# University Senate
## Research, and Graduate and Professional Education Committee (RGPEC)
## Response to Charge S-1207, Support for International Students
### May 1, 2015

### Summary Statement

RGPEC was charged to "Investigate and make recommendations with regard to core university support for international students and postdocs, particularly in the area of visas." Based on testimony gathered from experts and other stakeholders throughout the University including Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA), we developed a survey of international students of the graduate and professional schools, as well as those who provide support services to them. This survey was distributed in early 2015, with 1707 total respondents, 979 of whom were international students. Numeric satisfaction ratings as well as free-text responses were obtained.

Challenges that international students cited include language barriers; visa regulations that limit personal and academic flexibility; delays related to international travel, immigration, and security clearances; local transportation; acculturation difficulties; and the availability of information needed to address these issues. Several international students expressed concerns about the effectiveness of orientation and the quantity and quality of University services available to them, including the availability and cultural competency of University faculty and staff. Of faculty, staff, and administrative respondents, concerns identified were largely complementary and included the accessibility of information, the quantity and cultural competency of support staff. Faculty, staff and administrators called for improvements in language assessment/support, country-specific support, and education for international students regarding academic integrity and student conduct.

**Recommendations:**

1. The University's senior administration reassert its commitment to an inclusive University, one in which all faculty, staff, and students, regardless of nationality, can fully participate and excel.

2. Establish an independent review panel charged by the President's office to look at the current structures and organizations that serve the current needs and look at where restructuring and redefined organizational missions could be improved. This panel should bring together representatives from the many units serving international students, including Graduate and Professional Admissions, the Office of the Registrar, Office of Student Conduct, Health Services, University Career Services, housing offices, individual academic units including the graduate schools, GAIA, and others.

3. The University systematically review best practices within CIC and AAU institutions, and identify strategies to implement them.

4. The University implement uniform policies across all units.

5. Any University personnel interacting with international students and scholars receive mandatory cultural competency training, regardless of their own background.

6. The University appoint an ambassador for the communities with the largest representations of international students (currently China and India).

7. The survey be administered on an annual basis, with this initial iteration viewed as a benchmark.

8. The Senate provide a copy of our full report to GAIA and other units responsible for providing services to international students.

9. GAIA develop a handbook, website for resources with FAQ database, and other centralized sources of information as described in this report.

**Charge**

**Charge S-1207, Support for International Students**: Investigate and make recommendations with regard to core university support for international students and postdocs, particularly in the area of visas. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by May 2015.


**Background**

The Research, and Graduate and Professional Education Committee (RGPEC) addressed this charge first by gathering testimony from experts (faculty, staff, administrators, and international students) from New Brunswick, Camden, Newark, and RBHS, and then by conducting a university-wide survey, which was administered by the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (OIRAP).  The experts identified Rutgers' most pressing needs in this area, and recommended ways to address them; this input formed the basis of the survey questions.  Please see **Appendix I** for a select list of experts consulted and **Appendix II** for the talking points they addressed in our meetings.  The survey gathered input from international students of the graduate and professional schools, medical residents and fellows, postdocs, and visiting scholars (hereafter, *students*), as well as those who provide support services to them, including graduate program directors, employees of Rutgers Graduate and Professional Admissions, deans and associate deans in schools with international students, administrative or graduate program staff in schools or departments with international students, faculty assisting with issues related to international students and scholars, human resources and other staff assisting with these issues.  RGPEC has consulted with Eugene Murphy and others at the Rutgers Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA) as well as the Senate Student Affairs Committee.

Given Rutgers' aspirations to be a serious player in international student education, support for international students is an important area warranting significant ongoing attention.  Experts directed the Committee to several institutions that can provide best practices, including Michigan State University, University of California--Davis, University of Wisconsin--Madison, and Ithaca College.  The Rutgers University strategic plan is clear:  Transformation of the student experience is a strategic priority.  Moreover, "Rutgers is renowned for the diversity of its student body … [and] strives for a culture of inclusiveness."  "Diversity is central to our culture, and the University will work to remove obstacles and to create the conditions needed for all individuals and groups to enjoy full participation and inclusion in our community."  Critical to this effort is the provision of effective support for international students.

According to GAIA reports, in fall, 2014, there were 3,106 Rutgers international graduate and professional students coming from 97 countries.  (This number excludes Camden, for which totals are not available.)  Approximately 16% of the graduate student body this academic year is international, with the percentage varying significantly by school.  Just to take one example, the Graduate School-New Brunswick, the largest graduate unit at Rutgers, is nearly 56% international; a 12-year analysis of that school shows a steady increase in international students as a percentage of its total population.   In addition, GAIA reports indicate the total of international postdocs, as well as *visiting* predocs, research assistants, graduate students, professors, instructors, scholars, fellows, consultants, and interns is 324 (excluding Newark, for which totals are not available).  At the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS), about 50% of the students are international.

It is important to note that the international students experience can vary widely from campus to campus. For example, in the expert testimonies it was noted that international students in Newark have fewer on-campus housing options, students are older and more autonomous, and proximity to New York City can facilitate community building within particular national or ethnic communities. Within GSBS, there is a perception that the Piscataway students have a better sense of where to go for help at Rutgers than the Newark students, since the Piscataway program was joint with the Graduate School—New Brunswick for many years prior to the merger.

Rutgers is one of the nation's most culturally diverse universities, and this is one of its greatest strengths. There is a real opportunity to become a leader and model in this area, and in cultural competency training. RGPEC hopes this report, which clearly identifies the issues and offers concrete recommendations, will mark the beginning of a process that takes the University to the next level.

## Expert Testimonies

Because much of the input from our experts is reflected in the survey data, it is not described in full here. However, the following points warrant highlighting. International students reported to RGPEC that the International students group of the Graduate Student Association began in 2012, and there have been 1700-2200 student members over the last five years. The International Services Committee was established and led by Urmi Otiv (GAIA) in mid-2012, and involves all university offices. GAIA assigns an advisor to each student, with the main support function being the handling of immigration status issues. There is also a week-long orientation program, which has improved annually, with attendance required and financial incentives provided. 1,200 have attended. GAIA works with university offices on many issues; for example, international students' arrival time is not always synchronized to the opening of student housing. This problem has been addressed. The perception of the GSA international students group is that the university is often unaware of issues, but is willing to address them when they are brought to its attention. Students typically know where to find information, but there are more issues for international students than for domestic, and finding the answers can take a while, especially if the student is introverted or shy. Generally department advisors and faculty know where to direct the students. What the students really need is a comprehensive FAQ page, a one-stop shop, rather than a spattering of hyperlinks. Students need assistance with travel requirements, professional development and TA program, and scheduling conflicts with classes. A weeklong conference of workshops is needed, and it should occur in breaks between classes, since conflicts during the academic year can render scheduling a problem. Graduate student life is less of a priority, since there is less of a social life than with undergrads, but GSA-ISAC is working on improving social activities. There has been reduced funding for international graduate students. A comprehensive annual survey would be very valuable. It would be helpful to include compare international with domestic students, and Masters students with PhDs.

Several experts commented on orientation and first-time registration: When new students arrive at Rutgers, we provide orientation programs regarding academic procedures, enrollment processes, regulations, etc. These sessions are in addition to the programs provided by the GAIA Centers. Not surprisingly, given the real differences in U.S. higher education compared with other countries, extensive individual staff time needs to be directed to help students enroll in the proper courses in keeping with Rutgers policies. This guidance is not necessarily provided in the disciplines and departments resulting in extensive time commitments from GSNB staff throughout the semester. For many students this one-on-one service is required for most of their tenure at Rutgers. This is an extremely labor intensive endeavor that is very difficult for one person to oversee. Moreover, in academics, there is less room for error in registration, etc., due to visa limitations. Orientation is in English and not all comprehend the language sufficiently. A follow-up orientation might be necessary, with help from existing students. Ideally, critical information would be provided in the student's native language. Alternatively, language requirements could be raised. More is being done with ESL and the PALS program, but this requires a nuanced discussion. It is very difficult to schedule orientations that everyone is able to attend, , and virtual sessions might be good to explore: virtual tours of the University, conversations with Rutgers people prior to arrival and customized to international students. (This introduces some difficulties though, since some departments utilize rotating advisors.)

Other comments concerned behavioral issues and academic integrity violations, student treatment by faculty, and issues of communication, language, and cultural adaptation: Ranging from home sickness to a complete failure to comprehend U.S. norms pertaining to acceptable dating behavior as well as

violations of academic integrity, the problems are rising with students who need psychological assistance, who are processed under the Code of Student Conduct and are charged with violations of academic norms.  Experts also pointed out that international students are typically averse to raising complaints regarding the behavior of their advisors.  Finally, communication and language are primary issues for the international students and their academic support system, along with a related issue of cultural adaptation and the ability to function within the academic environment.  The TOEFL (*Test of English as a Foreign Language)* test score is not necessarily a good indicator of language proficiency, and better ways of interviewing incoming students and scholars should be considered, including third party vendors and videoconferencing.

Finally, GAIA should provide an emergency number and 24/7 support.


## Survey Methodology

RGPEC prepared and tested its survey in the fall of 2013, and was poised to distribute it to the Rutgers community in early 2014.  When it contacted GAIA offering to share the data, RGPEC learned that GAIA was planning to embark on a survey of its own, addressing many of the same questions but targeting undergraduates.  Since both GAIA and RGPEC were concerned about survey saturation, it was agreed to collaborate, and the two groups met to discuss the survey.  Ultimately, GAIA opted to withdraw from the project in favor of a more general Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) survey conducted by i-graduate; it is our understanding that this survey was conducted in fall, 2014.  The CIC survey did not include the graduate student/postdoc/scholar demographic or the support services community, and its ability to be customized for Rutgers was limited.  Therefore RGPEC continued with its survey initiative, aware that GAIA's survey would be conducted around the same time. Recognizing that the two surveys were complimentary we urge the University administration to view them in tandem.

Our survey was custom-designed by RGPEC members, and incorporates revisions recommended by Gene Murphy and GAIA staff.  It consists of two sets of questions, one for the students and one for faculty/administrators/staff.  The survey was distributed by OIRAP to approximately 36,000 potential respondents, including virtually all faculty, staff, administrators, and international graduate students and scholars.  See **Appendix V** for the survey.  The survey was open for three weeks beginning February 12, 2015, and non-respondents received weekly and final day reminders from OIRAP.  In addition, the survey was sent to all the graduate deans, who were asked to distribute it to their graduate programs.


## Survey Responses

### *Student Responses*

The series of 59 questions directed to students are largely organized according to the life cycle of Rutgers experiences:  recruiting and pre-admission; admission and preparation for arrival; orienting to the University; orienting to the area; education and academic research; submission of thesis/dissertation; the graduation process; and finally, career development, internships, and placement services.  Students were asked to rate specific support services in these areas on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=very poorly, 2=poorly, 3=adequately, 4=well, 5=very well), and to indicate whether or not they received all the information and support they needed. Students were also asked for basic demographic information, such as age, gender, country of citizenship, school, campus, and Rutgers entry date.  Throughout the survey, respondents were given opportunities to provide open ended comments and suggestions.

Of 1707 total respondents, 979 were international students, indicating a response rate of approximately 28%.[*] There were 75 countries of citizenship represented by student respondents:  38% from China, 23% from India, then percentages drop to 4%, 3%, 2%, 2%, and 1% respectively for Korea, Turkey, Iran, Canada, and Taiwan. Of those, more than half (37 countries) have just 1 or 2 students represented.  The remaining 68 countries have fewer than 10 respondents each.  See **Appendix III** for country breakdown.

Sixty-eight percent of respondents listed their primary campus as New Brunswick (exclusive of RBHS). **Table 1** shows the breakdown by campus.

Mean ratings ranged between 2.71 and 4.10. Items receiving a mean rating of $< 3.5$ were flagged as indicating low student satisfaction and those with ratings $> 4.0$ were identified as areas where students feel that they are well served. Although overall, there were 9 items with mean ratings of $< 3.5$ and 10 items with mean ratings $> 4.0$, further break-downs of the ratings and examination of the free responses written by many of the students provides a more fine-grained picture of the international student experience.

One important finding concerns gender differences in international students' satisfaction.  Of the 745 respondents who elected to answer this question "male" or "female," 364 were female (49%) and 381 were male (51%).  The mean rating for women was 3.70 while the mean rating for men was 3.90 and this was a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$, two tailed t-test). Women had nine items that were rated below 3.5, whereas men had four items falling into this category. Items that women, but not men, rated less than 3.5 included:  transportation on arrival, obtaining housing on campus, obtaining childcare, introduction to the bureaucratic system, and career advice.

Another salient characteristic of the survey data is the contrast between the numeric data and the free text responses.  The numeric data indicated that the University is generally rated as meeting students' needs well or adequately.  On the other hand, students' free text responses to questions eliciting suggestions for improvements were many, voluminous, passionate, and predominantly negative.  In a rough categorization of sampled (20%) responses, approximately 35% of respondents gave a largely negative assessment, compared to about 3% who were largely positive, and about 8% who were neutral (or equally positive and negative).  Importantly, the degree of negativity varied significantly by Rutgers entry date; see below.

It is known that in general, people tend to report negative experiences in disproportionate numbers, and that people tend to remember the distant past in more negative terms.  That said, there are two possible explanations that the free text responses may be particularly significant in this survey (and have been given some extra weight in this analysis).  First, the survey did not ask how long students had been in the U.S. or the area prior to starting at Rutgers.  Consequently, the picture painted by students might actually appear rosier by virtue of the fact that a substantive number of responses likely came from students who have lived in the country or area for quite a long time and are therefore well-acclimated in terms of language, culture, and customs, and live amidst a network of family and friends. Second, the free text responses revealed issues not anticipated in the other survey questions, and which would not otherwise be

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[*] There appears to be no precise count of international students and scholars at Rutgers. OIRAP data estimates two international visiting scholars, 111 international residents, 179 international postdocs, and 3,284 international students in the graduate and professional schools, for a total of 3,576 in the specified categories; OIRAP totals are approximate because the international status is based on student self-identification. The GAIA total of 3,430 international students and scholars excludes Newark scholars and Camden graduate students; moreover, GAIA numbers are based on visas sponsored by Rutgers, so exclude Fulbright scholars and others with visas issued by another institution. Since non-U.S. medical residents are sponsored by The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), the sole authority to issue J-1 visas for medical residents, this population is not included in the GAIA total.

brought out in the data analysis, including issues of disrespect, discrimination, as well as some perceptions of untrained, uncaring, and unprofessional staff.

Part of the disconnection between numeric data and free text responses may be explained by differences in respondents' start date at Rutgers. Because 2013 was the year that Rutgers merged with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), and because it is reasonable to expect that GAIA was firmly staffed and functional by that year (it was established in mid-2011), the data was broken down by entry dates of "pre-2013" and "2013 and later." Of 929 students answering this question, 328 (35%) started at Rutgers or UMDNJ prior to 2013, and 601 began their studies in 2013 or later. As shown in **Table 2**, a more fine-grained analysis indicates that in some areas, the University's services to the international student community are improving. **Table 3** shows the areas that received mean ratings of 4.0 or higher and all of these are from 2013 and later.

In terms of the free text responses described above, respondents who entered Rutgers prior to 2013 were significantly more negative, and in fact in the sampling of this group, there were no overall positive assessments.

The survey results also indicate, as can be seen in **Table 4**, that satisfaction in some areas, particularly those having to do with transportation, family services, and orienting to the area, vary by campus; although there are fewer respondents from Newark, it can be said that Newark responses are more negative than those from New Brunswick. On the other hand, students across all campuses were generally dissatisfied with the support available for obtaining housing and for career development.

It is also worth noting that we have no comparison data for non-international students; for that reason we have attempted to limit discussion of free text responses to those describing problems unique to international students, or issues exacerbated by international status. Difficulties obtaining social security number, visa, and identification, for example, are rarely encountered by U.S. citizens, but issues common to both groups, such as healthcare and employment, can be more of a problem to foreign students because of their visa status, lack of language skills and unfamiliarity with government offices and bureaucracies. Future iterations of this survey might consider gathering of the comparison data for non-international students. In any case, some of the recommendations included in this report extend to the larger Rutgers population.

### *Student Responses to Free Text Questions*

The Committee reviewed the free text responses and has summarized the most salient points below. In general, the survey found that many departments, though not all, manage to provide all kinds of good information, despite a lack of support from central administration. Students in departments with international specialists found them knowledgeable and helpful. Many students rated orientation positively.

International students face many challenges unknown to American students. Language barriers make it difficult to convey precise information within a myriad of governmental and university bureaucracies, and visa regulations limit personal and academic flexibility. Delays relating to international travel, immigration, and security clearances can keep students from orientation and housing opportunities, and can have a domino effect of repercussions, many of them financial. Conversely, international students often arrive at school several days earlier than other students, to adjust to jet lag and settle in. Buses run less frequently (or not at all), even food is often not readily available on campus, and students can become isolated during this period.

Differences in cultural norms create issues both in academic and daily life. Acculturation of international students happens over a longer period of time and orientations, workshops, educational sessions, etc., should reflect this. Only 39 respondents (4%) listed orientation as a Rutgers service that "worked very well"; many found it flawed. One respondent called the compulsory cultural integration sessions "frustrating, patronizing and offensive." Another termed orientation "condescending at best, if not

outright racist." Yet another suggested "approaching questions of legal status, crossing borders, etc., in a practical and respectful way [that] would treat international students with much more dignity." Many students called for an orientation (and other university sponsored events) where peers (other international students, or faculty who had once been international students) provide information and support to the new recruits, rather than having American staff telling international students what American life is like. Cultural competency training was recommended; one respondent noted that those who have experienced bi-educational systems (e.g. faculty members who once were international students) might understand better how to provide help to international students encountering academic challenges, and that Rutgers might consult people in this category.

A dearth of basic information was reported by an alarming number of respondents, who found they had to "figure out everything" on their own, either by googling, or appealing to friends, family, churches, former students, or seniors. The "buddy system" used by some departments (pairing an incoming international student with another student from the department) can also fall short, since the fellow student can be ill-equipped to provide guidance on health care facilities for schools or dependents, culturally appropriate food shopping, places to worship for particular religions or denominations, etc. A typical comment: "I did not get any help from anyone and there was nowhere to ask." One respondent suggested: "Put yourself in the shoe[s] of a new student—new to your culture, your country, your climate, your ways … and ask: what would I (or my child) need? Start there."

In addition to the lack of information, respondents cited a lack of professionals to provide support to international students and scholars; specialists are "urgently needed" and offices are "severely undermanned," with busy staff "overworked and … frequently operating in a crisis mode." Also lacking is a good support structure; respondents reported a lack of centralized services, scattering of responsibilities across departments, and a lack of good communication between the international office and the administration. Students complained of conflicting information, incorrect information, unwillingness for Rutgers personnel to communicate with one another, and a lack of continuity in contacts in the international office.

The survey revealed innumerable accounts of incompetence, lost paperwork, confusion, delays, and neglect. Admission documents take weeks to arrive, and staff does not remain in contact with the student. When asked what information was missing during the recruiting and pre-admission period, responses listed things like "my acceptance letter," "my award letter," "my I-20," "orientation schedules," "course schedules," "all my information regarding my financial aid, classes, and required documents for submissions," and "everything." Students don't know whom in the University to contact for help, and report being pushed from one office to another. Staff is not accessible, emails repeatedly go unanswered, and offices are too frequently closed. Drop-in hours are hectic and average wait times are long. Delays and failure to reply to student queries cause anxiety to students and prospective students. Said one respondent: "I wonder whether they even care." In one instance, an entire school had been relocated and the incoming student had not been informed.

Further, many respondents complained of a lack of professionalism from those who had been put in place to help, as well as a general attitude of condescension underpinning the culture of the administration towards international students. International office contacts were seen as working against the students, rather than for them, and a source of directives as to what the students can't do and have to pay. Respondents requested the university begin treating international students and scholars "with a little bit of respect and dignity." Remarks included: "Just be human about your students"; "I was treated like a number"; "I was expected to know everything … it was horrible." There was a perceived lack of tolerance to international students' need to repeat questions (due to cultural differences and lack of English fluency). One respondent noted that many at Rutgers lack the training or patience for dealing with foreigners; another recommended the University solve the discrimination problem at the ground level.

Examples of unfair practices and discrimination concerned waived mandatory courses, unfair allocations of internships, research opportunities, and travel grant awards, American students receiving transfers of credits earlier than international students, and more. "All University-level initiatives should allow equal participation and support. If not, reasons should be transparently laid out!" One respondent suggested that without consistent and equitable procedures in place for both American and international students, all students will realize that "international students are only cash cows." Some respondents cited a culture that discourages complaints against faculty, even when rules were clearly broken and students harmed as a consequence. . Two respondents reported contracts broken by the university.

In providing information to international students and scholars, the University must strike a balance between meeting needs and "information overload" by combining multiple and ongoing means of conveying information, often with a focus on a particular topic. While a common request was to send "all the information in one package (not redirect students to go to different areas and talk to different people)," many respondents emphasized that information didn't have to be all in one place, but any centralized information resource should include pointers to more information. This is especially important since so many international students are non-native English speakers. One respondent recommended a more active alumni network, as well as social events overseas, to increase Rutgers visibility and legacy beyond U.S. borders.

In terms of specific recommendations, respondents suggested the University consider the following. (Note that RGPEC was unable to verify every statement made by respondents. It is possible that some services reported to be lacking were actually available, but unknown to the respondent, or have since been made available.[*])

**Pre-Admission and Recruitment**

1. Offer virtual tours or online open houses, or invite international students to visit the campus

2. Improve communication with faculty before admission, perhaps through Skype interviews or as part of a virtual tour

3. Proactively facilitate current student and prospective student interaction prior to recruitment

4. Provide targeted information about the university to help prospective students understand the sheer size of Rutgers and the University culture; offer data on enrolled student GPAs and demographics, class statistics, student-faculty ratio, recruitment statistics, alumni placements and profiles, and placement rates after graduation

5. Streamline the application process and otherwise improve the online application system, which was termed "poorly designed" and "not user friendly at all"; allow candidates to easily check admission status on the web

6. Offer online application and uploading of transcripts

7. Help students complete the application process

8. Allow online payment for applications

9. Speed up the admission process and provide prompt notification to students; do not rely on the regular mail system to communicate internationally

10. Regularly update departmental websites with the latest in faculty research, coursework, and degree requirements; changes in coursework are sometimes discovered after admission and arrival

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[*] GAIA's RU-NB International Student Committee has addressed some issues on the New Brunswick campus; see its March 2015 status report.

11. Provide information on financial aid

12. Open an admissions office in China

**Orientation, Acculturation, and Daily Life**

1. Employ an array of strategies to orient new international students to the environment, including the following (for recommended contents, see below):

   a. Handbook (see **Appendix IV** for recommendations on contents)

   b. Website of centralized information, with pointers to more detailed information

   c. Welcome package

   d. Summary of suggestions from senior international graduate students

   e. Information boards on campus during the two weeks before the new semester

   f. Step-by-step "Quick Start" guide outlining what needs to be done, *and in what order* (for example, one must have a valid ID card to get on the shuttle, so one cannot take the shuttle to get the ID card)

   g. Step-by-step detailed guide

   h. Opportunities for orientation by peers (i.e. other international students, or representatives of different countries)

   i. Contact information to student associations for specific nationalities

2. Look to other organizations for best practices and models of handbooks for incoming international students, for example, the postdoctoral Handbook of Albert Einstein Medical School (http://einsteinpostdocs.info/resources/EPAHandbook2012.pdf)

3. Update international office staff with recent changes to rules related to visa, change of status, travel, vaccination, benefits to family members of international students, and other related issues, to avoid unnecessary delays in the application and extension filing process

4. Proactively coordinate with international student organizations to provide orientation in the students' home countries

5. Provide information prior to arrival and prior to classes, but also offer ongoing, voluntary monthly information sessions or workshops dedicated to specific topics, for selective participation by students. Provide more focused orientations; do not combine grad student from one country with a young undergrad from a very different country; consider departmental orientations

6. Organize social gatherings where students, postdocs, and scholars can get supplemental guidance from international student peers

7. Explore the possibility of a YouTube channel along the lines of TED to provide 10-15 minute talks on topics of interest

8. For ongoing information needs, provide multiple means of communication; online communication (websites, email) is often preferred over telephone, particularly when privacy concerns are involved

9. Provide staggered or ongoing orientations to accommodate students with delayed arrivals, which are often unavoidable, particularly for international students

10. For orientation week, multiple concurrent sessions make it difficult for the new international student to determine where to go. Consider breaking sessions into small groups based on field of study or other commonality

11. Include a person from the program or department to help students on orientation day

12. Provide a more complete orientation in January

13. Provide orientation for part-time students on working visas

14. Provide interactive sessions with senior students from similar backgrounds who could provide incoming international students with more information on non-academic issues

15. Provide tours of University facilities and the campus outside the student's own building, particularly the main offices important to student life, e.g., health center, hospital, gym or rec center, counseling center, library, computer labs, etc.

16. Assist students in obtaining ITIN or SSN numbers promptly; investigate the possibility of bringing Social Security personnel to the campus

17. Assign mentors to international students

18. Organize more events to facilitate social interactions between American and international students, as well as between international students from different countries, and students from different programs, such as mixers, clubs, and meet-ups for diverse students of different ethnicities

19. Provide more attention and support to students and scholars with families; Rutgers was perceived by some as "family unfriendly"

20. Provide support for debt management

21. Provide continuity in the form of a single international services counselor for each student throughout his or her stay

22. Offer a shopping shuttle in New Brunswick, similar to those in Newark and Camden

**Arrival**

1. Provide assistance transporting students from airport to campus and/or accommodation immediately upon arrival in the country

2. Investigate expansion of the school shuttle since many international flights arrive after 9:00 p.m.

3. Provide school or department volunteers, possibly students, to welcome international students upon arrival, to brief them, welcome them to the new place, etc., particularly when they are arriving a few days before orientation

**Housing**

1. Offer interim on-campus housing for at least the first month after arrival

2. Provide a website for off-campus housing

3. Provide reasonably priced on-campus housing for post doctoral fellows

4. Provide earlier notification of apartment assignments; international students need to buy their tickets early and need to know when to arrive

**Transportation**

1. Address the problem of limited bus service before a semester starts; this makes it very difficult for international students to buy groceries, for instance

**Academic Life**

1. More language training to help meet the challenges of verbal communications and writing in English, including more writing tutors for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows

2. More support for writing academic and scholarly work, including publication and grant writing

3. Provide an introductory course on IRB regulations and expectations, which are unique to the U.S.

4. More expert advising and help during registration, including course selection and deadlines, and taking into account the student's goals and career prospects; how to enroll in courses outside the student's school and how to pay for them, how to find classes in your field that interest you

5. Clarity in specifying exact requirements for a degree with clear and concise timeline, as well as clear and consistent requirements as to mandatory coursework; a well-constructed web page that lists *all* the requirements (credits, thesis requirements, how to submit the thesis, format etc.), including links to all specific requirements of all departments/schools; a meeting at the beginning of the semester with Graduate School administrators for dissemination of all pertinent information about graduation; provide an overview of the entire process for the PhD from beginning to end, up front, not step by step

6. More attention to academic matters in the international orientation; "how things work at Rutgers is very different to how things worked in my home country"; invite someone from the graduate school to introduce incoming students to the basic PhD process, explaining grading, GPA system, how to audit, proposal and defense information, etc.

7. Mandatory course enrollment assistance for every student's first semester

8. More information about how and when to get "research credits" and how much they cost

9. Details and reviews of instructors and course content

10. Guidance in selecting research area and advisor

11. More information about financial aid and sponsorships, grants, fellowships, and scholarships available to international students

12. More financial support for research and conference travel

13. Better support in finding summer funding/work, particularly for students supporting families, and including on-campus work for those subject to the restrictions of F1 visas

14. More conference spaces

15. More study spaces, including spaces for self-study

16. Better computer lab hours during breaks, a space for students to work late in the evening over the breaks

17. More information about the libraries

18. More opportunities to draw upon resources from departments or schools within a single or related discipline on other campuses

19. More information on research done in different research groups across the university

20. A means of identifying research instruments available to the researcher

21. Improved infrastructure (broken/leaking windows, mold in the walls, no investment in equipment)

22. Realistic assessment of employment potential upon completion of coursework; information on what other individuals and alumni of the program are doing post-graduation

23. Introduction to Sakai

24. More about the patent process

25. Make faculty-recommended books available in the library collections

26. Provide more accommodation and facilities for Ph.D. students and postdocs who work long hours and late into the night

27. Provide information on how to proceed if a student wants to take a break from studies, for personal or health reasons, for example

**Employment**

Respondents reported few job openings for international students, and little support for their job searches, especially for postdocs. Students are aware that it is more difficult to find companies willing to sponsor international students on work visas, and to place international students in jobs, and sought guidance on how to work with potential employers reluctant to hire international students. One respondent reported being told that all international students should return to their own countries to work.

Respondents suggested the following:

1. Offer workshops and career fairs geared toward assisting international students with job placement, preferably during "down" times like winter break or at the beginning of a semester when workloads are lighter

2. Strengthen industry relations; bring in more companies encompassing a variety of disciplines, to provide international students with jobs

3. Employ a career management professional (some would say an aggressive active industry professional) in Career Services dedicated to helping international students find employment opportunities

4. Rather than tell international students it is too legally complicated to work in the U.S., organize the resources so that they can make most of the international exposure they have

5. Increase internship opportunities and on-campus experiences that can improve employability; provide links to institutions, companies, or organizations offering internship programs for international students

6. More opportunities and support for the professional development, research, and conference travel that is required to succeed in the job market

7. Strengthen alumni relations

8. Provide more opportunities for teaching; one respondent cited the 15-student minimum enrollment rule as an obstacle to gaining teaching experience; lack of teaching opportunities means a lack of diversity in instructors for Rutgers undergraduates

9. More support for career services for postdocs

10. More networking guidance

11. Provide greater assistance with job hunting for partners of students

12. Offer a website for international students applying for campus jobs

*Faculty, Staff, and Administrator Responses*

Faculty, administrators, and staff providing support services to students were asked to assess issues of staffing, training, available resources, centralization of resources and services, and the ability of students and themselves to readily obtain needed information and services. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with particular statements around these topics on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=no opinion or uncertain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). They were also able to suggest ways to improve support for international students/scholars, to describe areas where Rutgers services for international graduate students and scholars work very well, and areas where the services do not work very well.

The three statements with the strongest disagreement were:

1. I have sufficient resources to provide an appropriate level of support to international students/scholars (mean=2.57)

2. The resources to support international students/scholars match the number of international students/scholars (mean=2.72)

3. International students/scholars know where to go for answers to their questions (mean=2.74)

The following statement received the most agreement (mean=4.03):

International students/scholars would benefit from an electronic database of answers to their FAQ

**Table 5** includes all numeric survey responses to these questions.

*Faculty, Staff, and Administrator Responses to Free Text Questions*

As with the student responses, this group's free text responses yielded the richest data. In large part, free text responses from faculty, staff, and administrators echoed the student/scholar comments in terms of issues that need to be addressed: orientation, housing, transportation, healthcare, visa status problems, and discrimination. They understood that information and services are scattered around this large university, and students feel they are not being appropriately directed in finding corrections to the problems they face. However, while more centralization may be desirable, the free-text responses indicated that some level of support at the academic unit level is also essential. The knowledge base needs to expand in both GAIA and the departments; clear guidelines as to respective roles and responsibilities of GAIA and the departments are essential, and communication between the two groups must be improved. The University needs more support staff, better qualified staff, cultural competency training for staff, mentor programs, more social opportunities and networking, and more help navigating daily tasks of life like shopping, acquiring banking services, etc. One respondent stated "We have not reached the global standard of graciousness to visitors as we would enjoy if we traveled to their home countries."

Of most concern though is the repeated characterization of current offices meant to serve and support the international student/scholar population as marked by confusion and misinformation, staffed by people who are "slow," "rude," unresponsive, "unsupportive," "not friendly," and "not helpful." One respondent said, "All my direct and indirect experiences with the central Office of International Students and Scholars have been disastrous. This is one of the most mismanaged offices in this university (and there are many) … a disgrace."

Some issues cited by both students and faculty/administrators/staff were contextualized somewhat differently by this group. For example, both groups reported difficulties associated with a lack of fluency in English, but this group was far more vocal in its demands for improvements in language assessment, as well as language support. In the words of one respondent, "By far, by a huge margin, the biggest problem is language proficiency, in all areas" (reading, writing, speaking, understanding); one respondent suggested this as a motivation for plagiarism. Several respondents pointed to a need for country-specific

support, or support materials in students' first languages.  Both student and faculty/administrator/staff groups mentioned that information conveyed to international students must be short and to the point.

This group was far more emphatic too about the need to educate international students in academic integrity and student conduct.  They cannot "thrive as scholars when they fail to understand academic requirements, expectations, and procedures."  Quite a number of respondents referenced an apparent lowering of the admission standard for international students, with many students arriving "woefully undertrained (poorly educated)," suggesting a lowering of language or other standards, and a lack of preparedness or innate ability.  It was in this context that one respondent, interestingly, invoked the same phrase used by one of the student/scholar respondents: international student as "cash cow."  Others were concerned that international students, given the high tuition rates, can (or have) become viewed as a profit center.  One respondent cited a dichotomy, rather than a gradient, between capable and incapable students.  Admission of inadequately prepared students "bring[s] down the entire complement of students and cheapen[s] the degree.  This is problematic to faculty and discouraging to the well-prepared graduate student who truly and realistically aspire[s] to careers in research." Both groups understood that student expectations of career development and job opportunities cannot be easily met given the visa issues and this disconnect needs to be addressed prior to arrival.

It was noted that discrimination against international students extends to service locations outside the university, such as the Motor Vehicle Commission.  Students have faced harassment by other students and residents, and when appropriate support is not provided by faculty, directors, and other supervisors who should be addressing the issue, the students feel violated not only by the aggressors, but by the authorities as well.

Many of the cited issues point to a need for significantly expanded financial support in this area.  The faculty/administrator/staff group was also very aware of the disproportional growth of the international student/scholar population relative to the growth of resources and staff to support them.  A common theme was that there is a disconnect between *recruiting* of international students and *serving* them, and this must be addressed.  (Or to put it another way, admit only the number of students that can be supported.)  Moreover, due to a lack of financial support for scholarship, Rutgers is "simply not competitive. It is frustrating and disappointing to continually invest incredible amounts of time in recruitment to continually lose out over our lack of scholarship support."

Aside from the many suggestions made by the international students and scholars themselves, faculty, administrators, and staff recommended the following:

**General**

1. Create a set of best practices for serving international students

2. Increase resources (personnel and money) to match the increase in international student/scholar population, or slow down admissions of international students; we are taking too many students too quickly, and are unable to provide adequate support to them

3. Increase communication between the many units serving international students, including Graduate and Professional Admissions, the Office of the Registrar, Office of Student Conduct, Health Services, University Career Services, housing offices, individual academic units including the graduate schools, GAIA, and others

4. Revisit the University's business model for funding services provided by GAIA; many services are funded by soft money with insufficient revenue streams and rapidly increasing international student enrollment; this office should be seen as an essential service to the University and its mission

5. Reduce bureaucracy so that students don't continually get sent from one office to another

6. Create a central database of information for international students and scholars to facilitate development of an international alumni program; this is an important and growing constituency

7. Feature Rutgers international connections by publicizing visitation, collaborations, and research products resulting from collaborations. Host symposia utilizing the University Inn and Conference Center to raise the university's profile among peer institutions. Foster research around global concerns and leverage the University's proximity to the United Nations. For example, partnering with UN programs to promote clean water and safe food access around the world would be a tremendous way for Rutgers research to contribute to global benefit. These are areas where large-scale private philanthropy such as the Gates Foundation and others would likely be available

**8.** Provide more support to international "non-students," including scholars, special visiting research students and student interns, perhaps through levying an optional or mandatory fee; this would allow them access to all campus facilities

## Language and Language Skill Assessment

1. Require minimum TOEFL score for admission

2. Significantly expand the PALS program; require a competency clearance before students can rise above EAD; require English proficiency upon admission, or develop ELL programs far more basic than anything currently offered

3. Coordinate both structured and informal programs where students can improve their English, such as language cafes, conversation groups, grammar workshops, tutoring, discussion and presentation classes, more grammar/conversation classes

4. Assign each new student a mentor in the writing program to field questions and trace the student's progress; develop a searchable network of tutors with background in the student's language, possibly upperclassmen who are international students themselves

5. Ensure websites, information, and University software have the option of translation into other languages

6. Provide a writing resource center similar to the one for undergraduates, for help with general and discipline-specific academic writing and speaking in English (humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, medicine). Alternatively, since discipline-specific vocabularies may mitigate in favor of in-house tutors in each department; consider establishing a fund for advanced Ph.D. candidates to tutor international students in reading, writing, and communication skills

7. Utilize technology to match international students with conversation partners, so that an international student is helped with English and the partner is helped with the international student's first language. A respondent reports that many groups have such programs, but a more unified approach would be more successful

8. Offer translator services

## Academics

1. Mandate an introduction to the Student Code of Conduct with specific instruction in how to use citation and quotation in writing academic papers; rather than lectures on what is bad or legal, engage students in discussions about the value of individual thinking and problem solving

2. Provide formal instruction in the cultural differences of an American University

**3.** Mandate international students meet with their advisors as least once a semester

**4.** Support internationalization of the curriculum

**Visa Status Issues**

1. Do not allow international students (F-1s) to register and attend class if they are out of status and have not provided all required documents to the Admissions Office

2. Ensure students have a strong understanding of the policies and procedures for keeping documentation up to date; it is difficult for departments to track documentation

3. Facilitate visa processing and make the application process completely online; reduce the number of approvals on the visa application process

4. Update the Student Records Database and improve functionality to track, update, and monitor international student data

5. Reduce the Rutgers fees for handling visa matters; they are disproportionate to the work involved

6. Reconsider the space allotted to the RBHS international student office; a basement is unwelcoming, and first impressions are meaningful

7. Address the gap between international students and scholars who are registering for continuing education programs and who need visas; the departments administering the programs have no access to SEVIS, and the international students office has no access to the non-credit registration system; therefore the required paperwork can't be generated

8. Utilize technology to send automated notifications when paperwork is expiring, needs renewing, etc.

9. Eliminate fees charged to departments for processing of visas

**Orientation and Ongoing Support**

1. Provide the full orientation to students beginning in the spring semester (five days, not one)

2. Provide pre- and post-orientation seminars to acclimate students to U.S. social and political structures, and a weekly orientation option for new arrivals

3. Provide a one-page quick guide to duties in the first weeks, as well as a comprehensive description of services and duties, linked to a website for additional information and contacts

4. Provide a source or blog, and networking groups, where international students can post questions about various issues, discuss housing options, and other pertinent topics

5. Provide a timeline as to when certain forms need to be prepared

6. Include in orientation to U.S. and New Jersey culture a specific focus on public safety; international students can become targets of scams or other victimization

7. Encourage early arrival of students to facilitate orientation

**Mentoring**

1. Develop a peer mentor or coaching program, recruiting current graduate students to serve as mentors upon arrival of new international students, to help students adjust to cultural expectations in and beyond the classroom

2. Assign faculty mentors within the department

**Daily Life**

1. Provide several small merit-based scholarships or awards ($1000 - $3000) that students can use for many of their expenses

2. Diversify on-campus food selections

3. Offer more access to U.S. cultural activities and programs not only to students, but also to visiting researchers and scholars, who often bring dependent children and have different needs

4. Keep campus transportation and dining options open year round

## Housing

1. Offer early entry housing options to better acclimate students to the language and culture

2. Offer short-term housing for students visiting for two months or less, for visiting scholars

3. Provide temporary housing so that students have a place to stay upon arrival

## Healthcare

1. Increase psychological counseling and support services, providing more counselors, especially during peak times (beginning of semesters, graduation, etc.)

**2.** Facilitate translation of medical records into English for medical service providers working with students with chronic illnesses and diseases

**3.** Provide adequate healthcare coverage; insurance programs available for purchase are extremely expensive and fail to cover general health concerns or routine checkups; more than one respondent quoted a cost of over $20,000 per year

**4.** Allow international students to claim insurance exemption if coverage from their homeland or home institution can be verified

## Staff Support and Governance

1. Mandate cultural competency training for staff in academic support positions

2. Provide staff and departmental administrators with annual (at least) training workshops on international student issues, as well as ways to more effectively reach these students

3. Audit departmental and school procedures and support for international students, providing feedback, recommendations and best practices

4. Improve communication and coordination between the International Office and the departments/schools. Departmental staff can be left feeling they are not on the same team, and students feel they're getting the run-around

5. Clarify GAIA's roles and responsibilities, and how they are delineated from other offices and academic departments

6. Reduce workload for GAIA's International Student Advisors; according to one respondent, each Advisor has over 600 students for whom s/he is responsible, a ratio much too high to be effective

7. Update the Center for Global Services website (https://globalservices.rutgers.edu); it is difficult to find information there

8. Indicate which GAIA staff is responsible for which issues; when individual offices and departments can only direct a student to that office, the students can feel they're being given the run-around

9. Provide a dedicated person in New Brunswick for RBHS students

10. Consolidate into one all the committees and councils, and include representation from all key players, stakeholders, and decision makers. Multiple committees are addressing the same agenda with parallel action plans

11. Increase support to the Office of Student Legal Services, which currently lacks the requisite space, staff, and funding to serve international students, who represent a disproportionate percentage of students seen by the Office

12. Create Case Manager positions within GAIA, people who would assist each international student from time of arrival at the airport to getting to campus and navigating the transitions

13. Create a Program Coordinator within GAIA, to run an official mentoring program led by fellow international students; to the extent this is currently in place, it needs to be more formalized and structured, with a dedicated staff person to provide mentors with full support and guidance; this person should also develop community building programs/initiatives through partnerships with other units

14. Create an International Student Support Task Force to negotiate roadblocks and serve as ombudsmen in issues of healthcare, transportation, discrimination, etc.

15. Assess services international students need during periods of long breaks, relative to what is currently provided, and take measures to close the gap

16. Provide more information to prospective students prior to registration and arrival

17. Establish a central unit on each campus to facilitate in-person meetings between students and international office staff

18. Offer more walk-in hours

**Tuition**

1. Reduce PhD tuition fees; the massive tuition cost charged to the programs by Rutgers precludes consideration of almost all international students unable to provide their own support

**Internships and Job Placement**

1. Develop career advising tailored to international students, either from Career Services or from individual academic units; many international students are interested in staying in the country to engage in authorized employment after graduation, but it can be very, very challenging for international students to effectively job search in the U.S.

2. Provide job postings specifically for international students on the Rutgers website

3. Provide faculty with guidelines for helping carve out roles for non-native English speakers to provide these students with equivalent academic experiences in terms of internships

**Conclusion**

Rutgers has made commitments to its international student/scholar population, both in the strategic plan and through its establishment of the Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA). However, financial support to this population, and those attempting to serve it, has not been as forthcoming, and has not grown in proportion to the influx of graduate students and scholars. Challenges faced by these individuals, particularly those newly arrived from abroad, are daunting, and are likely having a serious negative impact on their academic success. Students and scholars paint a grim picture of new arrivals struggling to manage as graduate student, teacher, and person with limited resources in a new country, while navigating a maze of bureaucracy with imperfect language skills. Faculty, administrators, and staff see the same picture, but augment it with an additional academic dimension. This group cites critical issues of language assessment, student conduct and academic integrity, with the latter alternately attributed to lack of English skills, cultural differences, and desperation. Internships and job placement

upon graduation for international students and scholars were seen by both survey groups as a very serious problem.

Many international students and scholars are exceptional, but some are not. The faculty/administrator/staff group saw tuition fees for international graduate students as extremely high, to the point that the students can become viewed as "cash cows." Indeed, both the students and those who serve them share a perception that the University views the international student population as a profit center, to the extent that some believe admission standards and language requirements have been lowered; consequently well prepared students are thought to be suffering and the University's reputation may be placed at risk. The University must take the long view. As one respondent noted, "Positive experiences and the resulting word of mouth among international students, current and future, will then help to build the RU programs."

An alarming number of survey respondents cited an extreme dearth of basic information available to incoming international students and scholars, and support staff that is poorly trained, unresponsive, and in need of cultural competency training. Many students cited unfair practices and discrimination, a general attitude of discourtesy and condescension, and a culture of indifference. Information and services are scattered around the University, with little coordination between GAIA, the academic units, and the many other offices that serve this population. If services to international students are to be transformed, many University units must arrive at a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities relative to one another, become involved, and collaborate. These include, but are not limited to: Graduate and Professional Admissions, the Office of the Registrar, the Office of Student Conduct, Health Services, University Career Services, housing offices, individual academic units including the graduate schools, and GAIA.

Many, many survey respondents offered concrete suggestions to move the University forward in providing support to its international population, and those have been summarized in this report.[*] In addition, the Research, and Graduate and Professional Education Committee (RGPEC) of the University Senate makes recommendations as follows.

## Recommendations

1. The University's senior administration reassert its commitment to an inclusive University, one in which all faculty, staff, and students, regardless of nationality, can fully participate and excel.

2. Establish an independent review panel charged by the President's office to look at the current structures and organizations that serve the current needs and look at where restructuring and redefined organizational missions could be improved. This panel should bring together representatives from the many units serving international students, including Graduate and Professional Admissions, the Office of the Registrar, Office of Student Conduct, Health Services, University Career Services, housing offices, individual academic units including the graduate schools, GAIA, and others.

3. The University systematically review best practices within CIC and AAU institutions, and identify strategies to implement them.

4. The University implement uniform policies across all units.

5. Any University personnel interacting with international students and scholars receive mandatory cultural competency training, regardless of their own background.

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[*] At least two survey respondents offered to help with implementing recommendations in particular areas, and the RGPEC chair can make those names available upon request.

6. The University appoint an ambassador for the communities with the largest representations of international students (currently China and India).

7. The survey be administered on an annual basis, with this initial iteration viewed as a benchmark.

8. The Senate provide a copy of our full report to GAIA and other units responsible for providing services to international students.

9. GAIA develop a handbook, website for resources with FAQ database, and other centralized sources of information as described in this report.

# TABLES

Table 1. Student Respondents by Campus

| Campus (Excluding 'Other') | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|
| New Brunswick/Piscataway (other than RBHS) | 609 |
| Newark (other than RBHS) | 152 |
| Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) - New Brunswick & Piscataway | 58 |
| Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) - Newark | 50 |
| Camden | 24 |
| Total | 893 |

Table 2. Items Rated Less Than 3.5 from Students Entering Before 2013 with Ratings for the Same Items from Students Entering 2013 and Later

| Question Topic | Before 2013 | | | 2013 and Later | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *N* | Mean | *SE* | *N* | Mean | *SE* |
| Transportation on arrival in New Jersey | 236 | 3.08 | (.09) | 451 | 3.63 * | (.06) |
| Obtaining a bank account | 235 | 3.33 | (.09) | 443 | 3.73 * | (.05) |
| Obtaining housing (on campus) for yourself | 198 | 3.46 | (.09) | 367 | 3.89 * | (.06) |
| Obtaining housing (on campus) for you and your family | 127 | 3.35 | (.12) | 249 | 3.69 * | (.07) |
| Obtaining housing (off campus) for yourself | 190 | 2.86 | (.10) | 366 | 3.26 | (.06) |
| Obtaining housing (off campus) for you and your family | 128 | 2.88 | (.12) | 260 | 3.35 | (.08) |
| Obtaining family services (school enrollment, daycare) | 109 | 3.06 | (.13) | 227 | 3.59 * | (.07) |
| Introduction to new culture (social norms) | 249 | 3.41 | (.07) | 523 | 3.82 * | (.04) |
| Introduction to a new country's bureaucratic system | 259 | 3.16 | (.08) | 518 | 3.60 * | (.05) |
| Informing you where to go for answers to your questions | 270 | 3.33 | (.08) | 538 | 3.84* | 0.04 |
| Help addressing a complaint against a faculty member or peer | 162 | 3.51 | (.10) | 365 | 3.81 * | 0.06 |
| Help with employment issues | 220 | 3.46 | (.08) | 439 | 3.73 * | 0.05 |
| Help with understanding the IRB approval process | 199 | 3.38 | (.09) | 399 | 3.78 * | 0.06 |
| Career advising and development | 220 | 3.25 | (.08) | 414 | 3.60 | 0.05 |
| Internships | 191 | 2.94 | (.09) | 382 | 3.40 | 0.06 |
| Job placement after graduation | 131 | 2.88 | (.11) | 276 | 3.41 | 0.07 |
| Financial issues | 188 | 3.36 | (.09) | 366 | 3.78 * | 0.06 |
| Family services (school and childcare, etc) | 83 | 3.45 | (.14) | 218 | 3.95 * | 0.07 |
| Transportation around the area | 222 | 3.36 | (.08) | 452 | 3.85 * | 0.05 |
| Housing issues | 186 | 3.29 | (.09) | 390 | 3.72 * | 0.06 |
| Admission and preparation for arrival | 246 | 3.44 | (.07) | 490 | 3.73 * | 0.04 |
| Orienting to the area | 249 | 3.21 | (.07) | 493 | 3.60 * | 0.05 |
| Career development, internships and placement services | 188 | 2.85 | (.09) | 368 | 3.37 | 0.06 |

* = Significant improvement, *p* <.05

*N* = Number of responses; *SE* = Standard error

Scale: 1=very poorly, 2=poorly, 3=adequately; 4=well; 5=very well

Table 3. Items Rated Greater than 4.0, All from 2013 and Later

| Question Topic | N | Mean | SE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Application process | 571 | 4.14 | 0.04 |
| Interviews prior to admission or hiring | 451 | 4.06 | 0.04 |
| First time registration | 532 | 4.09 | 0.04 |
| Introduction to Rutgers policies, proper student conduct and institutional norms | 538 | 4.08 | 0.04 |
| Introduction to academic integrity policies | 532 | 4.15 | 0.04 |
| Ensuring you understand requirements for obtaining your degree and/or conducting research | 523 | 4.10 | 0.04 |
| Help with course enrollment | 500 | 4.06 | 0.04 |
| The graduation process | 274 | 4.01 | 0.05 |
| Issues with your visa/status | 453 | 4.19 | 0.04 |
| Issues with your family members visa | 240 | 4.09 | 0.06 |
| Travel within the US | 376 | 4.02 | 0.05 |
| Travel outside the US (other than visa issues) | 353 | 4.03 | 0.05 |
| Services for people with disabilities | 226 | 4.12 | 0.06 |
| Mental health services (behavior, addictions, etc.) | 267 | 4.09 | 0.05 |
| Department of Homeland Security/SEVIS issues | 399 | 4.12 | 0.04 |
| Leave of absence issues | 285 | 4.06 | 0.05 |

*N*= Number of responses; *SE* = Standard error

Table 4. Items from Survey with Mean Ratings < 3.5 by Campus

| Campus | Topic | N | Mean | SE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) - New Brunswick-Piscataway | Transportation on arrival in New Jersey | 46 | 3.35 | 0.19 |
| | Obtaining a bank account | 45 | 3.42 | 0.20 |
| | Obtaining housing (on campus) for you and your family | 31 | 3.29 | 0.23 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for yourself | 42 | 2.88 | 0.20 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for you and your family | 31 | 3.19 | 0.24 |
| | Introduction to a new country's bureaucratic system | 51 | 3.49 | 0.16 |
| | Help with English language skills | 38 | 3.47 | 0.16 |
| | Help with understanding the IRB approval process | 38 | 3.50 | 0.18 |
| | Career advising and development | 42 | 3.50 | 0.15 |
| | Internships | 37 | 3.24 | 0.16 |
| | Application for Optional Practical Training (OPT) | 31 | 3.42 | 0.18 |
| | Job placement after graduation | 27 | 3.00 | 0.22 |
| | Housing issues | 40 | 3.40 | 0.18 |
| | Transportation around the area | 45 | 3.42 | 0.17 |
| | Admission and preparation for arrival | 47 | 3.47 | 0.14 |
| | Orienting to the area | 50 | 3.42 | 0.15 |
| | Submission of thesis/dissertation | 26 | 3.46 | 0.19 |
| | Career development, internships and placement services | 35 | 3.03 | 0.20 |

N= Number of responses; SE = Standard error

Table 4, continued

| Campus | Topic | *N* | Mean | *SE* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) - Newark | Providing useful information about Rutgers | 46 | 3.41 | 0.17 |
| | Transportation on arrival in New Jersey | 30 | 2.90 | 0.26 |
| | Obtaining a bank account | 31 | 3.03 | 0.28 |
| | Obtaining housing (on campus) for yourself | 24 | 3.17 | 0.32 |
| | Obtaining housing (on campus) for you and your family | 15 | 2.33 | 0.35 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for yourself | 26 | 2.38 | 0.25 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for you and your family | 20 | 2.35 | 0.33 |
| | Obtaining family services (school enrollment, daycare) | 15 | 2.80 | 0.35 |
| | Obtaining family services (school enrollment, daycare) | 41 | 3.39 | 0.19 |
| | Introduction to new culture (social norms) | 40 | 3.28 | 0.20 |
| | Introduction to a new country's bureaucratic system | 39 | 2.85 | 0.22 |
| | Informing you where to go for answers to your questions | 40 | 3.00 | 0.23 |
| | Help addressing complaint against faculty member or peer | 23 | 3.39 | 0.29 |
| | Help with employment issues | 27 | 3.26 | 0.28 |
| | Help with writing academic or scholarly works | 30 | 3.40 | 0.23 |
| | Helping submit electronic thesis or dissertation | 7 | 3.43 | 0.61 |
| | Career advising and development | 33 | 3.12 | 0.25 |
| | Internships | 25 | 2.56 | 0.28 |
| | Application for Optional Practical Training (OPT) | 17 | 3.12 | 0.30 |
| | Job placement after graduation | 16 | 3.31 | 0.31 |
| | Family services (school and childcare, etc) | 7 | 3.14 | 0.59 |
| | Transportation around the area | 28 | 3.32 | 0.25 |
| | Housing issues | 21 | 2.81 | 0.32 |
| | Services for people with disabilities | 7 | 3.43 | 0.57 |
| | Social activities with international students | 24 | 3.29 | 0.29 |
| | Social activities with all (not just international) students | 23 | 3.39 | 0.30 |
| | Religious services and support | 10 | 2.70 | 0.50 |
| | Admission and preparation for arrival | 33 | 3.30 | 0.21 |
| | Orienting to the University | 35 | 3.37 | 0.22 |
| | Orienting to the area | 36 | 2.97 | 0.23 |
| | Career development, internships and placement services | 25 | 2.64 | 0.28 |

*N*= Number of responses; *SE* = Standard error

Table 4, continued

| Campus | Topic | *N* | Mean | *SE* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Camden | Obtaining housing (on campus) for yourself | 11 | 3.45 | 0.37 |
| | Obtaining housing (on campus) for you and your family | 9 | 3.44 | 0.44 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for yourself | 10 | 3.40 | 0.45 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for you and your family | 10 | 3.00 | 0.45 |
| | Obtaining family services (school enrollment, daycare) | 9 | 3.22 | 0.40 |
| | Introduction to academic integrity policies | 16 | 3.50 | 0.29 |
| | Academic advising and course selection | 17 | 3.29 | 0.36 |
| | Help with course enrollment | 17 | 3.29 | 0.36 |
| | Help addressing complaint against faculty member or peer | 14 | 3.14 | 0.39 |
| | Help with employment issues | 14 | 3.36 | 0.39 |
| | Career advising and development | 12 | 2.92 | 0.45 |
| | Internships | 12 | 3.00 | 0.44 |
| | Housing issues | 9 | 3.33 | 0.33 |
| | Religious services and support | 10 | 3.10 | 0.43 |
| | Leave of absence issues | 6 | 3.50 | 0.67 |
| | Financial issues | 10 | 3.20 | 0.36 |
| | Family services (school and childcare, etc) | 7 | 3.00 | 0.53 |
| | The graduation process | 8 | 3.50 | 0.38 |
| | Career development, internships and placement services | 11 | 3.09 | 0.31 |
| New Brunswick-Piscataway (other than RBHS) | Transportation on arrival in New Jersey | 467 | 3.50 | 0.06 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for yourself | 367 | 3.23 | 0.06 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for you and your family | 241 | 3.29 | 0.08 |
| | Introduction to a new country's bureaucratic system | 519 | 3.47 | 0.05 |
| | Internships | 386 | 3.35 | 0.06 |
| | Job placement after graduation | 284 | 3.29 | 0.07 |
| | Career development, internships and placement services | 378 | 3.31 | 0.06 |
| Newark (other than RBHS) | Transportation on arrival in New Jersey | 107 | 3.42 | 0.12 |
| | Obtaining housing (on campus) for yourself | 84 | 3.39 | 0.13 |
| | Obtaining housing (on campus) for you and your family | 61 | 3.23 | 0.15 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for yourself | 89 | 3.07 | 0.14 |
| | Obtaining housing (off campus) for you and your family | 71 | 3.18 | 0.16 |
| | Obtaining family services (school enrollment, daycare) | 65 | 3.40 | 0.14 |
| | Career advising and development | 99 | 3.22 | 0.13 |
| | Internships | 94 | 3.05 | 0.13 |
| | Job placement after graduation | 61 | 3.03 | 0.18 |
| | Housing issues | 85 | 3.40 | 0.14 |
| | Orienting to the area | 125 | 3.34 | 0.10 |
| | Career development, internships and placement services | 91 | 2.93 | 0.14 |

*N*= Number of responses; *SE* = Standard error

Table 5. Mean ratings of faculty, administrators, and staff

| Statement | *N* | Mean | *SE* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The resources to support international students/scholars match the number of international students/scholars. | 569 | 2.72 | 0.04 |
| 2. I have sufficient information/training to provide an appropriate level of support to international students/scholars. | 565 | 3.14 | 0.05 |
| 3. I have sufficient resources to provide an appropriate level of support to international students/scholars. | 536 | 2.57 | 0.05 |
| 4. A centralized clearinghouse of INFORMATION for international students/scholars is better than relying on individual academic units. | 567 | 3.91 | 0.05 |
| 5. A centralized source of SERVICES for international students/scholars is better than relying on individual academic units. | 571 | 3.84 | 0.05 |
| 6. International students/scholars know where to go for answers to their questions. | 578 | 2.74 | 0.05 |
| 7. I know where to go for answers to questions from international students/scholars. | 572 | 3.54 | 0.05 |
| 8. International students/scholars readily receive the INFORMATION they need. | 570 | 3.02 | 0.04 |
| 9. International students/scholars readily receive the SERVICES they need. | 569 | 3.01 | 0.04 |
| 10. International students/scholars would benefit from an electronic database of answers to their FAQ. | 566 | 4.14 | 0.04 |
| 11. All immigration matters should be handled at a central unit within the University not at the department or program levels. | 557 | 4.03 | 0.05 |

*N*= Number of respondents; *SE*=Standard error

Respondents were asked to rate these statements on a scale of 1 to 5, 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=uncertain or no opinion, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

# Appendix I
## Select List of Experts Consulted

**Elizabeth Atkins**
Associate Dean, International Students, Division of Student Affairs, Rutgers University-Camden

**Barbara Bender**
Associate Dean, Academic Support and Graduate Student Services, Graduate School—New Brunswick

**Yocasta Brens-Watson**
Director, RBHS International Services, Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA Centers)

**Yee Chiew**
Associate Dean for International Programs, School of Engineering

**Michael Marcondes De Freitas**
GSA International Student Affairs Committee

**Robert M. Goodman**
Executive Dean, Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

**Shashank Kandade**
Chair, GSA International Student Affairs Committee

**Jerome Kukor**
Dean, Graduate School—New Brunswick

**Amy Liberi**
Graduate Student Services Coordinator (now Assistant Dean), Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Rutgers University-Camden

**Howard J. Marchitello**
Associate Dean for FASC Graduate School and Research, Professor of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Rutgers University-Camden

**Eugene Murphy**
Assistant Vice President for International and Global Affairs, Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA Centers)

**Urmi Otiv**
Director, Center for Global Services, Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA Centers)

**Kathleen W. Scotto**
Dean, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

**Lily Young**
SEBS Dean of International Programs, Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (now Provost of Rutgers University—New Brunswick)

**Appendix II**
**Questions Submitted to Expert Consultants**

**QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**

- What are the areas where Rutgers services to international graduate students and scholars are working well?

- What do you think are the areas of greatest need, in terms of Rutgers support for international grad students and scholars?

- Do you think students know where to go for information they need? for services they need? If so, are they getting helpful answers when they go there?

- What recommendations might you propose?

**QUESTIONS FOR THOSE PROVIDING SUPPORT SERVICES**

- What is your role vis-à-vis international students and scholars?

- What are the areas where Rutgers services to international graduate students and scholars are working well?

- What do you think are the areas of greatest need, in terms of Rutgers support for international grad students and scholars?

- Does your unit have sufficient resources (personnel, money) to provide the appropriate level of support?

- Does your unit have sufficient information/training to provide the appropriate level of support?

- Do you think students know where to go for information they need? for services they need?

- Ideally, how would you divide responsibilities for international student/scholar support between individual academic units (departments, grad programs, grad schools) and a central unit within the university?

- What other recommendations would you propose?

**Appendix III**
**Student Respondents by Country**

| COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP | NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS |
|---|---|
| CHINA | 345 |
| INDIA | 216 |
| KOREA, REPUBLIC OF | 40 |
| TURKEY | 30 |
| UNITED STATES | 24 |
| IRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF | 22 |
| CANADA | 15 |
| TAIWAN, PROVINCE OF CHINA [sic] | 12 |
| GREECE | 9 |
| ITALY | 9 |
| PAKISTAN | 9 |
| BANGLADESH | 8 |
| IRAQ | 8 |
| BRAZIL | 7 |
| CHILE | 7 |
| COLOMBIA | 7 |
| GERMANY | 7 |
| INDONESIA | 7 |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 7 |
| FRANCE | 6 |
| SPAIN | 6 |
| JAPAN | 5 |
| MEXICO | 5 |
| NIGERIA | 5 |
| PHILIPPINES | 5 |
| SINGAPORE | 5 |
| KENYA | 4 |
| RUSSIAN FEDERATION | 4 |
| SAUDI ARABIA | 4 |
| EGYPT | 3 |
| GHANA | 3 |
| ISRAEL | 3 |
| JAMAICA | 3 |
| LEBANON | 3 |
| MALAYSIA | 3 |
| NETHERLANDS | 3 |
| SOUTH AFRICA | 3 |
| THAILAND | 3 |
| UKRAINE | 3 |

| | |
|---|---|
| AUSTRIA | 2 |
| DOMINICAN REPUBLIC | 2 |
| ECUADOR | 2 |
| ESTONIA | 2 |
| HUNGARY | 2 |
| MYANMAR | 2 |
| PERU | 2 |
| POLAND | 2 |
| SERBIA | 2 |
| TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO | 2 |
| VIET NAM | 2 |
| ARGENTINA | 1 |
| BAHAMAS | 1 |
| BARBADOS | 1 |
| BOLIVIA, PLURINATIONAL STATE OF | 1 |
| COSTA RICA | 1 |
| CROATIA | 1 |
| CZECH REPUBLIC | 1 |
| GRENADA | 1 |
| ICELAND | 1 |
| IRELAND | 1 |
| KAZAKHSTAN | 1 |
| LIBERIA | 1 |
| MACEDONIA, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF | 1 |
| MALI | 1 |
| NAMIBIA | 1 |
| NEPAL | 1 |
| NEW ZEALAND | 1 |
| PORTUGAL | 1 |
| PUERTO RICO | 1 |
| SENEGAL | 1 |
| SLOVAKIA | 1 |
| SLOVENIA | 1 |
| SRI LANKA | 1 |
| SWITZERLAND | 1 |
| UGANDA | 1 |
| VENEZUELA, BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF | 1 |
| (other) | 4 |

# Appendix IV
## Student Recommendations for Handbook, Website, Orientation Material

In terms of what to include in any handbook, website, or orientation material, many student respondents wanted more information on these topics:

**Arrival**

1. Guide to getting from the airport or train station to the housing office where dorm keys are obtained, particularly from JFK airport

2. How to find the dorm or apartment upon arrival at the airport or train station (when housing has been pre-arranged)

3. Where to stay immediately upon arrival (when housing has not been pre-arranged)

4. Where on campus one must check in (e.g., at the international office, at housing office to get dorm key, etc.) and how to get there

**Housing and Neighborhoods**

1. Housing guide, including how to find a house or arrange accommodation, localities, average rate for a single room, lease terms and conditions, precautions for renters, availability of any Rutgers-sponsored housing, on campus or off (such as a Rutgers guesthouse), temporary housing such as affordable nearby hotels for use upon arrival

2. Safety/security issues related to off-campus residence options

3. Information about the area around the University, including population, demographics, etc.

4. Household moving (rental trucks, etc.)

**Transportation and Navigation**

1. Campus and area maps; some students were not aware that there are several campuses, and how to move between them.

2. Transportation options, for campus travel, local travel, and further afield (bus, train, air), including bus schedules or where to find them; "how to live off campus and get around without a car"

3. How to move around different campuses when Rutgers bus services is not fully functioning

4. Driver's license, car registration and insurance; how to obtain a car. "The only advice I was given was to not drive if I could avoid it. This is not helpful to me and I still am struggling to find a clear explanation of what paperwork I will need to complete *and in what order.*"

5. Parking and parking policies, including gate access questions

**Orientation, Acculturation, and Daily Life**

1. Social norms, both general and specific; "include more introductions [to] American culture, accent[s], and social habits"

2. University, local, and national society and club contact information, particularly for international student organizations, religious organizations, and the Graduate Student Association (GSA)

3. Everyday details such as public and housing smoking policies, where to get phone cards to call home, etc.

4. Where to shop, particularly for groceries, including for culturally appropriate food

5. How to set up internet access and email

6. Where to go for netID-related issues

7. How RU Express works

8. Rutgers apps

9. Rutgers discounts

10. Payroll deduction

11. How to apply for a bank account

12. How to apply for Social Security

13. How to get a state ID

14. Local government and federal offices

15. Availability of social services

16. Emergency telephone numbers

17. Campus service numbers

18. Healthcare, including any requirement to purchase health insurance (even where the student already has it), how to select a health plan/provider, how the health care system and insurance work (common paperwork, billing, etc.); "many international students come from countries with universal health systems where all that hassle does not exist."

19. Taxes, including tax rates and how to file, the tax refund system, tax deductions ("unknowingly [I paid] much more taxes than I should have during the first year"), tax on tuition remission

20. Weather, particularly for students coming from tropical locales who likely have no knowledge of how best to cope with the cold and snow, including tips on cold-weather clothing, etc.

21. Information for dependents, including healthcare, required immunizations, affordable daycare, school districts, school buses, any predominance of evening coursework for graduate students, which can be difficult for parents, particularly single parents, with children

22. Information on maternity and paternity leave, as well as options regarding pregnancy ("make it clear what it means to get pregnant while in America as a student; make it clear what options are available")

23. Activities outside the immediate urban area

**Issues Pertaining to Visa Status**

1. More information on visa procedure and interview, including U.S. immigration procedures at port of entry.

2. How to cross the border (for moving possessions, to minimize problems on re-entry, etc.)

3. Visa application process

4. Federal laws; rights as a student and resident of the U.S.

5. Regulations pertaining to the Department of Homeland Security (for example, one student reported that visa paperwork for grad students working in STEM fields can be placed in high security clearance if all documentation is not in place to demonstrate that the research is not technologically sensitive)

**The University:  Course Enrollment, Academics, and Student Life**

1. More information about the academic system (GPA, etc.)

2. University policies and ethical codes, code of conduct, etc.

3. Available courses

4. Minimum course registration

5. Timing and procedure of course selection

6. Details regarding compulsory PALS courses additional to the regular curriculum, including what is required and the cost

7. Available scholarships

8. Other schools on campus

9. Fee payment procedures

10. Tuition remission

11. Student governance

12. Benefits for postdocs, information about the postdoctoral union

13. Purchase orders

**Employment**

1. On-campus employment information


In addition, several respondents requested more candor and transparency in the information that is provided, for example concerning the realities of campus transportation (particularly when classes are not in session), neighborhoods (including cost of living, safety, public transportation service, quality of schools, etc.), "TA-ships [Teaching Assistantships] and their limitations," job prospects upon graduation, and relative prestige of the various campuses.  Students would like to know more about initial costs that will be incurred before fellowship/scholarship money kicks in, and about other factors impacting budget, such as tax rates (including when a country's tax treaty with the U.S. impacts that rate), school fees, and course fees beyond standard curricula (e.g. required PALS or placement courses).  At least one respondent was surprised to learn upon arrival that graduate fellowships do not cover tuition fees and may offer a weaker healthcare package.

**Appendix V**
**The Survey**

See separate attachment.

# RESOLUTION

*Whereas*, Rutgers University is renowned for the diversity of its student body and strives for a culture of inclusiveness;

*Whereas*, the University aspires to excel in international student education;

*Whereas* support for international students is an important area warranting significant ongoing attention;

*Whereas*, the Research, and Graduate and Professional Education Committee of the Rutgers University Senate, as well as the University Senate itself, have considered the issues related to support services to international students and have adopted a report on this matter;

*Therefore, Be It Resolved*, that, in keeping with the report so adopted, the Rutgers University Senate recommends that Rutgers' administration:

1. The University's senior administration reassert its commitment to an inclusive University, one in which all faculty, staff, and students, regardless of nationality, can fully participate and excel.

2. Establish an independent review panel charged by the President's office to look at the current structures and organizations that serve the current needs and look at where restructuring and redefined organizational missions could be improved.  This panel should bring together representatives from the many units serving international students, including Graduate and Professional Admissions, the Office of the Registrar, Office of Student Conduct, Health Services, University Career Services, housing offices, individual academic units including the graduate schools, GAIA, and others.

3. The University systematically review best practices within CIC and AAU institutions, and identify strategies to implement them.

4. The University implement uniform policies across all units.

5. Any University personnel interacting with international students and scholars receive mandatory cultural competency training, regardless of their own background.

6. The University appoint an ambassador for the communities with the largest representations of international students (currently China and India).

7. The RGPEC survey be administered on an annual basis, with this initial iteration viewed as a benchmark.

8. The Senate provide a copy of this report in its entirety to GAIA and other units responsible for providing services to international students.

9. GAIA develop a handbook, website for resources with FAQ database, and other centralized sources of information as described in this report.

# Research, and Graduate and Professional Education Committee (RGPEC)

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