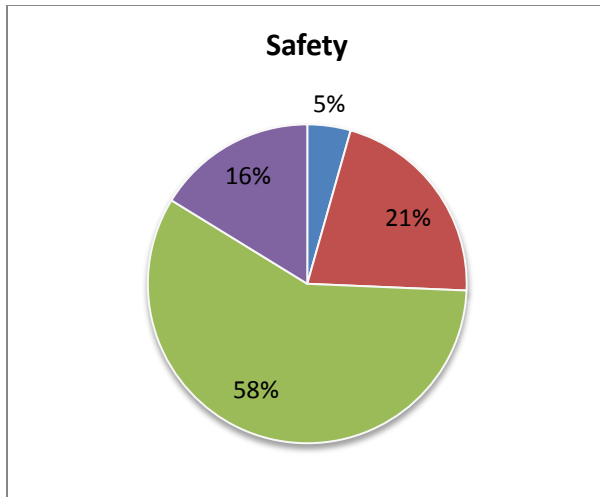


Figure 9 Satisfaction of safety (%)

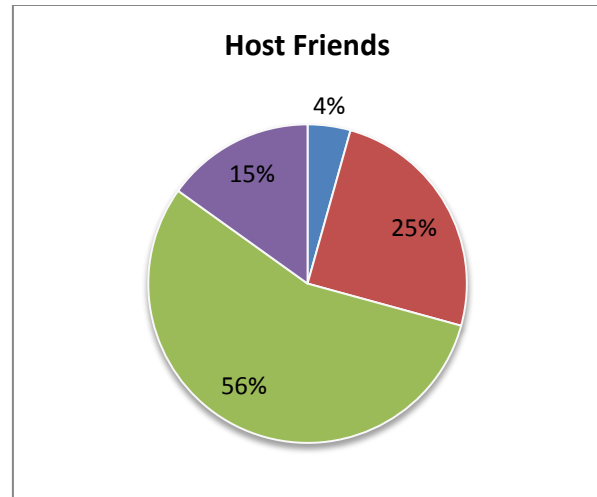


Figure 10 Satisfaction of host friends (%)

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with the following factors in living experience.

The factors demonstrated in the charts above have relatively low values (Living cost, accommodation cost, safety, host friends).

We can see from the chart above that regarding living cost and accommodation cost, only about 11% of students were very satisfied (purple area). Furthermore, about 30% students were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied (red and blue area) with living cost and accommodation cost. Regarding safety in their living experience, about 26% students were not satisfied. Additionally, about 29% students were not very satisfied with their experience of making friends with US students.

#### Qualitative Themes:

1. Safety
2. Sustainability (needing to be more Green)
3. Cost of living – too expensive
4. Lack of integration into US culture and with US students

Overall, international students commented a lot on safety both on campus and in the CU community. Many mentioned crime in the area as a concern. Most of these comments did not provide further explanation on why they felt unsafe, however, when they did, robberies and theft were the most common reasons. Another concern was campus sustainability in a variety of ways, from lack of recycling, wasteful energy use, and limited public transportation outside the campus. Some mentioned there was a gap in the opportunities to be sustainable and the knowledge of how to be sustainable (i.e., recycling bins, with garbage in them.) There were also many comments about cost of living (mainly in the residence halls) and how much money was needed to live there. Lastly, students mentioned the divide between domestic students and international students in a way that suggested they desire more interaction between groups.

Most of these themes were directly reflected in the quantitative portion of the data, with the exception of Eco-friendly attitude. Regarding Eco-friendly attitude, the satisfaction average was 3.02 in the quantitative results. This is a relatively large value compared with other factors in living satisfaction section. This result is not consistent with the qualitative results (see qualitative data below for further clarification). To explain this inconsistency, we can assume that the number of people who mentioned extreme dissatisfaction with UIUC's lack of Eco-friendly campus in the qualitative portion were the most passionate about this topic. However, this number was very small compared to the number of people who answered the quantitative question, who seemed to be generally satisfied with the Eco-friendliness of the campus.

### **Recommendations:**

- Create a comprehensive sustainability campaign across campus which would educate people to change habits and understand the benefits of "going Green."
- A comprehensive plan for the whole university to integrate both international and local diversity
- Educating students on who to call and how to stay safe in a variety of potentially dangerous situations on campus
- Create more opportunities for domestic and international students to have meaningful interactions
- Before arrival, provide students with better education about cost of living and quality of life in Champaign-Urbana

### **Support Services**

**Students were asked to comment on various support services offered at the University of Illinois**

#### **Summary of Relevant Quotes:**

"I rate dissatisfied for [this office's] service, but honestly I think they already tried very hard, but there are just many things to be covered. Also, I might get different advices if I talk to different people in this service-some of them are very helpful, some are not. It's really in-between dissatisfied and satisfied, depends on what situation and who you talk to."

"The health insurance is difficult to understand (we don't know for sure where it is accepted and, if an external facility is used, we were not always aware of the costs of the medical services).

"It would be very helpful if the university make a single introduction webpage, like a wiki, to introduce and guide all incoming international students, to all of the available support service, where to find them, and how to use them. From my experience, the information for all the student service is scattered and finding them can sometimes a little difficult for new students. I am aware that there are workshops for new incoming international students, but sometimes a workshop for new incoming international students is just not enough."

“The recreation center is good. Service from library is excellent-tons of books and the i-share system could get you to more books and you can pick up at any library.”

**Quantitative data:**

For support satisfaction, there are two parts of quantitative data. The first part is to understand students’ use or knowledge of various support elements, and the second part is to evaluate the satisfaction of students’ use of these supports or services.

For the use and knowledge section the 4-level ordinal scale differed slightly:

1=Not applicable/not relevant to me;

2=May be useful to me but I don’t know where to find it;

3=I am aware of this service is but I haven’t used it;

4=I have used this service.

**1. Use or knowledge of support elements.**

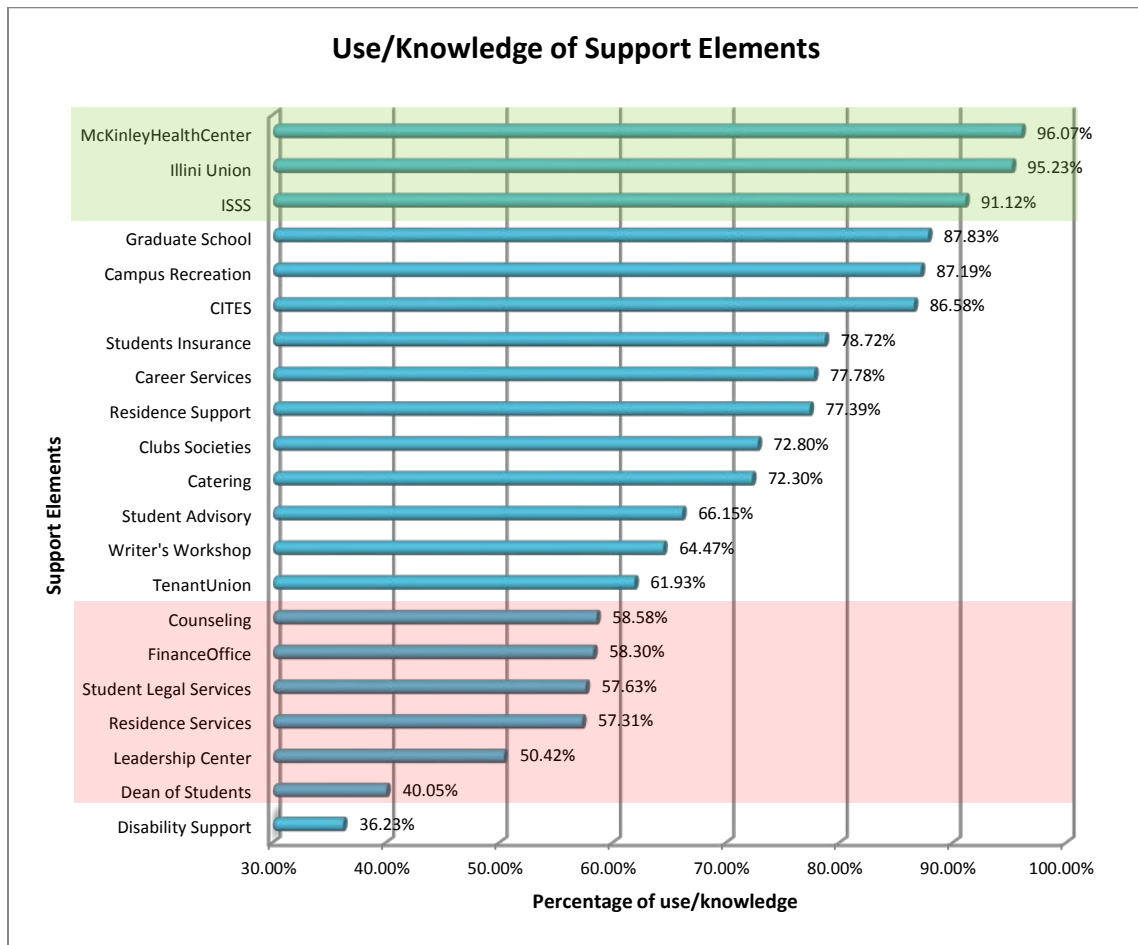


Figure 11 Percentage of use/knowledge of support elements

\*Please indicate your use/knowledge of the following support elements.

We combined levels 3 and 4 to get the above graph which reflects the percentage of students who used or were aware of those support elements.

From the above chart, we can see that McKinley Health Center, Illini Union and ISSS (International Students and Scholars Services) are the top 3 departments that students are aware of or have used those specific services. They all have a percentage greater than 90.

On the contrary, Counseling Center, Finance Office, Student Legal Services, Residence Services, Leadership Center and Dean of Students are the support elements have a low usage/awareness. They all have a percentage smaller than 60. Disability Support Services had the lowest use/awareness at 36.2%

## 2. Overall support satisfaction

For the satisfaction section, the classification is the same as other satisfaction categories. We received approximately 2000 responses in this support satisfaction section.

Table 3 Frequency of support satisfaction

Level	Frequency	Percent
Very dissatisfied	51	1.76
Dissatisfied	231	7.96
Satisfied	2340	80.66
Very satisfied	279	9.62



Figure 12 Satisfaction of overall support services (%)

\*Overall, how satisfied are you with the support services at this stage in the year?

There were 2,901 students who answered this question in the survey. All but 282 students were satisfied/very satisfied (green and purple area) with the support services, which is approximately 90%.



### 3. Satisfaction for support elements

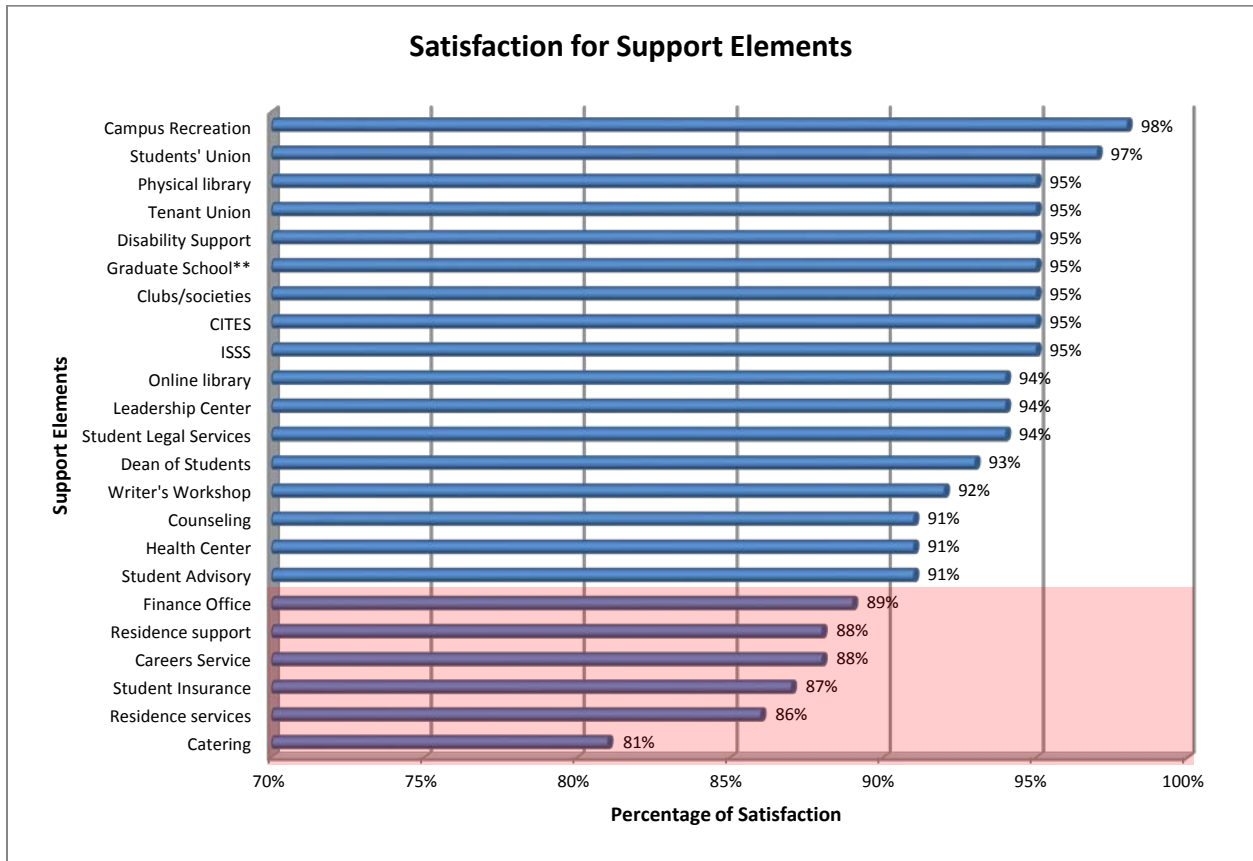


Figure 13 Support elements satisfaction (%)

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with the following support elements.

The above chart demonstrates the percentage of students who were satisfied with their experience when using specific support elements. Again, we combined levels 3 and 4 and considered these as “satisfied.”

Campus Recreation scored the highest value at 98% and 9 services received a value greater than 95%. However, we can see the Finance Office, Residence Support, Health Center, Student Insurance and Catering have a relatively low percentage. Some of these findings, specifically Student Insurance and McKinley Health Center, were also reflected negatively in the qualitative results.

#### 4. Elements that are frequently brought up by students

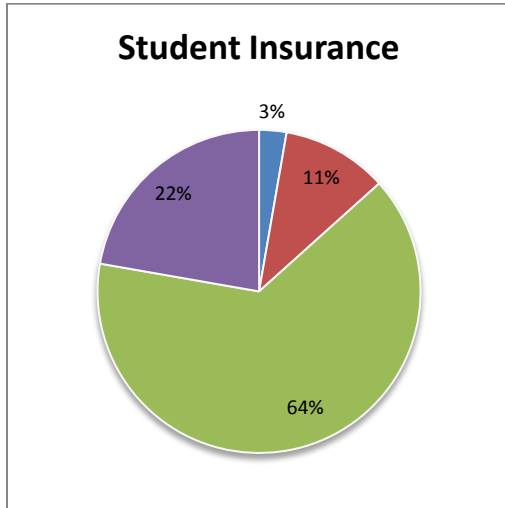


Figure 14 Satisfaction of Student Insurance (%)

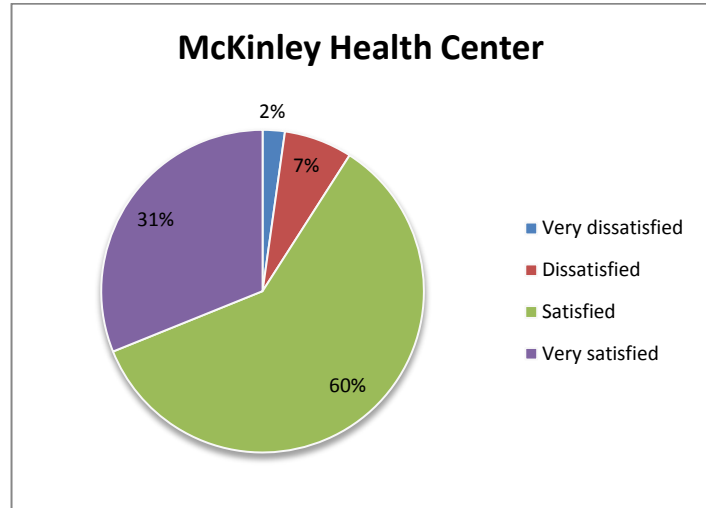
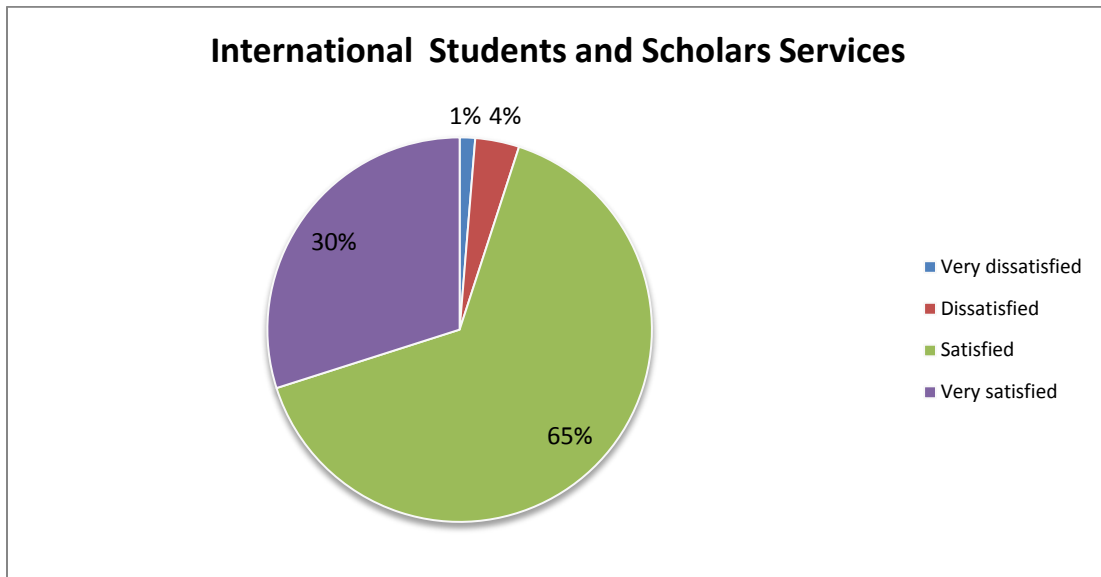


Figure 15 Satisfaction of McKinley Health Center (%)

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with Student Insurance and McKinley Health Center.

Above are two pie charts for Student Insurance and McKinley Health Center. Fourteen percent of respondents were not satisfied with Student Insurance and 9% were not satisfied with McKinley Health Center. Although these two values do not seem significant, when compared to other factors in the survey we can see that they are much lower.

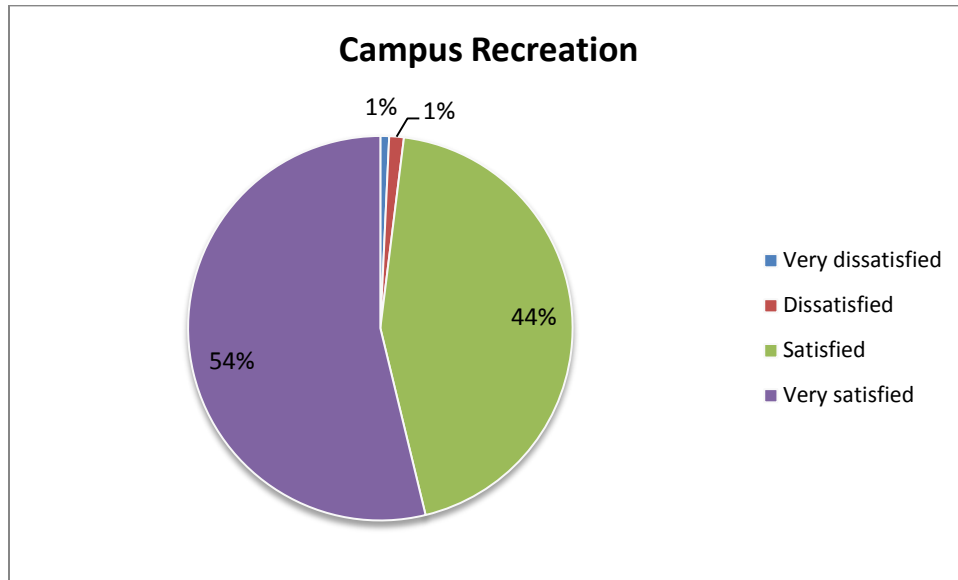


\*Figure 16 Satisfaction of International Students and Scholars Services (%)

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with ISSS.

Figure 16 is a pie chart of students' satisfaction of International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS). We can clearly see that about 30% students were very satisfied and 65% students were satisfied with their experience in ISSS. The overall satisfaction percentage for ISSS is 95%. About 1% students felt very dissatisfied with the service in ISSS. This result was very positive, however differed slightly from the qualitative results (see ISSS section in qualitative data analysis.)

**5. Support elements that have highly satisfaction**



\*Figure 17 Satisfaction of campus recreation (%)

For campus recreation, we can see that about 54% students were very satisfied (purple area) with campus recreation, and about 44% students were satisfied (green area). This is the *only* individual factor among the whole survey that received a 54% *very* satisfied rating. Furthermore, there were only 2% of students who were not satisfied.

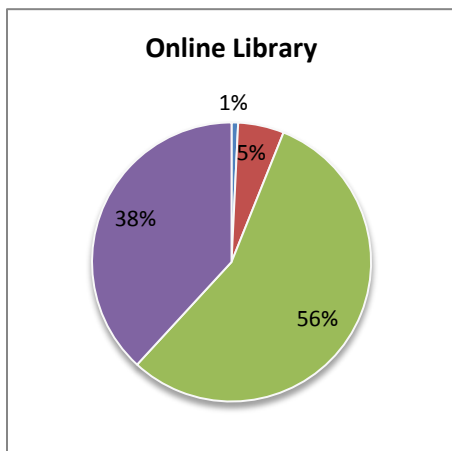


Figure 18 Satisfaction of online library (%)

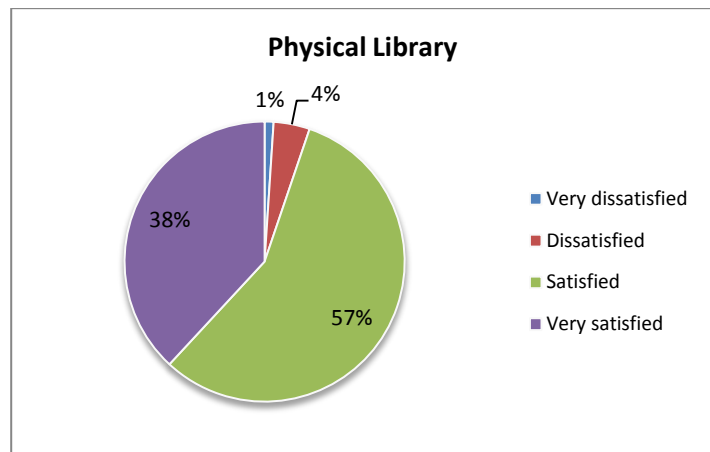


Figure 19 Satisfaction of physical library (%)

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with the following factors or elements.

The online library received a 94% satisfaction rating (green and purple area) among students and 6% dissatisfaction. Similarly, the physical library received a 95% satisfaction and 5% dissatisfaction rating.

#### **Qualitative Themes:**

1. Poor customer service
2. Student insurance is confusing and expensive
3. Not knowing where to find information on basic needs and structures in the US and support services at the university (insurance, medical, taxes)
4. Campus recreation and university library received very positive comments

There were mixed reviews in this section – some support services got consistently negative reviews, other support services got mixed reviews, and some, such as the university library and Campus Recreation received almost entirely positive reviews. When comments were negative, generally it was because the international students perceived staff members as rude or not culturally sensitive. Also, students did know where to find information or know what information they needed, particularly relating to health matters and insurance.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop some sort of wiki reference tool where students can find information on any aspect of student services at the university. Make this easy to find and navigate.
- More intercultural training for different campus departments, not just about immigration basics, but what international students are experiencing
- Students don't understand importance of insurance in the US; this should be stressed in orientation and before students arrive.

### **Learning Environment**

**Students were asked to comment on how satisfied they were with the learning experience at this stage in their program**

#### **Summary of Relevant Quotes:**

“My personal on learning experience in Illinois is something that I am really grateful to have. I have taken classes that teach the current and most updated knowledge in the field, with all the facility that support the learning process. The research that I have done so far have taught me a lot, and I'm sure that it will benefit my career in the future.”

“First I found the size of some course is too big that actually students can learn very little things during class...second, there should be more opportunity for international students to get involved in career activities (more lectures or meetings needed specific for international student issues). Third, there should be more communication between home and international students, especially during the lecture

or discussion. It will not only help international students to get involved in the local culture and community, but also help home students to broaden their views and learn more about campus diversity. “Professors may be good researchers, but many are not good teachers, which made me disappointed in some of my courses. Very few hold interdisciplinary knowledge let alone cross-cultural awareness, which made it difficult for me to make useful connections between what was taught/discussed and my own background.”

“Stressful, fun and challenging.”

“I received my master’s degree at another university and I have to admit that although the overall quality of education at U of I is better, I am generally disappointed with how politicized this campus is.”

**Quantitative data:**

In this part of the survey, students were asked to answer several questions about their satisfaction with the learning experience. Questions included overall learning satisfaction and asked about specific factors such as class size and teaching quality.

**1. Overall Learning Satisfaction**

Table 4 Frequency of learning satisfaction

Level	Frequency	Percent
Very dissatisfied	77	2.41
Dissatisfied	281	8.8
Satisfied	2273	71.16
Very satisfied	563	17.63



Figure 20 Satisfaction of overall learning experience (%)

\*Overall, how satisfied are you with the learning experience at this stage in the year?

From the above chart, we can see that about 89% students were satisfied with their learning experience. About 18% students were very satisfied with their learning experience, which is the largest percentage among overall satisfaction parts (overall learning satisfaction, overall living satisfaction, and overall arrival satisfaction).

The following charts can demonstrate this visually:

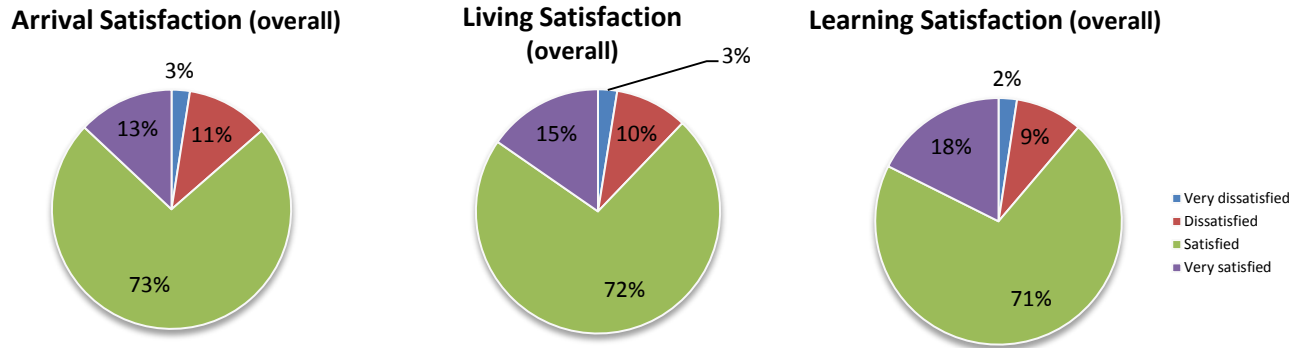


Figure 21 Comparison of satisfaction in arrival, living and learning experience (%)

## 2. Factors Comparison

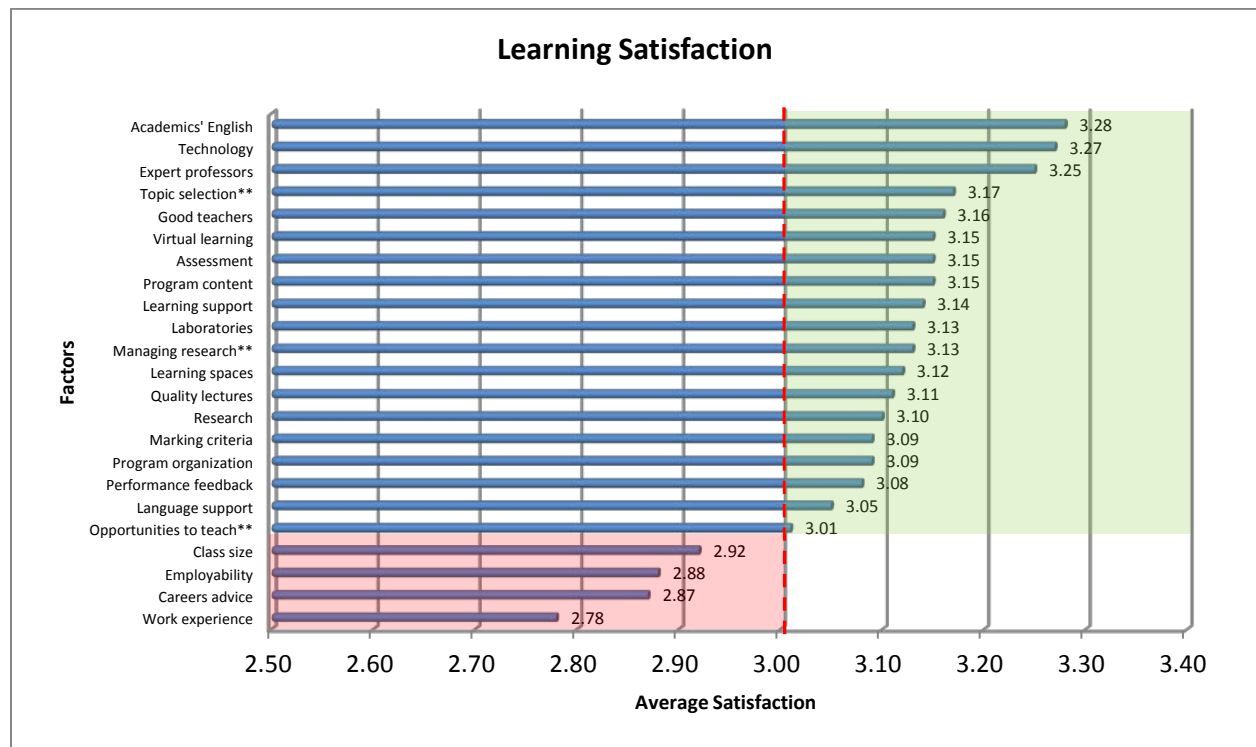


Figure 22 Satisfaction averages for factors in learning experience

\*Please say how satisfied you are at this stage in the year with the following learning experience.

\*\*Satisfaction averages are based on 4 point scale.

The chart on the previous page demonstrates average satisfaction of the factors that are related to learning experience. We can see with the exception of class size, employability, career advice and work experience (these are also factors mentioned frequently in the qualitative results); all other factors concerning learning experience have an average satisfaction greater than 3.

Compared with other parts in the survey, learning satisfaction received the best score among other satisfaction sections.

### **Qualitative Themes:**

1. Students had overwhelmingly positive learning experiences
2. Class size – too large
3. Limited work opportunities; need more practical experience with work
4. Poor teaching quality, too much emphasis on research and not enough on teaching. – *\*this depends heavily on each professor and tended to be isolated negative experiences*
5. Poor and out-of-date facilities (classrooms, equipment, internet not working, etc.)
6. Politics and bureaucracy at departmental levels and at the overall university can hinder the learning experience and cause frustration
7. Cultural adaptation also affects learning experience

This was the strongest positive area of the assessment. Students were very pleased with their learning experience at the University of Illinois, as also supported by the quantitative data. *By far, the number of positive comments outnumbered the negative ones.* When students did have negative comments about their learning experience it was usually comments that all students (international and domestic) have about larger research universities: class size, out of date facilities, and politics and bureaucracy all slightly affect the learning experience. Some students had a negative experience with a professor, but these tended to be isolated and depended on the individual professor. There were some negative comments specific to their international identity such as limited work opportunities and desiring more practical experience as a result of feeling limited because of their international status. The continuing theme of cultural adaptation also showed up in this section demonstrating that students have to adapt to the US classroom as well as other aspects of US culture.

### **Recommendations:**

- Design course curriculum to be more interculturally sensitive. For example, use international examples instead of examples relevant only for the US.
- Design course curriculum to include more practical (job related) experience in the classroom that could be used in lieu of an internship for which an international student may not qualify.
- More intercultural training for faculty/better awareness of how to interact and accommodate international students in the classroom.
- Help international students prepare for and have more realistic expectations of the job market in the US.

### Recommendation Comments:

**Students were asked to provide feedback on whether or not they would recommend the university**

#### **Summary of Relevant Quotes:**

“The university is everything you want. Strong academics, beautiful campus, incredibly nice people, good environment. The only reason I would think someone would not come is because of the cold weather, but I believe any weather condition is worth it to study here.”

“This is a nice place suitable for somebody who wants to pursue an academic career. In spite of being a bit isolated and sometimes a bit too local (in my department) it is a good venue where to meet scholars, international academic community and interdisciplinary scholarship. It has one of the most libraries I have ever met and an exciting cultural life. It is in the middle of nowhere but at the same time it is in the middle of everything. It is close to three big American cities and it is a very well ranked university in the world.”

“The U of I is such a great melting pot of cultures and you get to learn life skills outside of the classroom.”

“This place has nothing interesting. No hills, lakes, or anything to visit. It’s in the middle of nowhere, and such isolation begins to affect one’s well-being.”

“Funding and research opportunities for a graduate student in my department is very poor. So I won’t recommend my department for a student hoping to pursue a PhD in my field.”

“Because our program has too many Chinese people, I (I am from China) have little access to study with a lot of foreigners...experience this kind of culture is one my goals to study abroad.”

“I like the school overall but as the university is too big, it is hard to get involved in American culture and to form great relationship with other people, especially people with different backgrounds. Sometimes I get lost in this huge community, thus, I would rather recommend a smaller school for international students like me.”

#### **Quantitative data:**

In this part of survey, students were asked to rate their willingness to recommend The University of Illinois. The choices were based on the following 5-level scale:

5=I would actively encourage people to apply;

4=If asked, I would encourage people to apply;

3=I would neither encourage nor discourage people to apply;



2=If asked, I would discourage people from applying;

1=I would actively discourage people from applying.

### 1. Recommendation

Table 5 Frequency of recommendation

Recommendation	Frequency	Percent
Actively not recommend	11	0.36
Not Recommend	61	2.02
Neutral	368	12.18
Recommend	1413	46.76
Actively recommend	1169	38.68

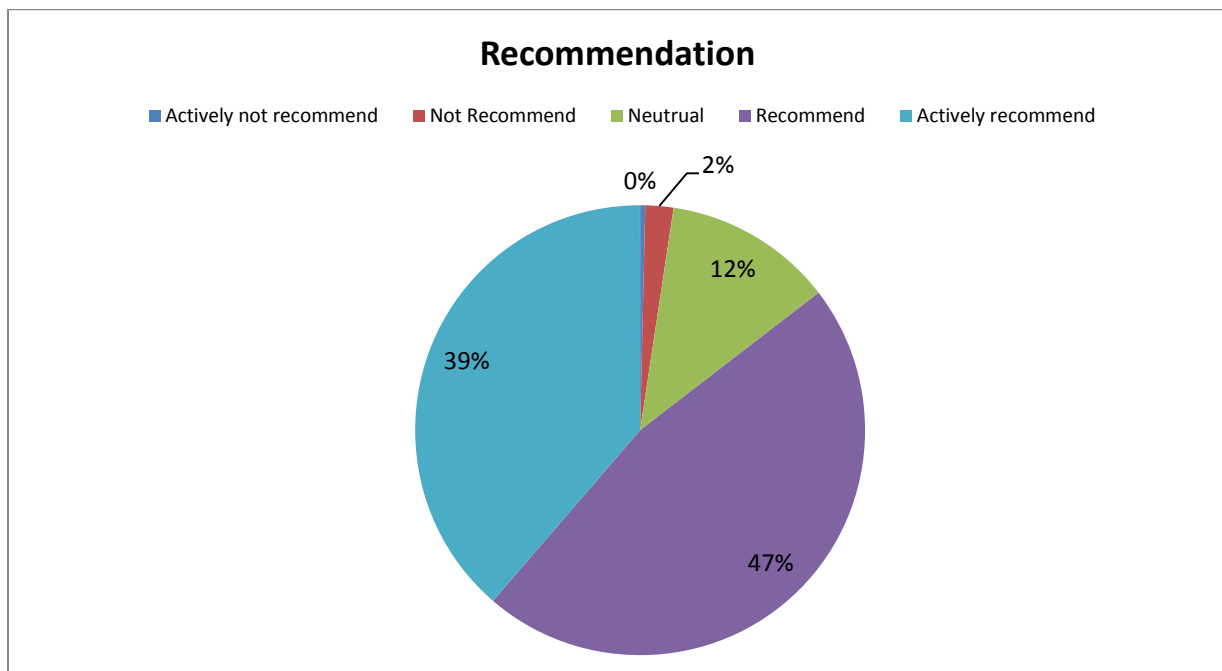


Figure 23 Recommendations (%)

\*Based on your impressions at this stage in the year, would you recommend the university to other students thinking of applying here?

There were 3,022 responses to this question. Only 11 students chose to actively not recommend this university. From the pie chart, we can see that about 39% of students were willing to actively recommend and about 47% of students were willing to recommend if people asked. Only 12% would do nothing.

In general, from the data in this survey, we can say that most international students would encourage people to apply to the University of Illinois.

## 2. Learning Satisfaction and Recommendation

In the logistic model (a model that checks how the factors' odds ratio contributes to the probability of recommendation) learning satisfaction, living satisfaction, support satisfaction and overall satisfaction are the only four significant factors in the survey, which means that the satisfaction level of students' experience has direct influence on the students' choice of recommendation.

Table 6 Two-way table (Learning Satisfaction by recommendation)

Learning Satisfaction	Recommendation(Recommendation)					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Frequency						
1	3	6	7	21	37	74
2	4	25	85	106	32	252
3	4	29	258	1104	748	2143
4	0	1	17	175	344	537
Total	11	61	367	1406	1161	3006

The above contingency table is a two-way table of learning satisfaction and recommendation. People who are very satisfied (ranking learning satisfaction as a 4) with their learning experience would not actively discourage people from applying (ranking recommendation as a 1). As the satisfaction level increased, the percentage of students who would recommend this school is also increased.

Furthermore, from the statistical test result, there is a significant association between Learning Satisfaction and Recommendation.

Table 7 Two-way table (Living Satisfaction by recommendation)

Living Satisfaction	Recommendation(Recommendation)					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Frequency						
1	0	7	17	23	30	77
2	5	17	74	126	64	286
3	5	32	257	1128	752	2174
4	0	5	18	127	314	464
Total	10	61	366	1404	1160	3001

The contingency table above of living satisfaction and recommendation demonstrates the same trend. As satisfaction level increased, the percentage of students who would recommend this university also increased.

### **Positive Qualitative Themes:**

The qualitative comments in this section of the survey were divided into positive and negative recommendations. Therefore, the themes were analyzed the same way.

1. High quality of education
  - a. Good learning environment
  - b. Good research opportunities
2. Reputation of the university and prestige
3. Campus and Champaign-Urbana community
  - a. Beautiful, fun, safe community
  - b. Good diversity
  - c. Friendly and welcoming people
4. Campus resources and support services
  - a. In general
  - b. Engineering
  - c. Campus rec
  - d. Library

### **Negative Qualitative Themes:**

1. Boring/poor location
2. Cost/lack of funding
3. Too many international students
4. (mini-theme) Poor job prospects
5. (mini-theme) Discrimination
6. (mini-theme) Poor quality of teaching
7. (mini-theme) Hard to adapt to culture

Overall students recommended the university much more than they did not recommend it. The top reason for recommending U of I by far was the quality of education. Students mentioned the good learning environment and the opportunities for research extensively in the positive recommendation section. This also ties back to the learning section which was also overwhelmingly positive, suggesting that the learning environment is very important to an international student's overall recommendation of the university (as also demonstrated in the quantitative data). Other positive recommendations came from the university's ranking and prestige associated with the name. Students also mentioned campus resources and support services both in general, but also a few departments specifically that did a good job such as Engineering, Campus Recreation, and the Library system.

Additionally, international students recommended the Champaign-Urbana and campus community as a great place to live because of the beautiful, fun, and safe environment, diversity, and welcoming atmosphere. Interestingly enough, the C-U community was also the number one (by far) reason listed for not recommending the university because of the boring location and lack of diversity! This

demonstrates that location is a very subjective concept and what some students find attractive other students find unappealing.

Other reasons for not recommending the university included cost or lack of funding, followed by “too many international students” including, a lack of interaction between domestic students and international students, classrooms with only other co-nationals, not enough chances to practice English, and too many of a specific nationality. A few other mini-themes emerged that are significant to mention, however, they did not nearly have as many comments as the first three reasons. These are: poor job prospects, discrimination, poor quality of teaching, and difficulties adapting to the culture.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure U of I maintains its high quality of education as this is clearly a HUGE draw for international students. Given the small theme of poor quality of education when people chose to not recommend the university, it is important to maintain the focus on high quality education to continue to attract international students.
- Find ways to guarantee more funding for graduate students and possibly offer funding options or scholarships to some undergrads.
- Try to balance out class sections so they are equally represented with US and international students, or at least avoid classrooms with only one nationality represented.
- Be more upfront with students about the C-U community and the university before they arrive so they know what they are getting into (for better or worse). For example, create webinars on factors such as weather, surroundings, social opportunities, size of the university, etc.

### **Advice Section:**

**The final question of the survey asked students to provide advice for new students coming to the University of Illinois**

### **Summary of Relevant Quotes:**

“It would be important to get open minded to every culture and people you will meet. I strongly encourage people to meet as many people as possible having different cultures. Also getting involve in various clubs will be helpful for learning English and learning cultures.”

“First of all I strongly recommend them to apply for UIUC. It is tough to study here, students need to study very hard and work a lot on their research but it has a great payoff when they want to find job. Being graduate from UIUC makes it much easier to land good jobs.”

“The moment you get off at the airport, be prepared to experience some degree of culture shock. But with a little bit of courage, you’ll find every other international student feels the same way...you’ll even find that American citizens will experience some form of culture shock regarding university life and study habits...everyone is desperate for new friends, new experiences, new contacts. If you come to the U of I knowing a group of friends...don’t fall back on to them as your safety net, by the time you reach

your sophomore or junior year, you will regret it to some degree. Make an extra effort to keep in contact with friends you meet in class, or on the quad, or at Espresso Royale in the union...chances are they might be feeling exactly the way you are.”

“Make sure you understand FULLY your funding situation BEFORE you come to UIUC for aerospace. Right now I am fully funded through another department that actually has the resources to fund me and cares enough about me to allow to be funded through their department.”

“If you can visit this place before start to study, do it. So you know what to expect. Take time to relax and study, it is difficult sometimes, but you need to have fun. Be open to new opportunities in a new culture. Try to improve your English the most you can at the beginning of your studies, so later it will be easier.”

### **Qualitative Themes:**

1. Have a social life
  - a. Get involved in campus and community early. Balance study with fun, make time to socialize. Take advantage of opportunities.
2. Branch out of comfort zone—make friends with students from US and from other cultures early
  - a. (mini-theme) Make friends from own culture to make you feel less lonely
3. Be open minded
4. English
  - a. Take every opportunity on campus to learn English
  - b. Come with high levels of English before you start
5. Academics are hard
  - a. Be prepared to work hard
  - b. (mini-theme) It’s worth it!
  - c. Grad students—choose your research area and advisor wisely
  - d. Good school for engineering overall
    - i. (mini-theme) don’t come if you are not in engineering, engineering only valuable major
6. Use and take advantage of services on campus
7. Financial preparedness
  - a. Come with enough money
  - b. Grad students secure funding before coming
  - c. More expensive than expected
8. Location
  - a. Too small and rural
  - b. Be prepared for country life
  - c. Weather (cold)

It is apparent in the previous sections how important academics and the quality of education are to international students. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the top three pieces of advice they would

give to incoming students all had to do with having a life outside of academics: have a social life and take advantage of the opportunities on campus and the fun you can have, branch out of your comfort zone by making friends from various cultures, and be open minded to new experiences. Students also significantly commented on English ability and advised to both have a high level of English before coming, and to consistently improve and practice once here. Other significant advice includes be prepared to work hard with academics—but it will be worth it! Students also advised to take advantage of campus services. Financial preparedness also came out in this section with students advising to have more money than expected. Finally, location was also mentioned and a caution given to be prepared for a more rural lifestyle and colder weather.

Please note, there were no quantitative questions about advice asked in this section.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide more English learning opportunities for students with lower TOEFL scores
- More comprehensive pre-arrival orientation or information. Example topics:
  - C-U community
  - Weather and seasons
  - Academic life and structure
  - Financial advice and breakdown of tuition and fees
  - Campus services available
  - Campus opportunities and ways to get involved.
- Emphasize the importance of getting involved outside the classroom at orientation
- Create mentor program to facilitate social and English opportunities
- Develop and implement more events with domestic students for first-year international students

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