

# **Graduate and Professional Student Government**

## **International Graduate Student Assessment**

### **2022**

#### **Purpose of Assessment**

The Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) wanted to assess the experience of international graduate and professional students at Texas A&M to identify areas in which GPSG could help improve their student experience and quality of life at Texas A&M. 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 Life Studies (SLS) in the fall of 2021 to assist them in creating and distributing the survey to international graduate students attending Texas A&M University in spring 2022; this is the second time SLS has assisted GPSG with this assessment.

#### **Key Findings and Recommendations**

Student Life Studies 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 the community. 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 student experience.

- Nearly two-thirds or more of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the accuracy of I-20 documents, responsiveness of the Texas A&M representatives to questions about the I-20 process and the timeliness of I-20 issuing process (more so than students responding last year). However, inconsistencies in satisfaction levels were noted with both timeliness of the I-20 issuing process and responsiveness of Texas A&M representatives. Data indicates somewhat higher satisfaction levels of students from countries with higher representation within the Texas A&M student population (China, India and Korea). Respondents' comments support these inconsistent experiences. Many indicated positive experiences, along with finding the turnaround time advertised by the International Student Services (ISS) too long (15 days), and experiencing unanswered or very slow responses to emails and phone calls along with some inaccurate and unprofessional interactions with the ISS staff.
- Most respondents using the Terra Dotta software available to international students to manage their records found it useful and more so than the respondents last year. Feedback regarding their experience with Terra Dotta were primarily positive. A few suggested that the software could be improved by being more user-friendly. Similarly, those who provided comments regarding the International Student Services website thought it was a good resource, but it too could be improved by being updated, streamlined in design and more user-friendly for its primary user, international students.
- About three-quarters of the respondents indicated considering Optional Practical Training (OPT) but had not participated yet. Comments about the OPT process indicated responders' lack of experience with the process and positive experiences with ISS OPT trainings. But similar to those comments regarding the overall I-20 issuing process, respondents also noted that the I-20 process for OPT was slow and that the turnaround time was often more than that promised on the ISS website.
- GPSG leaders are strongly encouraged to work with appropriate academic campus partners in sharing this information and working collaboratively on recommending changes. They could offer to organize an international student advisory committee to provide input, help benchmark similar services of other universities if requested, and provide feedback as changes are considered to enhance the international

student experience with I-20 and OPT processes as well as support with student training mechanisms surrounding these processes.

## **Method and Sample**

The survey was developed and distributed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The survey contained eight 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, Tableau® (data visualization software), Microsoft Word® and Excel®. Qualitative responses were analyzed using formal content analyses conducted during two sessions with two international students (one graduate and one undergraduate) and one staff member of Student Life Studies. Content analysis identified main themes from responses of students to the four qualitative questions.

The survey link was sent via email on February 8, 2022, to 3,614 Texas A&M international graduate and professional students; the email addresses for four students were undeliverable. Non-respondents received up to four reminders before the survey closed on February 28, 2022. Of the 3,610 students receiving the survey link, 637 took some part of the survey, yielding an 18% response rate, higher than the 11% 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%. Not applicable response choices were removed from the analysis. Tables list data in decreasing frequency or 2022 mean order unless otherwise noted; comparisons to the 2021 assessment are noted. Categorized themes determined through the content analysis are reported; the entire list of comments can be found in a separate document. Students whose countries have fewer than five students represented in the survey population are represented as “not identify” next to their comments within that list. Additional cross-tabulated response data and data disaggregated by country (citizenship) of student respondents also can be found in a separate document and through an online dashboard. Students’ demographics were gathered from the University’s information system based on the students’ Unique Identification Number (UIN).

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. As shown in Table ,1 on the next page, respondents were most satisfied with the accuracy of the I-20 documents and least satisfied with the timeliness of the I-20 process, but more satisfied with all three factors than respondents in 2021.

	<b>Very Satisfied (5)</b>	<b>Satisfied (4)</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)</b>	<b>Dissatisfied (2)</b>	<b>Very Dissatisfied (1)</b>	<b>2022 Mean (sd) [n]</b>	<b>2021 Mean (sd) [n]</b>
<b>Accuracy of I-20 documents</b>	52%	39%	6%	2%	1%	4.38 (.79) [615]	4.23 (.93) [355]

	Very Satisfied (5)	Satisfied (4)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2022 Mean (sd) [n]	2021 Mean (sd) [n]
<b>Responsiveness of Texas A&amp;M representatives to your questions about the process</b>	27%	39%	18%	9%	7%	3.70 (1.16) [619]	3.36 (1.31) [362]
<b>Timeliness of I-20 issuing process</b>	25%	38%	19%	12%	7%	3.61 (1.17) [617]	3.38 (1.30) [358]

Table 1: Experiences Working with I-20 Process

As the standard deviation of responses to the lowest rated statement regarding the timeliness of the I-20 issuing process was above 1.0, further exploration of that divergence of response was warranted. When reviewing means by respondents' country of citizenship some trend patterns emerged. Image 1, below, shows response means of the five countries from which 66% of respondents and 75% of the international graduate and professional student population hail. Those from the more highly represented countries (China, India and Republic of Korea) exhibit higher mean responses, although some variation of satisfaction exists within those countries' satisfaction data. However, notably, the mean satisfaction of students from Iran is nearly one point lower than those three countries. Respondents to the survey represent 70 countries, and a heat map containing average (mean) ratings along with frequency percent by chosen rating response for each country is presented for the 2021-2022 and 2020-2021 surveys within the associated dashboard. The 2022 mean responses of 20 of those 70 countries were at or below the 3.0 mid-point of the scale. Contact Student Life Studies for access to the dashboard.

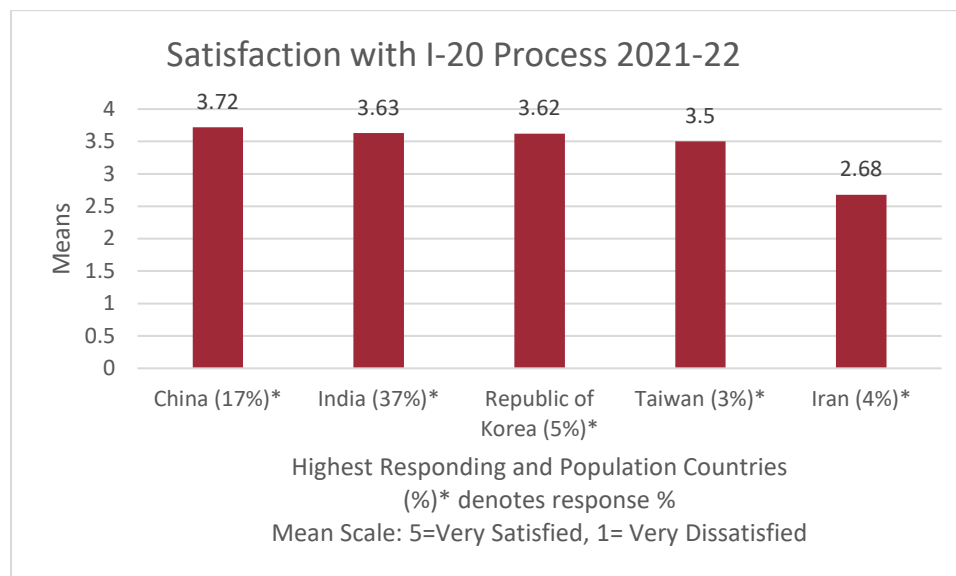


Image 1: Mean Satisfaction with I-20 Processes

Respondents were asked to share any comments regarding their experience as an international graduate student at Texas A&M and the I-20 issuing processes. Twelve categories of responses determined through formal qualitative analysis are noted in Table 2. About one-third of the 146 who chose to comment indicated positive experiences. One student from Taiwan remarked "I am pretty satisfied with the I-20 process and ISS advising during the past year" and another student from Nigeria noted, "I experienced an excellent service and prompt responses during the processing and issuing of my I-20."

Theme Category	Statements
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	46
<b>I-20 Process too long</b>	42
<b>Responsiveness (lack/slow) from Texas A&amp;M Representatives (ISS)</b>	28
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	12
<b>Communication About Process from Texas A&amp;M Representatives</b>	10
<b>Improved Experience/ Improvements recommended</b>	9
<b>I-20 Processes for Travel</b>	8
<b>Unprofessional Texas A&amp;M Representatives</b>	8
<b>Understaffed International Student Services (ISS) Office</b>	6
<b>I-20 Process Errors- Delivery Challenges</b>	6
<b>I-20 Process Turn Around for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) /Optional Practical Training (OPT)</b>	4
<b>Inconsistent Services from ISS</b>	3

Table 2: Summary Themes – I-20 Processes (n=146)

The next most populous themes identified through the student comments were categorized as I-20 processes taking too long and lack of or slow response from Texas A&M representatives, primarily identified by respondents as staff within the International Student Services (ISS) office. Those students who indicated that the I-20 processes takes too long spoke about how that experience caused them stress. One student from Iran noted, “The delay in issuing the first I20 caused me to miss my first semester and a late start.” The 15-day turnaround time, and how the process starts over when errors are found was also mentioned by students as onerous. One student shared, “It takes 15 days to just look [at] the documented submitted and then if by chance its not complete you wait for more 15 days.” (India)

Those who spoke about the slow or lack of response from ISS indicated phone calls and emails went unanswered or received slow response. And, as highlighted in the featured comments below, respondents’ experiences seemed inconsistent, as they could have a positive experience, as well as experience slow I-20 processing and slow response from ISS:

I don't like that every time a travel signature is needed, you give me a new I-20 (more documents to hold onto) instead of just signing the existing one. I like that the process to request the signature or a new I-20 is online. ISS does not answer emails promptly. (Non-identified country)

Your experience really depends on your luck of the draw. I have had a good experience when I finally connected with someone during an ISS drop-in office hour, but also had a horrible experience with someone being extremely condescending and rude over the phone when I called ISS for a quick question. Students’ hesitation is warranted when they get incomplete or even incorrect information from ISS repeatedly, explaining our wanting to ask more than just one question because we have had repeated experiences when something goes wrong. It’s unacceptable to be treated this rudely just when asking for further explanation because the person who picked up the phone is saying something different to what the form says. (Canada)

The next question asked about how recently students accessed the Terra Dotta system. Table 3 shows that slightly less than one-third accessed the Terra Dotta system three to five months ago, and those who indicated not having accessed the system at all was below 10% and fell by half from 2021.

	<b>2022 Percent [n=631]</b>	<b>2021 Percent [n=369]</b>
<b>Three to five months ago</b>	30%	16%
<b>Six or more months ago</b>	28%	20%
<b>Within the last month</b>	20%	35%
<b>One to two months ago</b>	17%	17%
<b>I have not accessed the Terra Dotta system</b>	6%	12%

Table 3: Last Accessed Terra Dotta System

Those indicating they had accessed the Terra Dotta system were then asked how often they had done so. Similar to last year, a slight majority indicated they had accessed the system two to five times, and almost one-third had accessed the system once, as noted in Table 4.

	<b>2022 Percent [n=576]</b>	<b>2021 Percent [n=318]</b>
<b>Two to five times</b>	55%	54%
<b>Once</b>	32%	30%
<b>Six to ten times</b>	7%	10%
<b>More than ten times</b>	5%	6%

Table 4: Frequency of Accessing Terra Dotta

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. The comments provided by 50 respondents categorized into five themes, and the most prevalent of those themes indicated positive experiences with Terra Dotta. While most appreciated the system and thought it an improvement compared to the older system, some respondents noted it was complicated and found it problematic as they could not cancel or edit a request once it has been submitted. Table 5 shows the five themes categorized from the comments provided regarding students' experience with the Terra Dotta system.

<b>Theme Category</b>	<b>Statements</b>
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	26
<b>Improvements Recommended for Terra Dotta</b>	6
<b>Complicated</b>	7
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	7
<b>Bad Experience</b>	4

Table 5: Summary Themes – Terra Dotta System (n=50)

Next, respondents were asked if they accessed information through the International Student Services (ISS) website (<https://iss.tamu.edu/>) and its associated webpages) within the last six months. Shown on the next page in Table 6, nearly three-quarters of respondents responded yes but at a slightly lower rate than last year's respondents.

	<b>2022 Percent [n=620]</b>	<b>2021 Percent [n=363]</b>
<b>Yes</b>	72%	76%
<b>No</b>	17%	15%
<b>I don't remember</b>	12%	9%

Table 6: Accessed the ISS Website

Those who indicated using the website were asked about how useful the information they accessed through the ISS website was for them. As displayed in Table 7, about two-thirds of respondents indicated the information being useful; slightly higher than the percentage of students who indicated the website was useful in 2021. Those who indicated that the information found on the ISS website was not useful also dropped one percentage point compared to last year.

	<b>2022 Percent [n=443]</b>	<b>2021 Percent [n=276]</b>
<b>Useful</b>	62%	57%
<b>Somewhat Useful</b>	35%	40%
<b>Not Useful</b>	3%	4%

Table 7: Useful Information on the Website

Those who indicated they accessed the website were then asked to share any comments regarding their experience with the ISS website as an international graduate student at Texas A&M University. Noted in Table 8, positive experiences topped the seven themes categorized from the comments of the 62 who responded, as students found the website a good source of information. However, others thought the website cluttered and noted that it could be difficult navigate. A few noted some of the information provided on the website incorrect, or inconsistent with information provided by staff in the ISS office. Suggestions also included adding more information regarding filing of international taxes, international insurance, and maintaining status.

<b>Theme Category</b>	<b>Statements</b>
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	17
<b>Disorganized/Hard to Navigate</b>	10
<b>Incorrect/Inconsistent with Information offered by ISS Office</b>	9
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	8
<b>Improvements Recommended for Website</b>	7
<b>Confusing/ Lacking Information</b>	6
<b>Clarify/Add Tax and Health Insurance Guidance</b>	5

Table 8: Summary Themes – ISS Website (n=62)

The next series of questions addressed the international graduate students' experience with the Optional Practical Training (OPT) processes. Table 9, on the next page, shows that slightly more than three-quarters were considering OPT but had not yet participated.

	<b>2022 Percent [n=614]</b>	<b>2021 Percent [n=357]</b>
<b>I am considering OPT but have not yet participated</b>	76%	58%
<b>I am not considering OPT</b>	12%	16%
<b>I have applied for OPT but have not yet participated</b>	4%	12%
<b>I have participated in OPT</b>	4%	7%
<b>I am not eligible to participate in OPT (not an F1 student)</b>	4%	7%

Table 9: Optional Practical Training (OPT) Status

All students reporting that they were eligible to participate in OPT were asked to share any comments regarding their experiences with the processes available through Texas A&M that enable participation in OPT. Of the 59 who responded to this question, six themes were categorized from their responses as displayed in Table 10. Most indicated that they did not have much experience with the process and that they intend to apply for OPT in the future upon graduation. Of those who noted experience with OPT or its process, about one-third shared positive experiences, expressing appreciation for informative OPT webinars conducted by ISS, and information found on its website. Others indicated that the turnaround time through ISS for essential OPT documents is too high and that this is not favorable in emergency situations, or that they needed clearer or more information regarding the process.

Theme Category	Statements [n=59]
<b>Not yet experienced OPT</b>	22
<b>Positive Experiences (OPT seminars, staff and website information)</b>	11
<b>Unclear on OPT Process/Need More Information</b>	9
<b>Poor Experience/Lengthy OPT Process</b>	8
<b>Improvements Recommended for Training on OPT Process</b>	7
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	6

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

The demographics of the students sent and responding to the survey were extracted using the University student database. Table 11, over the next three pages, shows the demographics in descending order of the respondent demographics for each category. Masters and doctoral student respondents were near equally represented, and a slight majority were from the College of Engineering. Of the 109 countries represented in the student population sent the surveys, students from 70 countries responded.

	Survey Respondents [n=638]	Survey Population [n=3,614]
<b>Classification</b>		
Doctoral	50%	54%
Masters	49%	45%
PB Nondegree	<1%	<1%
Pharmacy, First Year	<1%	<1%
School of Law, First Year	<1%	<1%
School of Law, Third Year	<1%	<1%
Dental, Fourth Year	--	<1%
Dental, Second Year	--	<1%
Dental, Third Year	--	<1%
Medical, Second Year	--	<1%
Medical, Fourth Year	--	<1%
Pharmacy, Fourth Year	--	<1%
School of Law, Second Year	--	<1%
Vet, First Year	--	<1%
<b>College</b>		
Engineering	52%	55%
Agriculture & Life Sciences	11%	8%

	Survey Respondents [n=638]	Survey Population [n=3,614]
Science	7%	10%
Architecture	5%	6%
Education	5%	3%
Business	5%	5%
Liberal Arts	4%	5%
Public Health	3%	2%
Geosciences	2%	2%
Veterinary Medicine	2%	1%
Bush School of Government and Public Service	2%	<1%
Medicine	1%	<1%
Pharmacy	<1%	<1%
Exchange	<1%	<1%
Galveston	<1%	<1%
Dentistry	<1%	<1%
School of Law	<1%	<1%
Nursing	--	<1%
<b>Country</b>		
India	37%	35%
China	17%	26%
Korea (Republic of)	5%	8%
Iran	4%	3%
Taiwan	3%	4%
Mexico	3%	2%
Nigeria	3%	2%
Bangladesh	2%	2%
Nepal	2%	1%
Turkey	2%	1%
Saudi Arabia	1%	1%
Pakistan	1%	<1%
Indonesia	1%	<1%
Canada	1%	<1%
Brazil	1%	<1%
Afghanistan	<1%	<1%
Australia	<1%	<1%
Bahamas	<1%	<1%
Bahrain	<1%	<1%
Belgium	<1%	<1%
Belize	<1%	<1%
Bolivia	<1%	<1%
Burma (Myanmar)	<1%	<1%
Cameroon	<1%	<1%
Chile	<1%	<1%
Colombia	<1%	<1%
Congo (Democratic Republic of the)	<1%	<1%
Costa Rica	<1%	<1%
Cote D' Ivoire	<1%	<1%



	<b>Survey Respondents [n=638]</b>	<b>Survey Population [n=3,614]</b>
Croatia	<1%	<1%
Dominica	<1%	<1%
Ecuador	<1%	<1%
Egypt	<1%	<1%
France	<1%	<1%
Germany	<1%	<1%
Ghana	<1%	<1%
Greece	<1%	<1%
Guatemala	<1%	<1%
Honduras	<1%	<1%
Hong Kong	<1%	<1%
Iraq	<1%	<1%
Israel	<1%	<1%
Italy	<1%	<1%
Jamaica	<1%	<1%
Japan	<1%	<1%
Jordan	<1%	<1%
Kenya	<1%	<1%
Kuwait	<1%	<1%
Lebanon	<1%	<1%
Libya	<1%	<1%
Macau (Macao)	<1%	<1%
Macedonia	<1%	<1%
Malaysia	<1%	<1%
Nicaragua	<1%	<1%
Peru	<1%	<1%
Philippines	<1%	<1%
Qatar	<1%	<1%
Romania	<1%	<1%
Serbia	<1%	<1%
South Africa	<1%	<1%
Spain	<1%	<1%
Sri Lanka	<1%	<1%
Sudan	<1%	<1%
Thailand	<1%	<1%
Togo	<1%	<1%
Trinidad and Tobago	<1%	<1%
United Arab Emirates	<1%	<1%
United Kingdom	<1%	<1%
Venezuela	<1%	<1%
Vietnam	<1%	<1%
All other countries with no student response*	--	2%

Table 11: Demographics  
 \*Represents students from 39 countries

## **Organization Background**

The Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) is a sponsored student organization at Texas A&M University, advised through the Offices of the Dean of Student Life. The website, <https://gpsg.tamu.edu/home/about/> indicates that “The Graduate and Professional Student Government exists to work in cooperation with the Texas A&M University administration to ensure that the needs of graduate and professional students are understood and considered when campus policies concerning academic excellence, tuition and finance, and research are made.” GPSG sponsors programs for the university community such as Grad Camp, Student Research Week, Interdisciplinary Dinners and hosts the Graduate and Professional Student Wine Tasting.

## **Project Details**

Responses in the survey may have been influenced by the COVID 19 pandemic and associated restrictions over the last two years. Also, the international graduate and professional student population surveyed included those associated with the Texas A&M University College Station site, including the Texas A&M Health Science Center (including College of Pharmacy, Dentistry, Medicine, Public Health), as well as the Texas A&M Law School. Galveston and Qatar sites were not sent the survey.

The Department of Student Life Studies 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 Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, anyone can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

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