

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY at BOULDER CAMPUS of UNIVERSITY of COLORADO

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### Abstract

In this paper, the associations between international students' socio-demographic and personal characteristics and their views about problems at a variety of levels; world, country, and as sojourners at Boulder, were examined. A brief, web-based questionnaire was administered to 1199 students through a special edition of an electronic newsletter from the International Student Center of the University of Colorado. The overall response rate was 10%, (116 students). The results of statistical analyses showed that students are not homogeneous within their socio-economic backgrounds or attitudes.

*Key words:* International students • attitudes • web-based survey

KOLORADO ÜNİVERSİTESİNDE ULUSLARARASI ÖĞRENCİ ARAŞTIRMASI

### Öz

Bu makalede Kolorado Üniversitesinde öğrenim gören uluslararası öğrencilerin demografik ve kişilik özellikleri ile sırasıyla dünyadaki, kendi ülkelerindeki ve öğrenim gördükleri Boulder kentinde yaşadıkları sorunlar arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Kolorado Üniversitesi Uluslararası Öğrenci Merkezi elektronik dergisinin özel sayısı ile 1199 öğrenciye ulaşılmıştır. Cevaplama oranı %10 (116 öğrenci) olmuştur. İstatistiksel analiz sonuçları öğrencilerin gerek tutumları gerekse sosyo-ekonomik özellikleri açısından bir örnek olmadığını ortaya koymuştur.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* Uluslararası öğrenciler • tutumlar • web-tabanlı araştırma

### Introduction

According to Gúriz (2005), international students are the most important component of the educational market in the world. In 1950 foreign students numbered 100,000. At the present time that number has increased to 2,000,000. The USA, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and France provide higher education facilities for international students, most of who

come from China, India, Japan, Turkey, and Korea. International students support their host countries financially. For example; the international students' contribution to the US economy is very important, taking fifth place among other service sectors. In order to provide better service, host countries should know the composition or characteristics of their international students. The international students should also know the customs and characteristics of the university at which they choose to study, beyond the infrastructure, which is always available via a website.

As Galambos and Leadbeater (2000) discussed, adolescence as well as youth is a stage of life. Research in this field has undergone many transitions during this century. For instance, in traditional epidemiological studies the use of the concept of risk has been related to mobility and morbidity and is, therefore, more biomedical. More recently these studies have been expanded to include student's behavior in social and political environments. Political socialization and political identity development are also new concepts in the field of youth studies. As Erikson, (1968) noted, the development of political commitment is a key concept in identity formation. The development of social responsibility and the understanding of the complexity of social issues are important facets of political commitment. The social processes through which youths become engaged in political attitudes and values gained importance in recent studies Yates and Youniss, (1998). Furthermore, beyond youth's personal problems, their knowledge and attitudes about 'other' people's societal problems as compared to their own can be considered an important political commitment Kasapoğlu and Çabuk, (2005).

In addition to the students' own culture, international or foreign culture and environment were included as an important dimension to this analysis of youth studies, and these issues provide originality to this current study. On the other hand, because it is web-based, this study provides comprehensive knowledge to the present literature on international students, primarily Asian and Australian, and their adaptation problems, (Sam, 2001; Hullett & Witte, 2001; Ying, 2002; Toyokowa & Toyokowa, 2002; Volet & Renshaw, 1995; Nesdale & Todd, 2000; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001).

International students at the University of Colorado (CU), Boulder campus are a diverse and ever increasing population. There were about 200 foreign students in 1960, increasing to 1199 students by year-end 2002. In other words, the number of foreign students attending CU has increased six times within the past forty years. The Asian student population has always been the highest in numbers; however, the highest *increase* in student numbers were those from India, (190), and China, (182). The next highest numbers were from Korea, (118), Japan, (73), Thailand, (56), Taiwan, (41). The number of students from Europe were as follows; Germany, (48), UK, (32), France, (22). The number of students from any additional countries was less than 20, i.e., 11 students from Turkey. (See CU website).

Although the original study is more comprehensive and some findings of the main research especially focused on students' self-esteem were published (Kasapoğlu et al., 2008:5-34) the main objective of this paper is to explore the theoretical issues in youth studies mentioned above and to investigate the students' levels of knowledge and attitudes on a variety of problems ranging from personal to world issues.

### **Method**

A total of 1199 foreign students were enrolled at CU-Boulder during the Fall 2002 semester. Of those students, 28% were undergraduate students and 72% were graduate students. The percentage of male students, (64%), was higher than the percentage of female students, (36%), and together they constituted the universe of the research. The students gained permission to respond to the study from the Colorado University Ethical Committee, and no incentive was offered to responding students. The overall response rate was 10%, or, 116 students. When compared with the response rate of other similar surveys, this response rate was not low.

The International Student Center database was used to communicate with the students. A special edition of an electronic newsletter informed the students about the research project. To retain anonymity, students' e-mail address and identities were not known to the researchers.

Student's names were submitted directly to the website, and then completed forms were statistically analyzed as aggregates.

Two phases of work were undertaken in this comparative study; special pilot research followed by the main survey.

The pilot research carried out in November 2002 helped refine the methods of measuring attitudes and behaviors of international students. During the month of December of 2002 a six-page, on-line questionnaire was administered to the international students

The students answered questions about their age, gender, educational status, region of birth, nationality, religion, family type, parental socio-economic status, number of children in their immediate family, marital status, post-arrival period, (the duration of their stay in the USA and Boulder were separate questions), the financial source of their education, their field or subject of study, the reason(s) they came to CU at Boulder and where they currently lived.

When the students were asked to discern problems in today's world, the USA, in their own country and in Boulder the questions were designed as follows; *"What are the most important current problems of the world? Please select only the two most important current problems of the world and then rank them 1 and 2."* Following each question was a list of possible answers. For example, the possible answers to *"What are the most important current problems of the world?"* were; "starvation", "rapid population growth", "terrorism", "practices of world financial organizations" "wars (religious, ethnic, etc.), "global warming", "aging population", "human rights" and "other (please specify)". Although the student ranked two answers, only the first answer was used as data for this study. The same types of close-ended questions were repeated for the other areas of this study. Data was analyzed by using SPSS. Parametric and nonparametric statistical significance tests were applied to provide a more comprehensive student profile.

## Results

In this section, the sample distribution was made according to age, gender, educational status, nationality and region. In terms of age distribution, 43% of the students within the sample group fell into the 18-23 age group. There were six students (4.3%) younger than 19 years of age and six students (4.3%) over the age of 35. The mean age was 25.29 and the standard deviation was 4.77. It is possible to interpret that the students included in the survey were not very young.

While the percentage of female students was higher, (50.9%), it appears there is an almost equal distribution of gender. Only two students, (1.7%), did not respond to this question.

A majority of students were graduate students (67.2%), 27.6% were undergraduates and 2.6% were post-graduate. Two students listed their response as “other”, “non-exchange”, or non-degreed students, (1.7%). This finding is consistent with the sample’s mean age and the universe of research.

A majority of the students were from Asia (44.8%) and Europe (32.8%). Latinos comprised 6.9%, Canadians, 5.2%, Middle Eastern, 5.2%, Australian, 1.7%, African, 0.9%. Two students classified themselves as “other”, one from the Caribbean and one from New Zealand. Among the European nations, 11.2% were from Germany and among the Asian nations 22.5% were from India.

For comparison, the percentages of the student’s top five problems, rated, are listed in Table 1. Although the students were asked to list their first two problems, the students’ first choices are taken into consideration when Table 1 was designed.

According to the results in *Table 1*, student’s perceptions about problems are not the same. Among world and/or problems within countries, only rapid population growth is considered. Political, ethical and religious wars, terrorism and human rights were seen first, second and fifth as the world’s problems. Rapid population growth and global warming were as important as environmental problems. It would not be wrong to say that the greater number of

students perceived political and environmental issues as the world’s problems. Ratings of problems subsequent to level five are as follows: starvation, (5.2%); practices of the world’s financial organizations, (5.2%), aging population, (3.4%), “other”, (7.8%). “Other” answers were investigated in detail. Those answers were;

“(…)lack of spiritual education, American hegemony, American external policy, anti-Americanism, discontent in people, growing intolerance, habitat destruction and loss of species, illiteracy, the dumbness of mankind, inequality of wealth across nations, irregular distribution of wealth, Jingoism, un-smart international politics and diplomacy lead to terrorism and financial problems, poverty, abuse of power by strong countries, slow economy, uneven accumulation of wealth, aggressiveness and ensuing problems with human rights violations.”

Table .1: Distribution of student answers on problems at four different levels

|    | World                           | Country                          | In their country                       | In Boulder                             |
|----|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. | Wars (39%)                      | Unemployment (30.2%)             | Economic- financial (33.6%)            | Economic-financial (29.3%)             |
| 2. | Terrorism (18.1%)               | Rapid population Growth ( 20.7%) | Educational (13.8)                     | Psychological stress (11.2%)           |
| 3. | Rapid population growth (13.8%) | Politics/government (19%)        | Psychological (9.5%)                   | Cultural Difference (11.2%)            |
| 4. | Global warming(9.5%)            | Education(7.8%)                  | Politics/government (9.5%)             | Lack of leisure time activities (7.8%) |
| 5. | Human rights (7.8%)             | Health services (6.9%)           | Lack of leisure time activities (5.6%) | Housing (5.2%)                         |

( The list of first five problems at world-country- self/personal in own country and in Boulder).

( N=116)

Students’ answers regarding problems in their own countries reveal they pay more attention to the infrastructural problems, i.e., economic, unemployment, health and education, as well as to their country’s government. The ratings of problems following the first five are; rapid urbanization, (4.3%), social class-based discrimination, (4.3%), human rights, (3.4%), housing, (1.7%), gender-based discrimination, (0.9%), and transportation, (0.9%). Migration and ethnic based discrimination were not seen as problems, (0%). “Other” answers included; “acute

*crisis in the collective consciousness, domination of materialistic Western values, diffusion of own identity, aging population, health care and pension, basic education or primary education, child poverty, corruption, debt, economy, show economy, income differential, quality of income, international relationship, Native American Land Claim issues, North Korea nuclear weapons, patriarchal systems, pollution, Quebec separation movement, and violence.”*

According to *Table 1*, the student’s perception about personal problems within their own countries and in Boulder was almost similar, with the exception of education, government and housing. As was expected, the students came to Boulder to receive a better education. However they had more psychological stress and mood swings (loneliness) in Boulder. Of course, as students abroad they do not have political problems at CU, but they did have housing problems.

Students’ answers after level five are: “family ties, (6.0%), social relations with others, (3.4%), social class-based discrimination, (2.6%), ethnic-based discrimination, (2.6%), health, (1.7%) and gender-based discrimination, (0.9%). The percentage of “other” answers was quite high at 12.9% and are as follows: *“being afraid of a life-threatening situation, it is very unsafe, violence, all types of discrimination, environmental pollution (2), few research positions in the sciences and engineering, no opportunities for technical study, how to study abroad (2), I do not have any specific problems, perhaps the biggest problem I have is seeing everything that is wrong in the world, lack of discipline, lack of good laws, lawlessness, lack of privacy, an over-crowded population, and the social health care system is going bankrupt.”*

Students’ personal problems in Boulder, after level five are; their subject of study, (3.4%), ethnic-based discrimination, (3.4%), new educational system, (3.4%), gender-based discrimination, (1.7%), communication, class-based discrimination, (0.9%), services and support for international students at C.U. Boulder, (0.9%). Problems specified by students as “other” (12.1%) are; *arrogance and rudeness of red-neck Boulderites, Asian vegetarian food, conservatism that verges on tolerance, distance from family and the loneliness associated with it, family ties, food is too expensive, I don’t have a car, I honestly do not have any problems in Boulder, I am happy with my life and it is a perfect place for me, incompatibility between my*

*co-workers in the lab and differing political thoughts, lack of job opportunities for foreign students, , loneliness from the lack of a family life, no problems, no time to find friends, not able to give the best at the moment, nothing, Bulder is great, parental relations, school pressure, suburban living, that I see how stupid Americans really are concerning their own political system, how the news is brought forth, unhelpful attitudes of the university staff at C.U. Boulder, utopians, and, weather is too cold."*

*Table 2* is designed to find out the predictor of student's answers in terms of their perceptions at different levels. Students rated each problem either first or second. In order to calculate regression analysis, the most important answers were coded with one, (1), the second most important answers as two, (2) and non-rated answers with zero, (0). For example; at the world level, *"all kinds of war"* is the highest rated answer, *"unemployment"* at the country level and *"economical problems for students both in their countries of origin and in Boulder"*.

According to the results in *Table 2*, only the marital status of students as an independent variable has an impact on their answers the world level. In other words, married students rated war as the most important world problem, (63.6%). The percentage of single students rating war as the most important world problem was (33.3%). A majority of the single students compared to married is 33.3%, they answered "not important at all", (55.5%). Non-parametric statistical test results also indicate there are significant differences between student's marital status and perceptions about war, (Chi-square = 15.972, DF=2,  $p \leq .000$ ). It can be interpreted that the student's marital status is the only predictor of this issue.

Table 2: Regression analysis of students' perceptions about the most important problem at different levels

| Independent Variables                                     | World level:<br>War<br>First =38.8%<br>Second =13.8%<br>No/not = 47.4% | Country level:<br>Unemployment<br>First = 30.2%<br>Second =18.1%<br>No/not = 51.7% | Self in their country :<br>Economical<br>First =33.6%<br>Second =9.5%<br>No/not = 56.9% | Self in Boulder:<br>Economical<br>First =29.8%<br>Second =14.7%<br>No/ not = 56.0% |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Age   | -.213 (-1.255)   | .047(.248)   | -.005(-.026)  | .363 (2.022)*  |
| Gender (Female =1)  | -.082(-.599)   | .102(.673)   | .186 (1.250)  | .001 (.008)  |
| Education(years)  | -.032 (-.173)  | .114 (.562)  | -.306 (-1.533)  | .076 (.393)  |
| Income (SES)<br>(Low income =1)                           | -.005 (-.047)  | -.126 (-.962)  | .216 (1.674)  | .112 (.902)  |
| Family type<br>(nuclear =1)                               | -.144(-1.174)  | .048 (.354)  | .285 (2.129)*   | .061 (.468)  |
| Number of children (two children =1)                      | -.088 (-.736)  | -.152 (-1.143)   | -.172 (-1.314)  | .000( -.002)   |
| Marital status<br>(Single =1)                             | -.474 (-3.548)***  | -.017 (-.112)  | -.014 (-.094)   | -.049 (-.347)  |
| Financial source<br>(family =1)                           | -.027 (-1.193)   | -.146 (-.945)  | -.010 (-.066)   | .212 (1.449)   |
| Field of study<br>(engineering =1)                        | .037 (.266)  | .079 (.503)  | -.056 (-.366)   | .183 (1.226)   |
| Religion<br>(Christian =1)                                | -.143(-1.064)  | .023 (.156)  | .132 (.900)   | -.057 (-.404)  |
| Region<br>(Asia =1)                                       | -.107 (-.748)  | -.078 (-.491)  | -.001 (-.006)   | .068 (.447)  |
| Living<br>(in apartment with friends =1)                  | -.213 (-1.512)   | .057 (.366)  | -.049 (-.317)   | .088 (.588)  |
| Reason for education in CU<br>(Prestigious University =1) | .067(.548)   | -.075 (-.548)  | .052 (.388)   | .070 (.542)  |
| Living in Boulder(years)                                  | .079 (.599)  | .166 (1.125)   | .014 (.099)   | -.019 (-.137)  |

(N=116) (Standardized Beta coefficients and t values in parenthesis). P<.05\* ; p<.01\*\*; p<.000\*\*

Results in Table 2 reveal there is no significant relationship between the students' perception of problems at the country level and the independent variables. On the other hand, the students who rate their country's most important personal problem as economic and the

family type each student comes from has impact as an independent variable. Although non-parametric statistical test results do not show a significant difference, (Chi-square = 3.426, DF = 4,  $p \geq .489$ ), there are more students from nuclear families who rated economic problems as their most important personal problem when in their countries of origin. It can be interpreted that few poor and extended family members can afford to come to Boulder for an education, (22.2%). It would not be wrong to say that the poor nuclear family can still support their child's education abroad as opposed to the extended and/or poor family.

Finally, *Table 2* indicates that as an independent variable, age has an impact on students' most personal problems in Boulder, (but only at the .05\* level). In other words, when students were classified by age, (18-22), (23-27), and, (28 and older), the economical problems of those in the second age group were slightly higher at 32.0% with 28.1% for the first age group and 26.5% for the third age group. Seeing economic problems as secondary was relatively higher among the third age group at 23.5%, as opposed to the first age group at 15.6% and second age group at 8.0%. It should be noted that non-parametric statistical test results do not show significant differences among the age groups, (Chi-square = 3.953; DF = 4,  $\geq .412$ ).

Finally, when correlation coefficients are calculated among the most important problems, there is a positive correlation between war at the world level and unemployment at the country level, (.349\*\*) and economical problems at the personal level both in the student's countries of origin and in Boulder, (.200\*). It appears the student's economic problems are consistent and quite important, (see *Table 3*). It could be interpreted that that most important problems to all students are war and economy. Since unemployment is also interpreted as a kind of economic problem, the perceptions of international students are consistent about economy at the first three levels, with the exception of the world level. While they are aware the world is in conflict, they suffer more from economical problems.

Table 3. Zero order correlation among most important problems at different levels

| <b>Problems</b>                                     | <b>1</b>     | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b>     | <b>4</b> |
|---|--------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| <b>1. War</b><br>(World level)                      | -            | -        | -            |          |
| <b>2. Unemployment</b><br>(Country)                 | <b>349**</b> | -        | -            |          |
| <b>3. Economical</b><br>(Personal in their country) | -.064        | .162     | -            |          |
| <b>4. Economical</b><br>(Personal in Boulder)       | .031         | .013     | <b>.200*</b> | -        |

$P < .01$  \*\*;  $p < .05$  \*

### Conclusion

As was expected, the web-based survey results indicated the socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics of international students were different. It is clear that discussions of homogeneity versus heterogeneity, as well as a shift from traditional disciplinary studies to more complex interdisciplinary studies will provide a reduction in risk, (Jessor, 1991, 1993) and an increase in protection of young people all over the world. However, it is realized that that a reduction of risk is not enough by itself, and therefore, measures must be taken to increase protection as well. Providing better education and counselor services based on understanding of international student diversity were important protective and strengthening measures for developing 'human capital', (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, all members of the global community, including sociologists, should be more aware of this need for education and place more effort into providing it.

As discussed by Güriz, (2005) it should also be noted that a shift exists in the rationality of educational market relations. In other words, instead of disseminating the cultural and political values of developed countries, obtaining economic benefit and attracting high quality manpower for students host countries is of great importance. Establishing international relations and developing networks should also be added as targets for other countries that send their students abroad for higher education. In this age of information and globalization, both sides should be aware of their qualities and intentions in order to make this experience a more beneficial one.

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## YAZARLAR HAKKINDA

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## ÖZET

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Colorado Eyaletindeki bir devlet üniversitesinde paralı olarak öğrenim gören yabancı öğrencilerin sosyo-demografik ve kişisel özellikleri ile çeşitli düzeylerde ele alınan bazı problemlere yönelik görüşleri arasındaki ilişkilerin internet üzerinden gönderilen bir anket aracılığıyla saptanmaya çalışıldığı bu araştırmaya 116 öğrenci katılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, Colorado Üniversitesi Boulder Kampüsü Uluslararası Öğrenci Merkezinde kayıtlı yabancı öğrencilerin sosyo-demografik ve kişisel özellikler açısından önemli farklılıklar taşıdığını ortaya koymuştur. Öte yandan öğrenciler dünya, ülke ve öğrencilerin eğitim gördükleri kent

olarak Boulder'da yaşadıkları sorunlar açısından karşılaştırılmıştır. Öğrencilerin siyasal ve çevresel sorunlara daha çok dünya ölçeğinde; ülkeleri söz konusu olduğunda ise, istihdam gibi ekonomik sorunlar kadar, eğitim, sağlık gibi alt yapı problemlerine ilk sıralarda yer verdikleri belirlenmiştir. Öğrencilerin kendi ülkelerinde ve Boulder'da yaşadıkları kişisel problemler karşılaştırıldığında ise, eğitim, barınma/konut ve yönetsel sorunlar dışında büyük benzerlikler olduğu saptanmıştır. Beklendiği üzere öğrenciler ABD'de ülkelerinden çok daha iyi koşullarda eğitim görmelerine rağmen barınma sorunu yaşamaktadırlar. Ayrıca ülkelerindeki yönetim sorunlarını önemli bulurken, Boulder'da yabancı öğrenci olarak yönetsel konuların dışında kalmaktadırlar. Öğrencilerin Boulder'da yaşadıkları en önemli sorun yalnızlıktır. Tüm dünyada olduğu gibi bu araştırmada da gençliğin karşı karşıya bulunduğu risklerin belirlenmesinin yanısıra koruyucu önlemlerin alınmasının ve katkıda bulunulması için danışmanlık hizmetlerinin çok önemli olduğuna işaret edilmiştir. Uluslararası öğrenciler sadece kültürel olarak değil, eğitim hizmeti sunan ülkenin ekonomisine de katkıda bulunduğu konunun çok yönlü olarak irdelenmesi gereği üzerinde durulmuştur.