Graduate and Professional Student Government
International Graduate Student Assessment
Spring 2023

Purpose of Assessment

The Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) wanted to assess the experiences of international graduate and professional students at Texas A&M to identify areas in which GPSG could work with International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) to improve international graduate students' experience. More specifically, GPSG wanted to understand international graduate students' experiences as they encounter processes unique to international students, like the I-20 processes, using the Terra Dotta system, and processes in applying and participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT). GPSG leadership contacted Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) in the fall of 2022 to assist them in creating and distributing the survey to international graduate students attending Texas A&M University in the spring of 2023; this is the third time SAPAR assisted GPSG with this assessment.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations that the GPSG may take based on the results. However, the GPSG leaders and members may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of international students. GPSG leaders and members are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of the international graduate and professional students' experience.

- Almost all students were satisfied with the *accuracy* of I-20 documents and two-thirds were satisfied with the *responsiveness* of Texas A&M representatives to questions about the process. However, just over half of the students were satisfied with the *timeliness* of the I-20 issuing process. In fact, dissatisfaction with the timeliness of the I-20 process was the largest theme that emerged from the formal qualitative sort conducted on the comments.
    - Graduate and Professional Student Government is encouraged to work with International Student & Scholar Services to communicate more about the time it takes for issuing I-20 documents. Perhaps, ISSS could monitor how long it takes and if that changes at different times in the year. This information could also be included in communications with international graduate students.

- Almost all students reported that the website for International Student & Scholar Services was useful or somewhat useful. Additionally, the website was reported as the top source students utilize to gather information from ISSS.
    - While most students were positive, some students felt it was hard to find information or that it was vague. GPSG may want to look at the website with ISSS to see if there are ways that information could be clearer. It also may be good to bring in a group of international students to provide feedback and specific areas that are confusing or anything they feel is missing.

- Three-fourths of students indicated they were considering OPT but had not yet participated. However, students also felt unclear about the OPT processes or that they needed more information. Additionally, only half of the students shared that were aware of the OPT webinars or workshops offered by ISSS.

- International Student & Scholars Services offers numerous programs and resources for international students. However, less than half of the responding students reported hearing about or utilizing these programs and resources.
    - It is recommended that Graduate and Professional Student Government explore ways they might work with International Student & Scholar Services to promote these programs and resources to hopefully bring more awareness. GPSG may want to start with the OPT webinars and workshops

since this is something that international students are considering, and this may provide clearer information about the process for these students.

Method and Sample

The survey was developed and distributed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The 15-question survey contained 11 quantitative questions and four qualitative questions. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. Responses were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Excel®. Qualitative responses were analyzed using formal content analyses conducted during two sessions with an international graduate student in GPSG and SAPAR staff. Content analysis identified the main themes from the responses of students to the four qualitative questions.

The survey link was sent via email on February 10, 2023, to 4,582 Texas A&M international graduate and professional students received from International Student & Scholar Services; seven email addresses were undeliverable and four were duplicates and not sent twice. Non-respondents received up to two reminders before the survey closed on February 28, 2023. Of the 4,571 students receiving the survey link, 524 took some part of the survey, yielding an 11% response rate. This was lower than the 18% response rate in 2022 and the same as the response rate in 2021.

Results

Results are reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are listed in decreasing order for 2023 mean or frequency, or the count number of themes for qualitative questions unless otherwise noted; comparisons to the past two years are included where applicable. Categorized themes determined through the content analysis are reported; the entire list of comments can be found in a separate document. Some comments contained more than one theme and were included in multiple themes, therefore, the number of comments for the themes may be higher than the total number of comments. Students whose countries have fewer than five students represented in the survey population are represented as "Not Identified" next to their comments within that list. Students' demographics were gathered from the University's information system based on the students' Unique Identification Number (UIN) received from International Student & Scholar Services.

Respondents were first asked to rate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with elements when working with Texas A&M and the I-20 process. Table 1, on the next page, illustrates that respondents were quite satisfied with the accuracy of the I-20 documents, with almost two-thirds reporting being very satisfied. Similar to previous years, students were least satisfied with the timeliness of the I-20 process, which was a slight decrease from last year, but higher than in 2021.

Please rate your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with these elements when working with TAMU and the I-20 process.	Very Satisfied (5)	Satisfied (4)	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2022 Mean (sd) [n]	2021 Mean (sd) [n]
Accuracy of I-20 documents	60%	33%	6%	1%	<1%	4.51 (.69) [454]	4.38 (.79) [615]	4.23 (.93) [355]
Responsiveness of Texas A&M representatives to your questions about the process	26%	41%	20%	9%	4%	3.78 (1.05) [454]	3.70 (1.16) [619]	3.36 (1.31) [362]
Timeliness of I-20 issuing process	24%	34%	21%	16%	5%	3.55 (1.16) [454]	3.61 (1.17) [617]	3.38 (1.30) [358]

Table 1: Experiences Working with I-20 Process

Respondents were asked to share any comments regarding their experiences as international graduate students at Texas A&M and the I-20 issuing processes. Eight themes were determined through the formal qualitative analysis of comments from 112 students. Table 2 shows that just under half of all comments (43%) talked about the processing time, specifically, that it is a long wait, too slow, or late. A student from India said, "It takes an insanely long time to process an I-20/CPT I-20/OPT I-20 at Texas A&M. This makes the life of an international student even more stressful." Another student from Bangladesh stated, "They [ISSS] took a very long time to process my I-20, there were mistakes about my country of origin twice."

Theme Category	Theme Count [n=112]
Process Time	47
Communication with International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS)	29
Positive Experience	28
Not Applicable	6
Correctness of I-20	5
General Negative Experience	4
ISSS Staff Training	3
Expensive	2

Table 2: Summary Themes – I-20 Processes

Additionally, just over one-quarter (27%) commented on the communication with ISSS. Specifically that it is hard to reach staff members, they do not receive an email reply, and that the phone is not answered. A Texas A&M Galveston student and a student from the Law School commented that it is difficult to reach someone and that the only option is remote contact.

One-quarter of students had a positive comment about their experience with the I-20. Many described their experiences as fine, excellent, helpful staff, quick, and efficient. Furthermore, one student from India indicated that it was improving stating "I-20 issuing has been a headache, it's improving for sure but still there are chances for improvement." Those commenting on the correctness of I-20 indicated that the wrong country was reported, that documentation was mailed to the wrong location, and that general mistakes were made. The staff training theme

was about the front desk and those answering the phone. Students felt that those working the front desk were not experienced and that they received contradicting information.

Furthermore, some students talked about something not related to the I-20 process and were themed as not applicable. Some students indicated they had a different form and not an I-20 or commented on other topics such as health insurance or graduating students.

International Student & Scholar Services uses Terra Dotta software [RD1] to manage international student records and requests. Respondents were asked about how recently students accessed the Terra Dotta system. Table 3, in order of the length of time, indicates that just under half accessed the Terra Dotta system within the last two months. Additionally, those who indicated they had not accessed the system at all continued to decrease compared to the past two years.

When did you most recently access the Terra Dotta software system?	2023 Percent [n=452]	2022 Percent [n=631]	2021 Percent [n=369]
Within the last month	29%	20%	35%
One to two months ago	18%	17%	17%
Three to five months ago	28%	30%	16%
Six or more months ago	24%	28%	20%
I have not accessed the Terra Dotta system	1%	6%	12%

Table 3: Last Accessed Terra Dotta System

International students indicating they had accessed the Terra Dotta system at any point (n=448) were asked how often they had accessed the software. Table 4, in order of frequency, demonstrates that almost one-third of students accessed the software once and that 90% accessed Terra Dotta up to five times. The frequency has remained similar for the past three years.

About how often have you accessed the Terra Dotta system within [time frame selected above]?	2023 Percent [n=443]	2022 Percent [n=576]	2021 Percent [n=318]
Once	31%	32%	30%
Two to five times	59%	55%	54%
Six to ten times	7%	7%	10%
More than ten times	4%	5%	6%

Table 4: Frequency of Accessing Terra Dotta

Additionally, those who indicated they had accessed the Terra Dotta system were asked to share feedback regarding their experience with the Terra Dotta software system and processes involved in using it as an international graduate student at Texas A&M. Table 5, on the following page, demonstrates the five themes determined from the 53 respondents. The most prevalent was positive experiences with Terra Dotta where students described the software as helpful, interactive, user-friendly, and easy to use. The second most common theme was software user issues; students felt the software was confusing, inconvenient, complicated, and required multiple signatures. Others indicated it was hard or slow to update information and that there are some non-exhausting lists. The unclear or lack of information included instructions and questions being unclear, not knowing about the software, not having enough guidance to use it, and having that information precise or using bullet points would be preferred. For the processing time, students shared that it took too long, and updates are not provided.

Theme Category	Theme Count [n=53]
Positive Experience	20
Software User Issues	16
Unclear or Lack of Information	7
Processing Time	6
Not Applicable	5

Table 5: Summary Themes – Terra Dotta System

When asked if they accessed information through the International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) website (https://iss.tamu.edu/) or its associated web pages within the last six months, nearly three-fourths said yes as seen in Table 6. This is similar to the past two years.

Have you accessed information through the International Student & Scholar Services website and its associated web pages within the last six months?	2023 Percent [n=440]	2022 Percent [n=620]	2021 Percent [n=363]
Yes	74%	72%	76%
No	15%	17%	15%
I do not remember	11%	12%	9%

Table 6: Accessed the ISSS Website

International students who indicated using the website (n=325) were asked two follow-up questions. They were first asked about how useful the information they accessed through the ISSS website was for them. Table 7 reveals that just over two-thirds of respondents indicated the information was useful, and almost one-third felt that it was somewhat useful. Students reporting that the information on the ISSS website was not useful decreased for a second year.

How useful was the information you accessed through the ISSS website?	2023 Percent [n=324]	2022 Percent [n=443]	2021 Percent [n=276]
Useful	68%	62%	57%
Somewhat Useful	31%	35%	40%
Not Useful	1%	3%	4%

Table 7: Useful Information on the Website

Students who accessed the website were asked to share any comments regarding their experiences with the ISSS website as an international graduate student at Texas A&M University. Table 8, on the following page, contains the six themes from the comments of 35 students. The most common theme was positive experiences with students saying the website was user-friendly, easy to use, had useful information, and answered most questions. However, almost the same number of students shared that information was hard to find, there was too much information, that it is easy to get lost on the website, that it takes a long time to find what you are looking for and it had broken links. In the lack of information theme, students commented that information was missing or that the information was so broad and vague that you need to contact someone from ISSS to get all the needed information. A few students mentioned that they had a difficult time finding the number of hours allowed to work during summer internships, health insurance information, and the insurance waiver process. The response time comments were regarding ISSS responding faster to questions.

Theme Category	Theme Count [n=35]
Positive Experience	10
Navigation Issues	9
Lack of Information	8
Response Time	5
General Comments	2
Not Applicable	2

Table 8: Summary Themes – ISSS Website

The next series of questions addressed international graduate students' experiences with the Optional Practical Training (OPT) processes. F-1 international graduate students interested in having practical work experience in the United States need to apply and participate in OPT. Respondents were asked about their status with OPT. Table 9 indicates that three-fourths of the respondents were considering OPT but had not yet participated, which is similar to the past two years.

Please choose from below which describes you best regarding OPT:	2023 Percent [n=431]	2022 Percent [n=614]	2021 Percent [n=357]
I am considering OPT but have not yet participated	75%	76%	58%
I am not considering OPT	12%	12%	16%
I have applied for OPT but have not yet participated	5%	4%	12%
I have participated in OPT	4%	4%	7%
I am not eligible to participate in OPT (not an F1 student)	3%	4%	7%

Table 9: Optional Practical Training (OPT) Status

Students reporting that they were eligible to participate in OPT (n=417) were asked to share any comments regarding their experiences with the processes available through Texas A&M that enable participation in OPT. Five themes emerged from the comments of 45 students as seen in Table 10. The most common theme was being unclear about OPT and needing additional information. Students shared that it was confusing, they were unsure when to use it, and they did not understand the process. Many of the positive comments were about the ISSS staff being helpful and supportive. The working with ISSS theme included having more assistance and in-person meetings and processing information quicker. One student from the Law School specifically asked for assistance. Students felt that the processing fee was unnecessary and very high.

Theme Category	Theme Count [n=45]
Unclear on OPT Process/Need More Information	14
Not Experienced OPT	12
Positive Experience	9
Working with ISSS (staff assistance and processing time)	6
Processing Fee	4

Table 10: Summary Themes: Optional Practical Training (OPT)

A new section about programs, support services, and resources offered by International Student & Scholar Services was added to the survey this year. Using a select all that apply questions, students were asked about which programs and services they had heard about or utilized. Table 11, on the following page, shows that less than half

of the respondents knew about most programs and support services. Additionally, 10% reported not knowing about any of the programs and services.

Which of the following programs and support services offered by International Student & Scholar Services have you heard about and/or utilized? (Select all that apply)	2023 Percent [n=409]
OPT Webinars/Workshops	50%
CPT Webinars/Workshops	46%
New International Student Orientation (online)	42%
Sprintax Tax Webinars/Workshops	41%
New Student FAQ Webinars	39%
Immigration Attorney Webinars/Workshops	39%
International/Global Welcome Party	39%
CAPS Let's Talk Program	29%
General Employment Webinars/Workshops	21%
None	10%
Other	--

Table 11: Awareness of Programs and Services by ISSS

International graduate students were also asked to identify resources they heard about or utilized to gather information from International Student & Scholar Services. Table 12 demonstrates that the website and email were the common resources students knew of or used. Social media was the least used to gather information from ISSS.

Which of the following resources offered have you heard about and/or utilized to gather information from International Student & Scholar Services? (Select all that apply)	2023 Percent [n=412]
Website	80%
Email	74%
Visiting the ISSS Office in Person	47%
Virtual Drop-In Advising through Zoom	41%
Phone	33%
Pre-Scheduled Advising Appointments	18%
After-Hours Emergency Call Services	8%
Instagram	8%
Twitter	2%
Facebook	2%
None	2%
Other	--

Table 12: Awareness of Resources to Get Information from ISSS

The final question asked students about the format for orientation that would have been most helpful when thinking about their first semester at Texas A&M. According to Table 13, on the following page, 85% of students either found in-person orientation to be helpful or believed it would have been helpful.

When thinking about your first semester at Texas A&M, would it have been helpful to attend an in-person orientation hosted by International Student & Scholar Services?	2023 Percent [n=408]
I did not attend an in-person orientation but believe it would have been helpful	47%
I attended an in-person orientation, and it was helpful	38%
I did not attend an in-person orientation but do not believe it would have been helpful	10%
I attended an in-person orientation and did not find it helpful	5%

Table 13: Helpfulness of In-Person Orientation by ISSS

The demographics of the students sent the survey and those who responded were gathered using the University student database. Table 14, on the following page, shows the demographics in descending order of the respondent demographics for each category. Most categories were similar between all students who were sent the survey and those who responded to the survey. There were slightly more students from Agriculture & Life Sciences and slightly fewer students from Engineering who took the survey compared to the survey population. Additionally, more female students and fewer male students took the survey compared to the survey population.

	2023 Survey Respondents [n]	2023 Survey Population [n]
Classification	**[n=524]**	**[n=4,578]**
Masters	53%	52%
Doctoral	45%	47%
PB Nondegree	1%	<1%
Pharmacy	<1%	<1%
School of Law	<1%	<1%
Dental	<1%	<1%
Vet	--	<1%
College	**[n=524]**	**[n=4,578]**
Engineering	48%	57%
Arts & Sciences	14%	15%
Agriculture & Life Sciences	11%	5%
Architecture	5%	4%
Education & Human Development	4%	3%
Mays Business School	4%	6%
Public Health	4%	2%
Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences	2%	1%
Bush School of Government and Public Service	2%	1%
School of Law	2%	1%
Medicine	1%	1%
Pharmacy	1%	<1%
Galveston	1%	<1%
Exchange	1%	<1%
Performance, Visualization & Fine Arts	<1%	<1%
Dentistry	<1%	1%
Qatar Campus	--	<1%
Nursing	--	<1%
Sex	**[n=524]**	**[n=4,578]**
Male	57%	65%
Female	43%	35%
Campus	**[n=523]**	**[n=4,576]**
College Station	93%	96%
Health Science Center	7%	3%
Galveston	1%	1%
Qatar	--	<1%

Table 14: Demographics

Additionally, countries the international students were from were also gathered through the University student database. Table 15, on the following two pages, provides this information.

Country	2023 Survey Respondents [n=520]	2023 Survey Population [n=4,561]
India	42%	43%
China	11%	19%
Bangladesh	5%	2%
Nigeria	4%	2%
Republic of Korea	4%	6%
Iran	3%	3%
Taiwan	3%	3%
Mexico	3%	2%
Nepal	2%	1%
Pakistan	2%	1%
Brazil	1%	1%
Canada	1%	<1%
Colombia	1%	1%
Egypt	1%	1%
France	1%	<1%
Ghana	1%	1%
Greece	1%	<1%
Honduras	1%	<1%
Indonesia	1%	1%
Italy	1%	<1%
Kenya	1%	<1%
Lebanon	1%	<1%
Peru	1%	<1%
Saudi Arabia	1%	1%
Thailand	1%	<1%
Turkey	1%	1%
Australia	<1%	<1%
Azerbaijan	<1%	<1%
Bahamas	<1%	<1%
Bolivia	<1%	<1%
Bulgaria	<1%	<1%
Cambodia	<1%	<1%
Cameroon	<1%	<1%
Costa Rica	<1%	<1%
Cote D'Ivoire	<1%	<1%
Gambia	<1%	<1%
Germany	<1%	<1%
Guatemala	<1%	<1%
Iraq	<1%	<1%
Jamaica	<1%	<1%
Japan	<1%	<1%
Jordan	<1%	1%
Kazakhstan	<1%	<1%
Libya	<1%	<1%

	2023 Survey Respondents [n=520]	2023 Survey Population [n=4,561]
Malaysia	<1%	<1%
Panama	<1%	<1%
Paraguay	<1%	<1%
Philippines	<1%	<1%
Romania	<1%	<1%
Russia	<1%	<1%
Rwanda	<1%	<1%
Spain	<1%	<1%
Sri Lanka	<1%	<1%
Sudan	<1%	<1%
Switzerland	<1%	<1%
Syria	<1%	<1%
Trinidad & Tobago	<1%	<1%
Tunisia	<1%	<1%
Uganda	<1%	<1%
United Kingdom	<1%	<1%
Venezuela	<1%	<1%
*All other countries with no student response	--	3%

Table 14: Demographics
*Represents students from 61 countries

Organization Background

The Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) is a sponsored student organization at Texas A&M University, advised through Student Life. The website, https://gpsg.tamu.edu/home/about/ indicates that The Graduate and Professional Student Government "exists to serve the needs of Texas A&M University's graduate students. As the student government of graduate students, GPSG exists to work in cooperation with the Texas A&M University administration, faculty, and student leaders to advocate for graduate and professional students." GPSG sponsors programs for the university community such as Grad Camp, Student Research Week, Interdisciplinary Dinners, and the Graduate and Professional Student Wine Tasting.

Project Details

The Texas A&M University Administration put a pause on data collection while this survey was being administered. As a result, the last reminder was not sent. Graduate and Professional Student Government and International Student & Scholar Services sent emails reminding students to find a previous email to access the survey link.

The Department of Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research provides quality assessment services, resources, and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research can be found at https://sapar.tamu.edu/results/. Additionally, anyone can follow Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research on Facebook.

To work with Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at https://sapar.tamu.edu/aqform/.