ABOUT GAISA

The Global Alliance of International Student Advancement (GAISA) is a private foundation committed to research and advocacy for the betterment of the international student community in higher education. GAISA unites students (domestic and international), parents (domestic and international) faculty, higher education administrators, and experts in education, retail, and market behaviour to help higher education institutions create and sustain environments where international students thrive academically, culturally, and socially.

OUR MISSION

GAISA is building a new model of international student success in higher education through evidence-based research and student-centered advocacy.
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Austin Ashe
Associate Director of Undergraduate Education
MIT Sloan School of Management

Jenny Bowen
Director of International Student Advising
Indiana University at Bloomington

Shams Vahedi
International Student and Faculty Advisor
Michigan State University

Cissy Petty
Vice President
The George Washington University

John Singleton
Director of International Student Programs
Texas Christian University

Tamara Yakabowski
Professor and Higher Education Program Director
University of Northern Colorado

Dulce Amor L. Dorado
Director of International Students & Programs
University of California San Diego

Justin Jeffery
Director of International Student Life
University of Georgia

Whitney Szmodis
Assistant Director of Fellowship Advising
Lehigh University

Huan Roholt
Advisor to International Students and Scholars,
University of Pennsylvania

Margee Ensign
President
Dickinson College

Jamele Adams
Dean of Students
Brandeis University

Suzanne Beech
Professor
University of Ulster in Northern Ireland

Margee Ensign
President
Dickinson College

Jenny Bowen
Director of International Student Advising
Indiana University at Bloomington

Shams Vahedi
International Student and Faculty Advisor
Michigan State University

Tamara Yakabowski
Professor and Higher Education Program Director
University of Northern Colorado

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Advisor to International Students and Scholars,
University of Pennsylvania

Jenny Bowen
Director of International Student Advising
Indiana University at Bloomington

Shams Vahedi
International Student and Faculty Advisor
Michigan State University

Tamara Yakabowski
Professor and Higher Education Program Director
University of Northern Colorado

Whitney Szmodis
Assistant Director of Fellowship Advising
Lehigh University

Jamele Adams
Dean of Students
Brandeis University

Dulce Amor L. Dorado
Director of International Students & Programs
University of California San Diego
LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

Dear students, educators, colleagues and allies,

It is with tremendous excitement that I welcome you to the launch of the Global Alliance of International Student Advancement (GAISA) and to the publication of our inaugural research report. At a time of truly extraordinary stress for higher education, my colleagues and I invite you to join us in generating positive, proactive and transformative change with and for the community of international students.

In founding GAISA, we have come together collaboratively to cultivate and promote insights and resources that advance the outcomes of international students around the globe. We hail from diverse locations, institutions and perspectives but we are united in our belief that education has no borders. That learning only happens when you begin to empathize with people of different cultures, races and backgrounds. And that the economy of ideas from a global community of learners enhances the educational experience for all.

For years, international students have been viewed as second-class citizens, despite their significant contributions to the higher-ed ecosystem. These learners, who should be welcomed for their ability to add unparalleled depth to the educational experience, have too often been met with benign neglect and more recently, with downright hostility by some public figures.

We aim to address the full range of these responses, both for the international students involved and for our greater communities. And we welcome all those who, like us, seek to create and sustain environments where international students thrive academically, culturally and socially. To learn more about us—and to participate in our first-of-its-kind open research program—please visit thegaisa.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Richard DeCapua
Ed.D., Founding President of GAISA
This report is intended to be an ongoing, living document where we hope to solicit contributions from our readers to comprehensively address the international student experience in higher education as one community.

You will be asked to contribute your thoughts, research and resources on:

- Academics
- Health
- Financial and legal issues
- Social and cultural experiences
- Workforce readiness

**HOW?**

This comment box featured throughout the report will take you to a form to provide your valuable input:

[WHAT DO YOU KNOW? Click here](#)

Thank you in advance for participating and advancing international student success at our institutions.
The International Student Today
UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The United States has long been the top global destination for international students, with over 50 top rated schools worldwide.

International Student Population Growth in the U.S.

1949-1950: 26K
2019: 1.1M

The benefits for the U.S. have been clear:

- $44.7B contributed to the nation’s economy in 2018
- 5.5 percent increase from 2017
- 450K jobs supported by international students
CONTRIBUTIONS TO SILICON VALLEY

About half of the international students studying in the U.S. in 2016 were studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) topics, creating a solid pipeline of talent for jobs in the U.S. technology sector.

Foreign students have helped to shape Silicon Valley.

87 billion-dollar startups have a founder that came to America as an international student.

By 2014, 45 percent of foreign student graduates were extending their visas to work in the same metropolitan area as their college or university, suggesting that international students offered valuable skills to local employers.
INSTITUTIONS PROFIT FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Of course, the most direct beneficiaries of the influx of international students are the universities and colleges they attend.

International students typically pay full tuition, boosting revenues for schools and enabling them to offer financial aid to domestic students. And the majority of these students pay for their fees from overseas funding rather than seeking support from host institutions.

Private institutions were no exception to enrolling high numbers of international students, but their data is more difficult to come by, and their tuition costs vary less student-to-student.

U.S. universities and colleges have also benefited from the presence of international students to increase their records for campus diversity.

IN 2015:

$9B
in tuition and fees gleaned from foreign students at U.S. public universities

28%
of annual tuition revenue was coming from international students

12%
of the student population in the US was international students
COVID-19 and Politics as the Inflection Point for Change
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT DECLINE

The pandemic has severely impacted international enrollments.

As of September 10, 2020:

- **25% predicted drop in enrollment**

- **11% drop in international student undergraduate enrollment**, more than any other group
POLITUICS AND POLICIES RESTRICTING HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS

Long-term challenges have also come to the fore in recent months, centering on political efforts to restrict access to higher education for international students.

**July 6, 2020:**

- President Trump’s directive would have forced all international students attending U.S. colleges out of the country if their classes were conducted fully online due to the pandemic.

- Harvard and M.I.T. quickly filed suit over the order and only days later, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) rescinded the policy amid a widespread backlash.

**September 25, 2020**

- The Trump administration proposed to eliminate “duration of status” on visas for international students by imposing end dates rather than allowing visas to remain valid for the time it takes to get a degree.

As disruptive as they’ve been, however, Trump’s policies and the pandemic have only served to magnify long-standing issues in how colleges and universities treat and exclude international students.
GLOBAL MOVES TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Meanwhile, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia are gaining an edge. In 2019, Canada recorded its second year of double-digit growth in international students, rising to third place behind the United States and Australia, according to the Canada Immigration Newsletter.

- Since March, Canada and the United Kingdom have also proposed or implemented policies to make it easier for international students to both come and stay.

- Canada has exempted students with valid visas from travel restrictions that affect most foreign nationals and has reduced barriers for students to keep their visas and work, according to its immigration services.

- And some universities in the United Kingdom, already facing drops in enrollment because of Brexit, are even exploring the option of chartering flights for overseas students.
Opinion: America Relies On International Students
By Margee Ensign, The Hechinger Report, September 19, 2020

International students bring to our campuses diverse perspectives shaped by the different opportunities and challenges of their countries. They enrich our understanding of their cultures and share their talents with us. They can build greater understanding of America when they return home, sharing the stories of their experiences in the U.S. Our campuses — and our country — cannot be as vibrant without them.

America, the world leader in higher education, stands at the precipice of losing the economic, intellectual and cultural contributions international students bring to our society and its college and university communities. This trend is also a harbinger of this country’s loss of soft power around the world.

These young men and women (international students) provide our students and the communities in which they live with a greater understanding of the world and its mosaic of cultures. They learn about American society and allow us to become better informed about global perspectives.

These perspectives are critical for the United States to be a global player, and their erosion is a real threat to our national security.
The International Student Experience: By The Numbers
International students help to subsidize the financial stability of countless public and private institutions and pump billions of dollars into national and local economies each year.

- They also add **priceless intellectual capital** to institutions that vie to educate some of the world’s best and brightest minds.
- Yet their **voices**—their lived experiences as students in a strange land—are **too often missing from the conversation** around international students.

What does life look like for these young people? What are their thoughts and experiences with regards to:

- **Academics**
- **Health**
- **Financial and Legal Issues**
- **Social and Cultural Experiences**
- **Workforce Readiness**

*The truth is, we don’t really know.*
GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVANCEMENT

We, as the higher learning leadership, have not asked for nor have we listened to the voices of international students and their families.

GAISA was created to do just that.

• And it’s why we are committed to bringing together those who are at the heart of the international student experience to uncover the complex realities of their lives.

• With our ongoing research, we expect to relate the first-hand answers of students and parents to the approaches, models and opinions shared by higher-ed administrators and faculty.
60% of international students said their institution was providing enough support and resources to enable their success.

But when asked about specific things their institution could do to better support them, 78% had an answer:

- Enhanced resources for mental health, counseling, housing, nutrition, and healthcare (21%)
- Increased focus on campus life integration (21%)
- Enhanced academic advising and faculty support (19%)
- Enhanced visa navigation assistance (8%)
- Open dialogue about social issues (4%)
- More personalized marketing and communications (4%)
- Enhanced onboarding programming (1%)

Methodology: This survey was conducted by GAISA from September 14-29, 2020 with 87 international students and 245 domestic students.
The International Student Experience: By The Numbers

Academics
A survey by the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Consortium found that both graduate and undergraduate international students reported higher levels of satisfaction with remote learning than their domestic peers.

When many, if not most interactions are taking place online due to the pandemic, academic integrity has emerged as a special area of concern for institutions.

Questions around academic integrity are a grey area for many students, but can be especially complex for international students.

Many universities are providing international students with guidance on academic integrity and ways to avoid plagiarism.

PLAGIARISM

The concept of plagiarism is often foreign to many international students studying in the U.S.:

- In a cross-cultural study comparing students studying in Israel, Russia, the Netherlands, and the United States, researchers found students who come from cultures where cheating is the norm are more likely to engage, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in the behaviors themselves.

- Another study concluded that “collectivist cultures are more likely to tolerate cheating, as helping other students during exams is accepted and may even be encouraged.”
ACADEMICS

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

OUR RESEARCH FINDS:

19% said their institution could better support them with enhanced academic advising and faculty support.

87% think they have a good understanding of what their institution considers as cheating.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY SITUATIONS:

32% of international students said all of these were academic dishonesty situations:

- Using notes to take a test or complete an assignment
- Doing an assignment or taking a test with a friend
- Paying someone to complete your assignment or test
- Obtaining answers to an assignment or test from a previous class session
- Copying and pasting quotes or written sections from a website or textbook into an assignment or test
- Including facts or opinions that are common knowledge into an assignment or exam without a citation of the author
DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE | STUDENTS

- Domestic students agree academic dishonesty has increased due to COVID-19, but they aren’t personally cheating in their classes and aren’t willing to name names.

56% said academic dishonesty has increased since the start of the pandemic

13% agreed that cheating is appropriate for the online classes they are enrolled in

6% said they knew of someone that has engaged in academically dishonest behavior since classes began in the fall
DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE | PARENTS

- Parents, on the other hand are convinced that academic dishonesty is not increasing, it is never appropriate and their student would never engage in such a thing.

**45%** believe academic dishonesty has not increased due to COVID-19

**92%** strongly disagreed that academic dishonesty is appropriate for the online classes their student is enrolled in

"Why would anyone, under any circumstances, condone cheating?"

Parent response to Facebook poll related to academic dishonesty

**WHAT DO YOU KNOW?**

Click here to share your thoughts, research and resources on international student academics
4.2 Health

The International Student Experience: By The Numbers
OUR RESEARCH FINDS:

21% said colleges and universities can better support their success in the following areas:

- Mental Health
- Nutrition
- Counseling
- Healthcare
- Housing

Our research finds:

In the SERU survey, international students cited the following as primary concerns:

- Maintaining good health while in the U.S.: 45% undergraduate, 67% graduate
- Understanding U.S. medical insurance and obtaining health services: 35% undergraduate, 53% graduate

Mental health for international students is incredibly important, particularly given that so many students come from countries where reporting issues related to mental health is considered weak or shameful. To date, there is limited research on this topic, so I am so excited for GAISA to tackle it further through the perspective of the student.

Suzanne Beech
GAISA Advisory Council member,
Professor at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Click here to provide thoughts, research and resources on international student health on campuses worldwide
Financial And Legal Issues
Primary concerns of international students in the **SERU survey**:

- **Managing immigration status and visa issues**: 44% (undergraduate) vs. 55% (graduate)
- **Adequate financial support**: 36% (undergraduate) vs. 49% (graduate)

**OUR RESEARCH FINDS:**

International students’ biggest challenges to success:

- **33%** tuition, housing and other costs
- **16%** immigration policies
- **55%** graduate concerns

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I believe there are very limited resources available to international students about their constitutional rights and many legal situations could be avoided if they were further informed beforehand. For example, some students who arrive in the U.S. are deported upon arrival because they signed a letter that was not necessary or even students who get detained because they participated in a peaceful protest.

*Shams Vahedi*

International Student and Faculty Advisor,
Michigan State University

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**WHAT DO YOU KNOW?**

[Click here to share your perspective, research and resources on immigration policies, visas, and financial support of international students](#)
The International Student Experience: By The Numbers

Social and Cultural Experiences
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

The presence of international students, even in large numbers, is insufficient to promote intercultural interactions and friendships.

**International students lack a sense of belonging on campus:**

10 OUT OF 12 international students internalized inequality and blamed themselves for it in the following ways:

- Imperfect English to express themselves better
- Not trying harder to prove to biased instructors or domestic peers that they are capable of doing group work or homework
- Looking different or wearing something different
- Only being seen as “foreigners” or “outsiders”

Both domestic and international students feel it is the institution’s responsibility to increase and enhance intercultural interactions on campus.
Institutions boast about their international student populations when recruiting domestic students, but fail to support the integration of student populations.

OUR RESEARCH FINDS:

70% of domestic students said their college or university advertised their global and diverse student population when going through the admissions process.

57% say interactions with international students have been a valuable or meaningful part of their collegiate experience.

52% said they don’t have any international student friends.

21% said colleges and universities can better support their success with increased focus on campus life integration.

Click here to contribute your thoughts, research and resources on the social and cultural experiences of international students on campus.
The International Student Experience: By The Numbers

4.5

Workforce Readiness
International students, especially those bound for the United States, study abroad for **improved career prospects**.

**81%** said that they chose to study abroad to **improve career opportunities**.

**43%** decided to study abroad to pursue a **specific career**.

**Leading Issue: Securing a job in the U.S. after graduation**
- **28%** undergraduate
- **67%** graduate

**OUR RESEARCH FINDS:**
- **14%** say career services, job preparation and access to on-campus jobs are the biggest challenges to their success.

**WHAT DO YOU KNOW?**

**Click here to share your perspective, research and resources on workforce readiness for international students**

**Dulce Amor L. Dorado**
Director of International Students & Programs,
University of California- San Diego

**Work authorization regulations and lack of professional connections** are often barriers to starting a career.
Stay Tuned and Get Involved

All of us involved in international education must recognize that we’re in for a bumpy ride, right now and for some time to come.

But to see where we’re going, stay tuned to GAISA.

Amid the very real pain of the pandemic and the anxieties and discord that surround it, we’re listening to—and helping to make sense of—the authentic voices of students, families and administrators involved in the international student experience.

We’re reaching out to those communities to help us better discern the realities of life as an international student. We’d love to receive any and all insights, experiences and reports that would allow us to add greater depth to our findings.

And the clarity that we create together can then help us all move more confidently towards a future that welcomes international students to our universities and colleges with the respect and dignity they deserve.

GET INVOLVED | Visit www.thegaisa.org