



SERU COVID-19 SURVEY

International Students' Experiences and Concerns During the Pandemic

July 1, 2020

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In contrast to domestic students, international students at research universities are more satisfied with their academic experiences and institutional support during the pandemic, according to the recent Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Consortium survey of 22,519 undergraduate students and 7,690 graduate and professional students at five public research universities. **International students' primary concerns are not with universities themselves but with health, safety and immigration issues.**

Academic Experiences of International Students

Both undergraduate and graduate international students report they adapted to remote instruction better than domestic students. International students are more satisfied with how their university responded to the pandemic, the courses that were offered remotely, and with how instructors supported their remote learning (Figure 1).

Academic experiences of international undergraduate, graduate, and professional students differ by the country of origin: for example, 69% of undergraduate students from China said they adapted well or very well to remote instruction—higher than students from India (41%) or Mexico (59%). Similarly, 75% of graduate and professional students from China adapted well or very well to remote instruction compared to 64% from India and 60% from Mexico.

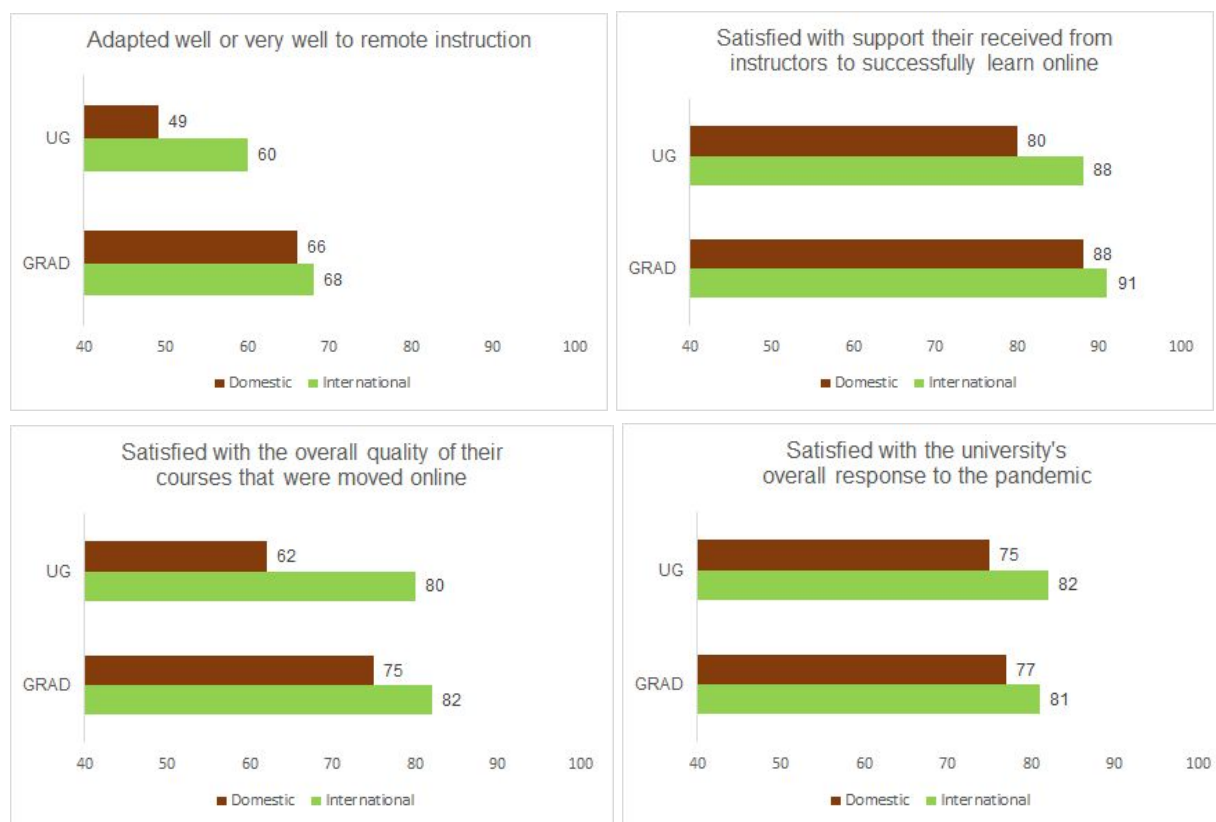


Figure 1. Adaptation to online instruction and satisfaction with university support during the pandemic, domestic and international students.

In general, international students faced similar obstacles as domestic students in their transition to remote instruction (but at a slightly lower rate): the lack of motivation for remote learning (54% of international undergraduate students and 56% of graduate students), the lack of interaction with other students (44% and 55%, respectively) inability to learn effectively in an online format (42% and 40%). However, for international undergraduate students who relocated to a different country during the pandemic the top three of most important obstacles also included inability to attend classes at their scheduled online meeting time -- 38% of students reported that obstacle.

Concerns of International Students

While international students are generally satisfied with the support they received from their institutions, they are concerned about living in the U.S. and navigating healthcare and immigration issues during the pandemic.

The most important concerns for both undergraduate and graduate/professional international students in the U.S. include maintaining good health during their studies and managing immigration and visa issues (Figure 2). Undergraduate students are also particularly concerned about having financial support and obtaining health services. Graduate and professional students were similarly concerned about understanding U.S. medical insurance and the health system as well as securing a job in the U.S. after graduation.

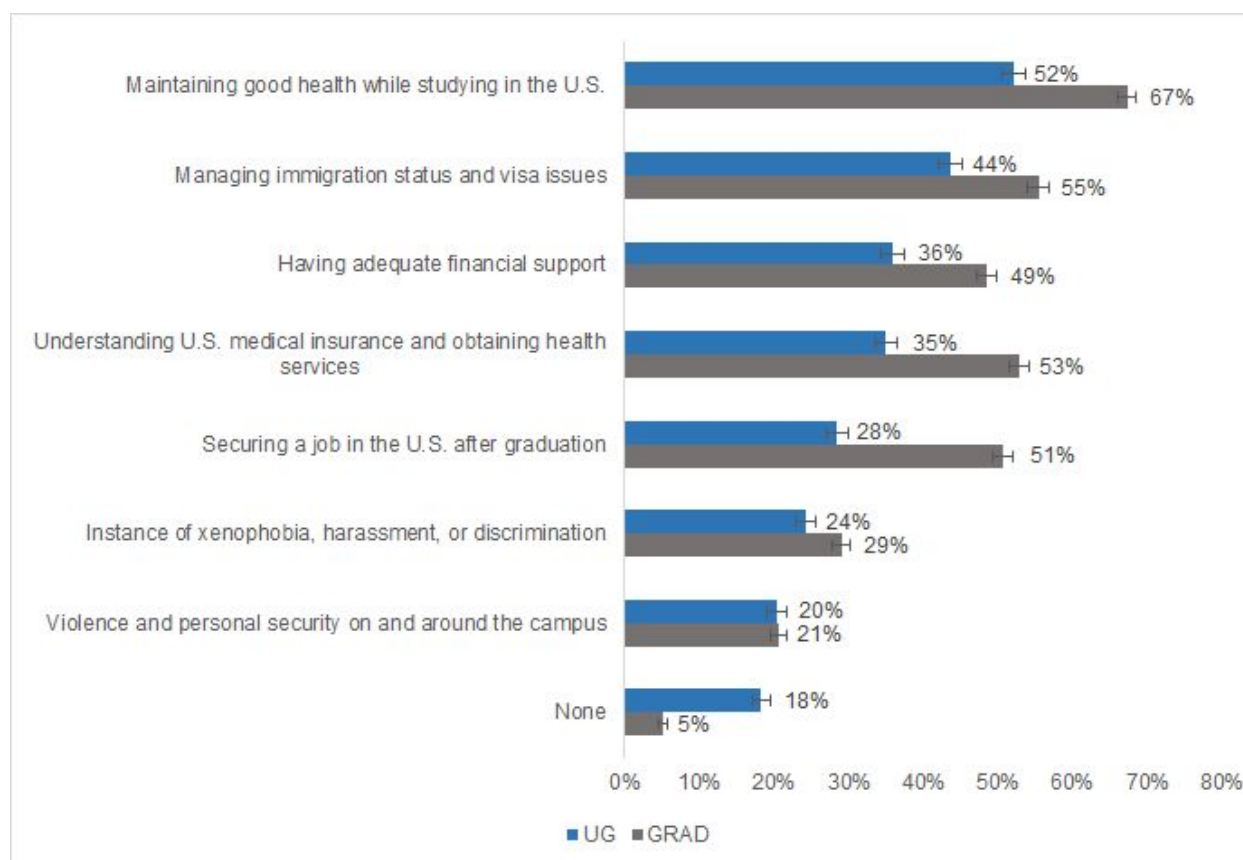


Figure 2. International students' concerns during the pandemic.

More than two-thirds of undergraduate students reported managing immigration issues was stressful for them (Figure 3). The most important concerns were managing their current visa status and travel restrictions between the U.S. and their home country. The impact on future employment-based visas concludes the top three of most stressful immigration-related issues for international students.

Graduate and professional students were more concerned about travel restrictions (61%), followed by managing their visa status and the impact upon their future employment-based visas.

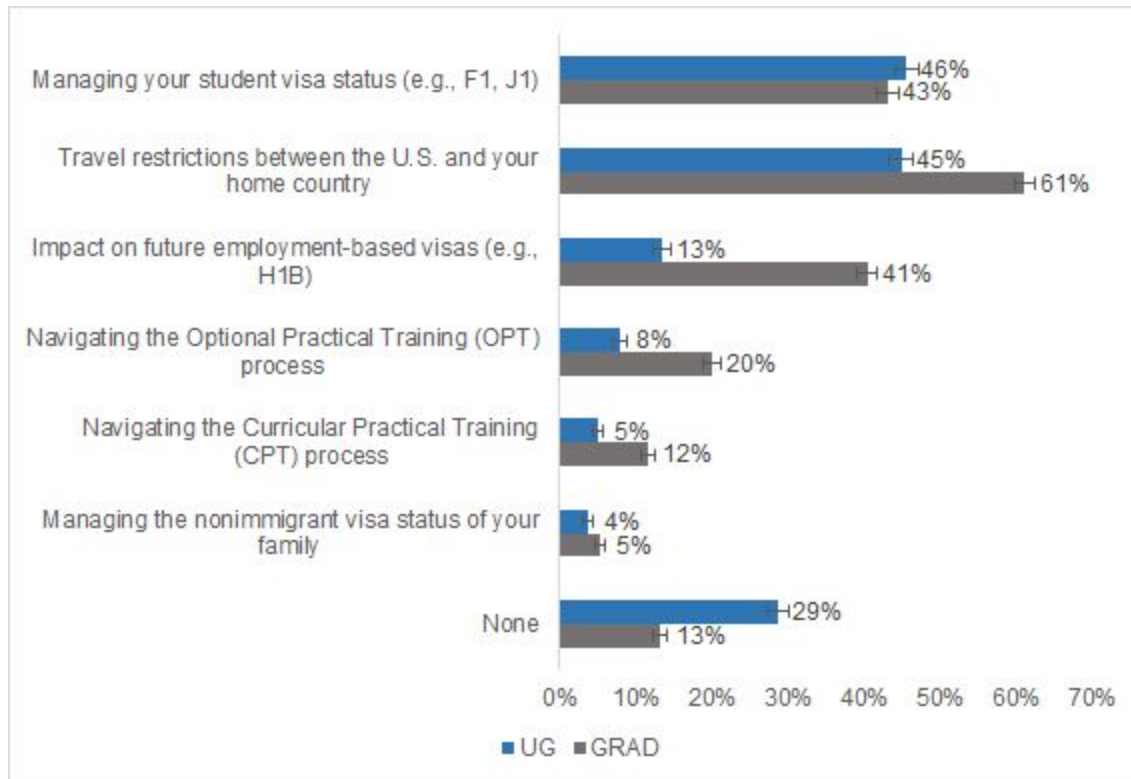


Figure 3. International students' concerns related to immigration issues during the pandemic.

One-fourth of international undergraduate, graduate, and professional students were concerned with xenophobia, harassment or discrimination (Figure 2). More worrisome, 17% of international undergraduate students and 12% of graduate and professional students personally experienced instances of intimidating, hostile, or offensive behavior based on their national origin. This rate is higher (22-30%) among international students from China, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. For the majority of students such experience increased their concerns over personal safety but for some it affected mental health and interfered with their relationship with their U.S. peers/friends (Figure 4).

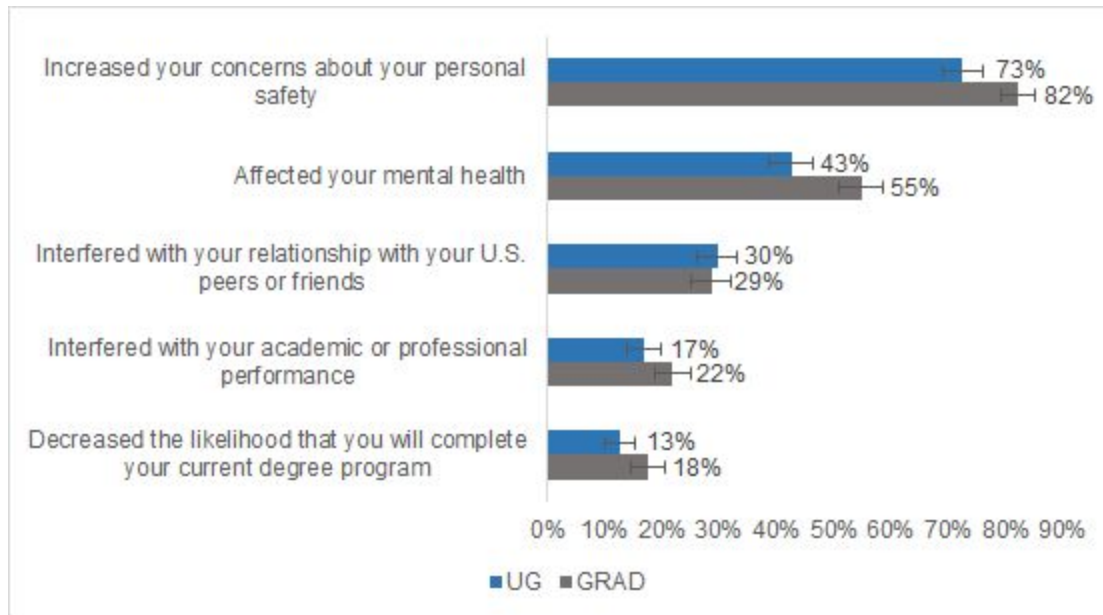


Figure 4. The ways instances of intimidating, hostile, or offensive behavior based on your national origin impacted students during the pandemic (% from international students who experienced instances of intimidating, hostile, or offensive behavior).

Conclusions

While the majority of international students reported that they adjusted well to online courses more than a third of undergraduate students who stayed abroad during the pandemic reported that they had obstacles with attending classes at their scheduled meeting time. Overall in our sample, 23% of undergraduate students moved to a different country during the pandemic. Faculty and staff working with these students should be mindful of this subpopulation and offer accommodations or asynchronous alternatives, where possible.

The most pressing concerns experienced by international students include maintaining their health, managing their visa status, having adequate financial support, managing U.S. health insurance, and obtaining healthcare services. University leaders, staff, and faculty who are seeking to support international students should consider offering students more information about maintaining their health via social distancing and other measures, helping students to navigate U.S. medical insurance systems during the pandemic, and obtaining healthcare services on or off campus.

Additionally, international students' concerns related to their immigration status include travel restrictions, managing their visa status, and future employment opportunities. We encourage campus officials who work with international students to respond to those immigration concerns by offering clear communications with students about policy changes related to travel restrictions and visa requirements, in addition to expanding services to assist students with travel planning and visa applications. Additionally, we recommend that international students support staff collaborate with career development staff to develop ways to alleviate students'

employment-related concerns, such as providing more intensive one-on-one career development and job application support for individual international students.

Further, we must recognize the toll that instances of xenophobia, harassment, and discrimination have on international students. Fully 17% of international undergraduate students and 12% of graduate and professional students personally experienced instances of intimidating, hostile, or offensive behavior based on their national origin. The effects bleed over into international students' feelings of safety, their mental health, and their relationships with U.S. peers or friends. Mental health counselors who specialize in working with international students should be aware of the negative experiences encountered by international students that affect their safety, mental health, and relationships and develop strategies to support students experiencing intimidating, hostile, or offensive behaviors.

Finally, we must acknowledge that international students are not a homogenous group and, therefore, policies developed to support international students should not be a "one-size-fits-all strategy," especially when it comes to students' ability to adapt to online instruction and the instances of xenophobia or harassment students encounter based upon their national origin. We encourage international student support offices to develop individualized services, resources, and support systems for international students based upon their unique cultural and national backgrounds.

About the SERU COVID-19 Survey

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Consortium is currently administering a special survey on the impact of COVID-19 on student experience at 10 U.S. public research universities. The SERU COVID-19 Survey assesses five areas to better understand undergraduates, graduates, and professional students' experiences during the global pandemic: 1) students' transition to remote instruction, 2) the financial impact of COVID-19 for students, 3) students' health and wellbeing during the pandemic, 4) students' belonging and engagement, and 5) students' future plans.

SERU COVID-19 Research

Additional research briefs developed from the COVID-19 survey include the following topics:

- Adapting to Online Instruction: Disparities Among Graduate and Professional Students
- Graduate and Professional Students' Fall 2020 Re-Enrollment Plans
- Will Students Come Back? Undergraduate Students' Plans to Re-Enroll in Fall 2020

Sample

The survey was a census survey administered to graduate and professional students at five large, public research universities. The data collection started in May and is still ongoing at most universities. The report uses data from 22,519 undergraduate students (8.8% are international students) and 7,690 graduate and professional students (18.5% are international students) who completed the survey as of June 11, 2020. The response rate as of June 11, 2020 was 7-22% at the respective institutions.

About the SERU Consortium

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Consortium is an academic and policy research collaboration based at Center for Studies in Higher Education at the University of California – Berkeley (CSHE) working in partnership with the University of Minnesota and partner institutions. More information about the SERU survey is available at <https://cshe.berkeley.edu/seru>

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Suggested APA Citation

Chirikov, I., & Soria, K. M. (2020). *International students during the pandemic: Academic experiences and concerns*. SERU Consortium, University of California - Berkeley and University of Minnesota. <https://cshe.berkeley.edu/seru-covid-survey-reports>