



ILLINOIS INTERNATIONAL

International Student and Scholar Services



International Student Barometer Survey Data: Analysis of Fall 2014 and Three Year Comparison

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Introduction

In October 2012, October 2013 and October 2014, 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®, a company based in the United Kingdom. It is utilized by universities across the globe, which allows for the benefit of benchmarking.

The ISB used a mixed method research design to gauge the satisfaction of international students surrounding various aspects of their experience at the University of Illinois. The survey asked a variety of quantitative questions, allowing students 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. In 2014, 2,432 out of 9,824 students participated in the survey, which is a response rate of about 24%. Out of 5,289 international undergraduate students, including non-degree seeking exchange students, 1,026 participated in this survey, which is a response rate of approximately 19%. Out of a total of 4,535 international graduate students, 1,406 participated in this survey, which is a response rate of approximately 31%.

While evaluating the 2014 data, we were particularly interested in analyzing how this data compared to the data that was collected in our ISB surveys from previous years. Therefore, this year's report is divided into two parts. While Part I will focus on comparing and contrasting the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Illinois, Part II will focus on analyzing trends surrounding the satisfaction levels of the combined student population across the three years during which the survey was conducted.

The purpose of this report was to present an analysis of selected qualitative and quantitative portions of the data that remain most relevant to our campus.

Abstract

This report presents the results of the Fall 2014 ISB survey. Part I of the report analyzes the experiences of graduate and undergraduate students separately. In each section, the results are divided into six categories: Arrival, Support, Living, Learning, Advice, and Recommendations. Overall, the quantitative results were positive. The first four categories, Arrival, Support, Living and Learning, all scored above an 85% satisfaction rate. Graduate students were slightly more satisfied than undergraduate students in all of these areas except for Arrival, in which an equal percentage of graduate and undergraduate students were satisfied. While the lowest satisfaction rate for undergraduates was in the Living category, the lowest satisfaction rate for graduate students was in the Arrival category. For graduate students, Learning and Support were tied for the highest satisfaction rate. Support had the highest satisfaction rate for undergraduate students as well. 84% of undergraduate students and 88% of graduate students said they would recommend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Part II of this report compares the combined data taken from both undergraduate and graduate populations in 2014 to the data collected in the 2012 and 2013 ISB Surveys. In the 3-year ISB Survey comparison, the quantitative data demonstrated that although students' overall

satisfaction rates from 2012-2014 only varied by 1-2 percentage points, the students' rates of satisfaction with specific elements of their university experiences tended to vary more visibly from year to year when the data was broken down into subsections. The qualitative data for the 3-year comparison showed that there were several themes that were consistently discussed in the students' open comments across all three years. This demonstrated that while some themes continued to be relevant in shaping many students' experiences from 2012 to 2014, other themes were only relevant to students in specific years of the survey.

Methodology

For the qualitative portion of this data, we based our analysis on Creswell's (2007) phenomenological approach. According to Creswell, "The type of problem best suited for this research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (p. 60). We chose this approach for our qualitative analysis because we were interested in understanding how this population experienced the common phenomenon of being an international student at our University. The data was analyzed by hand and a coding process was utilized to identify the themes. Please note that although the qualitative comments were edited for grammar and spelling errors, we made every attempt to preserve the original voice and tone of each comment.

Most of the quantitative variables in the report were categorical, such as levels of satisfaction and recommendation. Considering this fact, we based our analysis on descriptive statistics and data visualization. Descriptive statistics give summaries of the sample. Using data visualization, we can see the differences, trends, portions and attributes of certain groups. We utilized pie charts and bar charts to display the quantitative data, focusing on distribution of answers and satisfaction rates.

Limitations

The survey was divided into six different sections (Arrival, Living, Learning, Recommendations, Advice, and Support), allowing participants to rate their satisfaction levels and offer qualitative insight. It is important to note that the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey generally supported one another, but were not entirely consistent. Based on the quantitative data alone, the overall results of the survey were positive, whereas the qualitative data reflected more dissatisfaction. One possible explanation for this is that when participants took the time to answer the qualitative questions, they were generally either very satisfied or very dissatisfied, not simply neutral. Additionally, the quantitative results were measured on a 4 point ordinal scale (1=very dissatisfied; 2=dissatisfied; 3=satisfied; 4=very satisfied), which provided no option for a neutral answer.

Findings: Arrival to the University

Undergraduate Students

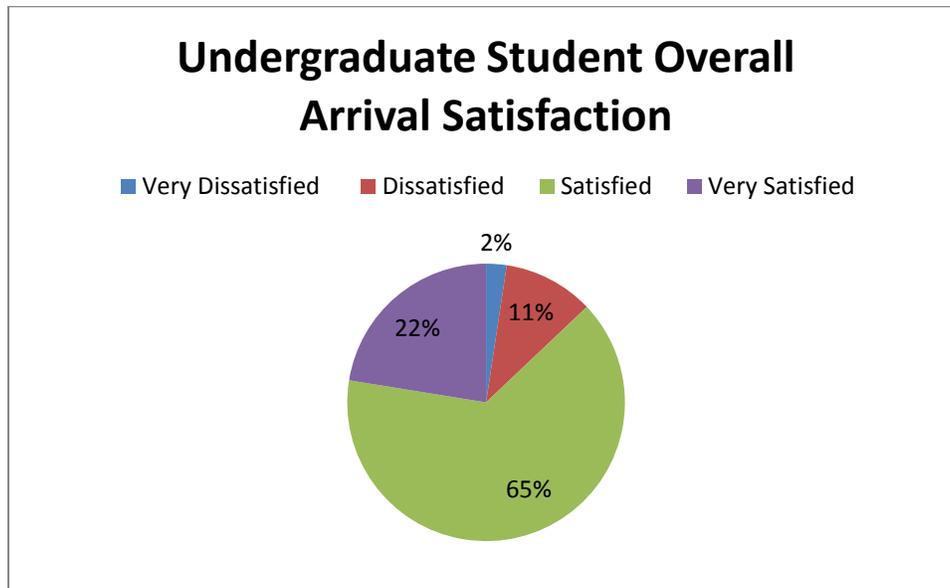


Figure 1. Overall Arrival Satisfaction for Undergraduate Students

Qualitative Undergraduate Arrival Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Using the O'Hare Shuttle Service

“I cannot emphasize enough how helpful the pickup at the airport was.”

“The airport picking up is very helpful.”

“The ISSS airport pickup did a great job! Please carry on!”

Arrival on Campus

“I was lucky in that I asked Joy (Study Abroad Office) to meet me upon arrival to campus - if I had not done this I would have been alone at 10pm with no idea of how to get to my accommodation - I didn't realize the size of campus prior to arrival and thought I could walk but obviously I was mistaken - I think members of staff/volunteers should be present to direct or even transport students to their accommodation from bus drop off points.”

“I was surprised and dissatisfied to see that they charge me \$100 for early arrival although I arrived on August 19. For the price we pay I think it's too much to ask students to pay this amount when we arrive less than a week before the first day of class.”

Accessing Information for New Students

“The information needed is not available from any one source, but rather is gleaned in bits and pieces from various people, announcements, events, and notifications, etc. which on occasion contradict each other.”

“For international students, it becomes really difficult to settle down initially; the University should have an online portal where students can learn extensively about the area and other aspects.”

“Make everything clear on ONE single website.”

“Initially, many of the faculty and students I interacted with expected me to understand how things work here. That was a huge challenge to cope with. They often always referred me to the website for details, and I was not conversant with it at the time so I got left behind on some things.”

Graduate Students

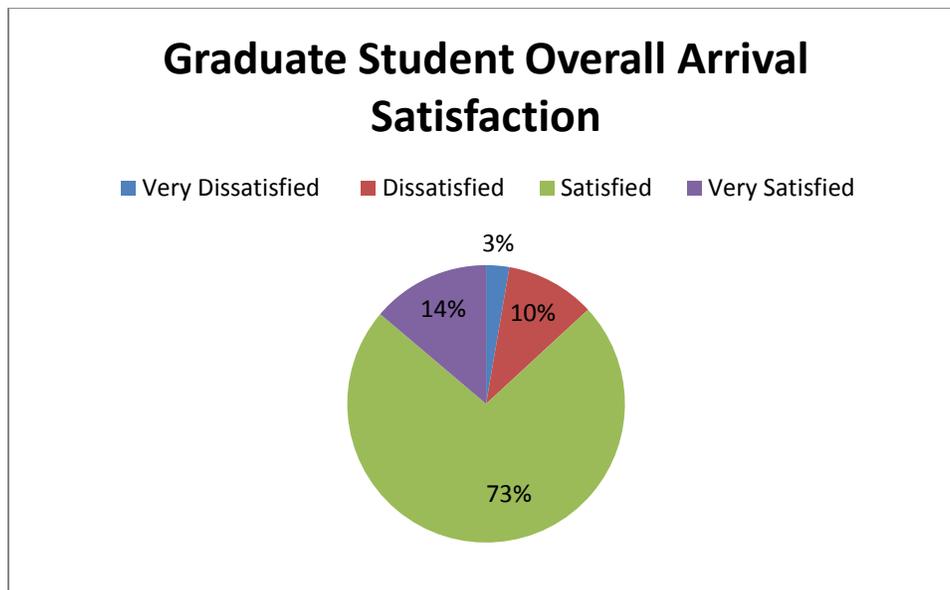


Figure 2. Overall Arrival Satisfaction for Graduate Students

Qualitative Graduate Arrival Themes and Relevant Quotes:

O'Hare Shuttles

“I had a Research Assistant (RA) appointment, so had to come to campus early like all other RAs. But there was no welcome/pickup at airport for that. So it would be really helpful to incoming students with RAs if you could arrange for their pickup/welcome also. Thanks.”

“Have transportation for graduate students from the Airport. Start the schedule earlier in August.”

“More welcome or pick up programs to help students arrive at school. More information about welcoming or picking up (make it more accessible).”

“Purpose of the arrival service is very great. But, it should be considered to hold it one month ahead for the students who come early or who bring their family members.”

“The welcome booth at O’Hare was amazing.”

“Have transportation for graduate students from the Airport. Start the schedule earlier in August.”

“The pick up at airport starts too late.”

Arrival on Campus

“I was not bothered by arrival experience because I had my undergrad here. But now that I thought about it, it was quite frightening: when I was a freshman, I got here on my own on the LEX but in the middle of the night. I was lucky that I ran into the resident assistant that time, and he let me in the dorm. It could have been a lot worse. I hope the school would have some kind of co-operation with bus companies or hostels to accommodate those who arrive late.”

“I cannot move into the house before Aug 16, therefore I have to stay in a hotel for the first several days.”

“International students should be provided for a few days of residence hosted by the university just to make the transition process easier.”

“Our program, MSPE has a pick-up service at first arrival. I highly appreciated the service.”

Accessing New Student Information

“Instead of sharing the paper flyers when we signed up with ISSS in the Union, I believe that the university can do better by sending us the electronic materials, for example, how to get an SSN.”

“Did not receive any notifications and there was not enough information available for arrival accommodation or transportation from ISSS website. 2) I was not aware that registration for Fall classes had already started well before the Fall semester started. 3) It would be difficult to find my way and settle all of the necessary things (getting an id card, reporting to the ISSS and grad school, opening an account, etc.) without the help of a current student.”

Registration

“For international students, we cannot make course selections before we arrive. It is very inconvenient because there are little options left for us at the start of the semester.”

“I couldn't find a guide to understanding what the course sections, and other letters on the registration page, mean. In our country, most colleges have courses as subjects and have fixed timings. Some things like the different sections for UG and PG students for the same course were also a bit confusing. It took up a lot of time figuring out the registration procedure.”

“When I arrived I did not have a Network account, could not register for classes and it took me a really long time to get someone to help me. I also would have liked to be able to see the courses available for the semester with some short description before coming so I could have some previous idea.”

“I had a lot of problems to register my courses due to different holds that came from different departments: international office, graduate admission, even some from UIC. The last one was the most difficult to eliminate! And it was a mistake from the university!”

Using Local Transportation

“Some instructions about the bus system would be welcomed.”

“I'm satisfied with most things, but I was a little confused with the bus. There too many different kinds of buses. If you could give more information about taking the bus that would be better.”

Summary of Arrival Findings

According to our quantitative data, equal percentages of graduate and undergraduate students were satisfied with their overall arrival experiences at 87%. However, our qualitative data demonstrated a divergence in the aspects of the arrival experience that graduates and undergraduates were most and least pleased with.

The common themes that both grads and undergrads brought up in their open comments included the shuttle service from O'Hare Airport, the initial arrival on the university's campus, and accessing information for new students. Both graduates and undergraduates who wrote comments were generally unhappy with their initial arrival experience on campus, citing a lack of direction or instruction upon arrival. They also expressed that they were displeased with the fact that students who arrived early either needed to pay a fee for early move-in or find an alternative housing arrangement until they could move into their dorms. Both graduate and undergraduate students were also both unhappy with the way in which information for new students was disseminated, explaining that essential information was either too spread out over various platforms, or was too difficult to find. Although graduates and undergraduates both mentioned the O'Hare shuttle service, undergraduate comments about the service were positive, while graduate comments were mostly negative. While undergraduates who used the shuttle service were content with it, many graduate students expressed disappointment that the service

was not offered earlier in August, which is when many graduate students with assistantships must arrive on campus.

While all of the Arrival themes mentioned by the undergraduate students were also shared by the graduate students, the graduate students mentioned several themes that were unique to them: registration and local transportation. They mentioned having difficulty finding information about how to register for their courses. In addition, they mentioned having difficulty with learning how to navigate the local bus system.

Findings: Support Services

Undergraduate Students

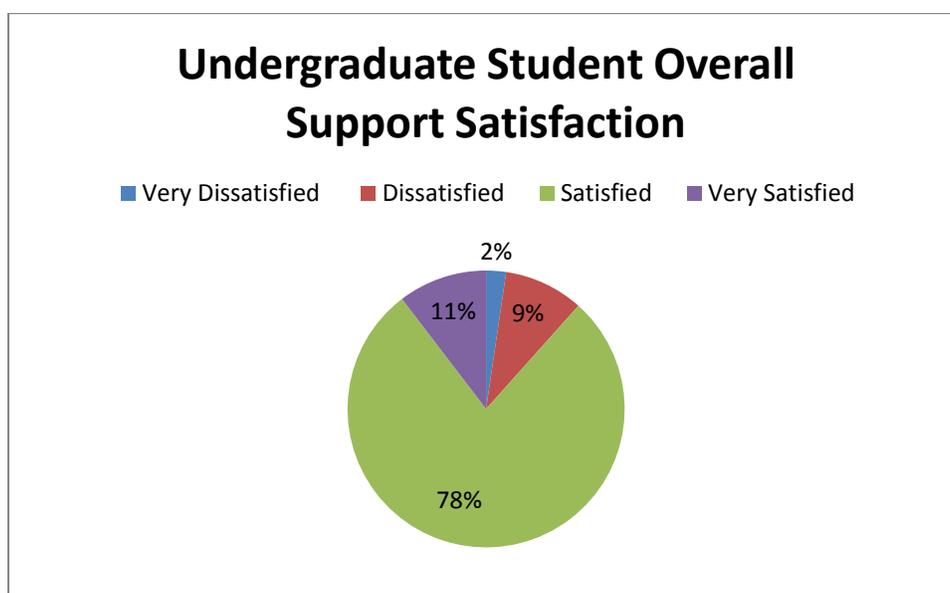


Figure 3. Overall Support Satisfaction for Undergraduate Students

Qualitative Support Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Academic Support

“My advisor is great in helping me with planning my coursework. However, some advisors in the LAS student advising department are not helpful. I've attended appointments with an LAS advisor who went through the advising process perfunctorily, and I didn't feel like I was being helped. Besides, I've been left waiting for a long time even if I've scheduled the appointment time in advance. This experience makes me feel very upset.”

“One of my advisors is very unhelpful because when I went there to ask about which courses to take and asked about the career options of the major, she was very cold to me and started arguing with me... I felt unwelcomed when I met the advisor, so I don't want to go there anymore. Now, I have to ask advice from my friends.”

“Can the writer's workshop extend to a longer one? 50-minutes is not enough.”

Health Services and Insurance

“The student insurance was helpful, but didn't think about the difficulties about transferring money from a foreign country. It's more expensive than they think, and it costs a lot of money to do so. And it takes time.”

“I can't make an account in MyMcKinley because of a technical error and when I went there, the doctor was late for more than an hour. The pharmacists or the people giving medicine were very indifferent to students.”

“McKinley should guide us to clinics that actually accept student insurance. I had to pay 500 dollars because student insurance doesn't cover this clinic”

“McKinley was very helpful when I had a knee injury and an eye issue. It was easily accessible and the price was very cheap (although I understand that the user fee was included within the mandatory fee at the beginning of the year). “

Financial Support

“I hope that there are more scholarships for International students. Also I hope that there are more programs for international students to adjust in American culture and to learn English.”

“There is no financial support/advice for international students.”

Graduate Students

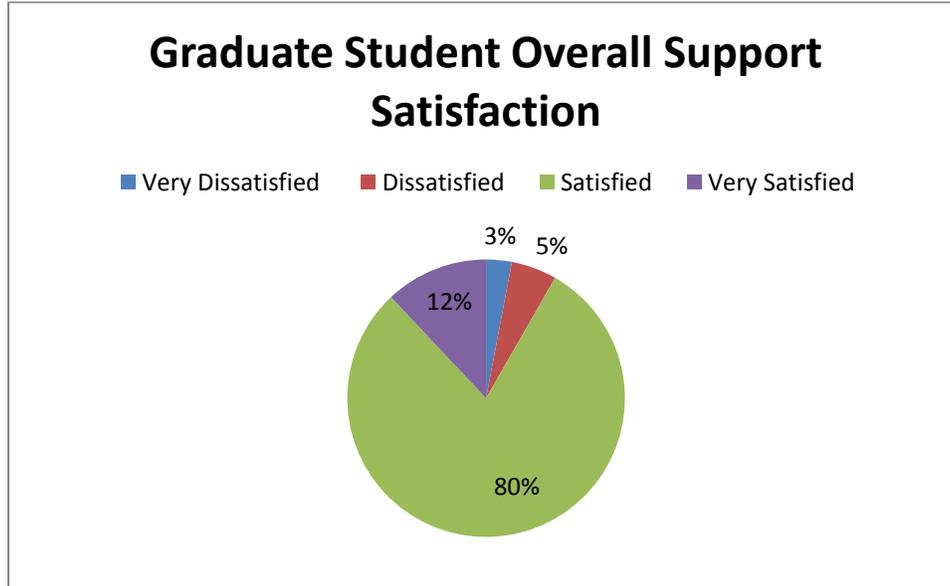


Figure 4. Overall Support Satisfaction for Graduate Students

Qualitative Support Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Insurance

“United Healthcare does not pay the bills for a lot of claims made at Carle.”

“The student's Insurance just charges premiums but has no way of ensuring that the claims are promptly settled when due, which leaves students at the mercy of the Insurance companies who are looking for every means to repudiate claims.”

“Student insurance claims can be made a lot easier. Especially at McKinley, the insurance system should obviate the need for students to pay and get reimbursed. Ideally, McKinley should get paid directly by the insurance company at the time of consultation.”

“Student Insurance is extremely expensive especially for family members. It does not support important things like vision, dentistry, pregnancy, etc.”

“Student insurance needs to be better for graduate students. There is a very high copay for outside consultation.”

“As a student I am satisfied with the student insurance, however, I have selected dissatisfied because it is just too expensive to get insurance for my family.”

Support Services

“Student Financial Services (Payroll Office): I had an appointment for my tax payments and after checking my papers they told me that they were ok. A month later I got a letter for the tax office saying my papers did not meet the criteria so I had to do the whole process again.”

“Once, the Legal Services got me my stolen security deposit. For me that service serves justice infinitely more than the courthouse.”

“It would be great to have an organization for spouses of students to share their knowhow about baby care, life dining, shopping, English class etc.”

“To international students, notary is necessary to enroll Ameren, and Student Legal Services was really helpful. But still, many international students do not know that the University provides student legal services.”

“I think that the writer's workshop can open an online reservation system so that we can see all of the available time and writers when we want to make an appointment. It would be better to show the writer's major because sometimes people would prefer writers who have the similar educational backgrounds.”

“CITES is one of the best services I have ever experienced!”

ISSS

“I won't completely say dissatisfied for ISSS, I am just unsure whether it is typical for ISSS to reach out to their last year undergrads/ grads to ask and ensure that they know what's next for them-- in terms of visas and everything. Thanks.”

“ISSS should organize more cultural activities for international students, such as Thanksgiving dinner for those who will stay on campus for Thanksgiving Break.”

Health and Fitness Services

“The recreation facilities at UIUC are one of the best that I have ever seen, especially ARC. I love the sports events like Basketball carnival and football 101 organized by ISSS. The activities at the Illini Union doesn't seem to excite the students all that much. They are good but I think they need more advertising.”

“If Campus Recreation facilities can extend their open hours during summer and winter vacation, that would be perfect.”

“Group fitness classes should be free of charge. McKinley does not have any eye doctors or dentists. Also, physical therapy is covered only up to 4 visits, which is not enough at all to recover from a physical problem.”

Summary of Support Findings

While 92% of graduates were satisfied with the support that they received, 89% of undergraduates were satisfied. The only common themes among graduates and undergraduates in the Support category were health services and insurance. The majority of the students who commented on these themes were unhappy with the costs and limitations of the University's health care services and insurance plan.

The most prevalent Support themes that were unique to undergraduate students surrounded academic support and financial support. Students who commented on academic support were generally disappointed with the quality and extent of the academic help that they received. They were also disappointed with the lack of financial resources and funding opportunities available to international students.

The Support themes that were unique to graduate students included general support services, recreational/fitness facilities and services and the International Student and Scholars Services Office. The graduate comments demonstrated a mixture of positive and negative feelings with regard to the financial, legal and technical support that they received from the university. Students were pleased with the quality of university's recreational facilities, but wished that some services, such as group fitness classes, could become free of charge. Finally, graduate students mentioned that they also wished to see an increase in ISSS's outreach to students.

Many factors may have contributed to differences in the ways in which graduates and undergraduates perceived the availability and quality of support services, including their financial situations and the source of their funding, their working dynamics with their academic advisors and whether or not they had dependents at the university that they were responsible for.

Findings: Living Satisfaction

Undergraduate Students

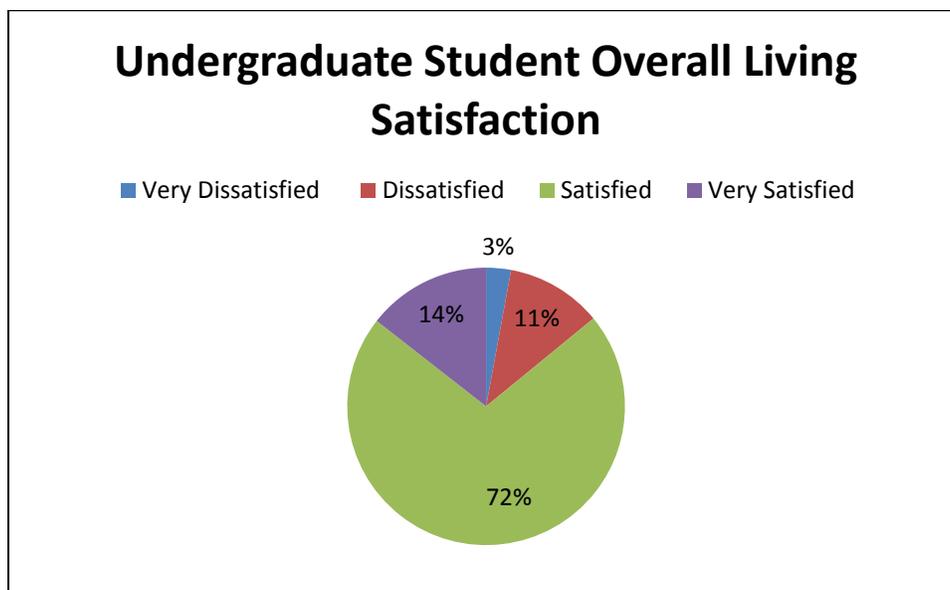


Figure 5. Overall Living Satisfaction for Undergraduate Students

Qualitative Living Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Transportation

“On-campus parking is very inconvenient. I have a car but I cannot drive to school. The parking lot is too far and limited.”

“The bus schedule in the weekends is not very often, but most of us do not have a car.”

“I hope there will be more buses and more bus shuttles. Waiting for the bus for more than ten minutes in the cold is very painful.”

“Overall, campus is very well structured and constructed. It is easy to navigate both by walking and by public transportations.”

Finances and Affordability

“I would say that the cost of living in the dorms is fair, but the mandatory purchase of a meal plan is too expensive.”

“The choice of living in a hall is not ideal, the cost is nearly two times that of renting a house outside, and the university charges me for Thanksgiving break! Where else am I supposed to go other than staying in the U.S.?”

“Meal Plans are too expensive, they should be optional. Cafe credits that only last for two weeks are robbery. Should have people introduce how meal plans work.”

Dorm Life

“Moving in a week early into halls of residence when there are few other residents was also difficult, as there were not many people to talk to. Although there were international events organized, I did not meet many people in LAR itself, especially because it is far away from many things. Also, nothing was done in the halls of residence to provide support for internationals and I felt the RA's should have organized some events or made sure to get to know us to help us with the huge change we were experiencing.”

“In terms of housing, I really like my halls but one point I will make is that it was tough moving in a week early for international orientation when there were not many people in my halls, as although there were some events put on, my halls are far out and it was lonely at times. Also, I think the RA's should have perhaps done more for the internationals in terms of introducing themselves, making themselves available to us, and organizing events.”

“I think that the university should consider not closing the dorms for the holidays. This is one of the biggest universities considering the number of international students in the US and it is inhuman that we need to leave the dorms during the holidays. This is our home, we pay for that. If the problem is because the staffs are not living here during that week, that's ok, we can live without them for one week. This situation does not happen anywhere else in the world. You really should consider doing the same as Illini Tower does, and stay open during these times.”

Graduate Students

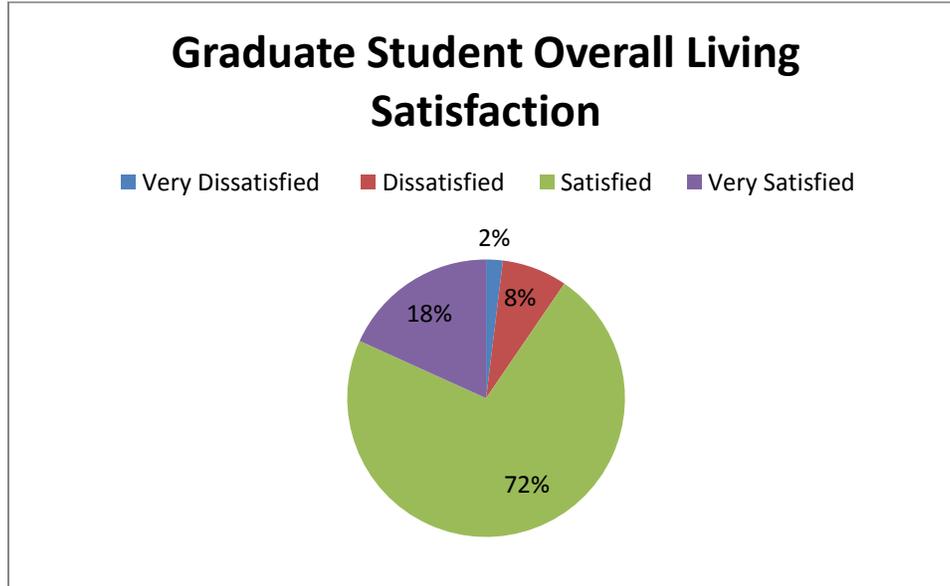


Figure 6. Overall Living Satisfaction for Graduate Students

Qualitative Living Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Transportation

“Free transportation for students is one of the best things in terms of living experience. However, during weekends it is very inefficient, especially if you don't live nearby campus (my case) or if you want to go to, for example, Walmart.”

“I would like more transportation options to other cities.”

“It is not convenient to travel other states. Maybe it is better to provide some shuttles or hold some trips for students with low prices.”

“The only problem that I have with transportation is that there are some routes with a limited schedule or no schedule after 7h00 pm.”

Finances and Affordability

“Scholarships are an important source of living expenses for students. It would be great to have more opportunities for scholarships for international students.”

“The salaries for TAs are abysmal. They are simply not enough to live on. There is also next to no budget housing, no options for communal living or communal meals to bring costs down.”

“Not too much support on tax issues for fellowship students. I know that there are workshops for TA’s.”

Security

“Need more police on the streets. I completed my MS at university of Pennsylvania where every block had a security officer present in the evenings. Robbery at gunpoint and other assaults are very common here. However, security measures are not very strong.”

“The living experience is great, although there seem to be a few incidents on campus. But I guess the University is using its power to reduce such incidents.”

“The amount of crime on or near campus is much too high.... Many side streets lack adequate night lighting.”

“It sounds like it is dangerous on campus at night.”

Cultural and Social Integration

“I feel there is a cultural barrier, that I would like to see gone, between American and international students, both socially and professionally. Although campus facilities promote social "mixing" it seems to me, at least at the graduate level (I am a PhD student), that American students typically organize social outings between themselves. Even when an international student is included in the group, they are still considered as "the outsider" somehow. It is not mean or anything, just cultural behavior maybe, and therefore, international students often find themselves socializing more with people from their own country/culture. This makes it also difficult to build professional networks with people from the US.”

“I hope to see more events that require American and international students to mingle around each other, as in really be in conversations instead of just being around but staying with their common circle of friends.”

“International students are making great efforts to step out of their comfort zones to blend in and mix up. Please encourage domestic students to do the same. Ask them not to stick together most of the time. Prepare them to have a global mindset.”

Summary of Living Findings

The Living category satisfaction rates for graduates and undergraduates students were 90% and 86%, respectively.

In their open comments, graduates and undergraduates both discussed the themes of transportation and finances/affordability. While both graduates and undergraduates appreciated having the MTD system as a transportation option, they also expressed disappointment in the infrequency of the buses, especially on weekends. Graduate students also expressed a desire for increased access to transportation options that would allow them to venture out of the state. Graduates and undergraduates were both unhappy with the financial aspects of their living experiences. While undergraduates were concerned with the high costs of meal plans and dorm rooms, graduate students were disappointed with their assistantship stipends and their difficulty with covering living expenses.

The Living theme that was unique to undergraduate students was dorm life. Undergraduates living in residence halls wished that their Residential Assistants had made more of an effort to reach out to them and make them feel comfortable, to organize events that would help them adjust to life in the dorms, and to help them meet their hall mates. Undergraduates were also unhappy that they are not permitted to remain in the dorms during holidays.

The Living themes that were unique to the graduate students were security and cultural/social integration. Graduates were uncomfortable with the frequency of crime-related incidents on campus, and wished to see an increase in security measures such as more police on campus and additional streetlights at night. Graduate students also wished to see more opportunities to engage in social activities with domestic students.

Findings: Learning Satisfaction

Undergraduate Students

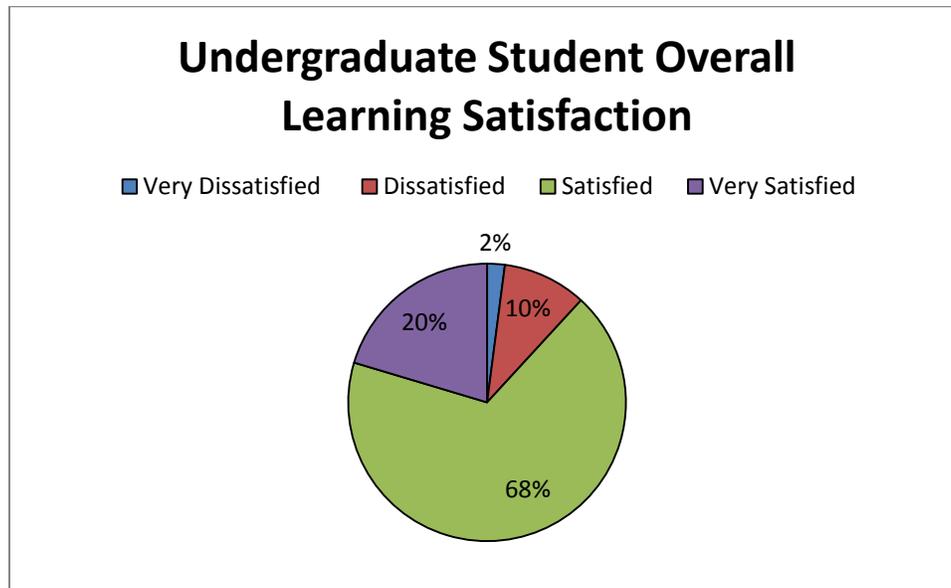


Figure 7. Overall Learning Satisfaction for Undergraduate Students

Qualitative Learning Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Excellence in Academics

“Everything is individual here, people are very closed and it is hard to get in contact with someone. I like to work together, discuss solutions and opinions. It is more fun, keeps things interesting and the motivation for working and studying is much higher. I am not a person that likes to work just for himself/herself all the time. Two out of my 3 group projects were not fun at all because people started to work at the very last moment. Teachers and teaching methods are great over here and keep classes interesting throughout the whole semester. Organization of classes is also very good! “

“The university provides a great environment for learning and the professors and TA's are all really helpful and approachable, especially since I am an exchange student. The facilities of the university are great and the studious culture of other students helps to provide enthusiasm for the subject and competitive and challenging aspects to the work. There are a wide range of classes and many options within these and I am gaining valuable knowledge here.”

“There is a lot of homework, but it is really helpful for learning course content. Lecturers are good and feedback on assignments is prompt.”

“I love that all the professors are experts in the fields they have chosen to study. This is often not true of high school teachers - as they only know knowledge very specific to that outlined by the secondary school program.”

Teaching and Grading Methods

“The teacher's assistants are 'hit or miss', because some of them are not very helpful or even passionate about the subject that they teach. Sometimes, the TA's grading is not clearly backed with reasons.”

“ACES College has two extreme sides of teaching quality. Some professors are well prepared and gave me excellent lectures, while others are terrible.”

“I kind of wish there was a way to give feedback in the middle of the semester because then the professor could work on improving for current students and not just future students.”

“The exams sometimes do not fit the hardness of the homework.”

Quality of Resources and Facilities

“School should provide online classrooms for every class so that students in the same class can discuss with each other and find study buddies easily. The computers in computer lab are too low and frustrating. I hope librarians can talk with those who always laugh and talk with their study buddies to make them quieter. There should be more programs provided to teach students how to make best of library resources. There should be a psychology library. I hope there will be more English learning programs provided.”

“Library facility should just be limited to the people who are actually in their college.”

“My experience tells that our school is not supportive enough to some departments such as Historical or Philosophy Department. Compare to Engineering or Business Department, LAS has lower-quality facilities such as classrooms and libraries. For example, oftentimes I had trouble finding seats with properly functioning desks whenever I had exams in main quad buildings. I understand LAS might not be financially supported compared to other popular departments (Engineering or Business), but I do think all students deserve same quality of studying environment.”

“Computers are so slow in the Art and Design building.”

“The blackboard eraser in Material Science and Engineering Building 100 is of bad quality. Every time the professor uses it, the blackboard becomes white with the chalk powder, which makes the words hard to see.”

Graduate Students

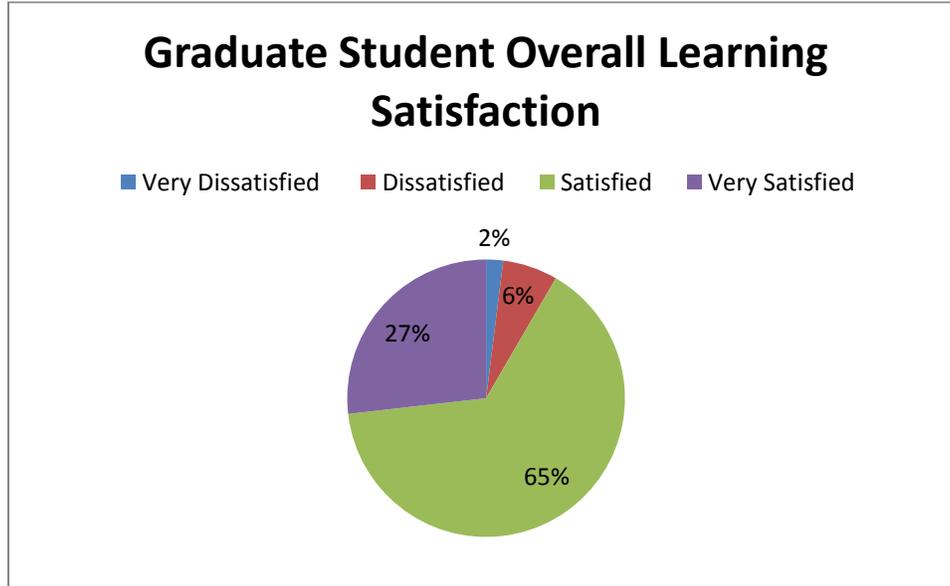


Figure 8. Overall Learning Satisfaction for Graduate Students

Qualitative Learning Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Lack of Diversity in Program

“The diversity of the students from MSA is low. Except for classes, there is barely time to get expose to other culture.”

“I think the law school can be benefited by a lot more diversity in the JD program. The lack of diversity makes the learning experience feel less holistic at times.”

“I wonder how come one specific nationality could be this dominant for this year's class. I hope that admission committee would give admissions to various backgrounds and nationalities.”

“Re: studying with people from other cultures, it varies massively between research groups in my department. In my old group, nearly everybody was American. It depends how racist the advisor is...”

Teaching and Grading Methods

“I am very happy with the professors. But I am not very happy with the CS 400 level TA’s. They are rather your colleagues/classmates who TA the other class that you are in. I strongly feel, for graduate studies, TAs should be only PhDs.”

“The grading of the assignments/homework/exams is a bit confusing as in sometimes I write a pretty long answer and sometimes for a similar question, I write a small answer (which may not have encompassed all points), but still the points obtained would be the same. So, I am not sure about the effort I should be putting into them. I might be wasting my time trying to improve an answer when that extra stuff wasn't even required.”

“As an international student, I really want my teacher to point out my grammar mistakes in my writing feedback.”

“American System of Education is different than other countries and that is why students require more guidance initially which I think is lacking in the system.”

“Student feedback is responded positively and supportively in general, but I would like to receive more specific and constructive suggestions.”

“The department has not done a lot of work to take the doctoral program to a higher level. It is still very discipline-focused and there is almost no integration with scholars from other units like the IPRH or the Unit for Critical Theory. Not even within the same college with departments such as Art History with which there should be a natural connection.”

Excellence in Academics

“The faculties are awesome! I love the academic atmosphere here. So far the experience is superb. The level of courses offered and the world-class facilities in the lab, in particular Clean room in MNTL and MEB, are fantastic; they motivate most of new graduate students to expand their perspective to a deeper level in science and engineering by practicing their knowledge and conducting research with state-of-the art resources and expertise.”

“I have two 500 level courses this semester and being graduate level courses, I expected them to be a bit difficult. But the professors explain it so well that both the subjects seem very easy.”

“The level of courses offered and the world-class facilities in the lab, in particular Clean room in MNTL and MEB, are fantastic; they motivate most of new graduate students to expand their perspective to a deeper level in science and engineering by practicing their knowledge and conducting research with state-of-the art resources and expertise.”

Office Hours

“I am truly satisfied with the learning experience but I personally feel that the professors should allot more office hours so that the students can meet with them and discuss their issues.”

“It is too hard to meet faculties.”

“We lost great faculties, part time job for student this semester because of money School of music is having a financial problem Also, New system of Qual. Exam is completely not a make sense. That was not on the handbook. And very weird and low quality.”

“The Music Department needs more faculty, they aren't enough.”

Course Restrictions and Limitations

“I have previously studied in the UK and in India. I would rate this experience at UIUC as the best in my life so far.. Overall I am learning a lot as a student. One flexibility I would like is to have the options to take up courses from any school that interests me. I am currently limited to a set of courses and electives. I am interested in an open curriculum to learn outside my course modules.”

“Some departments have a restriction prevents students from other departments to register the classes. Also, there are many prerequisite courses to take 400 or 500 level classes. So, it is hard to take a class in foreign departments. Expanding knowledge is important for students.”

“Would like to explore more interdisciplinary opportunities.”

“Some subjects are very demanding. Even though it is a low credit hour subject but the workload is equivalent to a higher credit hour subject. 8-weeks courses are usually very compact and the instructor tends to go through the subjects roughly, leaving behind lots of questions to be answered even after the class has ended. Some graduate classes take more than 30 students, which is not as efficient as it would be for a graduate setting.”

Summary of Learning Findings

92% of graduate students expressed they were satisfied with their learning experiences, while 88% of graduates expressed satisfaction.

The common Learning themes among graduates and undergraduates in the open comments were excellence in academics and teaching/grading methods. A majority of graduate and undergraduate students were happy with the degree to which they have been challenged in their classes, and they commended the expertise of their professors. However, students gave teaching methods a mixture of positive and negative reviews. When discussing grading methods, many expressed that they wished that they could get more constructive and comprehensive feedback from their Teaching Assistants.

A Learning theme that was unique to undergraduate students was the quality of resources and facilities. Students generally appeared to be unhappy with inconsistencies in the quality of the facilities for different departments.

The unique Learning themes that arose in the open comments for the graduate students included lack of diversity, office hours and course restrictions/limitations. Students discussed a lack of diversity in both the cultures and nationalities represented in their programs. Students also thought that faculty members were not as accessible as they would like for them to be, and called for an increase in the number of professors at the university. Finally, graduates expressed a desire to have more opportunities to explore fields outside of their main areas of study, calling for academic departments to establish more interdisciplinary relationships with one another.

Findings: Student to Student Advice

Undergraduate Students

Get Involved

“Get involved as a freshman, and it's also not too late to get involved as a sophomore!”

“You have to be proactive in trying to get into a community. Try being involved in American culture groups, your home country, and other culture groups. It really helps the boredom of cornfields with a great variety, but remember keep like a few close real good friends.”

“Get involved with all that the university has to offer outside of the classroom. Studies are important and all but the true experience of student exchange lies within the people you meet and the adventures you have as you immerse yourself in a new environment”

“Get involved in RSO, to know people so you can learn from their experiences and have someone to ask questions.”

Step Out of Your Comfort Zone

“Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone to meet new people”

“Get involved, jump out of your comfort zone, and learn about other people's cultures with an open mind. Be open, be respectful.”

“It's okay to venture to some place outside of your comfort zone. Even if you're not sure what to do with your future, just take on the challenge. Someday you'll find out.”

“We are living in a different culture, and we are going to face seriously lots of difficulties as living here. However, encourage yourself walking out your comfort zone. Be socialized with all people around the world, and you will find a whole different world.”

On & Off Campus Housing

“Dedicate more time to researching housing options and talking to current students. Be aware of all deadlines and conditions of any contract.”

“The off campus housing is hard to find if you want something for less than a year so do not wait to apply for housing.”

Graduate Students

On & Off Campus Housing

“Invest time on researching housing options and carefully weighing them. Also, prepare for a high academic level.”

“Pick housing close to your department and close to campus in general. It is convenient and safer.”

Importance of a Good Advisor

“Be highly careful of choosing research area and adviser. That is all about graduate life and future career.”

“The Advisor is more important than the program.”

“First you have to make sure that the most important and determining relationship you will establish in Grad College is with your advisor. You better be sure that the person you are going to work with is supportive and has some idea about working with people from different cultures, and especially, non-native speakers/writers. That is paramount to guarantee your mental health which is something that can turn into an issue under the levels of stress you will be dealing for a good while.”

“Pick a good adviser and be proactive and brave.”

“Choose adviser wisely.”

Importance of English Language Skills

“Invest a lot of time mastering English proficiency. I am more than sure that I would take advantage of my program if I would have had a better level on speaking. Too many times I knew the right answer or a different perspective during the discussions, but the language barrier prevented me to contribute properly. It has been very frustrating.”

“It is much better to study and learn how to speak English and what the culture here is before coming here.”

“Language is really a challenge for international students. Make sure to be well-prepared for this challenge before study abroad.”

“Try hard to communicate more with students with different background, practice English every day.”

“It is so important to prepare language fluency.”

Summary of Advice Findings

When discussing the advice that they would give to fellow students, graduate and undergraduate students agreed that on and off-campus housing was an important topic. Both populations encouraged students to put an adequate amount of time into researching the housing options that would be best for them.

The advice themes that were unique to undergraduates included getting involved on campus and stepping out of one’s comfort zone. Undergraduates encouraged their peers to get involved early with student organizations in order to make the most out of university life outside of the classroom. They also encouraged students to open themselves up to new experiences and socialize with people who have backgrounds that are different from their own.

The graduate student open comments in the Advice section focused on the themes of finding a good advisor and focusing on getting a firm grasp on the English language. Graduate students described one’s relationship with their advisor as one of the most important factors contributing to their academic success. They also stressed the importance of the impact that one’s English proficiency can have on their ability to contribute within the classroom, and ultimately, their ability to thrive in their program.

Findings: Propensity to Recommend the University

Undergraduate Students

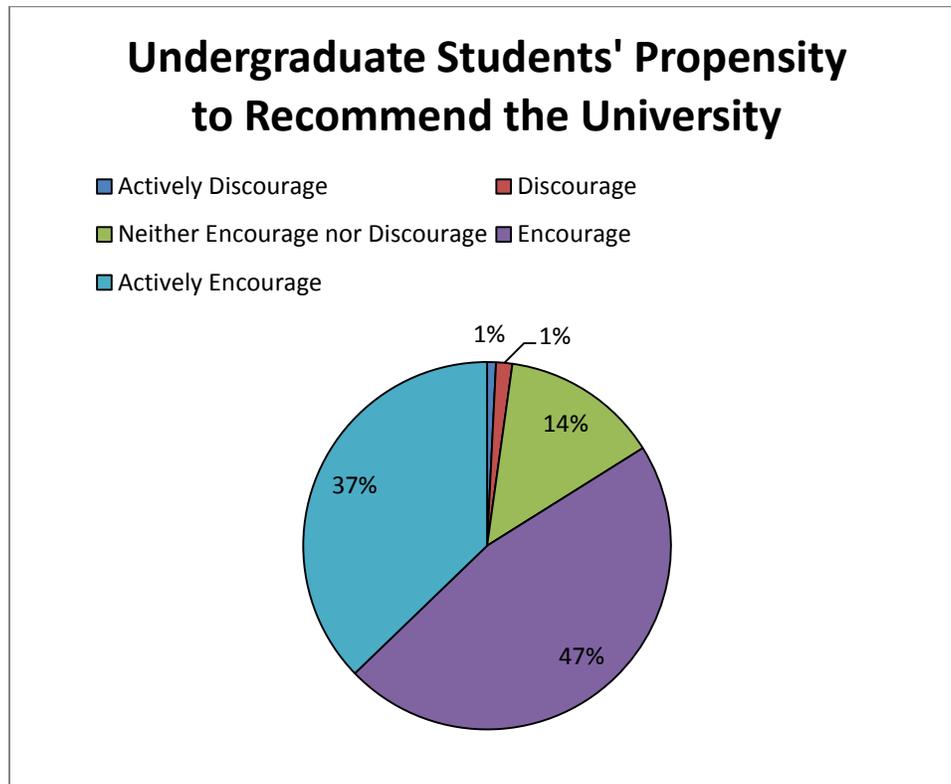


Figure 9. Undergraduate Students Recommendations

Qualitative Recommendation Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Great Learning Environment

“The college has a holistic approach towards education and various aspects of college life. The learning experience is stellar.”

“It has great number of opportunities and provides a very welcoming and healthy learning environment”

Be Prepared for Cold Weather

“The university has quality teaching staff and is one of the best public schools in the US. Tuition is costly and the winters here can get harsh, but I think it is still worth it.”

“It's so hard to make real American friends here and the weather is too cold”

“The weather in Champaign-Urbana is not good for living.”

Graduate Students

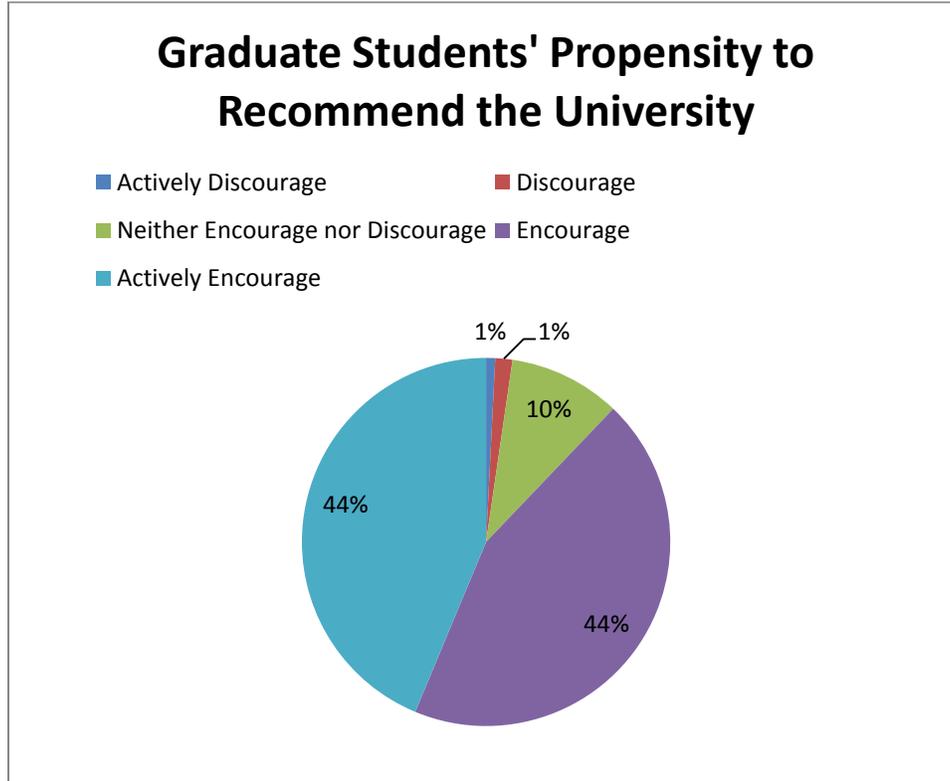


Figure 10. Graduate Students Recommendations

Qualitative Recommendation Themes and Relevant Quotes:

Great Learning Environment

“It’s a great learning environment overall.”

“The learning environment is very friendly and supportive. Campus facilities promote a healthy and enjoyable living.”

Excellent Academics

“The academic environment is the best.”

“Good institution academically and since I have been here there has been substantial improvement in the support services and overall academic programs at the institution.”

“University of Illinois is really an excellent school with everything excellent! Great academic reputation, various recreation facilities, great living environment, great university culture.”

Outstanding Professors

“Great university, great professors”

“Top level quality of education in terms of student body and faculty. Top level quality of research and research resources. Affordable living costs.”

“I am pretty satisfied with my studying experience here. I like American friends here, the culture in my school and my professors”

Cost of Living

“The quality of education you would acquire here and the level of challenge is promising. At the same time, the cost of living in the city is reasonable”

“Reasonable expense for living”

“The tuition is too expensive”

Summary of Recommendation Findings

While 84% of undergraduates said that they would recommend the University of Illinois to others, 88% of graduate students said that they would recommend the University.

While the undergraduates who said that they would recommend the University cited its wealth of academic opportunities, those who said that they would not recommend the University cited its harsh winters, the cost of tuition and their difficulty in making friends.

Graduate students who said that they would recommend the University also commented on its breadth of academic and research-related opportunities, as well as on its high-quality professors and the affordable costs of living. However, those who did not recommend the University argued that the costs of living were too high.

Three-Year Comparison

This section of the ISB report explores how student satisfaction rates changed over the three years during which the ISB survey was conducted. The section contains bar graphs and tables that compare the qualitative and quantitative findings taken from the Arrival, Living, Support and Learning sections of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ISB Surveys. The graphs break each of these four sections down into various specific elements of each student's experience, showing three bars each that represent the percentage of students that were satisfied with that element in a given year.

This section of the report also contains tables that explore the qualitative themes that graduate and undergraduate students chose to discuss in their open comments for the Arrival, Living, Support, Learning, Advice and Recommendations during the 2012, 2013 and 2014 surveys.

Overall 3-Year Comparison

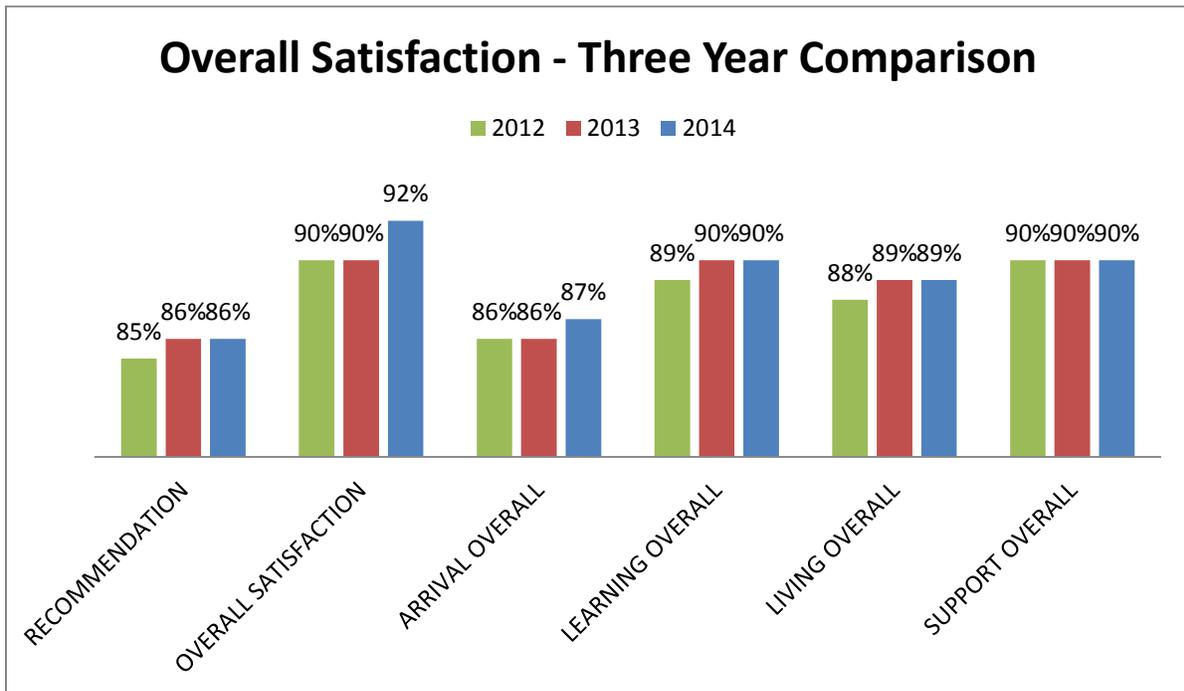


Figure 11. Three Year Comparison: Overall Satisfaction

3-Year Comparison: Living

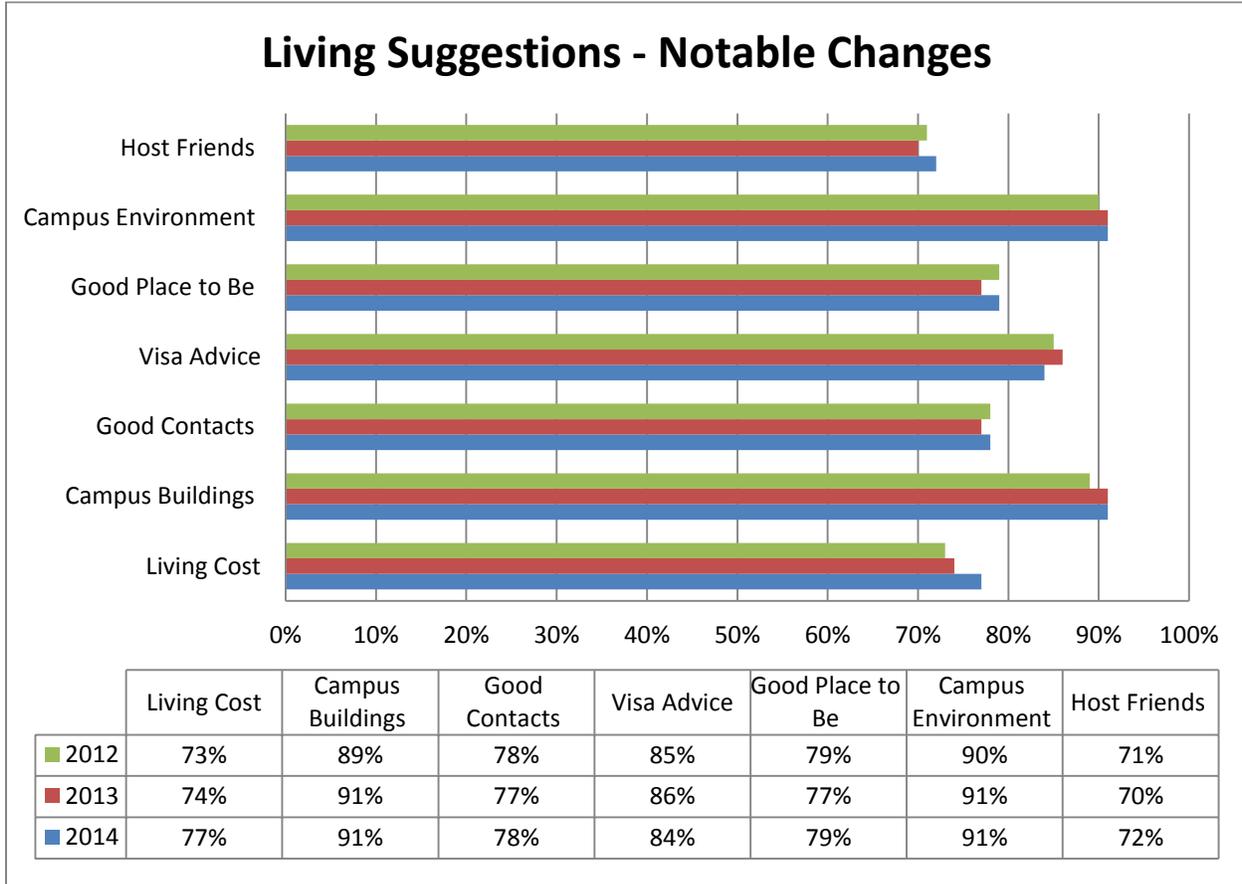


Figure 12. Three Year Comparison: Living

In the Living section of the ISB survey, the elements in which there were notable shifts in student satisfaction between 2012, 2013 and 2014 were Living Costs, Campus Buildings, the Ability to Make Contacts, the Quality of Visa Advice, the perception of the University of Illinois as a “Good Place to Be,” the Campus Environment and the Ability to Make Domestic Friends at the University. Over the three years, Living Cost was the only area in which there was a steady increase in satisfaction. Although the satisfaction rates for Campus Buildings and Campus Environment increased between 2012 and 2013, they remained steady in 2013 and 2014. “Good Contacts,” “Good Place to Be” and “Host Friends” all saw a dip in their satisfaction rates during 2013. Visa Advice was the only area in which the satisfaction rate was lowest in 2014.

3-Year Comparison: Arrival

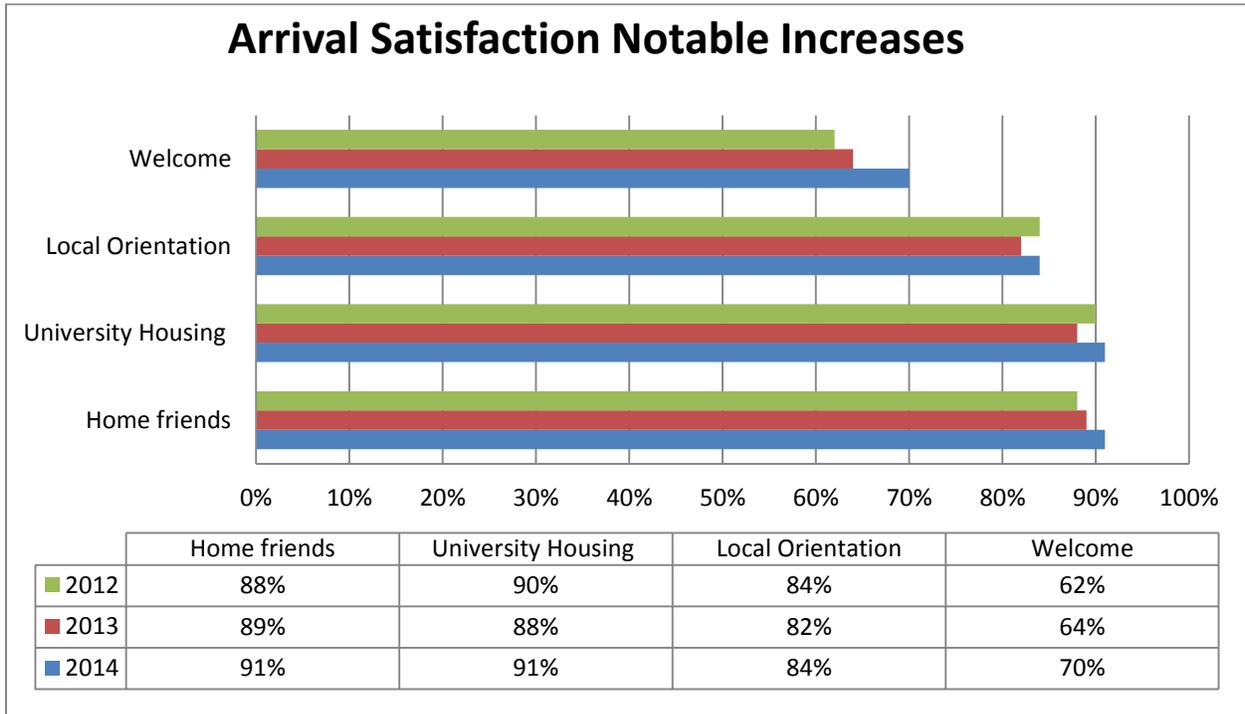


Figure 13. Three Year Comparison: Arrival

The elements in the Arrival section that saw the most notable shifts in their satisfaction rates from 2012-2014 were the Ability to Make Friends from Students’ Home Countries, the Quality of University Housing, the Ability to Get Oriented with New Local Surroundings, and the University’s Welcome Efforts. While “Welcome” and “Home Friends” both saw steady increases in 2012, 2013 and 2014, University Housing and Local Orientation both saw dips in satisfaction levels in in 2013.

3-Year Comparison: Learning

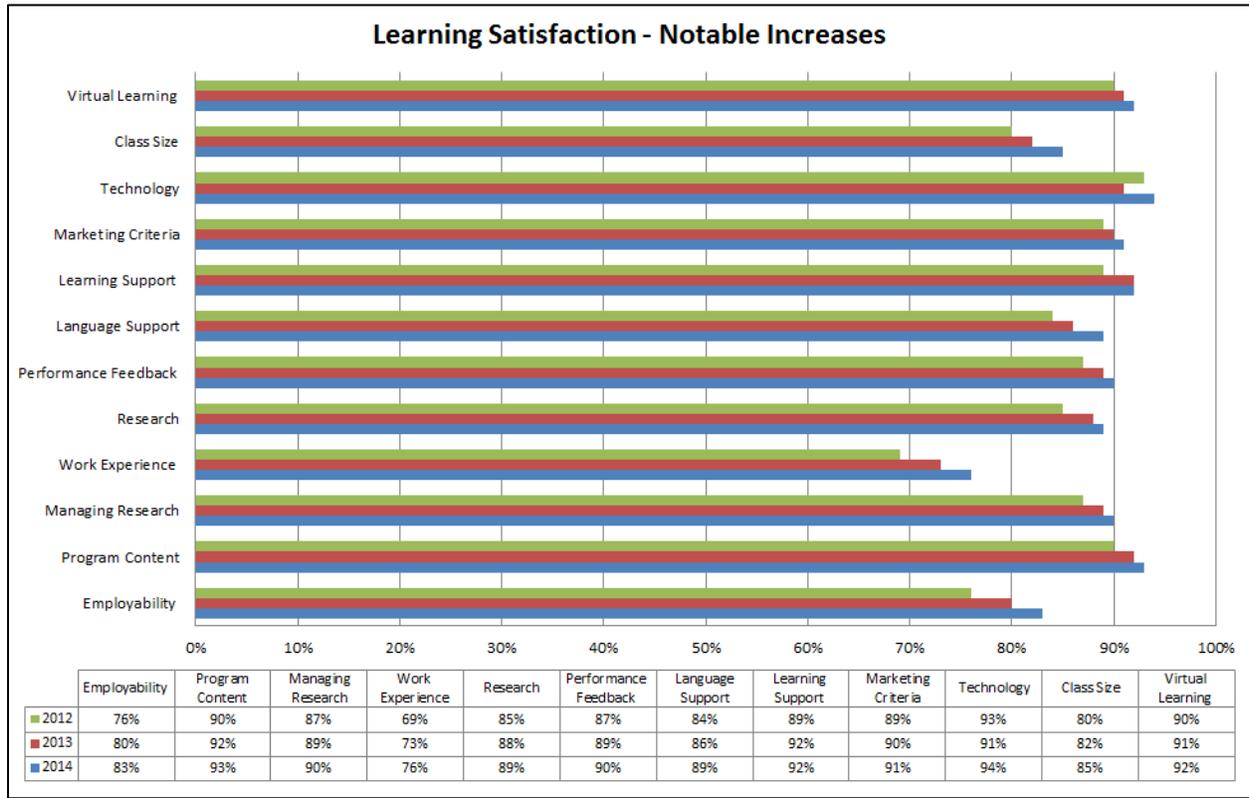


Figure 14. Three Year Comparison: Learning

The Learning category elements in which there were notable changes in satisfaction were Virtual Learning, Class Size, Technology, Marketing Criteria, Learning Support, Language Support, Performance Feedback, Research, Work Experience, Managing Research, Program Content and Employability. The elements with steady increases in satisfaction from 2012 to 2014 were Employability, Program Content, Managing Research, Performance Feedback, Language Support, Marketing Criteria, Class Size and Virtual Learning. While the satisfaction rates for Learning Support increased from 2012 to 2013, those rates remained steady from 2013 to 2014. Technology was the only element to see a dip in its satisfaction rate, which occurred in 2013.

3-Year Comparison: Support

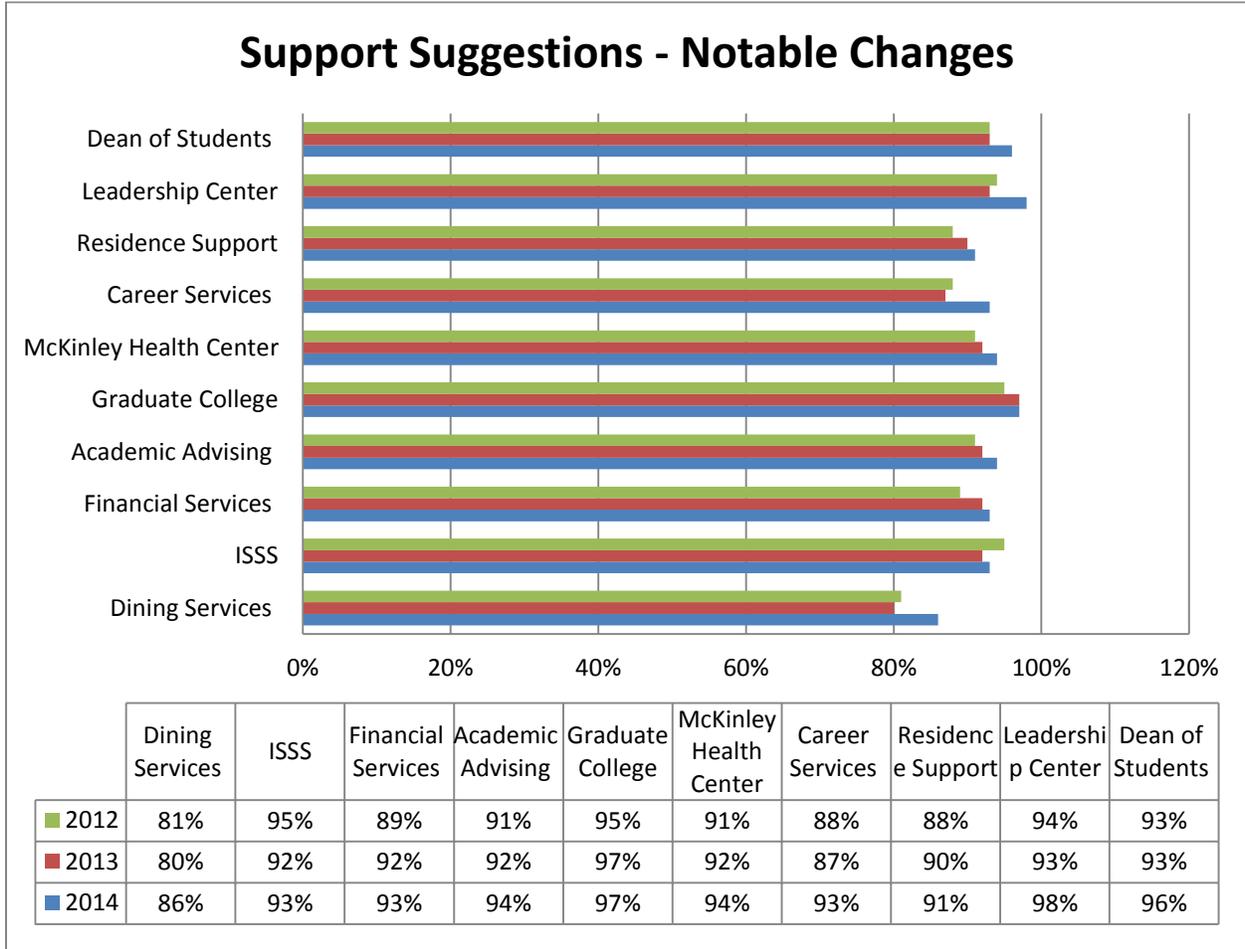


Figure 15. Three Year Comparison: Support

The elements of the Support category that saw notable shifts in satisfaction rates from 2012-2014 were the Dean of Students, the Leadership Center, Residence Support, Career Services, McKinley Health Center, Graduate College, Academic Advising, Financial Services, ISSS and Dining Services. Financial Services, Academic Advising, McKinley Health Center, and Residence Support all saw steady increases in satisfaction from 2012-2014. Satisfaction with the Graduate College increased from 2012-2013 and remained steady from 2013-2014, while satisfaction with the Dean of Students remained steady from 2012 to 2013 and increased in 2014. ISSS, the Leadership Center and Career Services saw dips in satisfaction in 2013.

3-Year Comparison: Qualitative Data

Our analysis of the qualitative data from the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ISB Surveys revealed that there were several themes that recurred in the open comments across the three years during which the survey was conducted.

Arrival Qualitative Themes			
	2012	2013	2014
Recurring Themes across all three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No greeting at airport • No transport from Chicago 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for airport pickup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O'Hare Shuttle
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing Orientation, or not knowing about it • Orientation not useful or not interesting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation 	
Recurring Themes between 2013 and 2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information received from the University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing New Student Information
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems/confusion registering for classes 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration
Single Year Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Situations • If they knew someone it was easier to be here • If they had been in the US before it was easier 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Local Transportation • Arrival on Campus

Living Qualitative Themes			
	2012	2013	2014
Recurring Themes across all three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living – too expensive • Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costly University housing • Safety concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances and Affordability • Security
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability (needing to be more green) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sustainability 	
Recurring Themes between 2013 and 2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of integration into US culture and with US students 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Life
Single Year Themes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unreliable internet service in University buildings • Need for prayer rooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing

Support Qualitative Themes			
	2012	2013	2014
Recurring Themes across all three years			
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer service 	
Recurring Themes between 2013 and 2014			
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student insurance is confusing and expensive Not knowing where to find information on basic needs and structures in the US and support services at the university (insurance, medical, taxes) Campus recreation and university library received very positive comments 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insurance Support Services Academic Support Financial Support Health and Fitness
Single Year Themes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved food options in University dining halls 	

Learning Qualitative Themes			
	2012	2013	2014
Recurring Themes across all three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmingly positive learning experiences • Poor teaching quality* • Poor and out-of-date facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall satisfaction • Teaching inconsistencies • Need for facility improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellence in Academics • Teaching and Grading Methods • Quality of Resources and Facilities
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2013			
Recurring Themes between 2013 and 2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty taking classes outside of academic program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Restrictions
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics and bureaucracy at departmental levels 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department Limitations
Single Year Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited work opportunities • Class size – too large • Cultural adaptation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Issues • Difficulties with learning platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office Hours • Lack of Diversity

Recommendation Qualitative Themes			
	2012	2013	2014
Recurring Themes across all three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality of education • Campus resources and support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality academics • Great library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent Academics • Great Learning Environment
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation of the university and prestige 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity is valued on campus 	
Recurring Themes between 2013 and 2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality faculty • Research opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding Professors • Great Learning Opportunities
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus and Champaign-Urbana community 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Living on Campus and in the Community
Single Year Themes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be Prepared for Cold Weather

Advice Qualitative Themes			
	2012	2013	2014
Recurring Themes across all three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more English learning opportunities • Importance of getting involved outside the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of English • Get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of English Language Skills • Get involved
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More events with domestic students for first-year international students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make friends from other cultural backgrounds 	
Recurring Themes between 2013 and 2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of a good advisor
Recurring Themes between 2012 and 2014			
Single Year Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create mentor program to facilitate social and English opportunities • More comprehensive pre-arrival orientation or information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step out of your comfort zone • On & off campus housing

Three-Year Comparison Summary

In the Arrival open comments, students discussed their experiences with arriving at the airport each year. While the majority of the 2012 and 2013 comments expressed disappointment in the fact that there was no airport pick-up service, in 2014, ISSS launched the O'Hare shuttle services, which led to an increase in the number of positive airport-related comments among undergraduates that year. However, among some graduate students, there was disappointment in the fact that the shuttle service started so late in the summer, as this meant that students who needed to arrive on campus earlier to begin their research assistantships could not take advantage of the service.

The themes that were discussed during all three years within the Living section were the cost of living and campus security. Students were generally upset with the costs of housing and meal plans at the University, and some wished to see an increase in safety measures taken on campus.

In the Support section, the themes that concerned the students appeared to vary each year, leading to there being no common themes across all three years in this section.

In the Learning section, the themes that were discussed in all three years of the survey included both positive and negative learning experiences, as well as the need to improve learning facilities. While some students had favorable opinions about their academic experiences, others questioned the effectiveness of the teaching methods used by their professors and teaching assistants. In addition, many students wished to see more consistency in the quality of facilities designated for different departments.

Within the Recommendations section, students consistently mentioned the high quality of academics and the great learning environment as reasons for being willing to recommend the university to others.

Finally, when asked to give advice to their peers, each year, students discussed the importance of building their English language skills and the importance of getting involved on campus. Students stressed the need for their peers to improve their language skills in order to make it easier for them to make the most out of their opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. They also urged their peers to get involved with activities and groups on campus as early as possible in order to adjust to campus life quicker and make more friends.

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Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

