

2017/Fall

S T **A** M P

Graduate Student Quality of Life

International Student Report



Graduate Student Life

Quality of Life Survey: International Students

Overview

Graduate Student Life provides opportunity for University of Maryland graduate students to connect and build community, connects graduate students to needed resources, and advocates for graduate student issues. In spring 2017, a survey was disseminated to all graduate students at the University of Maryland via an open link; 1,712 useable responses were collected. For the analyses included below, only those students who indicated they were full-time students are included (n = 1,303). Of these, 265 (31%) are international students; in fall 2016, 34% of the graduate student body were “foreign” according to federal reporting categories tracked by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment; as this is higher than the percent of survey respondents who reported that they are an international student, care should be taken in interpreting the results as they may not accurately reflect the demographics of the graduate student body.

See Appendix for rationale of data analysis decisions and notes.

International Student Respondents



When you see astericks throughout the report, this indicates there is a statistically significant difference between the groups.

Highlights

- International students appear to be more concerned with locating resources prior to starting their coursework. On every resource included on the survey, international students expressed these were statistically more important prior to starting their coursework than their non-international peers.
- International students reported engaging in Graduate Student Life events at higher rates than their non-international peers.
 - Of note, international students reported participating in the Monthly Social Series at almost twice the rate of non-international student respondents (16% v. 8%).
- Just over one in four (26%) of all graduate students do not know the Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) office in Stamp exists; 33% of international students did not know MICA exists.
- International students reported statistically higher levels of agreement on both sense of belonging subscales: support & safety and connection.

Findings

Resources

Included on the survey were a number of items regarding resources; specifically, respondents were asked to consider how important specific resources were prior to beginning coursework. Across **all** items, international students reported these items were statistically more important than non-international students.

Importance of Resources Prior to Enrolling



Items above asked on a 5-point scale from “not at all” to “extremely” important; percent shown includes “very” and “extremely” important

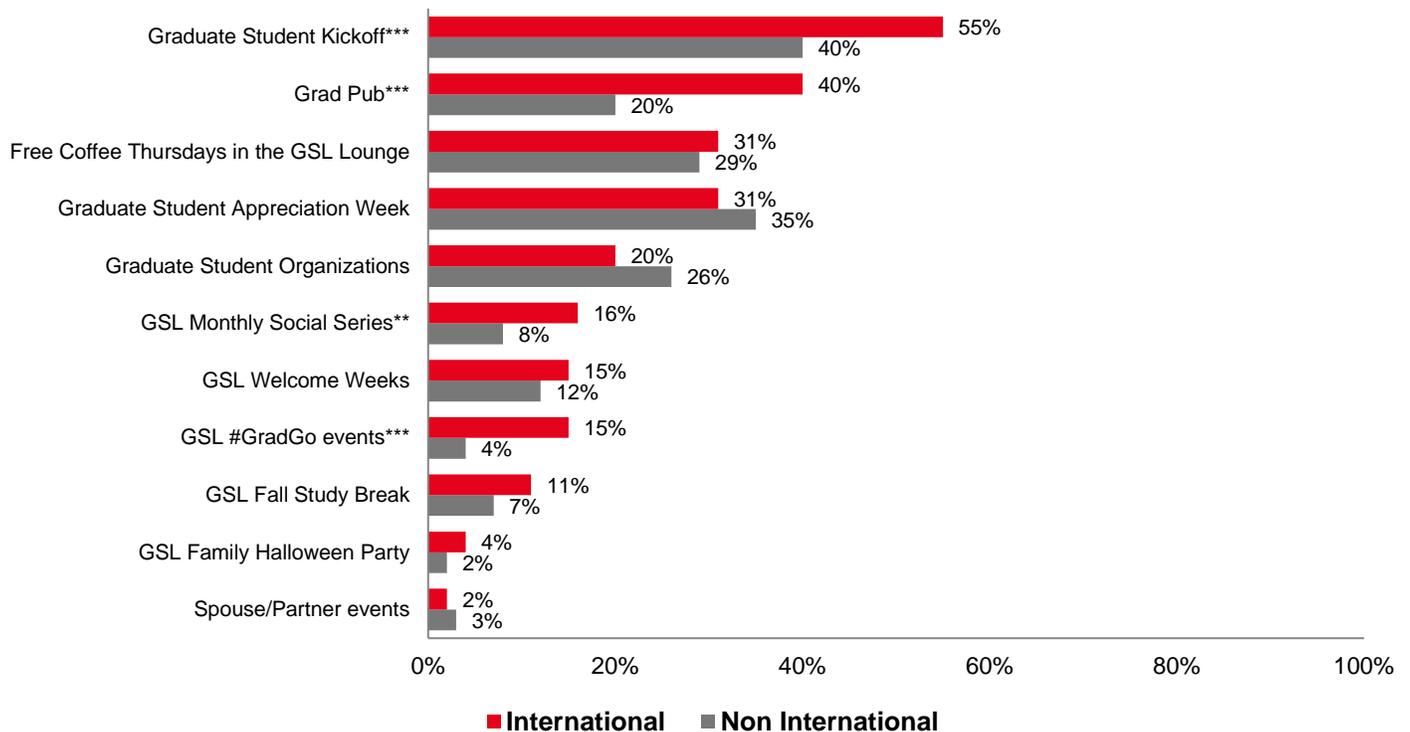
The survey was administered at the end of the spring 2017 semester; respondents had therefore been enrolled on campus for at *least* one semester. Respondents were asked to indicate how valuable they consider a number of resources or programs. International students expressed different value from non-international students of the following resources:

- Financial support provided by the Graduate School^{***} (68% of international students found these “very” valuable v. 80% of non-international students)
- Fellowships provided by the Graduate School^{***} (63% of international students v. 74%)
- Tax Assistance Program^{**} (53% of international students v. 29%)
- Resource Fairs^{*} (33% of international students v. 15%)
- Community/social programs^{*} (28% of international students v. 19%)
- Graduate School campus-wide orientation^{**} (27% of international students v. 13%)

Involvement on Campus

When comparing those respondents who indicated they were international students with those who were not, some interesting differences emerge regarding their on-campus involvement. Presented with a list of potential events and activities in which students could be engaged, **international students reported that they engaged in Graduate Student Life events at higher rates** than other students. This increased involvement is not true when you examine events *not* coordinated by Graduate Student Life. That is, international and non-international students participate in events not coordinated by GSL at equal rates. Below is a table of selected events for which respondents were asked if they had attended. Those events which saw statistically different proportions of international students compared to non-international students are Graduate Student Kickoff, Grad Pub, GSL Monthly Social Series, and GSL #GradGo events.

Event Participation

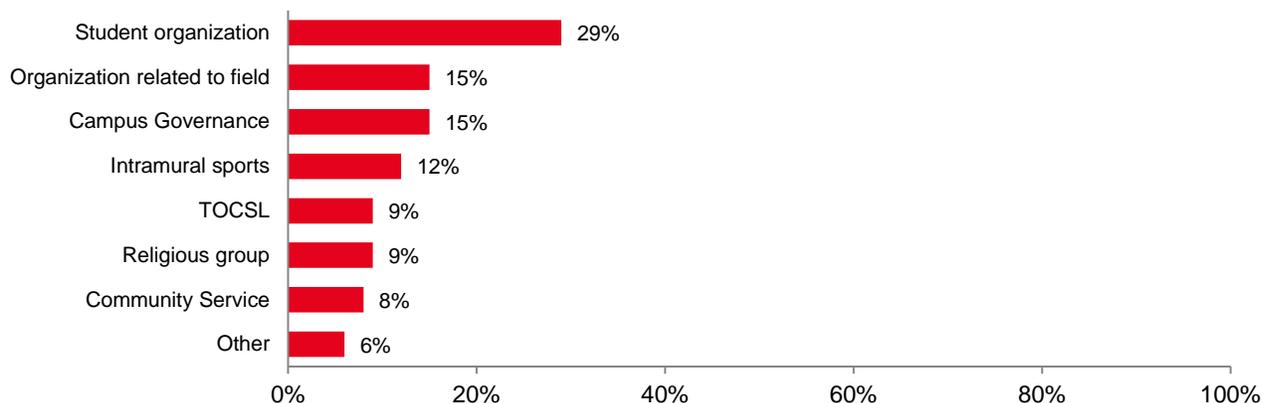


Other events which saw different levels of engagement from international and non-international students are:

- Career Development Workshops*** (45% of international v. 23% of non-international)
- Diversity related events*** (9% of international v. 21%)
- Graduate Student Legal Aid Lunch & Learn seminars*** (15% of international v. 7%)
- Graduate School Orientation** (57% of international v. 45%)

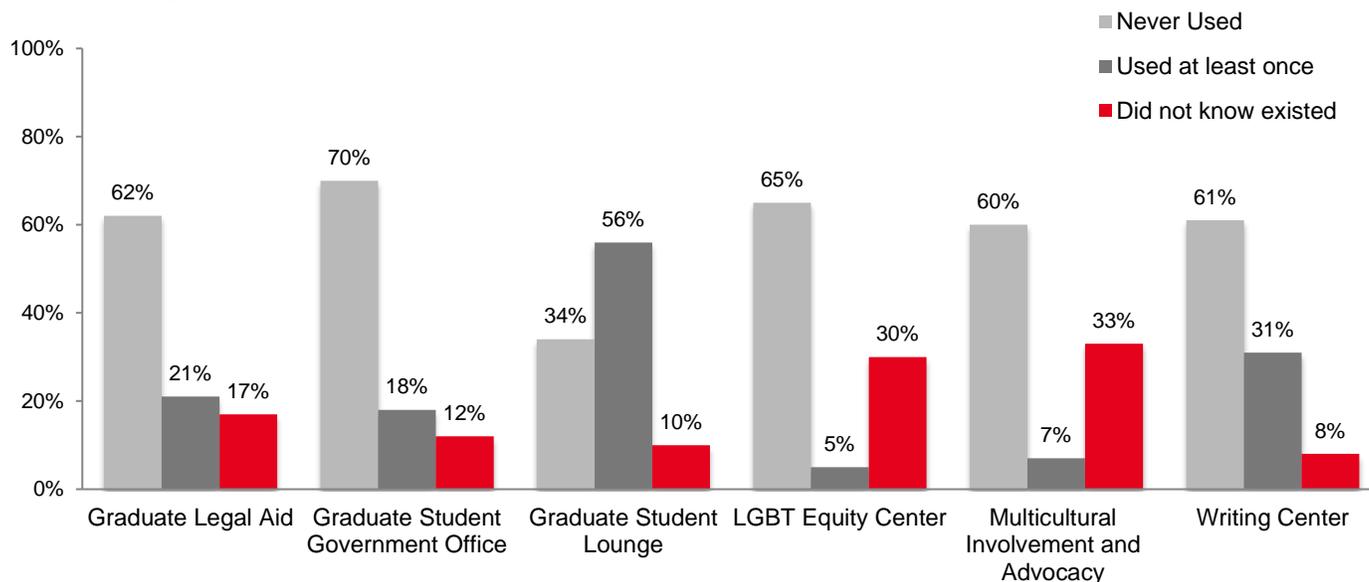
Respondents were also asked about their frequency of engagement in specific types of organizations and with specific spaces on campus.

Involvement once a month or more: International Students



Items asked on a 6-point scale from “never” to “daily”; results above include four categories ranging from “once a month” to “daily”

Service/Space use: International Students



Shown in the graph above, the Graduate Student Lounge is one of the most frequently used spaces included on the survey; only 10% of international student respondents had not heard of this space. This is compared to Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA), which 33% of international students reported they did not know existed.

A similar percent of international students did not know the LGBT Equity Center existed (30%). Of note, 98% of international students do not identify as transgender and 11% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning. Of those international students within the LGBTQ community (n = 29), 21% indicated they have used the LGBT Equity Center while 31% did not know it existed.

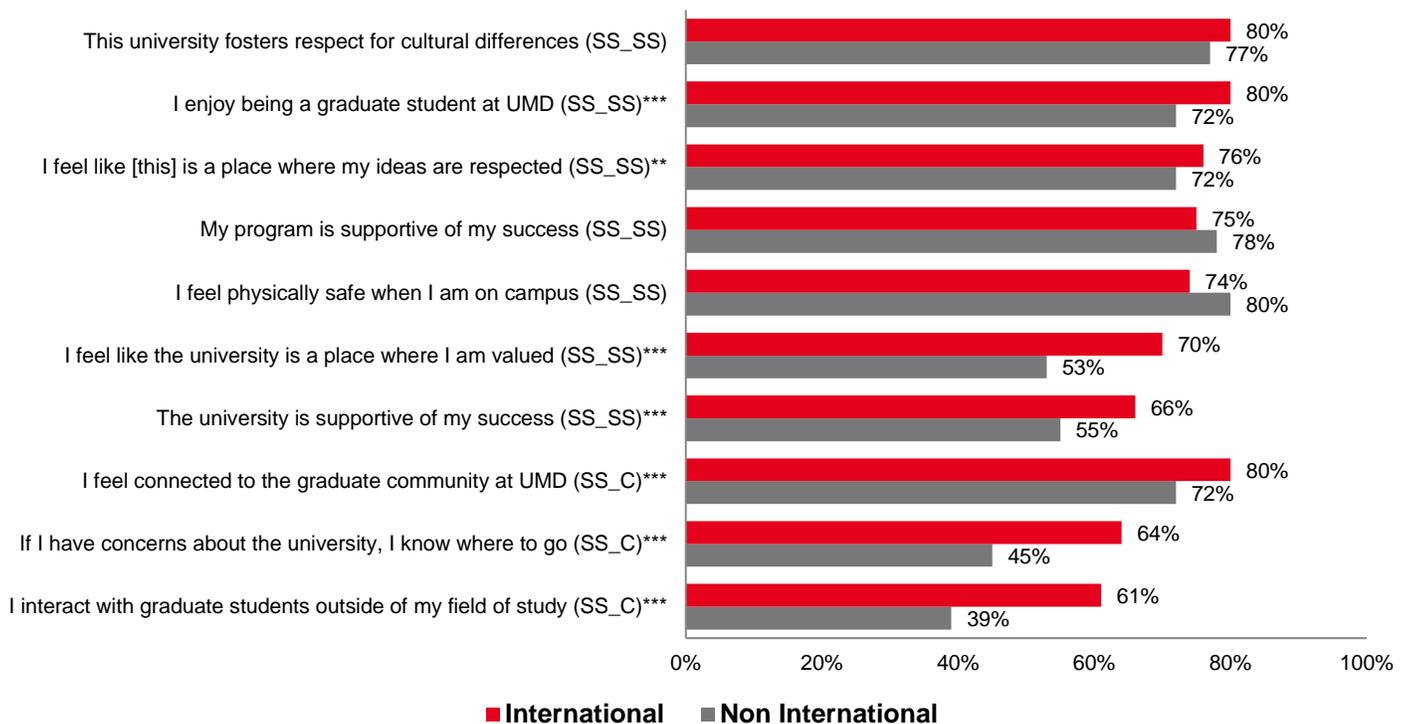
Respondents were asked why they were not engaged on campus. Only 8 international students responded to this item; two indicated they were online students and not on the College Park campus, three responses mentioned students work schedule being an inhibitor to engagement.

Students were also asked what types of student organizations they would like to see on campus. Of international student respondents, 73 responded to this question. The top three categories referenced by international students were: 1) physical health related student organizations such as yoga, dance, running (15 responses), 2) identity-based student organizations such as an international student organization (14 responses), and 3) arts/music/film related organizations (13 responses). Student responses could appear in more than one category.

Sense of Belonging

Ten items were included on the survey to explore students' sense of belonging and connectedness to campus. These items were reduced to two subscales: (1) Support and Safety (SS_S below) and (2) Connection (SS_C below; see Appendix for more information). Compared to non-international students, international students reported that they have higher feelings of connection as well as support and safety. For certain individual items, the difference in the percentage of students agreeing with the statement is stark; specifically, while 61% of international students indicate they interact with graduate students outside their field of study, only 39% of their non-international peers agree with this statement. Given the findings presented earlier in this report regarding frequency of participation in social events on campus, this result may not be surprising.

Sense of Belonging Items



Action Items/Recommendations

Based on the data presented above, there appear to be some fruitful opportunities to improve programming and resource education efforts for international graduate students.

- As international students report being more concerned with resources than non-international students prior to beginning their coursework, Graduate Student Life may consider collaborating with International Students & Scholar Services to provide additional outreach over the summer to incoming international students, focusing on information tailored to their needs.
- Of interest, just over one in four graduate students has not heard of Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) in Stamp. While we can hypothesize many reasons as to why this might be so (e.g., students know the office as “MICA” and did not know the full name), Graduate Student Life may want to explore developing a deeper collaboration with MICA.
- Similarly, about one in three international graduate students within the LGBT community did not know the LGBT Equity Center existed; this compares to 18% of all LGBT full-time graduate students and 21% of all full-time graduate students. It appears the LGBT Equity Center may be another fruitful collaboration for Graduate Student Life to develop.

Limitations

- As students responded to the survey at the end of the academic year, they may have forgotten the names of events they had attended. As a result, interpretation of these items may not be accurate.
- Some respondents may have been on campus for a number of years; while they may have indicated that they attended events such as the Graduate School Orientation, they may not have attended this event during the current academic year.

Appendix

Data Analysis Decisions

University of Maryland International Definition

The University of Maryland defines an international student (i.e., race/ethnicity is coded as “foreign” in the data warehouse) as those students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents. For this project, students’ self-reported whether or not they were international students. There are a number of situations where students may not be “international” *and* not meet the colloquial definition of a “U.S.” student (e.g., those with green cards). To make clear this distinction and ensure this category is more inclusive, these students are referred to as “non-international” students.

Analytical Sample

The analytical dataset included in this report is limited to full-time graduate students only. Of international students, 92% are full-time students compared with 71% of non-international students. As part-time graduate students may have additional commitments away from campus that prevent them from fully engaging in events and programs offered, these students were removed. This allows us to be more confident that the differences observed are not complicated by the enrollment status of students.

Further, those students selecting “prefer not to answer” when asked if they were international students have been removed from this analysis.

Statistical Significance

When conducting a high number of statistical analyses, the Type I error rate can be inflated; that is, we are more likely to see statistical differences simply because we are conducting a lot of tests; some of the differences that are “statistically significant” may only be so as a result of chance. As such, throughout this report a more conservative threshold was used to determine if differences exist ($p < 0.01$).

Subscales

Subscales were created using a categorical principal components analysis with an oblique rotation. The items in each subscale are presented below along with Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of reliability. All items were asked on a 5-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Support and Safety ($\alpha = 0.854$):

- I enjoy being a graduate student at the University of Maryland.
- I feel physically safe when I am on campus.
- I feel like the university is a place where I am valued.
- My graduate program/department is supportive of my success as a graduate student.
- The university is supportive of my success as a graduate student.
- I feel like the university is a place where my ideas are respected.
- The university fosters respect for cultural differences.

Connection ($\alpha = 0.623$):

- If I have concerns about the university, I know where to go on campus.
- I interact with graduate students outside my field of study.
- I feel connected to the graduate student community at the University of Maryland.