UNEVEN EXPERIENCES

What's Missing and What Matters For Today's International Students

CHRIS R. GLASS
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

STEPHANIE BUUS
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

LARRY A. BRASKAMP
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE INSTITUTE

Executive Summary

The United States remains the leading educational destination of globally mobile students; however, actionable information about the experiences that mitigate the key challenges international students face is rare. Almost weekly, new headlines highlight the uneven and unequal experiences of international students.

This report confirms many of the disturbing trends reported in major higher education periodicals, including a lack of community, low-quality faculty-student interactions, and uneven global learning. It adds to the national conversation by highlighting "encounters with difference that make a difference" based on an analysis of a representative sample of 36,973 U.S. and international students from 135 U.S. colleges and universities using the Global Perspective Inventory (see Braskamp, Braskamp, & Engberg, 2013).

MAJOR FINDINGS

We highlight uneven experience among U.S. and international students and within international students from the top 5 sending countries (China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada):

THE UNEVEN EXPERIENCES OF TODAY'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

PAGES 12-13

International students rate their sense of community significantly lower than their U.S. peers along every dimension, especially when asked whether they feel part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends at their institution.

Leadership programs that stress collaboration, and engaging in events and activities sponsored by their own culture, enhance international students' sense of community.

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

PAGES 14-15

Although the frequency of faculty-student interaction is similar among U.S. and international students, international students are significantly less likely to believe that faculty challenge their views on a topic during class or that faculty present issues and problems in class from different cultural perspectives.

Courses that involve opportunities for intensive dialogue or engage multicultural issues, as well as leadership programs and discussions of current events, all have markedly strong effects on the quality of faculty-student interactions.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

PAGES 16-18

Students from China, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia feel more threatened than students from the U.S. or Canada. They are also far more likely to rely on authorities as arbiters of knowledge and truth. Students from the U.S. are far less likely to form social relationships with students unlike them as their international student peers.

International students who participate in events celebrating both their own culture and other cultures, discuss current events, and engage in classroom dialogue are less likely to report feeling threatened, less likely to express heavy reliance on authorities as the arbiters of knowledge and truth, and more likely to form social relationships with peers from other cultures.

INTRODUCTION
Today's International Undergraduates

The number of international undergraduates enrolled at U.S. universities has surged in the last decade (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2012). Many institutions have seen their international undergraduate enrollment numbers double, which has tested their ability to facilitate the academic and social integration of international students with diverse academic and cultural backgrounds. Although most American universities have professed a commitment to increasing institutional capacity and enhancing the quality of the international student experience, many challenges remain. At the same time, new potential challenges and institutional responsibilities have arisen as American universities scale up their efforts to increase international enrollments.

Institutional efforts to increase international student enrollments rest on the assumption that the presence of international students will expose American students to greater cultural diversity through meaningful personal interaction with students of a different cultural background. In turn, it is believed that the learning environments of American colleges and universities will expose international students to the U.S. ideals of freedom of speech and critical inquiry in the classroom. The mutual benefits of such academic and cultural exchanges seem self-evident, but can we be certain that such exchanges are actually occurring? If they are occurring, are they providing the benefits that we believe they are and are these benefits enjoyed equally by both American and international students? Most U.S. institutions espouse the virtues of international education, but, as Rajika Bhandari asks in an article from *IIENetworker* magazine earlier this year, "An international education for what and for whose benefit?" (Bhandari, 2013).

> Many institutions have seen their international undergraduate enrollment numbers double, which has tested their ability to facilitate the academic and social integration of international students with diverse academic and cultural backgrounds.

New International Undergraduate Enrollment in the U.S.
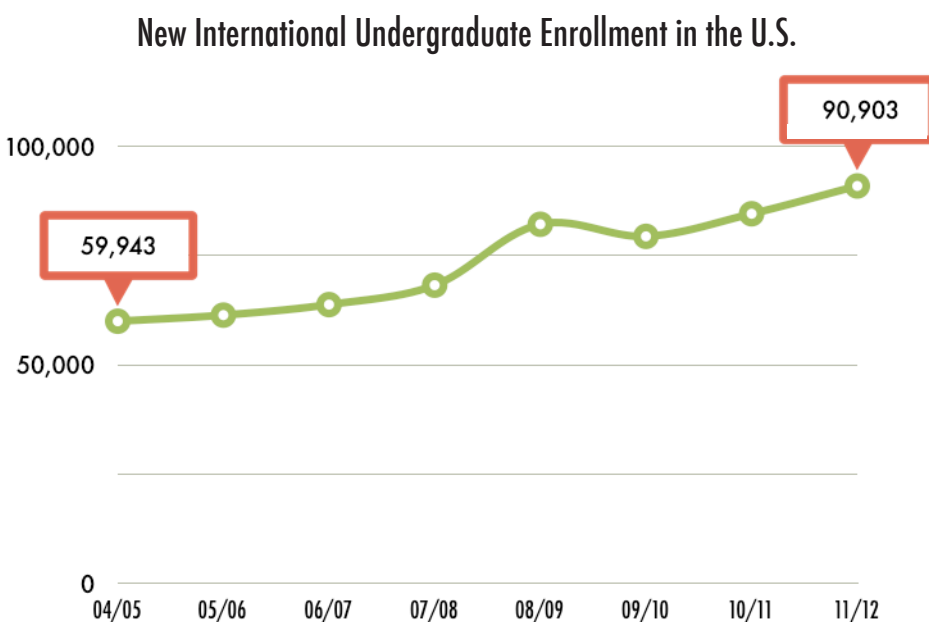
Source: Institute of International Education. (2012). "New International Student Enrollment, 2004/05-2011/12." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/opendoors

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% Change in International Student Enrollment since 2004/05 by Top 5 Countries of Origin for 2011/12

China ▲210%   India ▲25%   South Korea ▲35%   Saudi Arabia ▲890%   Canada ▼5%

Source: Institute of International Education. (2012). "New International Student Enrollment, 2004/05-20011/12." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/opendoors

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While there is growing debate about whether the academic and cultural benefits of international education are being achieved, this much is clear: the recent influx of new international students at American colleges and universities has created unprecedented opportunities for these universities to internationalize the student experience. International students have an opportunity to articulate non-U.S. perspectives and experiences in classroom discussions. Moreover, domestic students unable to afford the costs of study abroad receive a chance to interact and develop relationships with peers from around the globe.

Although the surge in international undergraduate enrollments at U.S. universities is cause for optimism, there are also a number of cautionary trends shaping the experiences of today's international students--trends that we ignore at our peril:

In our work as college educators, we have asked: "How do we create inclusive campus environments that are open to both American and international students and that are capable of fostering positive student global learning and development?"

INHOSPITABLE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS. Educational exchange programs are inherently about relationship-building. However, many international students live in "separate but equal" worlds, cut off from any meaningful interaction with their American student peers (Glass & Braskamp, 2012). Reports of unmet expectations (Smith & Khawaja, 2011); discrimination and unfair treatment (Lee & Rice, 2007); ethnocentric attitudes among faculty and American peers (Lee, 2013); concerns about individual safety (Lau, Guttenplan, & Farrer, 2013), and dissatisfaction with the U.S. university experience are all on the rise among international students in the U.S. In turn, institutions that fail to provide social and academic support for international students, many of whom arrive with more varied financial and academic profiles than their predecessors, are seeing a real decline in international student retention rates.

One of the most striking findings in our previous research is that while U.S. students generally believe that their campus honors diversity and internationalism, they rate their actual interaction with peers from different cultural backgrounds as rare (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2013). Also, many rate their desire for exposure to students with cultural backgrounds different from their own as neutral. Paradoxically, U.S. students from social networks that are relatively homogeneous culturally nonetheless view their campus climate as supportive of cultural diversity and internationalism. This contradictory finding runs counter to the image of cheerful diversity displayed in many university brochures.

MORE MOBILE, INFORMED, and COST CONSCIOUS. International students are becoming more mobile, informed, cost-conscious, and demanding global consumers. Prospective student households today have easy access to information from multiple channels, including global rankings information and institutional websites. Although information that influences destination choice has remained relatively constant (e.g., country image, institutional image, program quality, and personal motivations), how and from whom this information is gathered has changed dramatically in the post-industrial and increasingly borderless "connection economy" (Godin, 2012, p. 21). International students are influenced by immediate family members, to be sure, but they are also influenced by a plethora of transnational contacts (family, friends, etc.) with whom they exchange information about cities, universities, and countries on social networking sites (e.g., QQ, Sina Weibo, Tancent Weibo, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter).

> It is well-documented that the quality of the student experience at U.S. universities is uneven, varying markedly among students from different countries.

STUDENT MOBILITY TRENDS. Despite a long-held belief that the U.S. is the premiere destination for international students, North American student mobility is vulnerable to disruptive shifts in academic mobility patterns. Although the United States remains the leading educational destination of globally mobile students, its market share of international students has actually dropped from 23% to 17% in the last ten years (NSB, 2012). Overall, then, international student enrollment in the U.S. would be down were it not for the recent and disproportionately large influx of students from China and Saudi Arabia (IIE, 2012).

Moreover, it is well-documented that the quality of the student experience at U.S. universities is uneven, varying markedly among students from different countries. Since the day-to-day reality of international educators at U.S. universities is shaped by the human consequences of mass student migration, it is critical that we begin to "unpack" the international student experience by national origin. Greater insight into the experiences of international students is also *critical for international educators attempting to rally senior university administrators to invest more in the quality and capacities of their institutions* in order to meet the goal of a more internationally diverse student population.

Environments That Enhance The International Student Experience

College students live in a global world in which multiple worldviews and salient cultural traditions have a lasting influence on how they think, feel, and relate to others. In our work as college educators, we have asked: *"How do we create inclusive campus environments that are open to both American and international students and that are capable of fostering positive student global learning and development?"*

Colleges students need to find new as well as better ways of connecting with persons whose national origin, ethnicity, religious/spiritual orientation, race, gender, or sexual orientation is different from their own. In a previous article, the authors of this report argued that "an essential learning and developmental goal-which we call global perspective-can be enhanced if it is further interpreted within the context of educating students to be citizens of a global society" (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009, p. 27).

We further stress that the environment – the social and psychological influences in a student's life—also plays an important part in student development.

In our research on college students, we have defined global learning and development in terms of a global perspective. Global perspective is defined as the disposition and the capacity of an individual to think in complex terms. Such an approach takes into account multiple perspectives (the cognitive dimension of global learning and development) that contribute to the formation of a unique sense of self that is value-based and authentic (the intrapersonal dimension) and that relates to others with openness and respect, especially in contact with those who display one or more kinds of difference (the interpersonal dimension).

We further stress that the environment – the social and psychological influences in a student's life—also plays an important part in student development (Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Glass, 2012). No one lives in a vacuum, immune to external expectations, norms, modes of behavior, family and social influences, etc. Theories of college student development have long recognized the importance of the college environment (Renn & Reason, 2012). Today, the college community has expanded beyond the physical setting of a campus, since communications now extend beyond the local and national to the global level. Relationships that students form have therefore also become both more transnational and more diverse than ever before. As such, the multiple communities that many of today's students engage in are made up of a host of individuals from a wide variety of national, cultural, social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Hovland, 2006). It must therefore be the responsibility not only of individual students, but also of the institutions serving them, to create environments that deliver on the promises made in term of the benefits of campus diversity and internationalization.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY
Perceptions of the character and identity of the campus, supportive community of its members, extent of being encouraged to develop one's strengths and talents.

CURRICULAR AND CO-CURRICULAR EXPERIENCES

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTIONS
Discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts with faculty outside of class; faculty challenge students' views and perspectives; and faculty present issues in class from different cultural perspectives.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
The disposition and the capacity of an individual to think with complexity, taking into account multiple perspectives that contribute to the formation of a unique sense of self that is value-based and authentic, and that relates to others with openness and respect, especially in contact with those who display one or more kinds of difference.

Now that international students form a regular part of the budgetary planning cycles of so many U.S. institutions, it is imperative that these institutions devote more attention (and perhaps also more resources) to this surprisingly neglected, though powerful, student demographic. Universities have grown accustomed to investing large sums of money in recruitment agents. These efforts should now be matched by more earnest and concentrated efforts to strengthen institutional capacities to better serve the large international student population upon which U.S. institutions increasingly rely. By providing richer, higher-quality, and "higher-diversity" courses alongside other forms of educational experience, U.S. institutions can enhance their international students' sense of community and foster more meaningful interaction between these students and their faculty.

All of these core activities require U.S. institutions to connect with their international students in ways that more actively reflect and respect the changing campus and community environment(s) within which all students and institutions function today. If it remains the sole responsibility of international students to create and sustain environments that deliver on the promises made in terms of the benefits of campus diversity and internationalization, the U.S. is likely to its overall share of globally mobile students diminish further.

> Richer, higher-quality, and "higher-diversity" courses enable international students to connect more with other students, faculty, and the institution at large.

Research Study

This report highlights key findings from a recent national study on the qualitative aspects of international student experiences using the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) (see Braskamp, Braskamp, & Engberg, 2013; Merrill, Braskamp, & Braskamp, 2012). To collect data, colleges and universities administered the GPI through an online question- naire. Institutions provided invitations to a subsample of undergraduates by email in institution-wide efforts to assess global and intercultural learning.

It reports findings from the analysis of a nationally representative sample of:
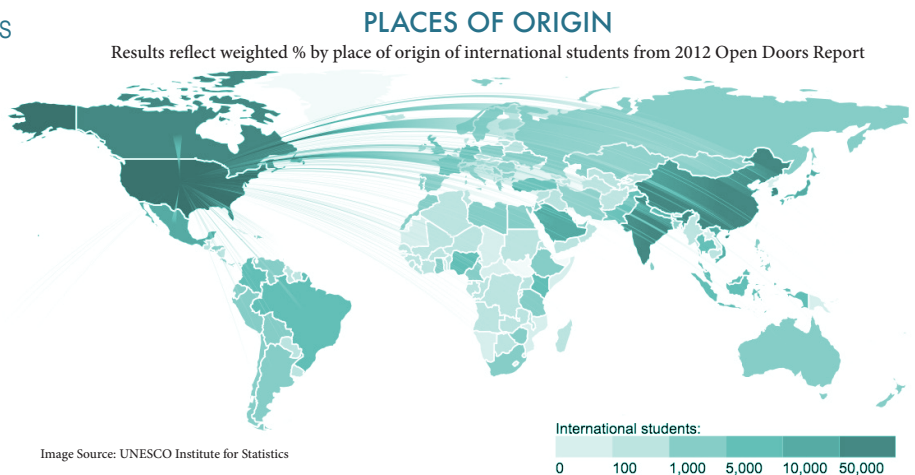
- U.S. and international students from 135 U.S. colleges and universities.

- 1,909 international students representing 110 countries weighted to reflect the most recent Open Doors report by country of origin, gender, college year, and field of study.

- 35,064 U.S. students weighted to reflect the 2012 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data by race/ethnici- ty, gender, college year, and field of study.

How do the experiences of these international students compare with those of their fellow American students?

This report addresses the question, *"How do the experiences of these international students compare with those of their fellow American students?"* It highlights comparisons of U.S. and international undergraduate student experiences as well as comparisons among the top five countries of origin for international undergraduate enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities.

SAMPLE

	U.S. STUDENTS		INT'L STUDENTS	
GENDER				
Female	19,871	57%	788	42%
Male	15,193	43%	1,113	58%
COLLEGE YEAR				
Freshman	8,178	23%	508	27%
Sophomore	8,662	25%	528	28%
Junior	9,051	26%	443	23%
Senior	9,173	26%	423	22%

PLACES OF ORIGIN

Results reflect weighted % by place of origin of international students from 2012 Open Doors Report

Image Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

International students: 0 100 1,000 5,000 10,000 50,000

COLLEGE MAJOR

Arts & Humanities · Business & Law · Communications & Journalism · Education & Social Work · Engineering · Health & Medical · Physical & Biological Sciences · Social & Behavioral Sciences
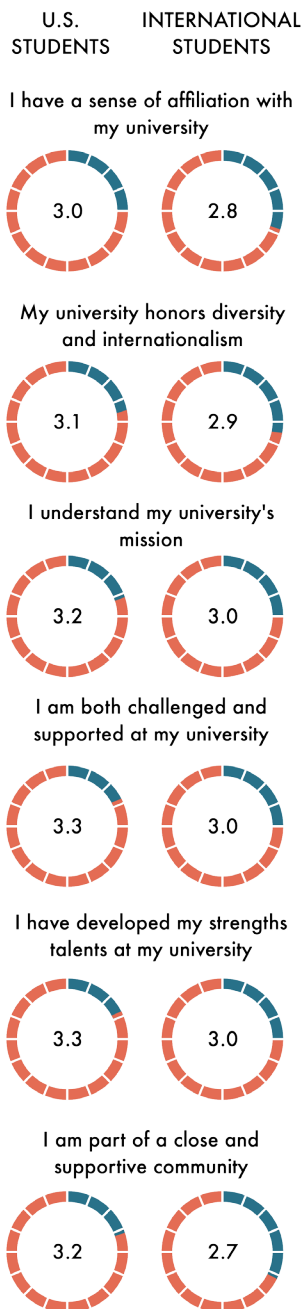
SENSE OF COMMUNITY

International students rate their sense of community as significantly lower than their U.S. peers along every dimension, especially when asked whether they feel part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends at their institution.

On all six items that measure sense of community in the GPI, international students rated their sense of community as significantly lower than their U.S. peers. They reported a weaker affiliation with their universities; were less likely to agree that their campus honors diversity and internationalism; were less clear on the mission of their university; felt less challenged and supported, and were less likely to believe that their strengths and talents had been adequately developed.

One of the most significant concerns reported in previous research on diversity and integration issues in higher education and in the media at large (Fischer, 2012; Redden, 2012) is the lack of social interaction and the sense of social isolation that many international students experience while abroad. This proves no less true for international students currently studying in the U.S. A strong sense of community is essential for improved academic performance (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2013). One of the most striking findings of our study was how detached many of the international students surveyed felt from their respective institutions and the larger university community. Overall, international students rated their sense of social connection significantly lower than their U.S. peers (see Figure 1). This lack of social connection was particularly pronounced for students from China, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea. Students from India, in contrast, reported the same levels of social connection to their U.S. peers as their American student counterparts.
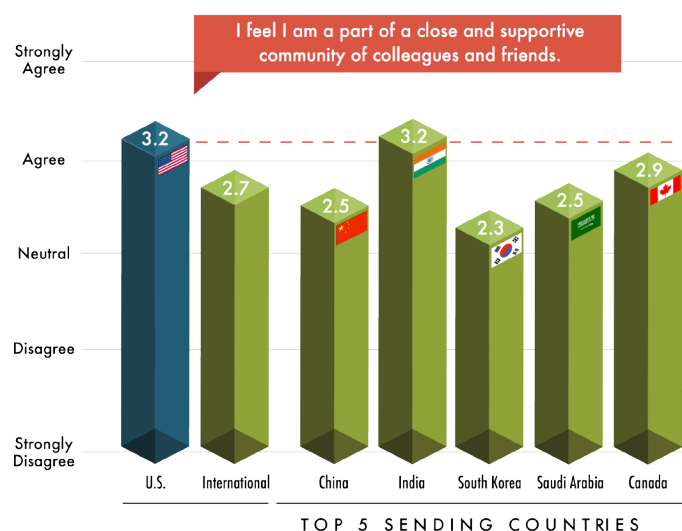
U.S. STUDENTS — INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

I have a sense of affiliation with my university
3.0 — 2.8

My university honors diversity and internationalism
3.1 — 2.9

I understand my university's mission
3.2 — 3.0

I am both challenged and supported at my university
3.3 — 3.0

I have developed my strengths talents at my university
3.3 — 3.0

I am part of a close and supportive community
3.2 — 2.7

Scale 0-4
0 = Strongly Disagree; 4 = Strongly Agree

I feel I am a part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

U.S. 3.2 | International 2.7 | China 2.5 | India 3.2 | South Korea 2.3 | Saudi Arabia 2.5 | Canada 2.9

TOP 5 SENDING COUNTRIES

Figure 1.

ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE
THAT ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Leadership programs that stress collaboration, and engaging in events and activities sponsored by their own culture, enhance international students' sense of community.

Developing relationships with others from similar cultural backgrounds creates a secure base for interpersonal exploration and supports adjustment to college. International students most engaged in activities and events sponsored by their own culture are also most likely to also be engaged with events sponsored by cultures different from their own. Own culture events help develop a strong social network with co-national peers as international students explore an unfamiliar cultural environment, including forming friendships with U.S. students and international students from other countries. Leadership programs that involve collaboration and teamwork with others from varied cultural background has a markedly strong effect on international students' sense of community.
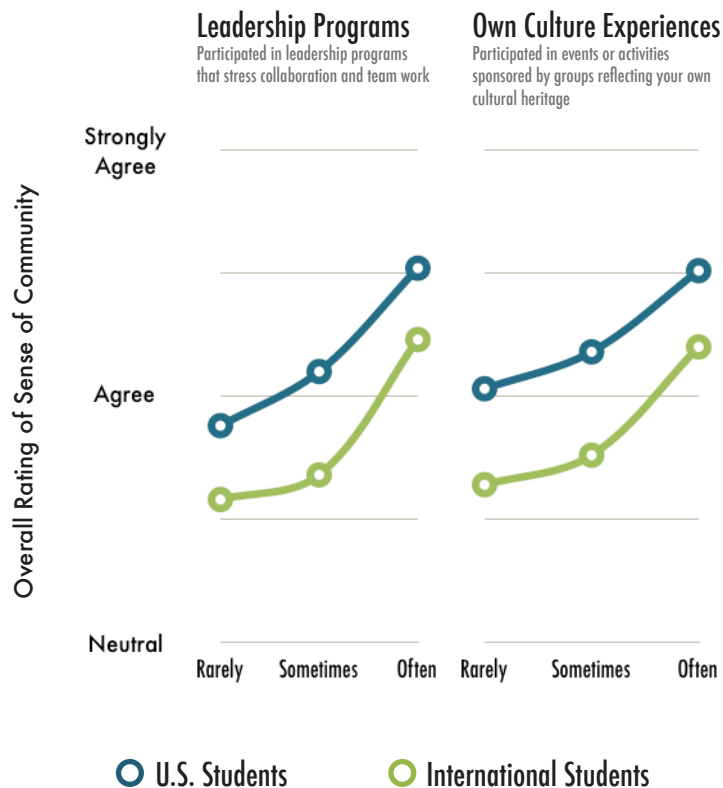

Figure 2   ○ U.S. Students   ○ International Students

Overall Rating of Sense of Community determined by taking the mean of the 6 items in the GPI (0 = Strongly Disagree; 4 =Strongly Agree): (1) I have a strong sense of affiliation with my college/university; (2) I feel that my college/university community honors diversity and internationalism; (3) I understand the mission of my college/university; (4) I am both challenged and supported at my college/university; (5) I have been encouraged to develop my strengths and talents at my college/university; and (6) I feel I am a part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends.

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Although the frequency of faculty-student interaction is similar among U.S. and international students, international students are significantly less likely to believe that faculty challenge their perspectives on a topic during class or that faculty present issues and problems in class from different cultural perspectives.
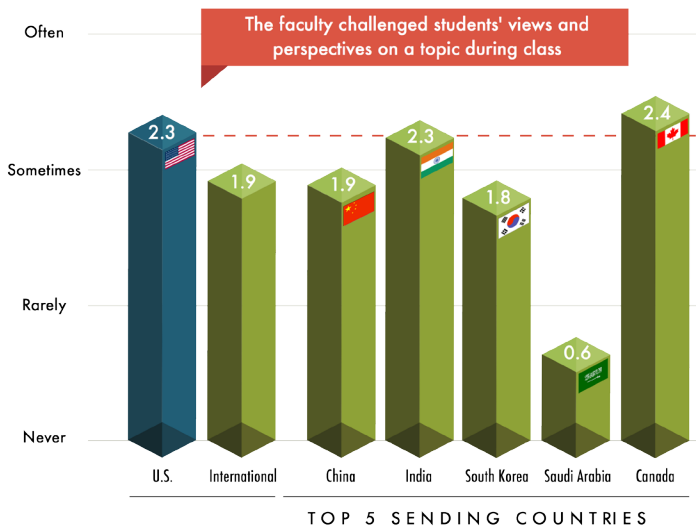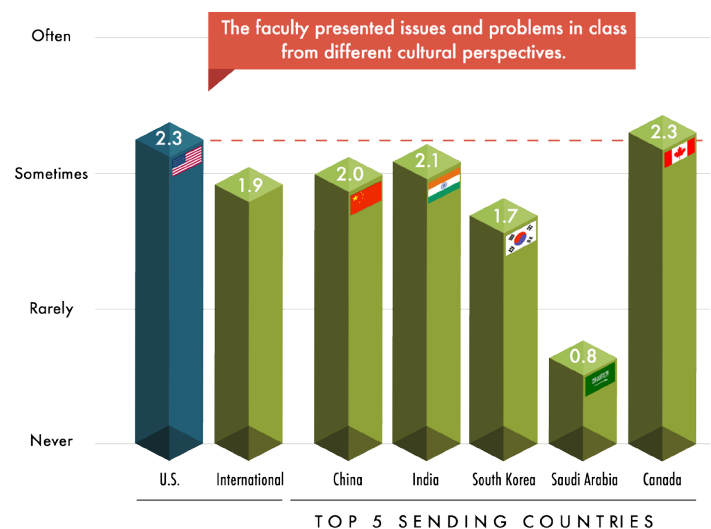

Figure 3: The faculty challenged students' views and perspectives on a topic during class

U.S. 2.3 | International 1.9 | China 1.9 | India 2.3 | South Korea 1.8 | Saudi Arabia 0.6 | Canada 2.4

TOP 5 SENDING COUNTRIES

Figure 3

Figure 4: The faculty presented issues and problems in class from different cultural perspectives.

U.S. 2.3 | International 1.9 | China 2.0 | India 2.1 | South Korea 1.7 | Saudi Arabia 0.8 | Canada 2.3

TOP 5 SENDING COUNTRIES

Figure 4

Since the 1950s, the United States has promoted educational exchange as a form of cultural diplomacy designed to improve relationships among the world's nations and to promote Western ideas of cultural pluralism and freedom of inquiry. High-quality, faculty-student interaction in the form of office hours and one-on-one discussions is a key dimension of undergraduate student learning (e.g., Cole, 2007). According to the results of our survey, international students were equally likely to have discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class and to have discussed their academic performance with a faculty member.

Although the frequency of interaction is similar, the quality of those interactions, in-class and out-of-class, was rated as significantly different between international students and their U.S. peers. International students were appreciably less likely to agree that their faculty challenged students' views and perspectives on a topic during class or that their faculty presented issues and problems in class from different cultural perspectives (see Figures 3 and 4). Saudi Arabian undergraduates, in particular, rated the quality of their interactions with faculty exceptionally low. Chinese and South Korean students, in turn, rated the quality of these interactions lower than their U.S. peers. Canadian undergraduates, in contrast, rated faculty-student interactions at the same level as or even somewhat higher than their U.S. peers.

ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE
THAT ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY

Courses that involve opportunities for intensive dialogue or engage multicultural issues, as well as leadership programs and discussions of current events, all have markedly strong effects on the quality of faculty-student interactions.

Just as international student experiences in the U.S. are uneven and vary by country of origin, they are also uneven and vary in terms of student engagement. Although traditional approaches to student engagement based on the experiences of residential U.S. students have proven less useful in the case of international students (Zhou & Cole, 2013), Figure 5 illustrates how engagement in four core activities outlined in these traditional approaches is nonetheless linked to a marked increase in international students' more positive view of faculty-student interaction:
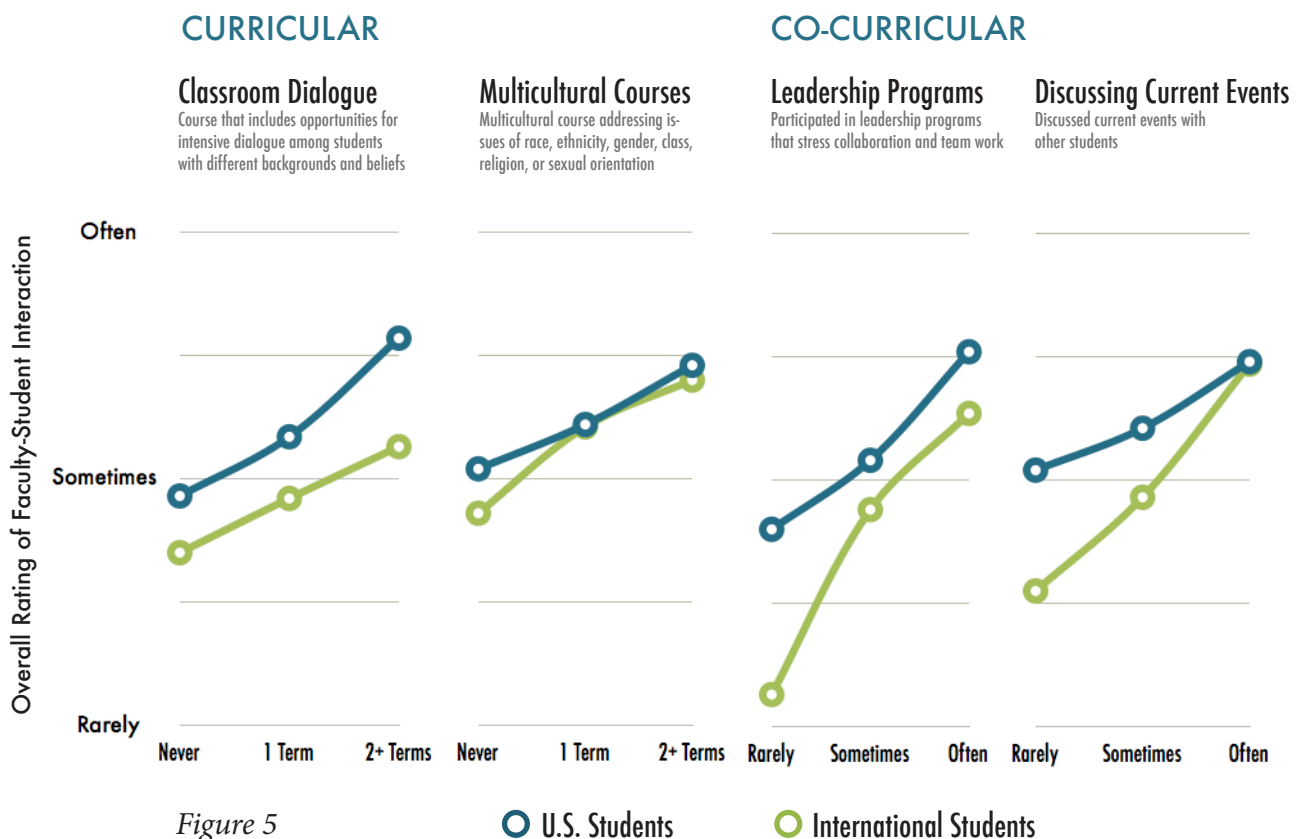
CURRICULAR

Classroom Dialogue
Course that includes opportunities for intensive dialogue among students with different backgrounds and beliefs

Multicultural Courses
Multicultural course addressing issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, or sexual orientation

CO-CURRICULAR

Leadership Programs
Participated in leadership programs that stress collaboration and team work

Discussing Current Events
Discussed current events with other students

Figure 5   ◯ U.S. Students   ◯ International Students

Overall Rating of Faculty-Student Interaction determined by taking the mean of the 4 faculty-student interaction items in the GPI (0 = Never; 4 =Very Often): "Since coming to college, how often have you experienced the following with your faculty:" (1) Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class; (2) Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member; (3) The faculty challenged students' views and perspectives on a topic during class; and (4) The faculty presented issues and problems in class from different cultural perspectives.
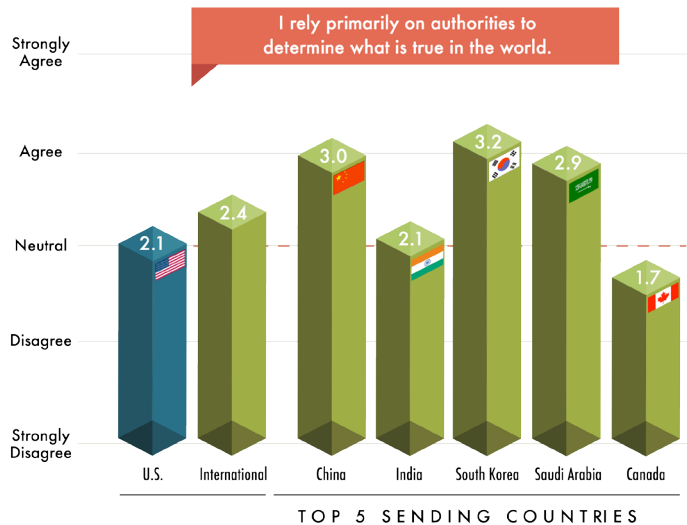
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

VIEWS OF KNOWLEDGE

Students from China, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia are also more likely than their U.S. and international peers to rely on authorities as arbiters of knowledge and truth.

I rely primarily on authorities to determine what is true in the world.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Neutral — Disagree — Strongly Disagree

U.S. 2.1 | International 2.4 | China 3.0 | India 2.1 | South Korea 3.2 | Saudi Arabia 2.9 | Canada 1.7
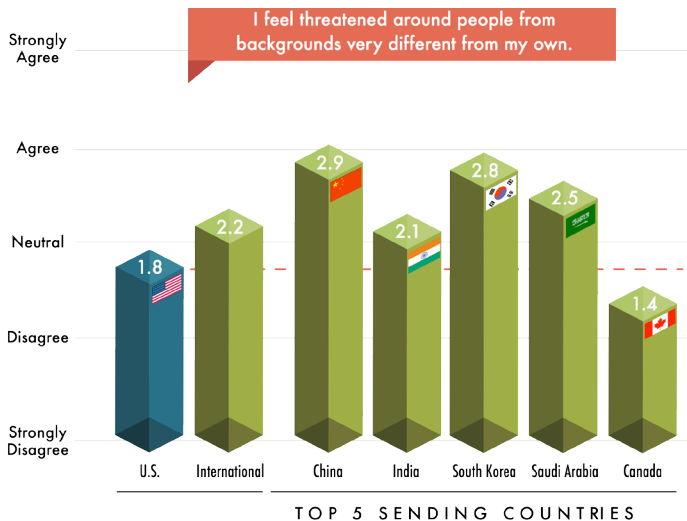
TOP 5 SENDING COUNTRIES

Figure 6

Another marked difference between U.S. and international students can be found in their expressed views of the role that authority plays in the construction of knowledge. One of the cultural diplomatic goals of educational exchange in the American model is the promotion of Western ideas such as "freedom of inquiry" and "critical thinking." In stark contrast, students surveyed from China, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia were more likely to express a strong reliance on authorities as arbiters of knowledge and truth in the world (see Figure 6).

RESPONSE TO ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE

Students from China, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia feel more threatened than students from the U.S. and Canada.

Students need to feel a basic sense of safety and security in order for learning and engagement to occur in new and unfamiliar environments. Our survey finds a marked difference not only between U.S. and international students surveyed, but also among international students from the top 5 sending countries when it comes to issues of personal safety.

I feel threatened around people from backgrounds very different from my own.

Strongly Agree — Agree — Neutral — Disagree — Strongly Disagree

U.S. 1.8 | International 2.2 | China 2.9 | India 2.1 | South Korea 2.8 | Saudi Arabia 2.5 | Canada 1.4

TOP 5 SENDING COUNTRIES

Figure 7

Students from China and South Korea were 50% more likely to agree with the statement that they "feel threatened around people with backgrounds very different from their own." Canadian students, in comparison, were less likely to feel threatened than their American peers. This could suggest campus/institutional discrimination towards Asian student populations specifically (e.g., Redden, 2012). Such a strong response from Chinese and South Korean students highlights, in any case, the need to better utilize existing strategic opportunities, such as new student orientation, to build more positive interactions between international students and their U.S. peers (see Figure 7).

CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Students from the U.S. are far less likely to form social relationships with students unlike them as their international student peers.

U.S. students are far less likely to intentionally involve people from other cultural backgrounds in their lives. This confirms perceptions among many international educators, as well as empirical research that highlights a lack of interest in cross-cultural engagement among U.S. students. This reinforces our belief that it must be the responsibility, not only of individual students, but also of the institutions serving them, to create environments that deliver on the promises made in term of the benefits of campus diversity and internationalization.
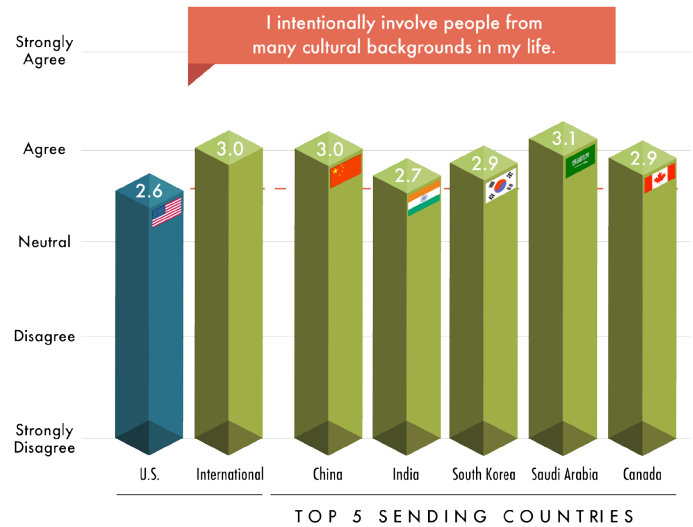

Figure 8

ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE
THAT ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

Own Culture Experiences
Participated in events or activities sponsored by groups reflecting your own cultural heritage

Other Culture Experiences
Participated in events or activities sponsored by groups reflecting a cultural heritage different from your own

Discussing Current Events
Discussed current events with other students

Classroom Dialogue
Course that includes opportunities for intensive dialogue among students with different backgrounds and beliefs

○ I feel threatened around people from backgrounds very different from my own

□ I rely primarily on authorities to determine what is true in the world

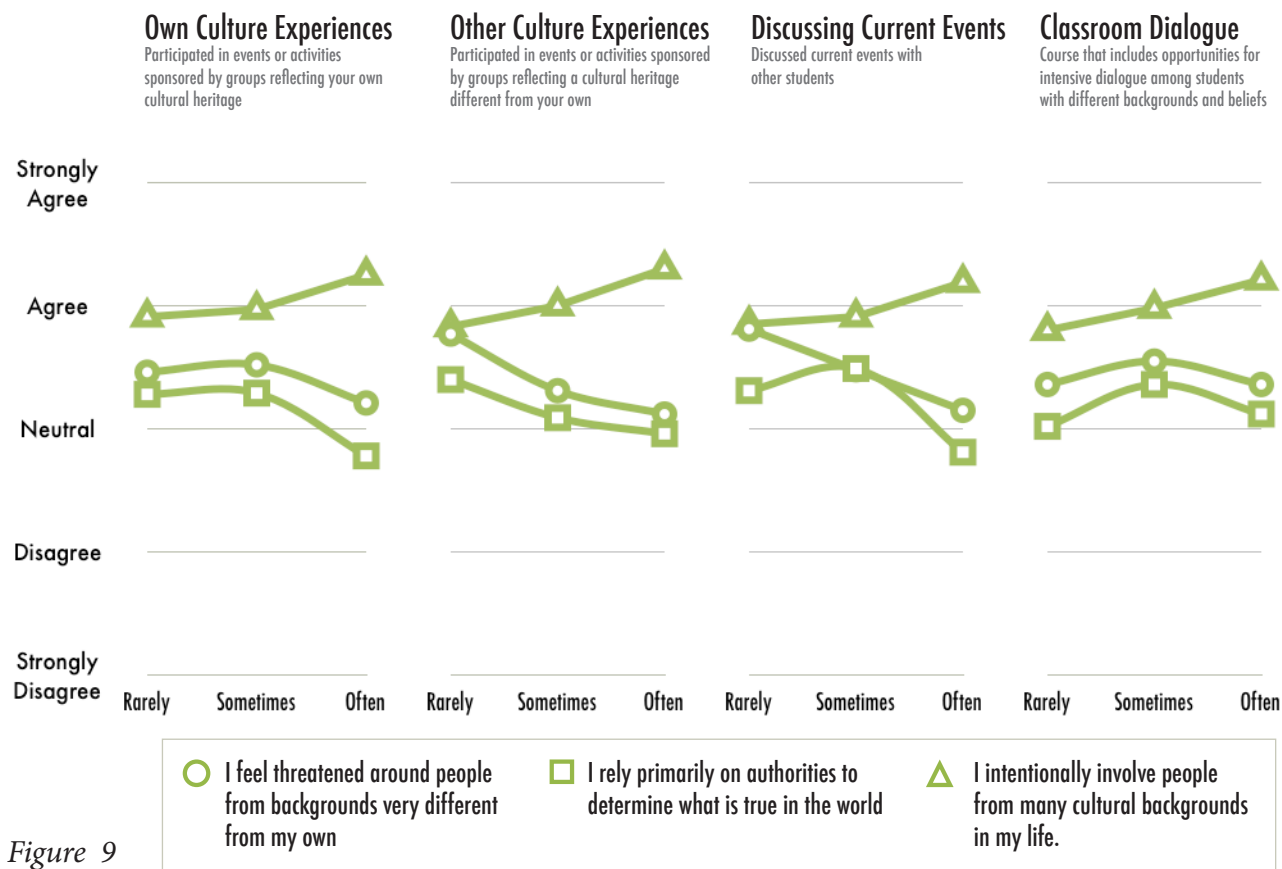△ I intentionally involve people from many cultural backgrounds in my life.

Figure 9

What happens outside the classroom appears to influence international students sense of safety and views of knowledge more significantly than what happens in it. International students surveyed who participated in events celebrating both their own culture and other cultures, including American culture, were less likely to report feeling threatened and also less likely to express heavy reliance on authorities as the arbiters of knowledge and truth. It would appear that students' engagement in same-culture activities provided a secure base for cross-cultural exploration. Cross-cultural activities, interaction, and exchange have in turn been shown to provide students with multiple perspectives, thus encouraging greater cultural liberalism/multiculturalism and more openness to different ways of thinking, knowing, and establishing truths (see Figure 9).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chris R. Glass is an assistant professor at Old Dominion University. He earned a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education from Michigan State University. His research examines the formation and evolution of the social networks of international students who attend U.S. colleges and universities. He directs the International Higher Education Leadership track in the Higher Education graduate program at ODU. Contact: crglass@odu.edu

Stephanie Buus is a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. She earned a Ph.D. in Scandinavian Studies from the University of California, Berkley. Her current research examines Mexican-American educational relations. Contact: sbuus001@odu.edu

Larry A. Braskamp earned a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Iowa. He has held administrative positions at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and at Chicago, and was Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Loyola University Chicago. He is co-author of *Putting Students First*, *Assessing Faculty Work*, and the *Global Perspective Inventory*. He consults with institutions and professional organizations in international education. Contact: braskampl@central.edu

More information about the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) may be found on the website: http://gpi.central.edu

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