Executive Summary

International students come to Emporia State University (ESU) seeking affordable and quality education, in a safe campus. After arriving to campus, their expectations are mostly met. First, international students appear to adjust well academically and connect easily with faculty members. Expectedly, international graduate students tend to feel they contribute more to the classroom discussion compared to undergraduate students. However, both undergraduate and graduate students feel they are well prepared to conduct academic work at ESU. On the social dimension, international students appear to connect more easily with their other international peers and face more limitations connecting with American peers. Similarly, campus involvement expressed in participation in student organizations and programming appears to be more challenging, particularly to graduate students. For the most part, international students take advantage of and are satisfied with many campus resources and services. Students are mostly satisfied with the services and resources offered by William Allen White Library and the Student Recreation Center. Areas where the campus could provide more effective support to international students consist of English writing and dining services. Finally, the OIE plays an important role supporting students in their integration to campus. Students rated highly the OIE services related to maintaining student visa status. Areas to monitor for improvement in the coming years consist of continuing and expanding the OIE services that help students integrate to the campus and the U.S., both socially and academically. Finally, the OIE is challenged to continue raising awareness of and increase student participation in support services, programs, events and campus employment.

Methodology and Population

The survey was the result of a collaboration between Technology Computing Services (TCS) and the OIE. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to all international students enrolled in Spring 2012 (N=445). Participation in the survey was voluntary. Students received the invitation in their ESU e-mails during the first week of March. In the course of eight weeks, they received a total of four reminders. The
data was collected electronically via Zoomerang Survey.

About 97 students completed the survey, which represents a response rate of 21.6 percent. Respondents came from 15 countries, where China, South Korea and Japan were largely represented. Most respondents were undergraduate students (49 percent), among which junior students had the largest share (18 percent). Graduate students also participated, with a share of 37 percent.

Respondents depict a fairly accurate picture of the international student population at ESU. About 75 percent were degree-seeking and 22 percent were visiting students (at ESU for one or two semesters). Most of the students said to be affiliated with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (41 percent), followed by the School of Business (34 percent) and the Teacher’s College (14 percent). Not surprisingly, respondents from the School of Library and Information Management had the smallest share (2 percent). Respondents were evenly divided in the length of time at ESU. About 52 percent had been at ESU for more than one academic year and about 48 percent had been for a shorter period of time.

The analysis consisted of descriptive statistics and frequencies. Where pertinent and appropriate, the analysis used t-tests to compare groups. To ensure the findings represent accurately the student sub-populations, the analysis compared graduate v/s undergraduate and short-term v/s degree-seeking students.

Reasons to Study at Emporia State University

Respondents considered several reasons for choosing ESU. International students come to ESU first and foremost for its affordable tuition (64 percent). Affordability gives ESU a competitive edge relative to other U.S. institutions in the recruitment of international students. Another factor is the recommendation of foreign partner universities. From qualitative data, respondents said the recommendation of their home university was an important reason for choosing ESU. While partnership with foreign universities is a separate and distinct category, it cannot be completely dissociated from tuition affordability, as some partnerships may involve partial tuition waivers.

In addition to affordability, international students identified safety (36 percent) and quality of academic programs (30 percent) as two other reasons for choosing ESU over other U.S. colleges. Finally, in a smaller percentage, respondents had a favorable perception of the campus size (13 percent). Two reasons that appear less compelling for international students were campus location (8 percent) and the innovative nature of academic programs (3 percent). The last two –location and innovative programs- must be addressed with effective communicational campaigns to present a more complete and attractive picture of ESU and its surrounding.

Student Expectations

The survey asked students about expectations associated with their ESU experience. In general, the findings suggest ESU is a good match for international students’ needs and expectations. However, generally, respondents rated slightly more favorably their academic experience relative to their social experience.

The findings suggest students have a positive experience finding and enrolling in academic courses (87 percent). Also, results suggest students are receiving proper introduction to the resources available on campus (79 percent) and have positive experiences with their academic advisors (78 percent). For the most part, students appear to be satisfied with the introduction received to get acclimated to the U.S. academic life (76 percent).

There appears to be room for improvement in the international students’ social dimension. Respondents said to be satisfied with the opportunities to meet other international students on campus (83 percent); however, they were less satisfied in their ability to meet American peers (69 percent). Looking at
standard deviations, respondents varied largely when assessing their ability to meet U.S. peers, which suggests international students have varying experiences immersing into the U.S. culture. Comparing groups, undergraduate students enjoy more opportunities to meet American peers compared to graduate students and the difference between the groups is significant (p<.05). Finally, respondents rated from fair to good their ability to be introduced to the U.S. culture while studying at ESU (74 percent).

Overall, the survey findings suggest international undergraduate and graduate students feel comfortable at ESU. About 89 percent said ESU is a friendly university for international students. The City of Emporia was also identified as a friendly place (96 percent) and 88 percent either agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend ESU to their friends.

The Office of International Education

The survey included several items aimed to capture international students’ experience with the OIE. Special attention was given to the OIE because international students have permanent interaction with this division. Therefore, students’ opinion is vital for assessing current services and identifying areas for improvement. The survey included items on how frequently international students use the OIE services as well as satisfaction with such services.

International students appear to use the OIE website less frequently than expected when they have issues or questions (36 percent). The finding may suggest the need for improving the layout of the website to ensure more accessibility and readability. Also, the finding may suggest students seek and obtain information through other means. For example, 88 percent said they receive e-mails from the OIE with information that is both relevant and pertinent. Similarly, students may prefer to visit the OIE and resolve specific questions and issues face-to-face. About 69 percent said to enjoy visiting the OIE; they are greeted by a friendly staff (79 percent) and receive quick and accurate responses to their questions (80 percent). Looking at the standard deviations, there appears to be consensus on the OIE capacity to respond questions accurately and timely. Conversely, greater variance was observed when respondents were asked whether they enjoyed visiting the OIE.

Most international students seem to appreciate the services provided by the OIE. Chief among them is maintaining students' visa status. About 83 percent said the OIE does a good to excellent job in maintaining their student visa status. While this finding is positive, it is important to note there is a considerable drop on how students rate the non-SEVIS related functions offered by the OIE. The drop may suggest international students have a narrow perception of OIE role on campus. Additional communicational efforts may be required to expand student involvement in OIE services and support beyond SEVIS-related responsibilities.

Students appear to have a positive opinion regarding the OIE-sponsored programs and campus events (65 percent). They also appreciate the shuttle service from and to the airport offered during holidays and breaks (62 percent). Finally, students seem to appreciate the OIE role in authorizing campus employment (63 percent) and extending stays in the U.S. via curricular or practical training (61 percent).

Examining standard deviations, there appears to be greater variance in students’ satisfaction regarding the airport shuttle service and student-work processing. The variance may be explained because the former (airport shuttle) is a relatively new service and although it has progressively served more students, the number of students served remains small. Similarly, the latter (campus employment) affects a small portion of the total international student population.

The Academic and Campus Experience

In the Classroom

Overall, international students appear to have a positive academic experience at ESU. Faculty
members and students connect well at different levels and respondents rated from good to excellent most of the items related to academics. For example, 97 percent said their professors are available to resolve and clarify questions. They agreed ESU professors are genuinely interested in helping international students succeed in the classroom (95 percent) and understand what their professors and classmates say during class (92 percent). Finally, professors seem to appreciate the diversity that international students bring to their classroom by expressing interest in students’ countries and cultures (87 percent).

For the most part, respondents said to feel well-prepared to undertake academic courses at ESU (98 percent). In addition, they either strongly agreed or agreed their grades are a good reflection of their academic effort (91 percent). Finally, the survey findings suggest international students enjoy participating in classroom and group discussions (91 percent) as they feel they bring fresh and new perspectives to the classroom (88 percent).

From an examination of the standard deviations, respondents showed greater variance on whether their professors were genuinely interested in their countries and cultures. Similarly, graduate students appeared to feel significantly more confident they are contributing to the classroom discussion compared to undergraduate students (p<.05). Finally, respondents appear to reach consensus when self-assessing their preparation to undertake academic work at ESU.

Campus Resources and Services

International students utilize campus resources and services that support their academic, social and professional integration. Respondents said to use frequently the William Allen White Library (97 percent) and the Student Recreational Services (77 percent). Examining standard deviations, responses varied on the use of the Student Recreation Center, which is not surprising. About 50 percent said to use frequently the Student Wellness Center.

The survey also reveals some of the resources and services that international students use less frequently. Some of these were predictable and some were surprising. For example, 37 percent said to use Career Services. Considering that almost one fourth of respondents declared to be visiting students, the finding is not surprising. Visiting students are less likely to seek career advice in the U.S. relative students who will earn a degree from ESU. Similarly, 33 percent said to visit frequently the Center of Student Advising (SAC). This finding is not surprising because most respondents were outside the population typically served by the SAC. However, about 22 percent of graduate students said to use the SAC services either sometimes or regularly. A possible explanation for this inconsistency is that graduate students responded the item thinking of their advising experience, even if it was outside the SAC.

Most surprisingly, only 59 percent said to take advantage of the Writing Center, with no significant difference between undergraduate and graduate students. Also, few international students seem to use the campus dinning services. Only 40 percent said to eat at the Hornets’ Nest and 45 percent said to eat at the Hornet Express. Finally, only 58 percent said to use the campus Bookstore, although undergraduate students use this service significantly more often than graduate students do (p<.05).

Campus services and student satisfaction

Respondents rated in a scale from excellent to poor the different services available on campus. To measure student satisfaction, respondents had the option to select N/A (Not Applicable) when they had no experience with some of the campus services. Percentages were adjusted accordingly.

International students appear to have a good to excellent opinion of the services provided by the William Allen White library (85 percent) and the Student Recreation Services (84 percent). It is important to note that among the two, respondents showed greater consensus when rating satisfaction with the Student Recreation Center, as shown in the
standard deviations. Furthermore, undergraduate students rated significantly more favorably the Student Recreation Center compared to graduate students ($p<.01$).

Respondents rated from fair to good the services provided by Registration and the Student Wellness Center (72 percent). Similarly, respondents rated from fair to good the service provided by Career Services (66 percent), the Hornet Express (64 percent), the Bookstore (63 percent), Cashier’s Office, the Writing Center (62 percent), Assessment and Testing (58 percent) and the Hornets’ Nest (57 percent). More qualitative data is needed to provide insights about why students do not feel as satisfied with the above campus services as they seem to be with other services.

**Campus life**

International students appear to have a smooth transition to campus. As noted before, most international students find it easier to meet other international students (89 percent) relative to meeting American students. Comparing groups, international undergraduate students have significantly more opportunities to meet American peers, compared to graduate students ($p<.01$).

About 86 percent respondents said to know where to go for help. However, there appears to be some challenges regarding campus involvement. For example, 67 percent either agreed or strongly agreed to participate in Recognized Student Organizations (RSO). Comparing groups, undergraduate students tend to be more involved in student organizations compared to graduate students and the difference between the two is significant ($p<.01$). Similarly, 65 percent said to participate in campus events and programs. Finally, international students appear to have limited knowledge about the Associated Student Government’s (ASG) role on campus (58 percent); however undergraduate students tend to be significantly more familiar with the ASG compared to graduate students ($p<.05$).

The survey findings suggest the need for specific programs to encourage international graduate student become more involved in campus activities. However, the results may need to be confronted with data from the domestic student population to resolve whether such programs should expand to domestic graduate students.

**Discussion, Comments and Implications**

The survey offers valuable feedback regarding international students’ perception and satisfaction of their experience at ESU. The findings shed light about students’ use of campus services and resources, the support they receive to integrate into the campus and the U.S. culture and student satisfaction. The survey is intended to serve as a baseline for future assessments in the coming years and inform continuous improvements in the services for international students.

Overall, the survey findings suggest international students have a positive experience at ESU. They come to ESU motivated by affordable tuition, quality education, and a safe and manageable-sized campus. International partners play a vital role in recommending students to come to ESU, which implies shared-decision making at the moment of selecting ESU as academic destination. Although ESU location is not precisely appealing to international students, respondents were pleased with the City of Emporia for being a friendly place. More substantively, a large percentage of students said they would recommend ESU to their friends. More qualitative information is required to identify specific aspects that make the City of Emporia in general and ESU in particular friendly places for international students. In future surveys, it would help to add additional items pertaining to the experience with the campus location and surroundings. Such information would help inform future communication with international students and promotion.

The OIE plays a predominant role in international students’ lives, from the moment of recruitment to graduation and beyond. International students
welcome the services provided by the OIE; however, there is a pervasive perception that the OIE is mostly concerned about SEVIS and visa regulations. Consequently, a challenge for the OIE in the future consists of promoting the OIE's broad mission and functions. The campus experience and the integration to the U.S. campus and culture, both socially and academically will mark the difference between ESU and other U.S. colleges and this area of intervention must be strengthened in the coming years. The hiring of a new Director of International Student Services is a critical step to move in this direction.

The survey offers valuable feedback for continuous improvement of the services offered to international students. It is not surprising that respondents varied in evaluating the airport shuttle service. Ridership is growing but the number of students served remains low. Students pay a minimal fee (about $35) and the service is offered on specific times and dates to accommodate students who travel during breaks and holidays. Students with travel plans outside these criteria may find the shuttle service unhelpful. However, adding this service in 2011 was a positive step and the OIE expects to expand student services aimed to reduce the distance between Emporia, the airport, and the nearby shopping areas.

Finally, the survey suggests areas that require attention for future improvement. Although international students seem to be generally satisfied with the OIE, satisfaction levels on whether students are greeted by a friendly staff, whether students enjoy visiting the OIE, and the processing of campus employment, CPT and OPT must grow in the coming years.

International students had positive feedback on the services provided by the WAW Library and the Student Recreation Center. In the past years, these two areas have reached out to international students, through open houses and specific programming. The survey findings point to conclude students appreciate these efforts. Other campus services were rated from fair to good. Such evaluation should take into account the nature of the service and the target population. However, there are some findings that require further examination to ensure ESU is serving international students well. For example, 41 percent of respondents said they either never or seldom use the Writing Center, which contradicts the expectations for international students. Similarly, dining services (Hornets' Nest and Hornet Express) appear to be an area for improvement to attract the international student community, particularly those who live on campus. More data is required to discover underlying limitations for students to take full advantage of these campus resources. The OIE is conducting a brief follow-up survey to obtain students' feedback about preferred foods and dishes for the campus cafeteria.

At a first glance, international students appear to have few opportunities to meet American students, get involved on campus, and participate in student organizations. A more detailed examination indicates undergraduate and graduate students share different experiences regarding campus involvement whereby graduate students have fewer opportunities to develop friendship with U.S. peers. It would be interesting to compare these findings with domestic graduate students.

A substantive and positive finding was the academic dimension of international students' experience at ESU. For the most part, international students appear to connect well with their professors. Faculty members are accessible and available when international students need them. Similarly, faculty members appear to be genuinely interested in the success of international students. The feedback is consistent with students' self-assessment regarding preparation and ability to undertake academic work at ESU. A possible area for growth for the coming years consists of ensuring faculty members continue to incorporate the perspectives and diversity that international students bring into the classroom.

The survey findings will be benchmarked in future surveys and assessments. As ESU continues to serve a growing international student population, on-
ongoing assessment is required to monitor how the campus is equipped to meet international students' needs. At the same time, as the international student population grows, ESU faculty and staff must remain sensitive to the social and academic needs of all students and particularly populations with special needs.