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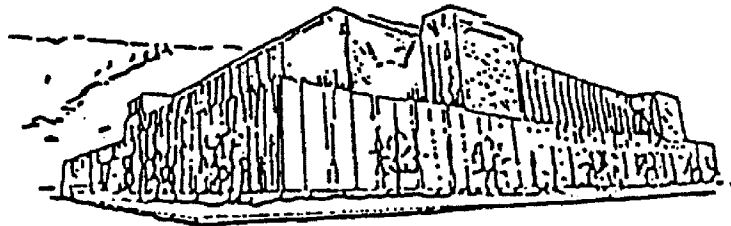
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1995 FOREIGN STUDENT SURVEY:
ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND SATISFACTION

by

Warren Gehl

B.S., Montana State University, 1988

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

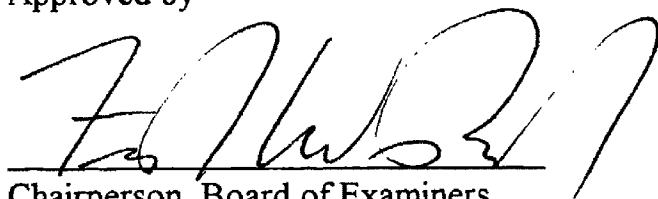
for the degree of

Master of Arts

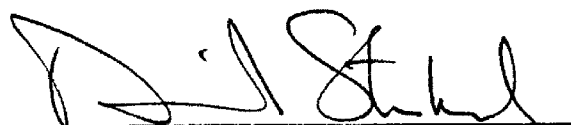
The University of Montana

1995

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Dean, Graduate School

8-23-95

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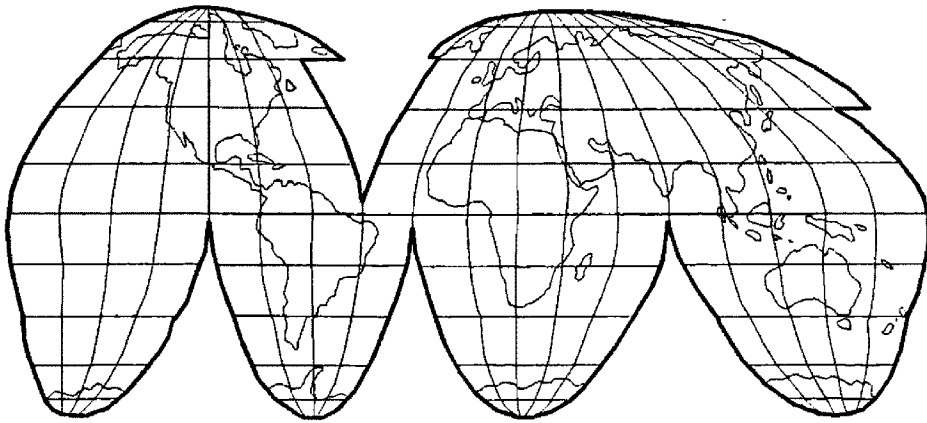
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Foreign Student Survey

Assessment of Needs and Satisfaction

**Conducted for
Foreign Student and Scholar Services
August, 1995**

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Belgrade, Montana 59714
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This paper reports the findings of a study which, by its nature, required the assistance and cooperation of several departments and many individuals at The University of Montana. Our sincere appreciation goes to all who contributed to this work beginning with the students who persevered through the five page questionnaire so that we could learn from their experiences. It was obvious from viewing their responses that many took great care in sharing their views with us. While it is not possible to list all of the people who lent a helpful hand to this undertaking, we would like to mention several individuals here as an expression of our sincere gratitude.

Ms. Eden Fessahaye and the other board members of the International Students Association graciously participated in a pretesting of the questionnaire and offered many valuable insights and ideas for the final version.

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Ms. Effie Koehn, director of Foreign Student and Scholar Services, and the staff of the foreign student office contributed a great deal of time and effort in helping the study take shape. This study came about as a result of their steadfast desire to enrich the experience of those who come to this country to attend The University of Montana.

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Dr. Fred Reed, professor of Sociology, provided his untiring support in every aspect of this project. Certainly, this study would not have been able to meet its goals as effectively without the benefit of his experience in social research and his willingness to contribute to the well being of international students at The University of Montana.

Warren Gehl

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the Spring Semester of 1995 a study was conducted to gain a better understanding of how the foreign students perceive their experiences at The University of Montana. A questionnaire was given to all enrolled foreign students to gather information about their personal backgrounds and their opinions regarding various experiences they have had at this school. The major findings were:

- ▶ Students were most satisfied overall with orientation programs, student faculty relations and their relationships with other foreign students. Ninety-two percent of the respondents were satisfied with their overall experience at The University of Montana.
- ▶ Students were least satisfied overall with the availability of financial aid programs, the availability of library resources and employment opportunities on campus.
- ▶ The most important items for students were academic advising, student-faculty relations and the relevance of courses to their needs and interests.
- ▶ Students ranked social experiences such as opportunities for involvement in the community and relationships with other foreign students as least important to them. Some social programs such as the Peer Assistant and Missoula International Friendship program appeal to a small but significant group of foreign students.
- ▶ Non-western students (whose region of origin is culturally dissimilar to the United States) tend to place a higher importance on requisite services such as health care, financial aid and student employment than western students. Non-western students also tend to place a higher importance on programs that promote social interaction such as the International Student Peer Assistant Program and the Missoula International Friendship Program.
- ▶ Canadians were less apt to see themselves as foreign students in terms of culture, but were burdened with legal matters concerning their alien status. Overall, Canadians were less interested in social oriented programs but benefitted most from information and services related to immigration and tax preparation.
- ▶ When asked about U of M attractions, most students listed attributes associated with a pleasant living environment such as the pristine natural surroundings and the friendly, relaxed atmosphere of campus.
- ▶ Students gave Foreign Students and Scholar Services consistently high marks when asked several questions regarding the quality of service they receive at the office. The students' opinions remained largely the same even when comparing such factors as age, sex and region of origin.

INTRODUCTION

The office of Foreign Student and Scholar Services is interested in the well-being of the foreign students who attend the University of Montana. This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of how well the needs of foreign students are being met and where the University can improve the services offered. This report addresses major facets of the university experience from the initial adjustments that students make at their new home in Missoula to meeting their basic needs such as housing and medical services as well as academic and financial needs. In addition, the study examines social areas of the students' lives including their interactions with Americans. The study also seeks to aid recruiting efforts by finding out what attracts international students most to the University of Montana. The final purpose of this study is to carry out the periodic assessment of the office of Foreign Student and Scholar Services.

METHODOLOGY

The information for this study was compiled by sending a five-page questionnaire (Appendix A) to all of the foreign students who were registered for classes at the university in the Spring semester of 1995. A cover letter explained the purpose of the survey and assured the recipient that their responses would remain anonymous. Those students who were enrolled in English language classes were given the survey in class by their instructors. A second mailing was sent to all foreign students a few weeks later as a reminder. Of the 457 students registered, 230 completed and returned the survey for a response rate of just over 50%.

The questionnaire was designed to gather personal background information such as the age and sex of the respondents and asked for their opinions regarding their experiences at the university. In the questionnaire, students were given a list of thirty

services and experiences and asked to respond to each item with “very satisfied”, “satisfied”, “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied.” A neutral option was omitted from the list of possible responses so that the participant would be forced to make a positive or negative evaluation when answering. Because of the limited sample size and the reluctance of students to choose the extreme response options, the range of responses was consolidated into “satisfied” and “dissatisfied” categories. For this report, those who marked either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” are described as satisfied with the item. Students were then given the same list and asked to give their opinions on how important each item was to them. They were given the choice of answering “more important”, “somewhat important” or “less important.” In a pre-test of the questionnaire, the response options were labeled as “very important”, “somewhat important” and “not important”. It became evident, however, that foreign students were especially reluctant to denounce any service as unimportant even when they did not use the service themselves. In order to elicit more diverse responses, the extreme choices were therefore replaced with “more” and “less” important. However, because answering “more important” places an item at the highest priority for the student, those items are described in this report as “very important.” The next section of the questionnaire asked students for written comments concerning the University of Montana as a whole. The students were encouraged to give both positive and negative opinions by first being asked to describe the main problem they have encountered at this school and then reporting the main attraction they would share with their friends when they return home. In the last section, students were asked to evaluate the office of Foreign Students and Scholar Services by indicating whether they agreed or disagreed with several statements about the staff and the services they provide. The students were then asked to write any comments they might have concerning the office. A complete list of the frequency distributions from the questionnaire is provided in appendix B.

It is important to note that the data collected do not represent a random sample of the foreign student population, therefore tests of statistical significance cannot be used

with any confidence. Chi-Square tests were used for the purpose of bringing out more information about the trends and relationships that the reader may find useful. For those who may be interested in the test results, significance levels are provided, however their interpretation must be weighed with the understanding that, while the survey was designed to provide a balanced and accurate representation of the foreign student population, the sample is not random.

This study has observed several instances where student perceptions and opinions vary according to background characteristics such as region of origin and age. Where Chi-Square tests have shown relevant and statistically significant relationships, those findings are included in this report. Chi-Square results may not be discussed where no significant relationship was found or where the results are not particularly informative for the reader.

DEMOGRAPHICS

While the foreign students at the University of Montana come from every region of the world, the majority of students come from Asia (58%) and Canada (21%). Thirteen percent came from Europe and only a few students came from Africa, Latin America and other regions.

In order to make informative comparisons, it has been useful to divide the students into two meaningful categories; students from more western regions of the world (those more culturally similar to the United States) and those from other regions. This division is based on similarities of student responses within categories, not on cultural, religious or other academically important dimensions. The western group categorized for this study includes students from Australia and New Zealand, Europe and North America while the non-western group includes students from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle

East regions. Sixty-five percent of students were from non-western regions and 35% were from western regions.

Region of Origin

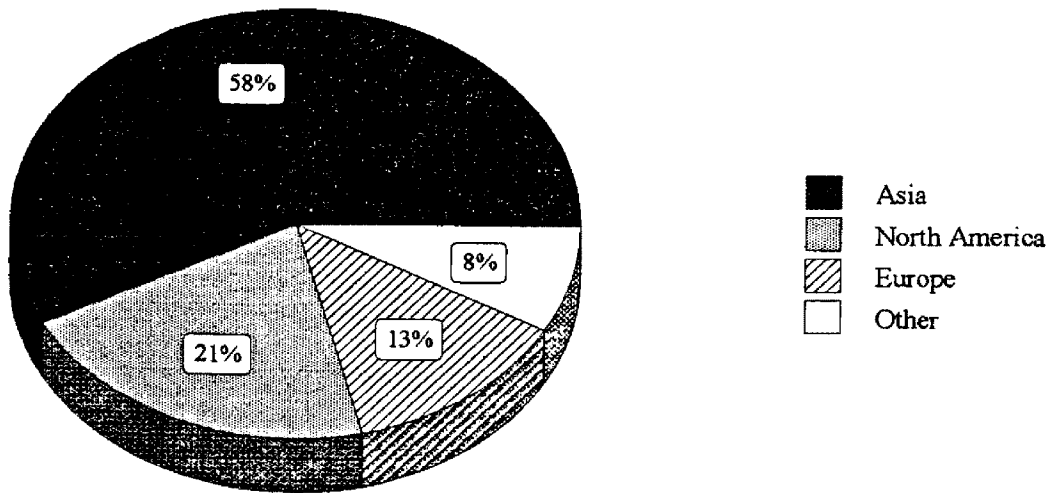


Figure 1 Distribution of respondents by their region of origin.

Virtually the same number of females and males responded to the survey (113 and 116 respectively) and the respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 47 with an average age of 25. Only 19% of the respondents were married, but most of those who were married (71%) had their spouses with them in Montana. Seventy-three percent of the respondents were undergraduates and 27% were graduate students. Most students were pursuing degrees from the college of Arts and Science (33%), Business Administration (30%) and Forestry (13%). Nine percent of students were majoring in Pharmacy and Health and 7% in Journalism. Only 6% were majoring in Education and 2% in Fine Arts.

MAKING THE TRANSITION

The initial obstacle that most foreign students experience is making the difficult move from their home environment to one that they are not accustomed to. In many cases, they are faced not only with a new scholastic environment as they first enter college, but they must also manage a new cultural environment that touches every part of their daily living. The university provides services and information before and after arrival to help make the transition easier for them.

The students were generally satisfied with the assistance the school gave them in making the transition. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents were satisfied with the pre-arrival information they received. More older students (over the age of 23) were satisfied with the pre-arrival information available than younger students ($p < .01$). Eighty-seven percent of older students were satisfied compared to 72% of the younger students. Also, more western students (87%) were satisfied with their pre-arrival information than non-western students (75%) ($p < .05$). Eighty-seven percent of the respondents were satisfied with the reception they received upon their arrival and 89% were satisfied with the orientation programs. Of the three services, students felt that the pre-arrival information was the most important assistance for them. Sixty-nine percent of all foreign students felt that pre-arrival information was very important. Only half (49%) felt that the reception upon arrival was very important and 56% indicated the orientation program was very important to them. (See figure 2) Those students from non-western regions placed a higher importance on the pre-arrival information than those from western regions ($p < .01$). Seventy-seven percent of non-western students felt that pre-arrival information was very important compare with 54% of western students. Opinions concerning the reception received upon arrival and the orientation programs were the same regardless of place of origin.

•

Presumably, those students who had some prior college experience in the United States or Canada would have the least difficulty becoming acclimated to the U of M. Almost a third (31%) had attended other colleges in the US or Canada prior to coming to the University of Montana. Most Canadian students (63%) had attended other colleges but only 13% of the European students and 24% of the Asian students had done so. However, opinions regarding these services did not differ significantly between those who attended other colleges in the U.S. or Canada and those who did not.

Making the Transition

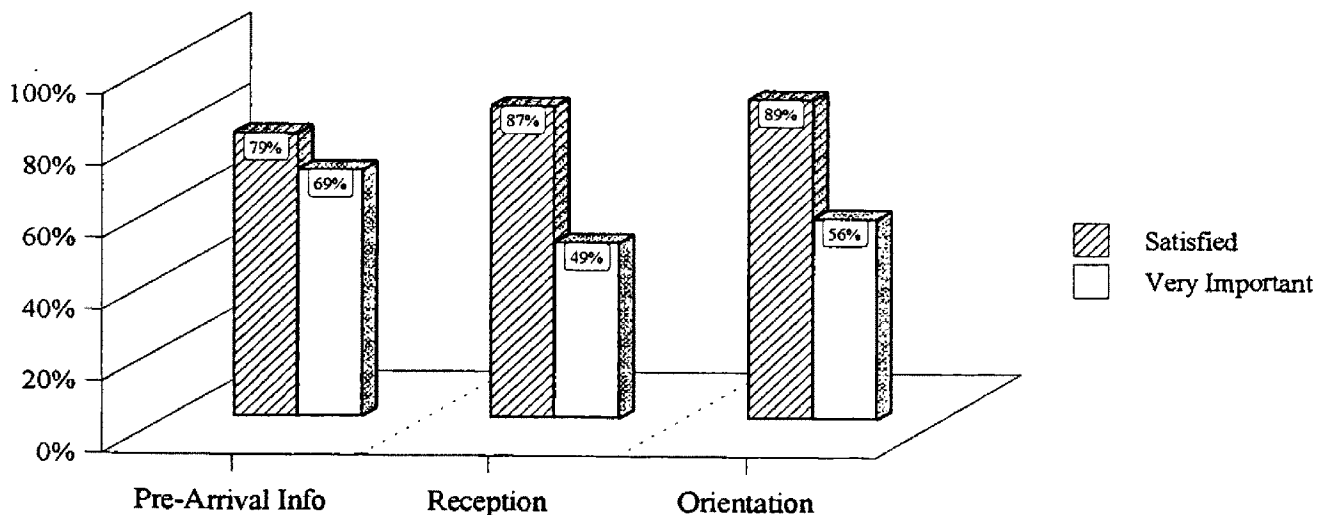


Figure 2 Students rate services designed to help them adjust to their new environment by satisfaction and importance.

BASIC NEEDS

While the students are attending school, they often rely on services provided by the university to meet their basic needs of housing, food and health care. While less than a third of foreign students surveyed live on campus, the majority of those students (78%)

were satisfied with their housing arrangements. Eighty-two percent of those who live in family housing also reported that they were satisfied with their housing. Those students who live on campus are required to purchase a meal plan with the food service as part of their housing agreement. Some students, however, were dissatisfied with the food service because they felt that their meal plans were too expensive.

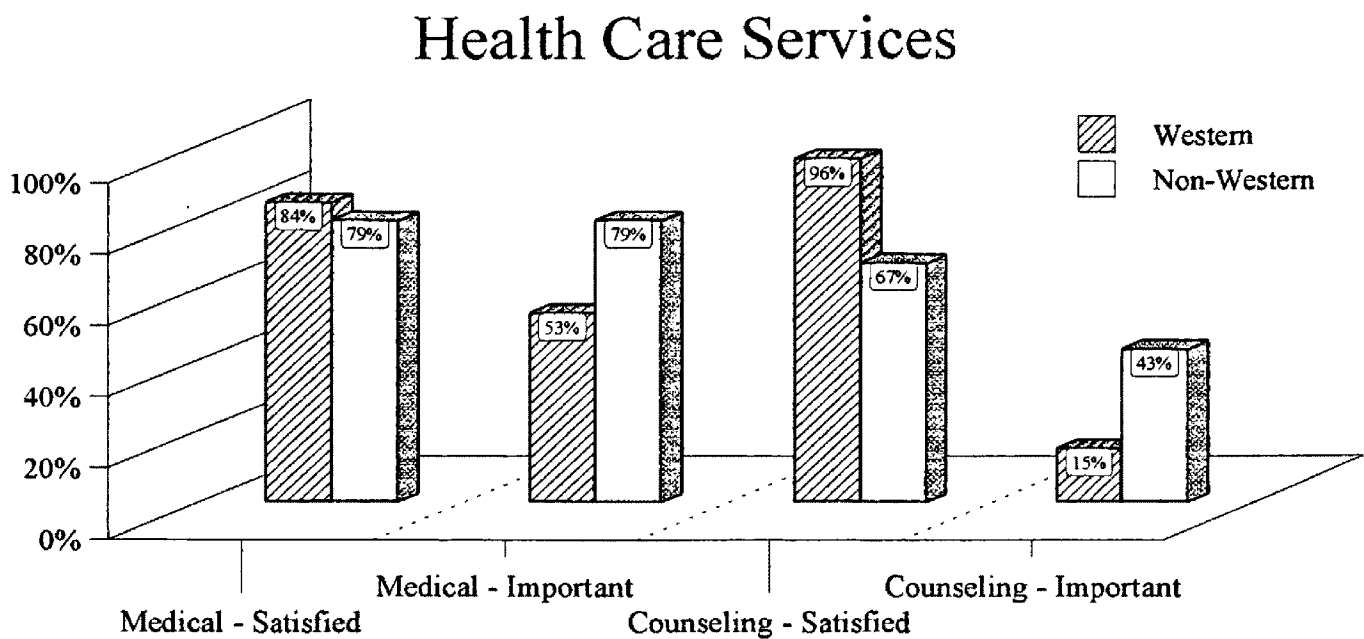


Figure 3 Western and Non-Western students rate aspects of health care services by satisfaction and importance.

Most students indicated they were satisfied with the health care services provided by the university. Eighty-one percent were satisfied with the medical care available. While half of the students indicated that counseling services for social and personal problems did not apply to them, 73% of those who gave an opinion were satisfied with the services. Sixty-nine percent felt that the health care services were very important while only 33% felt counseling was very important. More non-western students than western

students felt medical care and counseling were very important. Seventy-nine percent of non-western students felt medical care was very important compared to 53% of the western students ($p < .001$). Forty-three percent of non-western students felt counseling services were very important, but only 15% of western students agreed ($p < .001$). However, almost all (96%) western students who gave an opinion indicated they were satisfied with the counseling services available while 67% of non-western students indicated they were satisfied ($p < .01$).

ACADEMIC NEEDS

The key services that the university provides students are, of course, the academic programs and supporting services. Foreign students were satisfied overall with the academic programs and supporting services the university provides them. Seventy-two percent of the students were satisfied with the academic advising that they have received and 84% were satisfied with student-faculty relations. Interestingly, 78% of non-western students expressed satisfaction with their academic advising and only 60% of western students were satisfied ($p < .01$). However, this may be explained by the fact that a higher percentage of non-western students are graduate students and thus tend to be more satisfied with the academic advising they receive. Thirty-two percent of non-western students are graduate students compared to 18% of western students ($p < .05$). Among the graduate students, 86% were satisfied with the academic advise available to them compared to 67% of the undergraduates ($p < .01$). Seventy-six percent of the respondents were satisfied with how relevant the courses were to their needs. Here, the western students seemed to be most satisfied. Eighty-six percent of western students were satisfied with how relevant courses were to their needs compared to 71% of the non-western students ($p < .05$). The academic service that rated lowest in satisfaction was the availability of library resources. Only 57% of the students were satisfied with the service. A higher percentage of undergraduate students (62%) were satisfied with the library

resources than graduate students (43%) ($p < .05$). More students from non-western regions (79%) felt that the availability of library resources was very important when compared to those from western regions (59%) ($p < .01$). Over half of the students (56%) did not evaluate the tutorial service on campus because it was not applicable to them, but of those who did, 70% were satisfied with the service. Older students (over age 23) and non-western students generally felt that the tutorial service was very important to them. ($p < .05$ and $.001$ respectively) Figure 4 compares some areas of academic service.

While the academic programs were generally viewed favorably, some foreign students have commented on problems they have had in class. A Malaysian student felt that “other students do not interact with us (foreign students) even though we try.” A student from India commented that it was somewhat difficult getting used to the informal atmosphere in class and participating in class discussions. He did add, however, that he appreciated the different approach to learning once he got used to it.

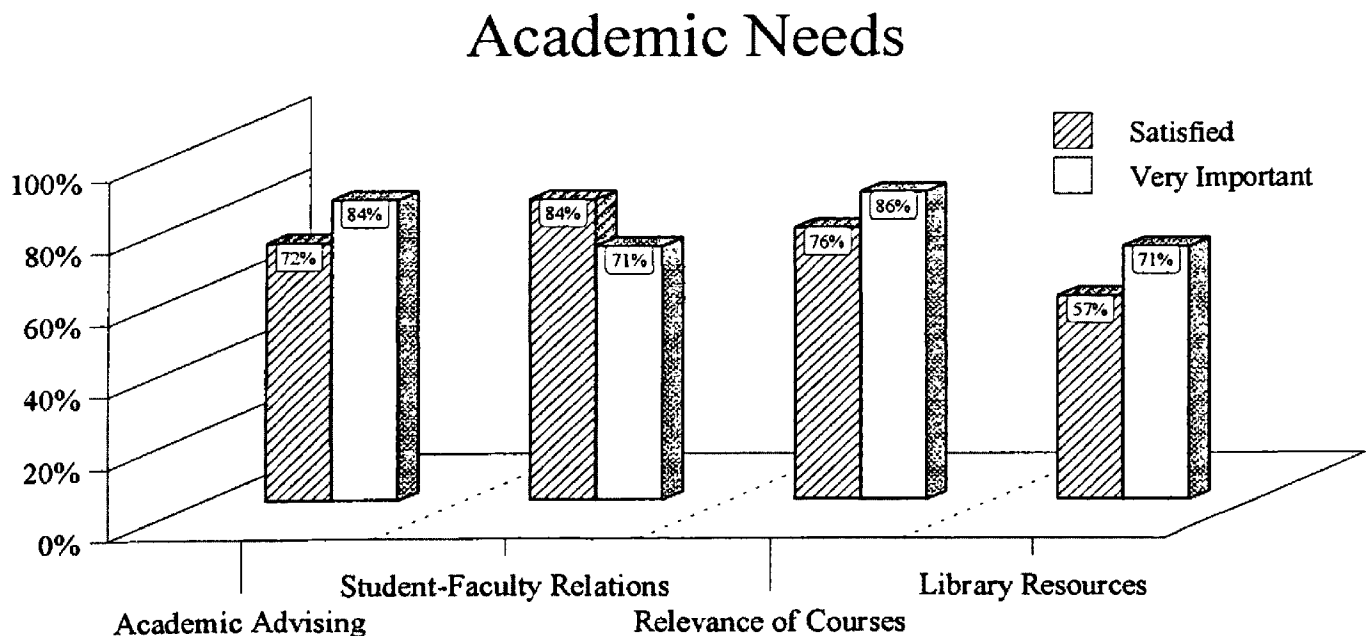


Figure 4 Students rank aspects of academic services by satisfaction and importance.

For many foreign students, going to school in the United States is an excellent opportunity to sharpen their English language skills. English skills are honed by the daily interactions students have with English-speaking people and formally through English classes designed to help foreign students who are not yet proficient in English. Although 74% have indicated that they are satisfied with the opportunities to improve their English skills at the university, some have expressed dissatisfaction with the English as a Second Language courses. One Chinese student felt his reading and writing skills were improved by taking regular courses rather than ESL courses. Another student did not feel the graduate students who teach ESL classes are effective as teachers. A higher percent of male students (82%) were satisfied with the opportunities to improve their language skills compared to 67% of the female students ($p < .05$). Those students from western regions of the world were more likely to be satisfied (96%) with opportunities to learn English than those from non-western regions (69%) ($p < .01$). Those who have been at the university for eighteen months or less were more likely to be satisfied than those who had been attending for a longer period of time (82% and 64% respectively)($p < .05$).

FINANCIAL NEEDS

While a student is attending classes, he or she must have the means to pay for daily living expenses in addition to the cost of tuition and books. Many foreign students are especially troubled by financial pressures because they have more expenses such as travel costs, yet fewer job opportunities than American students. Although the university provides some jobs for students who need help in meeting their expenses, many of those jobs are classified as work-study positions and foreign students are not eligible for work-study.

Fifty-one percent of the students were satisfied with the employment opportunities on campus and 53% felt that they were very important. Students from western regions

were more likely to be satisfied with employment opportunities than those from non-western regions of the world ($p < .01$). Seventy percent of western students were satisfied compared to 43% of non-western students. Yet, a higher percentage of students from non-western regions felt that employment opportunities were very important (60%) compared to those from western regions (40%) ($p < .001$).

Only 30% of students were satisfied with the availability of financial aid programs at the university and just over half (54%) felt that financial aid was very important. Undergraduates tend to be far less satisfied with the financial aid programs than graduate students ($p < .01$). While 53% of the graduate students reported being satisfied, only 23% of the undergraduates were also satisfied with financial aid. Sixty-seven percent of non-western students indicated that financial aid programs were very important and only 30.8% of the western students agreed ($p < .001$).

The Foreign Student and Scholar Services office provides some financial support to foreign students in emergency situations. Fifty-seven percent were satisfied with emergency support provided and 44% felt it was very important. Fifty-seven percent of non-western students indicated that financial support in emergency situations was very important compared with 21% of western students ($p < .001$).

Only a quarter of the students surveyed (27%) responded to the question regarding their experiences as teaching or research assistants. Of those who responded, 64% were satisfied with the experience. A higher percentage of non-western students (39%) felt that assistantships were very important compared with the western students (18%) however this seems to coincide with the fact that 32% of non-western students are graduate students compared to 18% of western students.

Financial Needs

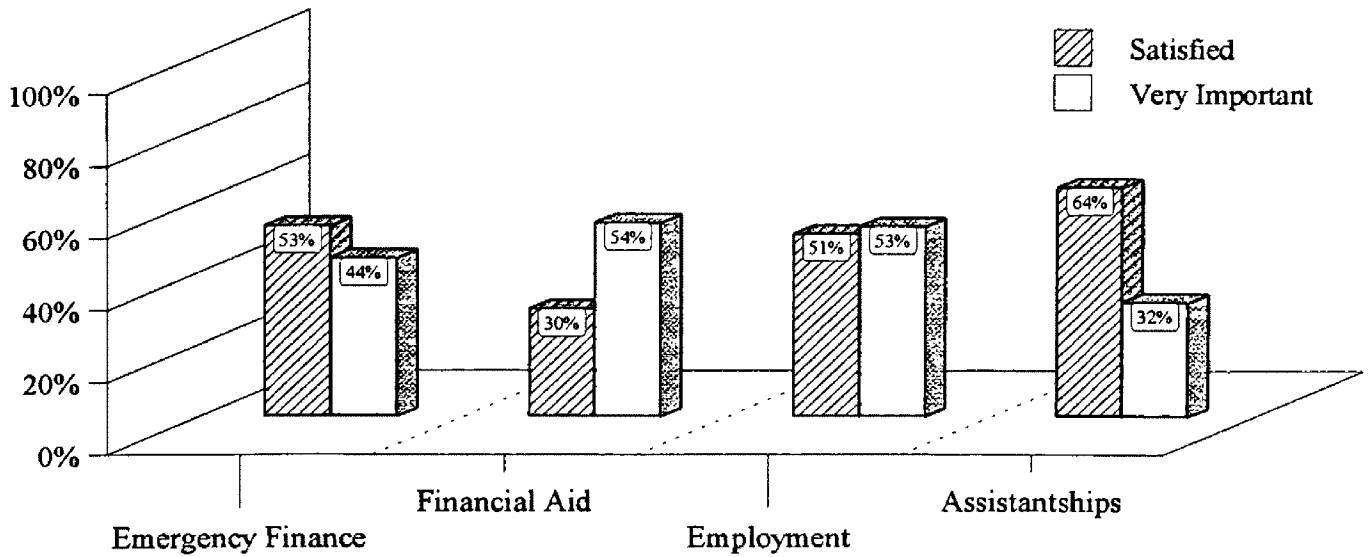


Figure 5 Students rank aspects of financial services by satisfaction and importance.

Financial Needs

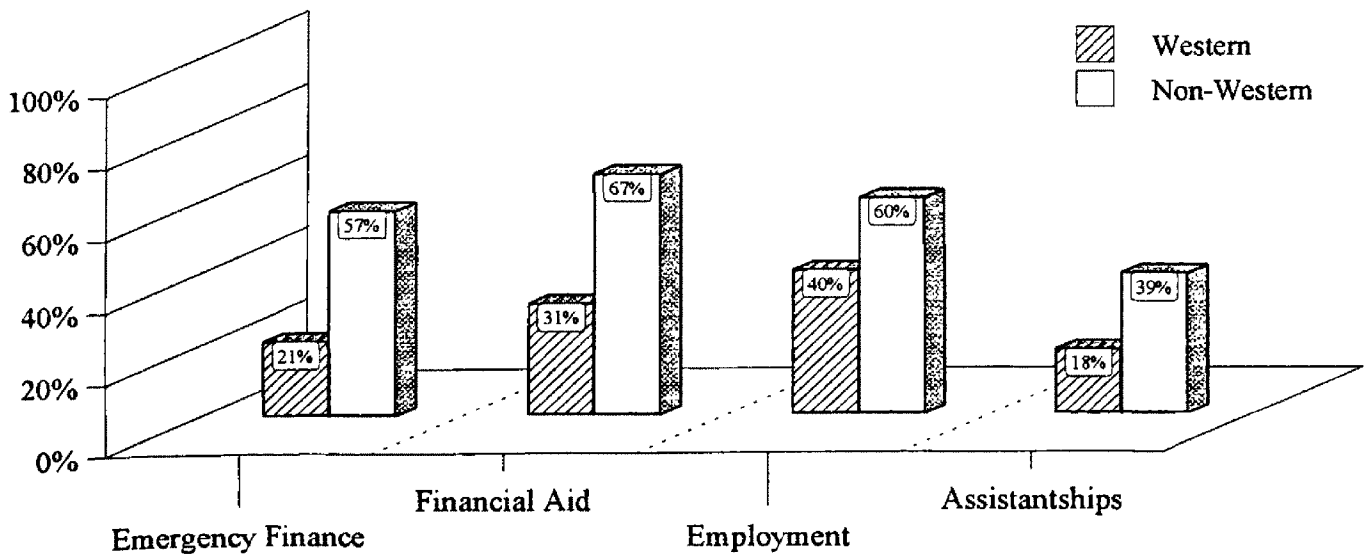


Figure 6 Western and Non-Western students rank aspects of financial services by importance.

SOCIAL NEEDS

The Foreign Student office recognizes the need for foreign students to interact socially with people in the Missoula community. The office therefore offers programs such as the Missoula International Friendship Program (MIFP) and the Peer Assistant program to help international students meet more local people. Twenty-one percent of the students surveyed were involved in MIFP. Non-western students were more likely to be involved in MIFP than western students ($p < .01$). Twenty-seven percent of non-western students and only 10% of western students were involved.

Foreign students generally felt that social aspects of their school experience were less important than academic and financial concerns, but non-western students placed a higher priority on their social experiences than western students. (See figure 7) Thirty-one percent of non-western students felt the Peer Assistant program was very important compared to 15% of western students ($p < .01$). Thirty-nine percent of non-western students and only 10% of western students felt that relationships with friendship families were very important ($p < .001$). Attitudes toward community involvement were more consistent among western and non-western students, but in keeping with the trend, non-western students felt involvement was more important. Forty-six percent of non-western students felt that community involvement was very important compared to 31% of the western students ($p < .01$). A much stronger difference of opinion is evident when comparing the importance of sharing one's culture with Americans. Forty-two percent of non-western students felt that opportunities to let Americans know about their country were very important compared to only 14% of the western students ($p < .001$). Interest in the Missoula International Friendship Program corresponds with the participation rates among western and non-western students. Twenty-seven percent of non-western students felt that the MIFP was very important and only 13% of western students agreed ($p < .001$).

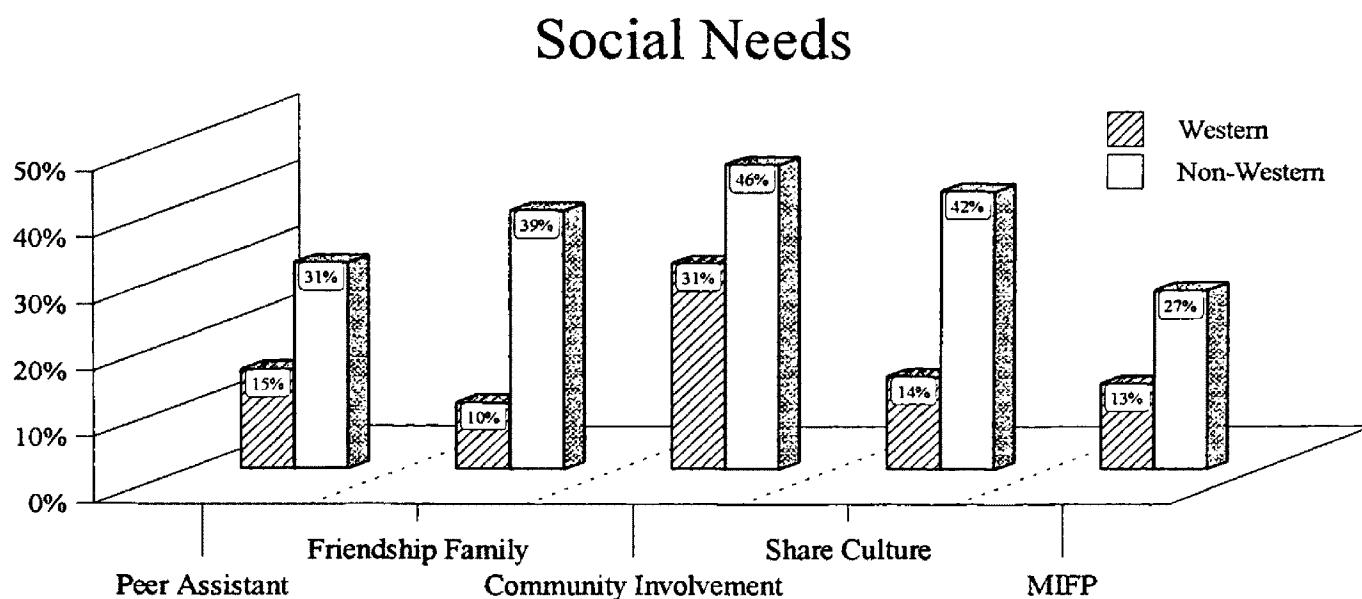


Figure 7 Western and Non-Western students rank social experiences and services by importance.

Although most people indicated that they were satisfied with how well their social needs were being met, a few students commented that they did not interact much with English-speaking people. One student observed that many foreign students will tend to stay together and eventually stop trying to make contacts with American students. Another student felt that friendships here seemed “shallower” than those in his home country and they took a longer time to form.

Some comments suggested that more activities might alleviate feelings of loneliness and that students should be encouraged more to participate. One senses that foreign students would benefit most from activities that facilitated more interactions with U. S. students. One student that participated in the peer assistant program commented that she was still very good friends with her peer assistant.

In response to specific questions, 83% were satisfied with their opportunities for involvement in life on the campus and in the community, but western students were more satisfied than non-western students. All of the western students (100%) indicated that they were satisfied with their involvement in campus and community life, but only 75% of the non-western students were also satisfied ($p < .001$). Most of the foreign students (73%) were satisfied with the opportunities to share their culture with Americans and give their perspectives on different issues, however student satisfaction seemed to decrease with time. While 79% of those students who had attended school for 18 months or less were satisfied with opportunities to share their culture with Americans only 66% of students who had attended school longer were also satisfied ($p < .05$). Ninety-four percent of the students were satisfied with their relations with other foreign students.

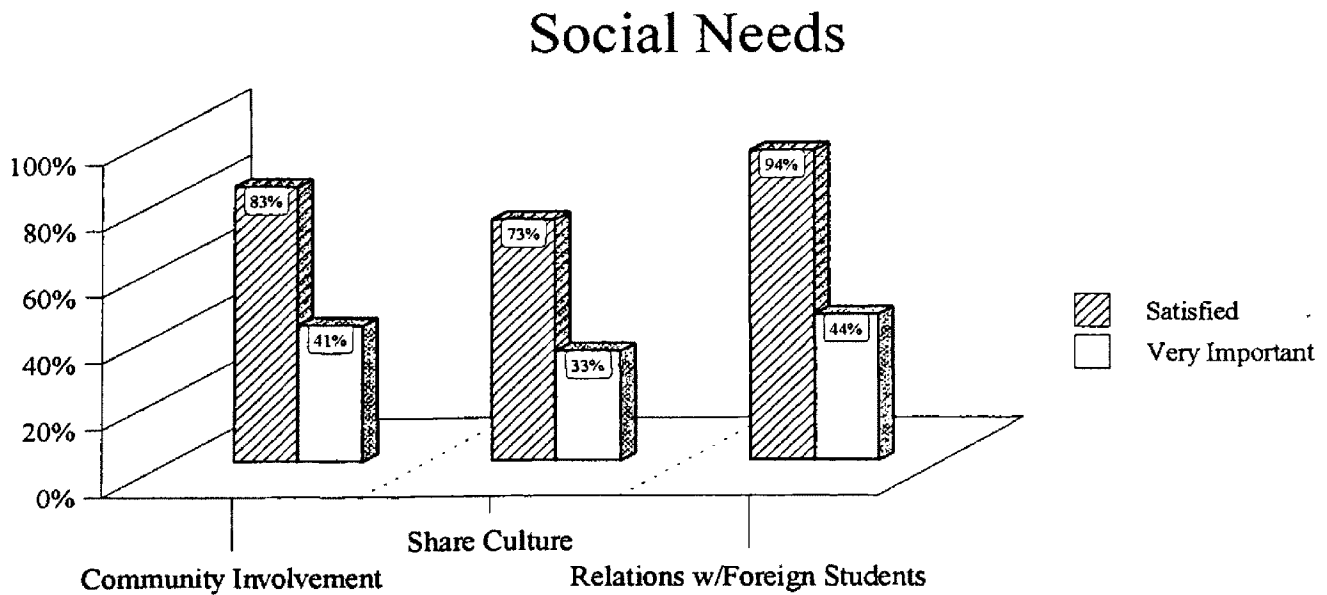


Figure 8 Students rank social experiences by satisfaction and importance.

INTERACTIONS WITH AMERICANS

In order to gain some understanding of how well foreign students interact with American students, they were asked to give their general perceptions of Americans with whom they have come in contact. While opinions were generally positive, some students complained about the closed mindedness of some Americans they have encountered. Others feel that the United States in general is insulated from the rest of the world and that Americans' lack of understanding adversely affects their attitude toward foreign students. One student believed that, because English was not his native language, he was perceived by some Americans as being less intelligent. Another simply felt that some Americans do not know how to spend time together with foreign students.

Experiences with Americans

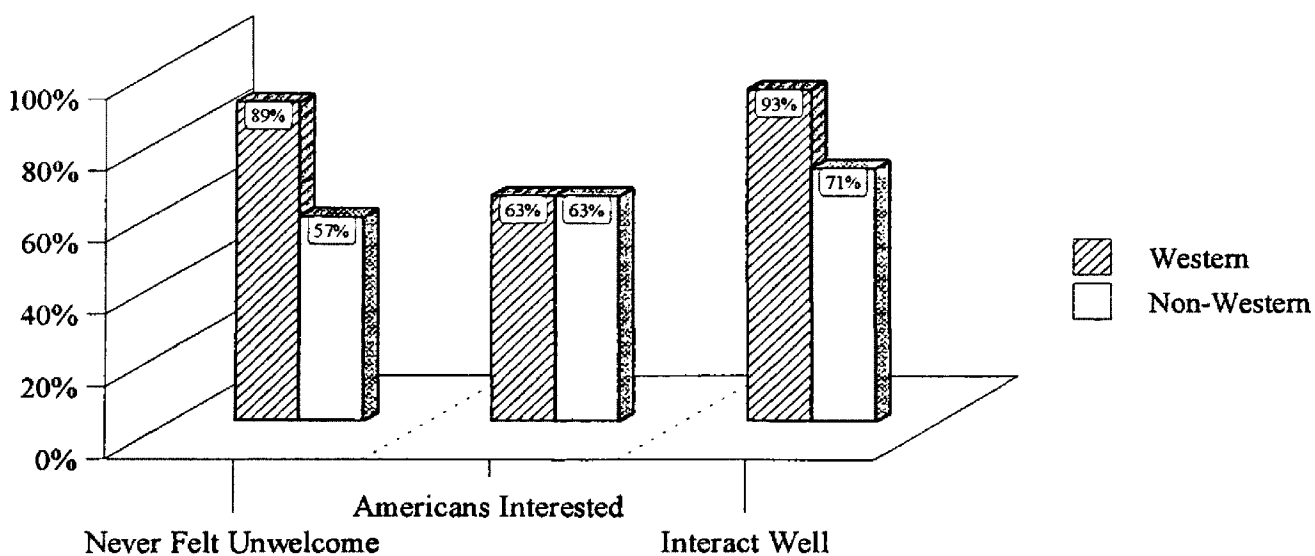


Figure 9 Western and Non-Western students give their perceptions of their interactions with Americans.

Although the students generally responded favorably toward their American counterparts, answers to specific questions were somewhat mixed among western and non-western students. A higher percentage of non-western students indicated that they had at some time felt unwelcome because they came from a different country ($p < .001$). When asked if they had ever been made to feel unwelcome, 43% of non-western students indicated they had compared to 11% of western students. Sixty-one percent of all students agreed that Americans are interested in learning about their home country, but more western students felt that Americans interact well with foreign students. Ninety-three percent of western students agreed that the students and staff interact well with them compared to 71% of non-western students ($p < .001$). Students who have spent more time at the university are less apt to feel that Americans interact well with foreign students. Eighty-seven percent of students who had spent less time attending school felt that Americans interacted well, but only 70% of the students who had been at the university longer agreed ($p < .01$).

CANADIAN STUDENTS

One fifth of the foreign students at the University of Montana are from Canada. Their situation is unique because, although they are classified as foreign students, many Canadian students identify more closely with students from the United States than they do with other foreign students. They tend to see little or no difference between themselves and U. S. students and usually have no problems with fitting in and adjusting. (A few Canadians even commented that they didn't feel qualified to respond to the survey.) Their ambiguous situation is illustrated by the fact that some Canadians live only a few hundred miles from Missoula and can return home as often as a student from Billings or Great Falls. Yet, because they cross an international border when they come to Missoula, they are subjected to the same regulations as any other foreign student.

Differences in the Canadian perspective are most apparent when comparing their interests and priorities with those of other foreign students. Canadians tend to place less importance on some social experiences and student services than other foreign students. When comparing opinions on the importance of college experiences, Canadians and other foreign students differed significantly on the following social items: relations with other foreign students, relations with a friendship family, opportunities to let Americans know about their country (share culture) and contacts with people in the Missoula community through the Missoula International Friendship Program (All $p < .001$). Almost half (49%) of the non-Canadian students felt that their relations with other foreign students were very important, but only 23% of the Canadian students agreed. Only 5% of the Canadian students ranked the Friendship Family as very important compared to 35% of the other foreign students. Canadian students were also less interested in opportunities to share their culture with students from the United States. Only 11% felt that sharing their culture was very important while 38% of the non-Canadian students indicated that sharing their culture was very important to them. The Missoula International Friendship Program (MIFP) was ranked very important by only 9% of the Canadian students compared to 26% of the other foreign students.

Canadians were also less apt to view financial aid, financial support in emergency situations and career counseling as very important ($p < .001$, $.001$ and $.05$ respectively). Only a third (33%) of the Canadian students felt that the financial aid programs were important to them, but 60% of other foreign students ranked financial aid as very important. An even greater gap existed between those who view emergency financial help as very important. Only 16% of the Canadians felt emergency financial assistance was very important to them compared to 52% of the non-Canadian students. While half of the other foreign students (50%) ranked career counseling as very important, only 26% of the Canadian students agreed.

Social Interests

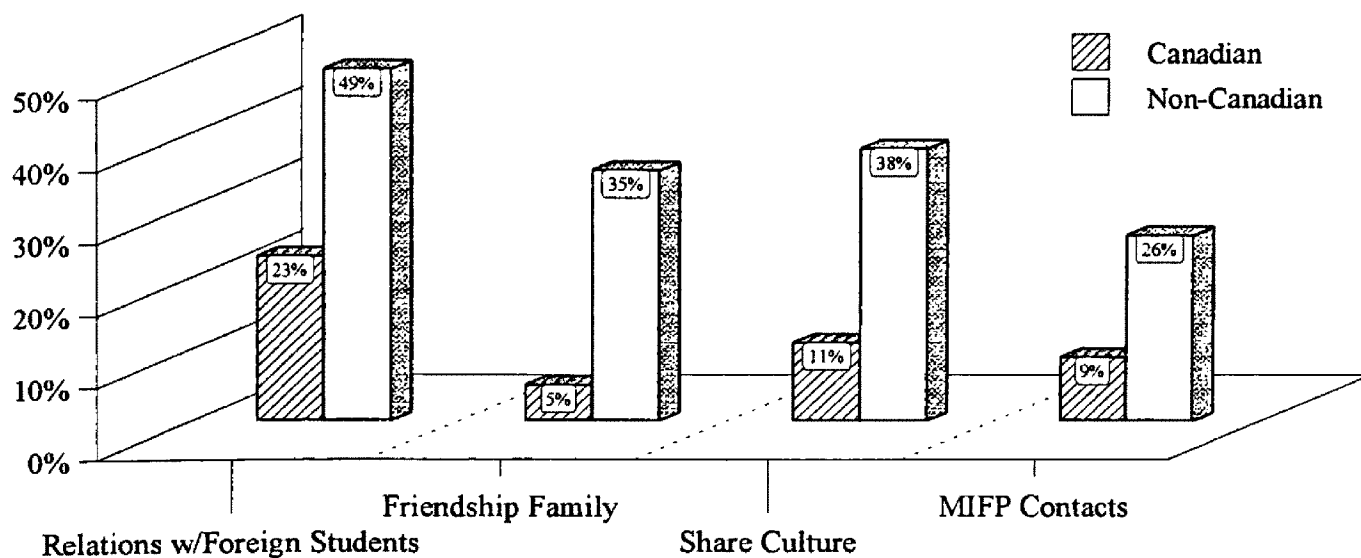


Figure 10 Canadian and Non-Canadian students rank social services and experiences by importance.

Student Services

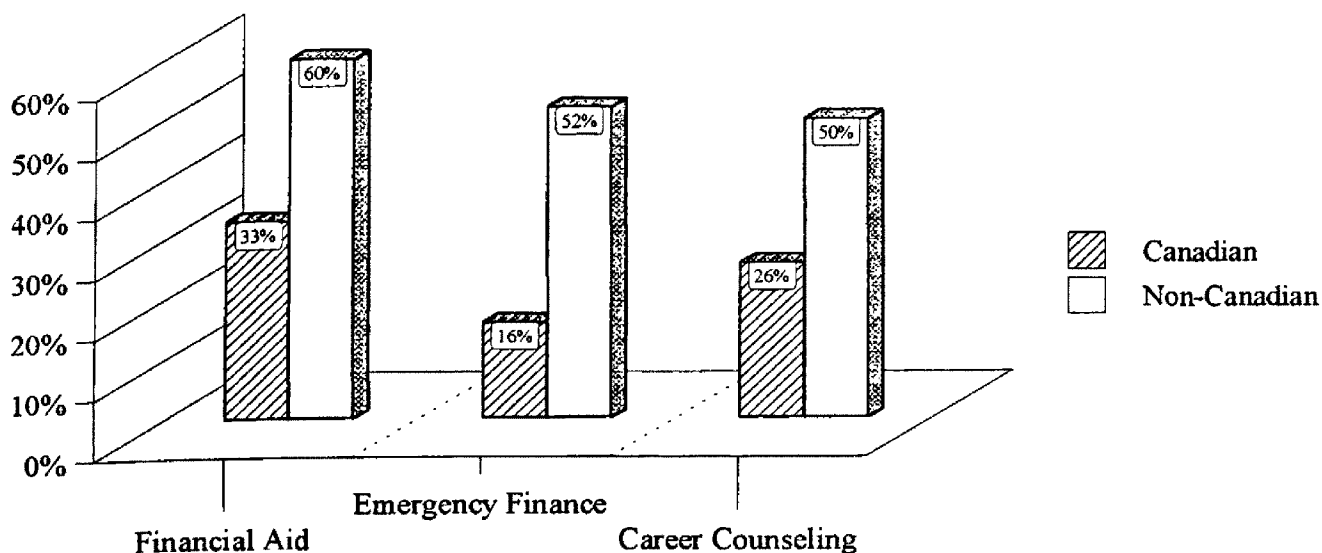


Figure 11 Canadian and Non-Canadian students rank students services by importance.

UNIVERSITY ATTRACTIONS

In order to learn more about what attracts foreign students to the University of Montana, students were asked to comment on the main attraction they would share with their friends upon returning home. When more than one response was given, the first answer was recorded.

Most students listed attributes associated with a pleasant living environment. The scenery and natural beauty of the Missoula area and university campus was mentioned most frequently (25%) by students who responded. Twenty-two percent mentioned the environment on campus. Most commented that they enjoyed the smaller size and the informal atmosphere of the campus. Seventeen percent commented on the friendly nature of people in Missoula and at the university. Other attractions mentioned were the recreational opportunities in the area (8%), the overall quality of life (especially personal safety) (7%), and the academic programs offered by the University of Montana (7%).

UM Attractions

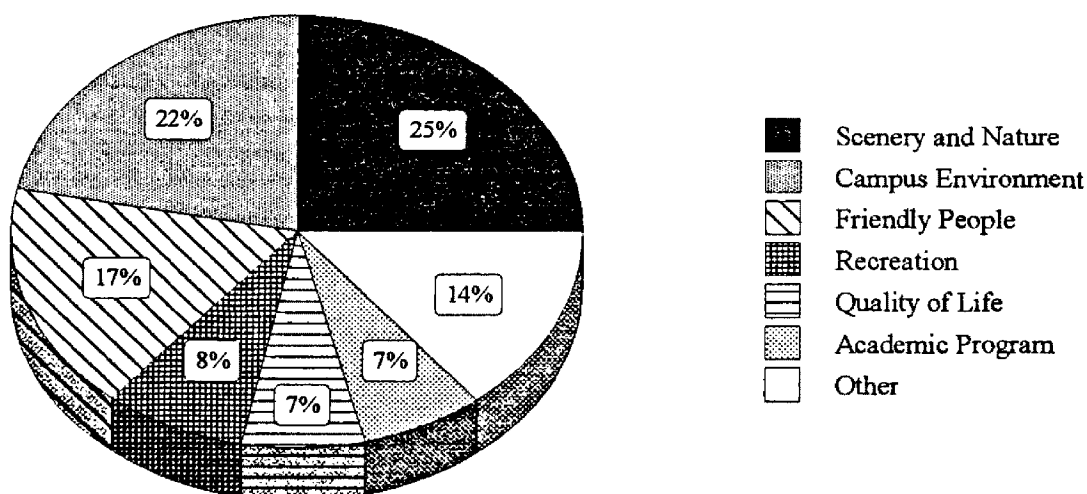


Figure 12 Distribution of student responses when asked what attracted them most to The University of Montana.

FSSS EVALUATION

On the last part of the questionnaire the students were asked to give their evaluation of the Foreign Student and Scholar Services office. The students were asked to respond to the following statements concerning the services provided by the FSSS office:

In general I find that:

- ▶ *FSSS employees are available to help me.*
- ▶ *The staff is friendly and courteous.*
- ▶ *The staff is knowledgeable about services available to me.*
- ▶ *They provide useful information.*
- ▶ *The FSSS office is able to meet my needs effectively.*
- ▶ *The staff makes me feel comfortable in seeking help.*
- ▶ *Overall, I am pleased with the service I receive at the FSSS office.*

Students were asked to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement. Those who marked “strongly agree” or “agree” were counted for the analysis as agreeing with the statement.

The students gave consistently favorable responses to the questions ranging from 88% agreement to 96%. Generally, the agreement rates for each question were not affected by student characteristics such as age, sex or region of origin. The only exception was that more older students (94%) agreed that the staff makes them feel comfortable in seeking help compared to 84% of younger students ($p < .05$).

Student Evaluation of FSSS

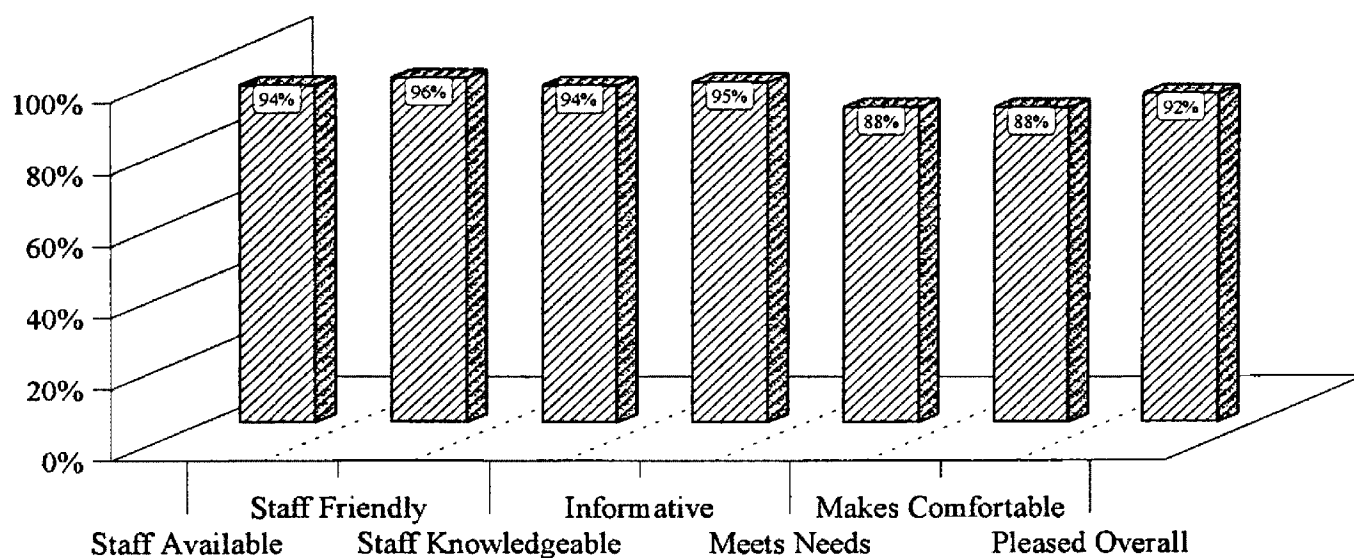


Figure 13 Students who agree with statements concerning the Foreign Student and Scholar Services office.

In order to provide some estimate of which services students utilize most from the FSSS office, they were asked to state the purpose of their most recent visit. Figure 14 gives a breakdown of the responses. The reason most frequently given was to have visas and other government documents signed (34%). Twenty-three percent of those who responded visited the office with general questions about such things as rules and regulations for leaving the United States, tuition and credits, and of events such as the International Food Bazaar. Fourteen percent of the responses were job related. These students were usually either seeking permission to work off campus or asking for references. Twelve percent of the responses came from students who were involved in an activity or function sponsored by the Foreign Student office. Seven percent of the responses were from students who were attending tax workshops or picking up tax forms.

Purpose of FSSS Visits

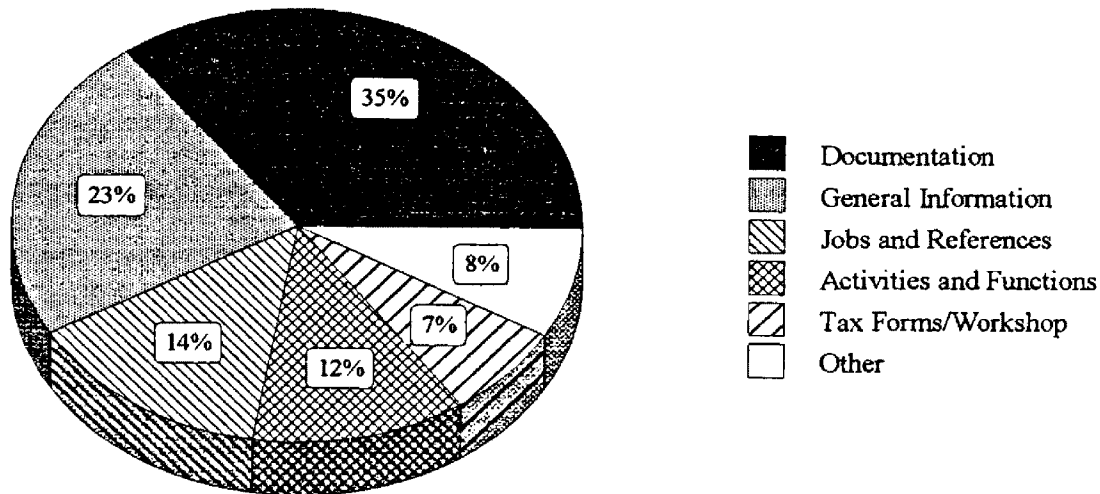


Figure 14 Distribution of student responses when asked the purpose of their most recent visit to the FSSS office.

For the last part of the evaluation, students who were especially pleased or dissatisfied with the service they received were given an opportunity to write their comments about the FSSS office. Most of the comments were from people who were pleased with the office. They often expressed their appreciation for the friendliness and helpfulness of those who work in the office: “The staff is excellent, never belittling and always extremely polite.” Another claimed: “You guys just really make us feel great!” One student commented that he was given “very personal service” and another said he felt comfortable when visiting the office because “they are ready and willing to help me.”

Other students were pleased because they were able to get answers to their questions or help in solving their problems: “I needed information about student

employment cards and Mona helped me solve [the] problem. I was very grateful and satisfied.” Another student was grateful for a loan provided him during a time of need. Students also expressed their appreciation for events such as tax workshops and organized trips that were sponsored by the Foreign Student office.

Some of the criticisms came from students who had difficulties in trying to see someone from the office. One student gave the following comment: “I understand FSSS is very busy. However, I feel uncomfortable [visiting the office] because they are too busy for me to relax and talk about personal help.” Another student suggested that more people need to be on hand to sign visa documents because “Effie is only one person and cannot be there all the time.” In one case a student found it difficult to meet with Effie because his class schedule conflicted with the times she was available.

CONCLUSION

The information gathered for this study helped identify the services and programs that foreign students perceive most favorably and others such as financial aid and employment opportunities that may need improvements. The information also identified those services and experiences that foreign students felt were very important to them. The study also found that, in some cases, opinions and perceptions varied according to such characteristics as age and region of origin.

Although this study sought practical answers to many specific questions, it was also designed to bring out those issues and ideas that may prove to be instrumental in providing a more fulfilling experience for international students at this school. Several topics have emerged from this study that are deserving of closer study and further discussion.

It is clear that there is a considerable difference between the needs of those students categorized as “western” and “non-western.” While the needs of the western students must not be overlooked, the expectations of those from other regions such as Asia are considerably different and should be recognized as such. Many non-western students are unable to satisfy social, financial and academic needs and this study suggests that all of these areas must be looked at holistically. As an example, it is plausible that the effects of financial pressures may go beyond the hardship of “doing without” and actually diminish the experience of living abroad in important ways. If housing is too expensive, students from the same country may decide the only way to make living in Missoula affordable is to rent their housing together off campus. This in turn will isolate the student over time and lessen the chances of forming meaningful relationships with Americans and other foreign students. Some information brought out in this study hints that students may become more isolated over time, but more in-depth research is needed to understand how problems and concerns are interrelated.

Further study should also be done on the effectiveness of the English as a Second Language courses. Although students were satisfied with the opportunities to develop their language skills it is unclear what role the ESL courses have in their exposure to English. Some students are required to take the course if their TOEFL score are too low, but many seem resentful because they want to get on with their other studies. Other students have taken the courses even when their English is fluent because they wanted an easy “A.” Perhaps a study focusing on the participants in the ESL program would help determine whether the program is meeting its original objectives.

The study also suggests that much could be gained by improving the quality and quantity of interactions between American students and foreign students. More activities and functions would certainly be helpful, but a real improvement must also include the development of more international awareness on the part of Americans. As Montana becomes more integrated in the global community, it makes sense that U of M graduates

have more understanding of people from other parts of the world.

Student comments suggest that future recruiting prospects may be more impressed with the pleasant living environment at The University of Montana than with the quality of academic programs. The university appears to occupy a market niche that appeals to those students who seek a comfortable and pleasant lifestyle. The students surveyed perceive Missoula as a place with beautiful natural scenery, friendly people and a safe and relaxed living environment. The University of Montana should take advantage of these perceptions and market itself as having those attributes.

It is hoped that this study will aid service providers of the University of Montana in making improvements that will benefit the international students attending this school.

APPENDIX A

The following questionnaire was used to collect data for the foreign student survey.

Age: _____

Sex: Female _____ Male _____

Are you married? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, is your spouse with you in Montana? Yes _____ No _____

Your Major: _____

Class:
(Check one) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Fresh. Soph. Junior Senior Grad. MA Ph.D.
Non-Degree

Region of
Origin:
(Check one) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Africa Asia Australia/
New Zealand Europe Latin America/
Caribbean Middle East North
America Other:
Please
Specify

Country of Origin (Optional) _____

Visa Status: Non-Immigrant (F1, F2, J1, J2, B2, etc.) _____ Immigrant (Check if yes) _____

How long have you been at the U of M? Years: _____ Months: _____

Where are you currently living?
(Check one) _____ _____ _____
On campus Family housing Off campus

Please check the following answer that best describes your situation.

Have you attended other colleges or universities in the U.S.
or Canada prior to coming here? Yes _____ No _____

Are you currently involved in the Missoula International
Friendship Program (MIFP)? Yes _____ No _____

Have you been or will you be able to return to your home
country at least once while you are a student at U of M? Yes _____ No _____

Listed below are situations and services that you may have encountered since coming to the U of M. Please rate your experience in each situation on a scale of 1 "Very Satisfied" to 4 "Very Dissatisfied" by circling the appropriate number. If a statement is not applicable or you are not sure what it means, circle number 5.

	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Not Applicable</u>
1. Pre-arrival information	1	2	3	4	5
2. Reception upon arrival	1	2	3	4	5
3. Orientation programs	1	2	3	4	5
4. Housing arrangements on campus	1	2	3	4	5
5. Experience with peer assistants	1	2	3	4	5
6. Contacts with people in the Missoula community (MIFP)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Academic advising	1	2	3	4	5
8. Student-faculty relations	1	2	3	4	5
9. Relevance of courses to your needs/interests	1	2	3	4	5
10. Opportunities to improve English language skills at U of M	1	2	3	4	5
11. Tutor service	1	2	3	4	5
12. Availability of library resources	1	2	3	4	5
13. Health services and obtaining medical care	1	2	3	4	5
14. Counseling for social and personal problems	1	2	3	4	5
15. Opportunities for involvement in campus/community life	1	2	3	4	5
16. Recreational activities	1	2	3	4	5
17. Needed services from sponsors	1	2	3	4	5
18. Information about immigration regulations and benefits	1	2	3	4	5
19. Career counseling	1	2	3	4	5
20. Financial support in emergency situations	1	2	3	4	5
21. Availability of financial aid programs	1	2	3	4	5
22. Experiences as graduate teaching or research assistant	1	2	3	4	5
23. Employment opportunities on campus	1	2	3	4	5
24. Opportunities to let Americans know about your country or perspective on different issues	1	2	3	4	5
25. Relationship with your friendship family	1	2	3	4	5
26. Relationship with American roommates	1	2	3	4	5
27. Relationship with other foreign students	1	2	3	4	5
28. Community services (banks, restaurants, clinics, stores, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
29. Quality of life of accompanying dependents (spouse and/or children)	1	2	3	4	5
30. Overall experience at U of M	1	2	3	4	5
31. Other, Please list and specify	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate how *important* each of the following areas of your University of Montana experience have been to you. Please rate your experience on a scale of 1 "More important" to 3 "Less important" by circling the appropriate number.

	<u>More Important</u>	<u>Somewhat Important</u>	<u>Less Important</u>
1. Pre-arrival information	1	2	3
2. Reception upon arrival	1	2	3
3. Orientation programs	1	2	3
4. Housing arrangements on campus	1	2	3
5. Experience with peer assistants	1	2	3
6. Contacts with people in the Missoula community (MIFP)	1	2	3
7. Academic advising	1	2	3
8. Student-faculty relations	1	2	3
9. Relevance of courses to your needs/interests	1	2	3
10. Opportunities to improve English language skills at U of M	1	2	3
11. Tutor service	1	2	3
12. Availability of library resources	1	2	3
13. Health services and obtaining medical care	1	2	3
14. Counseling for social and personal problems	1	2	3
15. Opportunities for involvement in campus/community life	1	2	3
16. Recreational activities	1	2	3
17. Needed services from sponsors	1	2	3
18. Information about immigration regulations and benefits	1	2	3
19. Career counseling	1	2	3
20. Financial support in emergency situations	1	2	3
21. Availability of financial aid programs	1	2	3
22. Experiences as graduate teaching or research assistant	1	2	3
23. Employment opportunities on campus	1	2	3
24. Opportunities to let Americans know about your country or perspective on different issues	1	2	3
25. Relationship with your friendship family	1	2	3
26. Relationship with American roommates	1	2	3
27. Relationship with other foreign students	1	2	3
28. Community services (banks, restaurants, clinics, stores, etc.)	1	2	3
29. Quality of life of accompanying dependents (spouse and/or children)	1	2	3
30. Overall experience at U of M	1	2	3
31. Other, Please list and specify	1	2	3

*We would like to know about your experiences with the office of Foreign Student & Scholar Services. (FSSS)
Please read the following statements and indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement.*

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Not Applicable</u>
In General, I find that:					
FSSS employees are available to help me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff is friendly and courteous.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff is knowledgeable about services available to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They provide useful information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The FSSS office is able to meet my needs effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff makes me feel comfortable in seeking help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall, I am pleased with the service I receive at the FSSS.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What was the purpose of your most recent visit to the FSSS?

If you were especially pleased or dissatisfied with the service you received at the FSSS, please explain or describe.

We are interested in knowing more about how being an international student has shaped your experiences at the University of Montana. (Please check the response that best describes you)

Do you feel that you have ever been made unwelcome because you come from a different country?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you feel that, in general, people are interested in learning about your home country?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you feel that the students and staff at U of M interact well with foreign students?

Yes _____ No _____

In your opinion what is the main problem foreign students like you encounter at the U of M?

What is the main attraction of the University of Montana that you would share with your friends when you return home?

If you have any other comments you would like us to know about, use the space below.

APPENDIX B

The following are the frequency distributions of the responses to the survey questions. The first row of each response represents the number of students who marked the given answer. The second row indicates the percent of all students who marked the given answer and the third row (printed in bold numbers) indicates the valid percent excluding those who marked "not applicable" or did not answer the question.

Sex	Female	Male
	113	116
	49.1%	50.4%
	49.3%	50.7%

Married	Yes	No
	43	187
	18.7%	81.3%
	18.7%	81.3%

Spouse in Montana	Yes	No
	31	13
	13.5%	5.7%
	70.5%	29.5%

Major

Arts & Science	Business Admin.	Education	Fine Arts	Forestry	Journalism	Pharmacy & Health
70	63	12	5	28	15	18
30.4%	27.4%	5.2%	2.2%	12.2%	6.5%	7.8%
33.2%	29.9%	5.7%	2.4%	13.3%	7.1%	8.5%

Class

Fresh	Soph	Junior	Senior	Grad Non-Degree	MA	Ph.D.
22	26	31	89	12	37	13
9.6%	11.3%	13.5%	38.7%	5.2%	16.1%	5.7%
9.6%	11.3%	13.5%	38.7%	5.2%	16.1%	5.7%

Region of Origin

Africa	Asia	Australia New Zealand	Europe	Latin America	Middle East	North America	Other
6	134	2	30	6	2	48	2
2.6%	58.3%	.9%	13%	2.6%	.9%	20.9%	.9%
2.6%	58.3%	.9%	13%	2.6%	.9%	20.9%	.9%

Visa Status

F1	F2	J1	B2	Other	Immigrant
182	1	17	1	2	21
79.1%	.4%	7.4%	.4%	.9%	9.1%
81.3%	.4%	7.6%	.4%	.9%	9.4%

Currently living

On campus	Family housing	Off campus
51	18	161
22.2%	7.8%	70.0%
22.2%	7.8%	70.0%

Attended other colleges or universities
in the U.S. or Canada prior to coming to UM

Yes	No
72	158
31.3%	68.7%
31.3%	68.7%

Currently involved in the Missoula International
Friendship Program (MIFP)

Yes	No
48	181
20.9%	78.7%
21.0%	79.0%

Return to home country at least once
while you are a student at U of M

Yes	No
152	76
66.1%	33.0%
66.7%	33.3%

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
Pre-arrival information	37 16.1% 17.9%	127 55.2% 61.4%	27 11.7% 13.0%	16 7.0% 7.7%	20 8.7%
Reception upon arrival	48 20.9% 24.6%	122 53.0% 62.6%	15 6.5% 7.7%	10 4.3% 5.1%	32 13.9%
Orientation programs	48 20.9% 24.4%	127 55.2% 64.5%	20 8.7% 10.2%	2 .9% 1.0%	30 13.0%
Campus Housing	27 11.7% 14.4%	83 36.1% 44.1%	48 20.9% 25.5%	30 13.0% 16.0%	37 16.1%
Experience with peer assistants	29 12.6% 19.3%	80 34.8% 53.3%	30 13.0% 20.0%	11 4.8% 7.3%	74 32.2%
Contacts with people in the Missoula community (MIFP)	38 16.5% 27.5%	71 30.9% 51.4%	25 10.9% 18.1%	4 1.7% 2.9%	91 39.6%
Academic advising	51 22.2% 23.2%	107 46.5% 48.6%	41 17.8% 18.6%	21 9.1% 9.5%	9 3.9%
Student-faculty relations	46 20.0% 20.4%	144 62.6% 64.0%	26 11.3% 11.6%	9 3.9% 4.0%	5 2.2%
Relevance of courses to needs	48 20.9% 21.2%	124 53.9% 54.9%	47 20.4% 20.8%	7 3.0% 3.1%	2 .9%
Opportunities to improve English	35 15.2% 22.6%	80 34.8% 51.6%	35 15.2% 22.6%	5 2.2% 3.2%	71 30.9%

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
Tutor service	17 7.4% 17.5%	51 22.2% 52.6%	25 10.9% 25.8%	4 1.7% 4.1%	129 56.1%
Availability of library resources	26 11.3% 11.7%	100 43.5% 45.0%	66 28.7% 29.7%	30 13.0% 13.5%	5 2.2%
Health services and obtaining medical care	40 17.4% 19.3%	127 55.2% 61.4%	26 11.3% 12.6%	14 6.1% 6.8%	20 8.7%
Counseling for social and personal problems	19 8.3% 17.1%	62 27.0% 55.9%	24 10.4% 21.6%	6 2.6% 5.4%	116 50.4%
Opportunities for involvement in campus/community life	36 15.7% 18.0%	130 56.5% 65.0%	28 12.2% 14.0%	6 2.6% 3.0%	27 11.7%
Recreational activities	59 25.7% 28.5%	121 52.6% 58.5%	23 10.0% 11.1%	4 1.7% 1.9%	22 9.6%
Needed services from sponsors	10 4.3% 11.0%	55 23.9% 60.4%	21 9.1% 23.1%	5 2.2% 5.5%	135 58.7%
Information about immigration regulations and benefits	35 15.2% 20.6%	89 38.7% 52.4%	38 16.5% 22.4%	8 3.5% 4.7%	59 25.7%
Career counseling	12 5.2% 9.4%	61 26.5% 47.7%	44 19.1% 34.4%	11 4.8% 8.6%	100 43.5%
Financial support in emergency situations	11 4.8% 14.3%	30 13.0% 39.0%	26 11.3% 33.8%	10 4.3% 13.0%	149 64.8%

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
Availability of financial aid programs	12 5.2% 9.3%	27 11.7% 20.9%	45 19.6% 34.9%	45 19.6% 34.9%	97 42.2%
Experiences as graduate teaching or research assistant	15 6.5% 26.8%	21 9.1% 37.5%	13 5.7% 23.2%	7 3.0% 12.5%	168 73.0%
Employment opportunities on campus	18 7.8% 12.0%	59 25.7% 39.3%	44 19.1% 29.3%	29 12.6% 19.3%	77 33.5%
Opportunities to share views and perspectives w/Americans	27 11.7% 14.0%	114 49.6% 59.1%	36 15.7% 18.7%	16 7.0% 8.3%	35 15.2%
Relationship w/ friendship family	44 19.1% 39.6%	50 21.7% 45.0%	12 5.2% 10.8%	5 2.2% 4.5%	115 50.0%
Relationship with American roommates	56 24.3% 35.9%	72 31.3% 46.2%	23 10.0% 14.7%	5 2.2% 3.2%	72 31.3%
Relationship with other foreign students	72 31.3% 35.0%	122 53.0% 59.2%	11 4.8% 5.3%	1 .4% .5%	21 9.1%
Community services	59 25.7% 26.6%	140 60.9% 63.1%	15 6.5% 6.8%	8 3.5% 3.6%	6 2.6%
Quality of life of accompanying dependents	14 6.1% 23.3%	39 17.0% 65.0%	6 2.6% 10.0%	1 .4% 1.7%	162 70.4%
Overall experience at U of M	50 21.7% 22.1%	157 68.3% 69.5%	16 7.0% 7.1%	3 1.3% 1.3%	1 .4%

	More Important	Somewhat Important	Less Important
Pre-arrival information	155 67.4% 68.9%	60 26.1% 26.7%	10 4.3% 4.4%
Reception upon arrival	110 47.8% 49.1%	83 36.1% 37.1%	31 13.5% 13.8%
Orientation programs	125 54.3% 56.3%	70 30.4% 31.5%	27 11.7% 12.2%
Housing arrangements on campus	143 62.2% 64.7%	49 21.3% 22.2%	29 12.6% 13.1%
Experience with peer assistants	56 24.3% 25.3%	87 37.8% 39.4%	78 33.9% 35.3%
Contacts with people in the Missoula community (MIFP)	50 21.7% 22.3%	93 40.4% 41.5%	81 35.2% 36.2%
Academic advising	188 81.7% 83.6%	31 13.5% 13.8%	6 2.6% 2.7%
Student-faculty relations	159 69.1% 71.3%	59 25.7% 26.5%	5 2.2% 2.2%
Relevance of courses to your needs/interests	193 83.9% 86.2%	27 11.7% 12.1%	4 1.7% 1.8%
Opportunities to improve English language skills at U of M	132 57.4% 60.3%	28 12.2% 12.8%	59 25.7% 26.9%

	More Important	Somewhat Important	Less Important
Tutor service	62 27.0% 27.8%	80 34.8% 35.9%	81 35.2% 36.3%
Availability of library resources	160 69.6% 71.4%	55 23.9% 24.6%	9 3.9% 4.0%
Health services and obtaining medical care	155 67.4% 69.2%	54 23.5% 24.1%	15 6.5% 6.7%
Counseling for social and personal problems	73 31.7% 33.2%	70 30.4% 31.8%	77 33.5% 35.0%
Opportunities for involvement in campus/community life	90 39.1% 40.5%	93 40.4% 41.9%	39 17.0% 17.6%
Recreational activities	92 40.0% 41.3%	103 44.8% 46.2%	28 12.2% 12.6%
Needed services from sponsors	43 18.7% 20.0%	77 33.5% 35.8%	95 41.3% 44.2%
Information about immigration regulations and benefits	107 46.5% 49.1%	66 28.7% 30.3%	45 19.6% 20.6%
Career counseling	100 43.5% 45.2%	76 33.0% 34.4%	45 19.6% 20.4%
Financial support in emergency situations	97 42.2% 44.3%	60 26.1% 27.4%	62 27.0% 28.3%

	More Important	Somewhat Important	Less Important
Availability of financial aid programs	120 52.2% 54.1%	59 25.7% 2.6%	43 18.7% 19.4%
Experiences as graduate teaching or research assistant	69 30.0% 32.1%	72 31.3% 33.5%	74 32.2% 34.4%
Employment opportunities on campus	117 50.9% 53.2%	64 27.8% 29.1%	39 17.0% 17.7%
Opportunities to let Americans know about your country or perspective on different issues	71 30.9% 32.6%	106 46.1% 48.6%	41 17.8% 18.8%
Relationship with your friendship family	63 27.4% 29.6%	72 31.3% 33.8%	78 33.9% 36.6%
Relationship with American roommates	90 39.1% 41.3%	84 36.5% 38.5%	44 19.1% 20.2%
Relationship with other foreign students	97 42.2% 43.9%	95 41.3% 43.0%	29 12.6% 13.1%
Community services	120 52.2% 54.3%	90 39.1% 40.7%	11 4.8% 5.0%
Quality of life of accompanying dependents	65 28.3% 32.3%	55 23.9% 27.4%	81 35.2% 40.3%
Overall experience at U of M	165 71.7% 74.0%	53 23.0% 23.8%	5 2.2% 2.2%

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
FSSS employees are available to help	80 34.8% 40.2%	108 47.0% 54.3%	7 3.0% 3.5%	4 1.7% 2.0%	22 9.6%
The staff is friendly and courteous.	90 39.1% 44.6%	103 44.8% 51.0%	5 2.2% 2.5%	4 1.7% 2.0%	19 8.3%
The staff is knowledgeable about services available	78 33.9% 39.8%	107 46.5% 54.6%	11 4.8% 5.6%	0 0.0% 0.0%	25 10.9%
They provide useful information	79 34.3% 39.1%	113 49.1% 55.9%	6 2.6% 3.0%	4 1.7% 2.0%	19 8.3%
The FSSS office is able to meet needs effectively	65 28.3% 34.4%	102 44.3% 54.0%	18 7.8% 9.5%	4 1.7% 2.1%	29 12.6%
The staff makes me feel comfortable in seeking help	83 36.1% 43.5%	86 37.4% 45.0%	18 7.8% 9.4%	4 1.7% 2.1%	28 12.2%
Pleased overall with the service received at the FSSS	89 38.7% 44.9%	94 40.9% 47.5%	12 5.2% 6.1%	3 1.3% 1.5%	23 10.0%

Do you feel that you have ever been made unwelcome because you come from a different country?

Yes	No
72	157
31.3%	68.3%
31.4%	68.6%

Do you feel that, in general, people are interested in learning about your home country?

Yes	No
145	83
63.0%	36.1%
63.6%	36.4%

Do you feel that the students and staff at U of M interact well with foreign students?

Yes	No
177	47
77.0%	20.4%
79.0%	21.0%