

## **Foreign Student and Scholar Services Student Satisfaction Survey**

**Assessment of: 1) student satisfaction with programs, services, and facilities; 2) student satisfaction with Foreign Student and Scholar Services office and staff**

### **ABSTRACT**

Foreign Student and Scholar Services (FSSS) provides information, advising, and programs and services designed to make the foreign student experience as positive and productive as possible. FSSS administered a survey to UM's foreign student population to gauge student satisfaction with the opportunities, programs, services, and facilities on-campus and to ascertain student satisfaction with the FSSS office. Our findings indicate that students are very satisfied with the services and staff of the FSSS office (responses ranged from 94% to 97% on individual measures) and mostly satisfied with aspects of academic life such as counseling for social and personal problems, campus life, and library resources. The lowest satisfaction scores were in response to financial aid and dining services.

### **BACKGROUND**

FSSS assumes responsibility for the general welfare of foreign students at The University of Montana, from admission to graduation and post-completion practical training. The office also assists departments in bringing international scholars (researchers and faculty) to campus. FSSS provides direct support services, consultation, and acts as a liaison to help students and scholars achieve their educational and professional goals. In addition, the office supports campus and community activities that promote meaningful and positive cross-cultural experiences.

FSSS's general goals are to serve the needs of international students and scholars and their families; assist students and scholars in understanding and complying with government policies and regulations; and collaborate with UM departments and community groups in order to foster cross-cultural understanding and goodwill.

At the beginning of each academic term, FSSS offers a specialized orientation program for all new foreign students with the help of other University personnel and conducts a personalized orientation for new scholars. On-going orientation sessions throughout the semester complete the initial orientation programs. FSSS advises students and scholars about their legal status, as dictated by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (US CIS). FSSS develops and implements programs and activities that promote intercultural awareness and enrich the educational experience of UM international students and scholars, as well as that of Americans.

Such programs include Global Partners Program, Speakers' Bureau, International Culture and Food Festival, Missoula International Friendship Program, educational fieldtrips, International House management and activities, school break activities, and activities with student clubs and organizations.

We strive for a high level of satisfaction with our services, the academic success of foreign students, high retention and graduation rates of foreign students, high degree of foreign student involvement on campus and with community organizations, and a low number of reinstatements of legal status.

## **ASSESSMENT GOALS**

The goal of the assessment is to gain a better understanding of how well the needs of foreign students are being met and how FSSS and the University can improve the services and programs it offers.

## **ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE**

In April 2008, FSSS administered an online survey to approximately 440 enrolled UM foreign students pursuing undergraduate or graduate studies. Of the 440 students contacted, 112 completed the survey for a response rate of just over 25%.

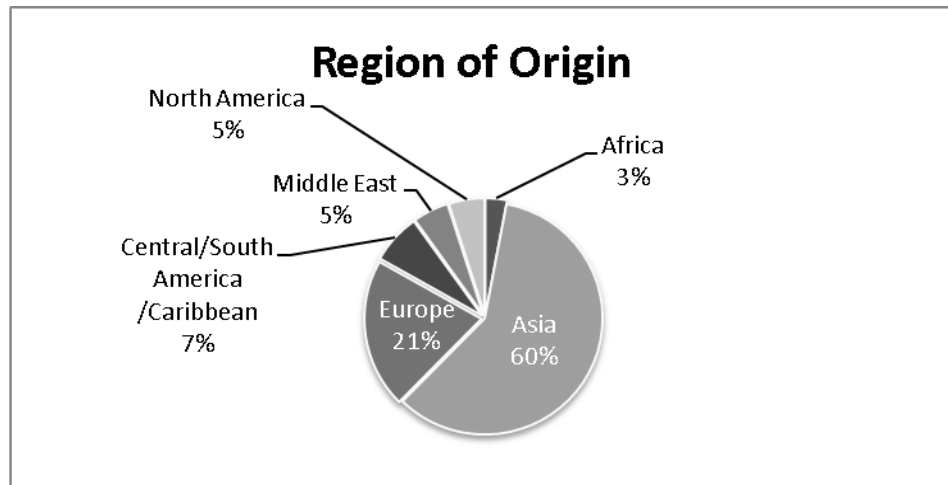
The questionnaire first gathered background information such as the country of origin and gender of respondents. Next, the respondents were asked to assess their level of satisfaction with UM services and their own experiences. They were given a list of 30 services and experiences and asked to respond to each item with "very satisfied," "satisfied," "dissatisfied," "very dissatisfied," or "not applicable." For the analysis, those who chose either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" are described as "satisfied" with the item, while those who chose either "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" are described as "dissatisfied" with the item. Students also had the option to list and rate any experiences or services that were not listed.

Another section of the questionnaire asked students to evaluate the office of Foreign Student and Scholar Services by indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements about the staff and the services they provide. The students were also given the option of adding specific comments about FSSS.

Several yes or no questions gauged the students' interactions with students, staff, and faculty at UM. These were followed by open-ended questions regarding problems encountered at UM and the main attraction of UM that students will share with their friends at home. Finally, the students were asked to share any additional comments or concerns.

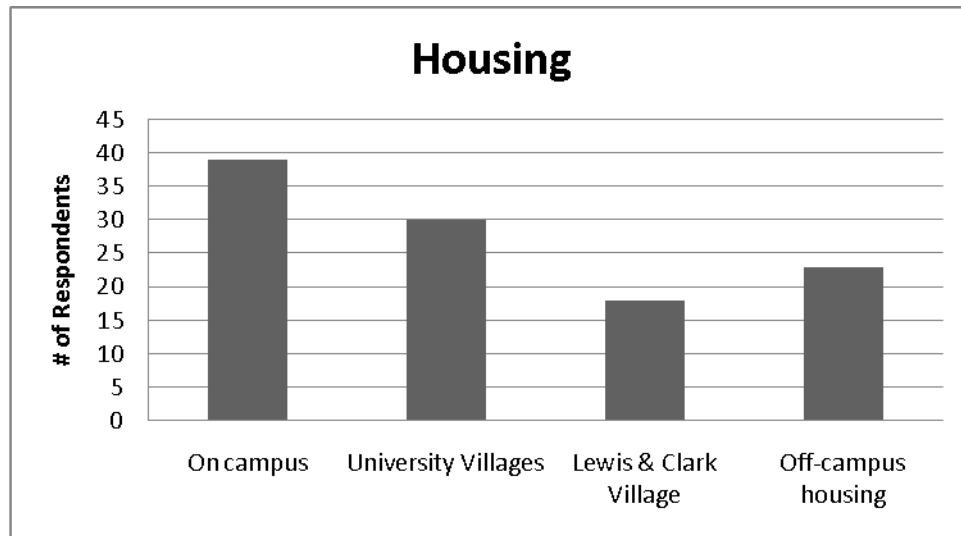
## FINDINGS

Of the respondents, 67% are undergraduate students, 25% are graduate students, and 7% are non-degree students. Fifty-five percent of the respondents are female and 45% are male. The majority of respondents (60%) are from Asia, with the second largest group (21%) coming from Europe.



**Figure 1: Distribution of respondents according to their region of origin**

In terms of age, 37% of respondents are 18-21, 35% are 22-24, and the remaining 28% are 25 and older. The majority of students lived in some type of campus housing, with 35% on campus, 27% in University Villages, and 16% in Lewis and Clark Village. The remaining 21% of respondents live in off-campus housing. Of the respondents, 44% began their studies at UM during the 2007-2008 academic year while 56% began earlier.



**Figure 2: Distribution of responses according to living arrangements**

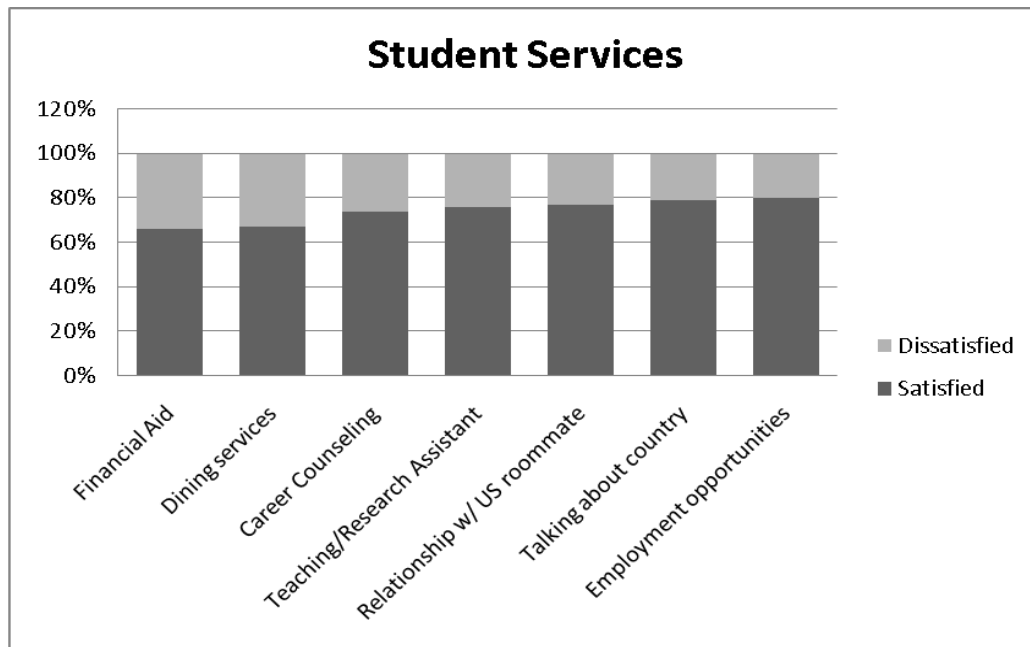
### *New Student Services*

Respondents were satisfied overall with the information and orientation provided for them as new students: 88% were satisfied with the pre-arrival information received, 86% were satisfied with their reception upon arrival, and 86% were satisfied with the orientation programs they attended. Of the number who lived on campus, 84% were satisfied with their housing arrangements. Seventy percent of the respondents had taken part in the Global Partner Program (formerly known as the International Peer Assistant Program), and 81% of these participants were satisfied with the experience with their Peer Assistant. A similar number of respondents (67.8%) were connected with a community friend through the Missoula International Friendship Program, and 93% of them were satisfied with the experience.

### *All Student Services*

The majority of respondents who took advantage of other student services expressed satisfaction. Overall, 97% of the respondents were satisfied with their experience at UM. Respondents were most satisfied (over 90%) with the following services: counseling for social and personal problems, opportunities for involvement in campus/community life, recreational activities, relationships with other foreign students, quality of life for accompanying dependents (spouse/children), student-faculty relations, opportunities to improve English language skills at UM, and the availability of library resources.

Students were least satisfied (34% or less) with the availability of financial aid programs, career counseling, experiences as a graduate teaching or research assistant, opportunities to let Americans know about their country or perspective, relationships with American roommate(s), employment opportunities on campus, and dining services on campus.



**Figure 3: Respondents rank satisfaction with student services**

Students also had the opportunity to list and rate any additional services not already mentioned. Several students expressed dissatisfaction with campus transportation, specifically mentioning the evening bus schedule and the difficulty of parking.

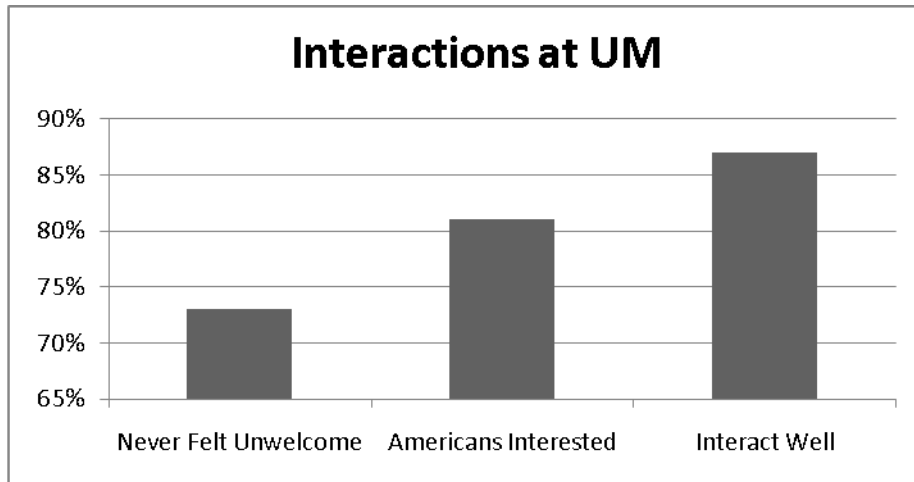
### *FSSS*

Of the students who took advantage of the services offered by FSSS (94% and above), the overwhelming majority (97% and above) agreed with the following statements: FSSS employees are available to help me; the staff is friendly and courteous; the staff is knowledgeable about services available to me; they provide useful information; the FSSS office is able to meet my needs effectively; the staff makes me feel comfortable in seeking help; and, overall, I am pleased with the service I receive at FSSS.

Respondents had the opportunity to make additional comments about the FSSS office and the majority of comments were very positive. One student wrote: “Appreciated for providing help and intentions for help even in dead-end situations.” Other respondents also thanked the FSSS staff for the help they provide. Another student noted that “It is nice that everyone smiles to welcome me when I come into the office.” Another student said that “they make your stay in US comfortable and full of care. I think people have special devotion to their job and take it serious, making the first impression about U.S. and UM positive.”

### *Interactions at UM*

Respondents were asked three yes-or-no questions pertaining to their interactions with Americans at UM: whether they had been made to feel unwelcome because of coming from another country, whether people are interested in learning about their home country, and whether the students, staff, and faculty at UM interact well with foreign students. The majority of students had positive experiences and interactions, but some students did experience difficulties.



**Figure 4: Student perceptions of their interactions at UM**

### *Main Problems Encountered*

When asked about the main problems they had encountered at UM, 77 students responded. The most prevalent problem was the prejudice and ethnocentrism foreign students encountered when interacting with American students, faculty, and staff, with 20% of respondents reporting this as the main issue. Responses in this category ranged from “Other students and faculty don’t understand some cultural differences” to “discrimination because of my accent, skin color.” Among respondents, 17% stated that they have not had any significant problems during their time at UM. The next two greatest issues were language difficulties (12%) and finances (10%). Smaller percentages of respondents also reported the following issues: food, academic issues/differences, cultural differences, lack of American friends/activities, transportation, employment, issues with roommates/neighbors, and several miscellaneous problems. Figure 5 provides the percentage of responses for each of these issues.

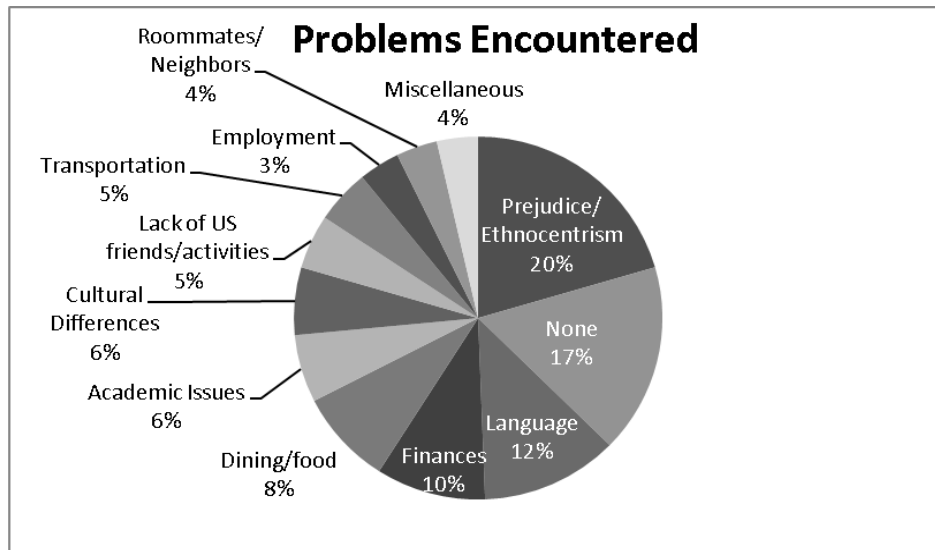


Figure 5: Distribution of student responses regarding main problems encountered at UM

### UM Attractions

Students were also asked to provide the main attraction of UM that they would share with their friends upon returning home and 83 students responded. The largest response (35%) pertained to the friendliness of people on campus and in Missoula. The next two most popular attractions mentioned were scenery/nature (22%) and the campus environment (19%). Students also mentioned the recreation opportunities, their academic programs, campus events, and a few miscellaneous answers. The miscellaneous answers included two students who said “everything” and one student who said “nothing.” Figure 6 provides the distribution of responses for UM attractions.

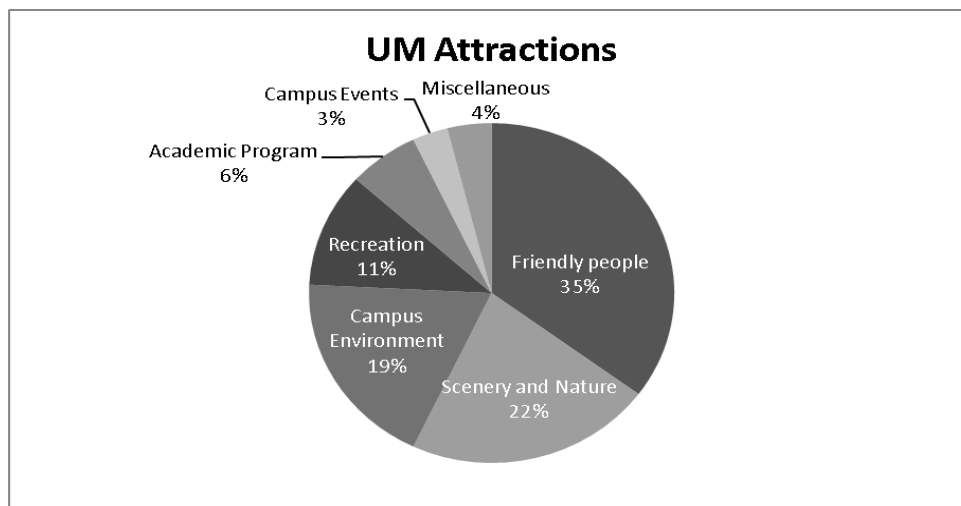


Figure 6: Distribution of student responses regarding the main attractions at UM

### *Additional Comments/Concerns*

The final question on the survey asked for students to share any additional comments or concerns. Thirty-four respondents entered comments, which ranged from further positive comments about their experiences at UM and with FSSS staff and services to concerns and suggestions. Several students suggested new services for FSSS to offer, such as helping international students obtain their local driver's license, explaining the American health and insurance systems, and providing students with information about American laws when they first arrive. Also, one student asked for the yes-or-no questions to be changed to include some type of "it depends" answer.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the survey, students indicated that they are the least satisfied with financial aid programs, dining services, and employment opportunities (both on- and off-campus employment). The situation of financial assistance and job opportunities is often dictated by federal government regulations. Because of this, prospective students must be informed of the lack of such opportunities before coming to study at UM. The level of satisfaction with financial programs may not increase with such knowledge, but the student will at least be aware of the situation. In addition, more opportunities for campus jobs would help alleviate some of the financial burden faced by foreign students.

Students who made additional comments about dining services mentioned difficulties interacting and communicating with their work supervisors, as well as the food quality. For the former issue, some type of cross-cultural training would be beneficial for dining service employees to enhance their working relationships with international student employees. In terms of food issues, dining services could offer opportunities to students to submit recipes for more international food options.

Student survey responses also showed that they have had some issues when interacting with American students, faculty, and staff. Twenty percent of respondents listed prejudice/ethnocentrism as the main problem they have encountered at UM. Also, 27% of students have been made to feel unwelcome as a foreigner, 19% have found that people are not interested in learning about their country, and 13% believe that people on campus do not interact well with foreign students. This suggests that much could be gained by improving the quality of interactions between American and foreign students. An effort could be made to increase global awareness and intercultural competence. For example, more multicultural and international courses could be offered. Faculty could also help increase attendance at international activities by offering extra credit for students who attend. Plans are also underway to organize a bi-



monthly international coffee hour to promote greater interaction between foreign and domestic students.

Another way to increase intercultural awareness on campus would be to create an international residence option. An international residence would be composed of 50% foreign students and 50% American students. In addition to living in an international environment, cultural programming would be created to enhance the atmosphere of intercultural awareness and inclusion. While there have been problems in the past with foreign and American students rooming together, students living in the international dorm would be self-selecting and thus would desire to live in such an environment.