

2012



Investigating and Addressing Barriers to Academic Success for New Immigrant and International Students at Simon Fraser University

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SFU

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THINKING OF THE WORLD

- A Little Context: SFU's Diverse Student Body
- The Issue: Academic Success for All (or Not)
- A Chance to Learn More
- Some Early Findings
- Food for Thought



Session Overview

Simon Fraser University Students are Diverse

- 53% self-identify as a visible minority.
- 2% indigenous/aboriginal.
- Approximately 17% international students; very high percentage of new immigrants.



A Little Background: Who Are SFU Students?



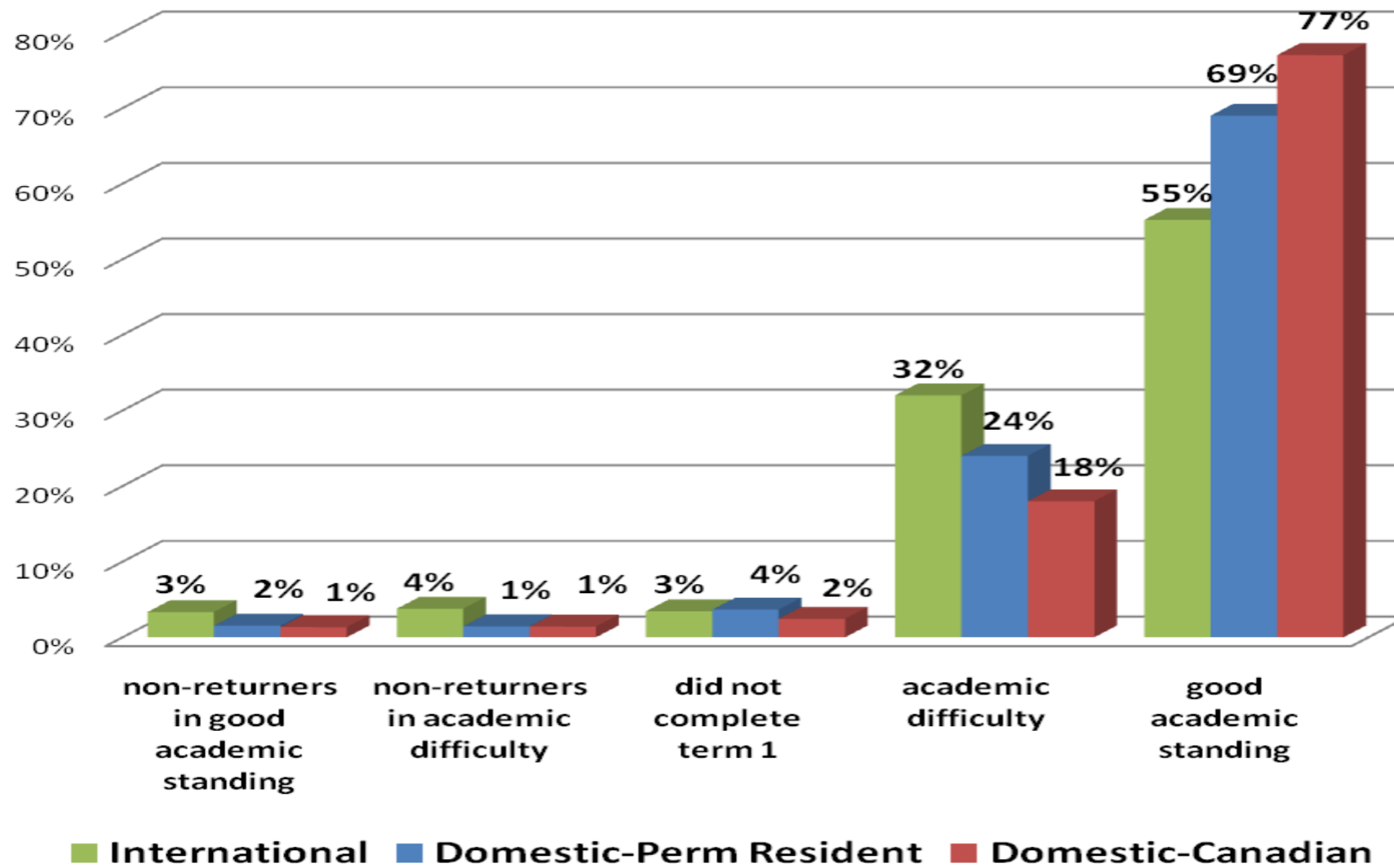
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- Students come from over 130 different countries of origin and represent multiple races and ethnicities.
- Many have experienced different life and educational/cultural experiences prior to coming to SFU.
- 57% speak English as their first language – 43% do not. Many are multi-lingual.
- 40% primarily speak a language other than English at home.



Language and Culture Differences

BC 12 international, permanent residents & domestics: academic success rates



And Many Experience Difficulty Early

- **Step One:** Stop the Bleeding: develop immediate interventions. E.g. Back on Track
- **Step Two:** Find Out Who is Bleeding and Why (do our research)
- **Step Three:** make appropriate, informed recruitment and retention practice and policy changes.



So What Are We Doing?

- We obtained a small SSHRC grant (Metropolis) to more fully explore assumptions about the shared and different challenges faced by both International students and EAL students, most of whom are new immigrants.
- We wanted to know what role if any citizenship, country of origin, and basis of admission play with respect to academic success.
- We wanted to find out what staff and students felt were the barriers to, and supports for their academic success at SFU.



Metropolis BC: A Chance to Learn More



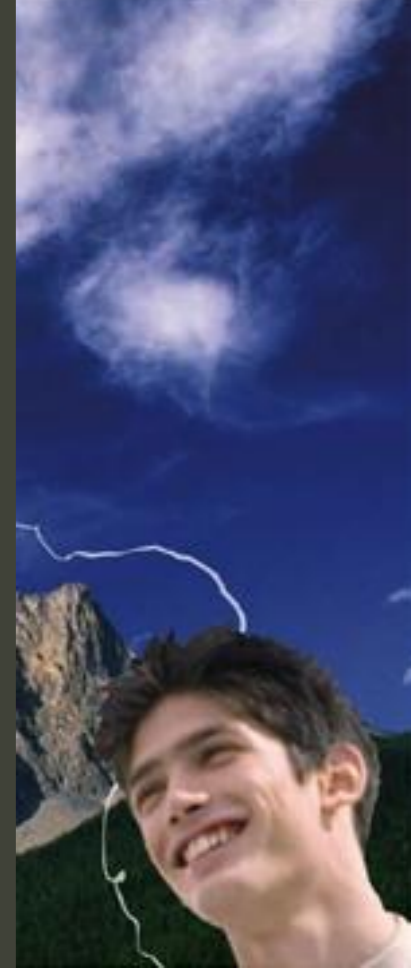
So we examined our student population more closely and discovered that:

- 24% of SFU students (or nearly 1 in 4) were born or primarily schooled in a country other than Canada.
- More than 70% of traditional SFU admits come from the Lower Mainland and South Fraser, regions which have significant immigrant populations.
- Over 55% of SFU's incoming visa students were recruited locally (2010 fall)



Some Background Info

- We received a SSHRC Grant to examine whether and how language, country of origin and country of schooling affected academic performance at SFU
- We examined over 35,000 academic records representing students from 137 different countries, between the years 2005 and 2010.
- We compared the aggregate performances of three groups: **domestic** students, **international** (visa students) and **permanent residents** (new immigrants).



MetropolisBC Research: Methodology

- Using regression analyses, chi square and Cramer's V tests, cross tabulations were performed to explore whether a student's **citizenship**, **basis of admission**, and **country of origin** have an impact on their academic success at various stages throughout their academic career.
- Using a survey tool and focus groups we also gathered qualitative data regarding supports for and barriers to student academic success.



MetropolisBC Research: Methodology (cont'd)

Academic Status of Students by Citizenship Status and Term of Study

Distribution by Percent

	Good Standing	Academic Probation	Required Withdrawal	Other*
After 1st Semester (N=35,844)				
Canadian Citizens	82.1%	15.4%	0%	2.5%
Can. Perm. Residents	78.7	18.0	0	3.3
Visa Students	75.0	21.3	0	3.6
After 2nd Semester (N=34,392)				
Canadian Citizens	80.1	11.9	5.0	2.4
Can. Perm. Residents	75.7	15.3	6.4	2.5
Visa Students	70.5	19.3	7.9	2.3
During 2nd Year (N=24,616)				
Canadian Citizens	83.9	8.1	5.0	3.1
Can. Perm. Residents	78.8	11.0	7.0	3.2
Visa Students	75.3	13.5	8.5	2.7
During 3rd Year (N=14,676)				
Canadian Citizens	89.9	4.4	2.8	3.0
Can. Perm. Residents	87.7	5.9	3.6	2.8
Visa Students	86.2	6.6	4.4	2.8



MBC: Early Findings by Citizenship

**Academic Status of Students by
Citizenship Status and Term of Study
(cont'd)
Distribution by Percent**

During 4th Year (N=7,054)

Canadian Citizens	93.4	3.0	1.7	1.9
Can. Perm. Residents	91.2	4.0	2.2	2.0
Visa Students	89.1	5.1	3.4	2.4

During 5th Year (N=2,578)

Canadian Citizens	96.1	2.2	1.6	0.1
Can. Perm. Residents	92.7	3.5	3.8	0
Visa Students	92.1	5.8	2.1	0

As of August 2010 (N=35,844)

Canadian Citizens	82.5	5.6	10.0	1.9
Can. Perm. Residents	78.4	7.3	11.9	2.4
Visa Students	74.4	10.1	13.4	2.1



Citizenship and Academic Status (cont'd)

Table 8
Percentage of Students in Good Standing
By Selected Country of Citizenship

Country of Citizenship	Term of Study:					
	Sem. 1	Sem. 2	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Hong Kong	74.8%	71.9%	78.9%	88.7%	90.2%	86.4%
India	79.2	72.8	79.6	87.2	85.9	96.6
Indonesia	73.4	72.4	77.3	84.1	89.1	83.3
Philippines	79.0	75.9	83.1	87.9	91.7	100
Malaysia	83.6	82.4	83.7	88.2	94.7	100
China	77.8	73.6	79.2	89.8	93.3	92.9
Korea (S)	68.2	58.4	59.4	75.4	82.4	86.7
Taiwan	66.7	67.1	70.1	86.5	87.0	90.7
All Student Average	80.8	78.9	81.8	87.1	90.3	96.7



Country of Origin and Academic Status

Academic Standing by Citizenship Status and Basis of Entry

	High School Graduate			University Transfer			Other Status			TOTAL
	BC	Other	Subtotal	BC College	Other	Subtotal	Degree Holder	Technical Inst	Other	
Canadian - Citizen										
Good Academic Standing	79.6%	78.2%	79.5%	83.8%	84.8%	83.9%	94.5%	85.3%	83.7%	82.5%
Probation	7.6	8.6	7.6	4.4	2.7	4.1	0.2	1.9	3.3	5.6
Required Withdrawal	10.7	11.9	10.8	11.0	10.3	10.9	1.7	10.1	9.5	10.0
No Return	2.2	1.3	2.1	0.8	2.2	1.0	3.5	2.7	3.5	1.9
Canadian - Perm. Res										
Good Academic Standing	72.8%	74.9%	73.1%	80.9%	80.9%	80.9%	92.1%	88.5%	82.2%	78.4%
Probation	9.5	10.7	9.7	6.1	4.7	5.8	1.4	7.7	6.6	7.3
Required Withdrawal	14.5	13.0	14.3	11.8	11.0	11.7	4.3	0.0	8.6	11.9
No Return	3.2	1.3	2.9	1.1	3.4	1.6	2.1	3.8	2.6	2.4
Visa Student										
Good Academic Standing	62.1%	69.7%	67.2%	78.4%	79.0%	78.5%	84.5%	73.3%	50.0%	74.4%
Probation	13.6	13.8	13.7	9.3	7.4	9.0	3.3	5.6	33.3	10.1
Required Withdrawal	21.0	15.1	17.0	11.6	11.3	11.5	8.2	12.3	16.7	13.4
No Return	3.3	1.5	2.1	0.7	2.3	1.0	3.9	8.8	0.0	2.1



MBC: Early Findings (cont'd)



- **Language** arose as an issue but not just for the students – they also reported much frustration trying to understand many profs and TAs.
- In particular, idiomatic English and related **cultural references** posed the biggest problems.
- **Motivation** was a theme, starting with self but extending to the campus not being very engaging.
- The supportive roles of **faculty, friends** and **family** were noted as important (the 3 F's)
- **Transitional issues** to university **PLUS** to a new country, Can. schooling system etc. **require much more** time to be addressed.



Some early Qualitative Findings...

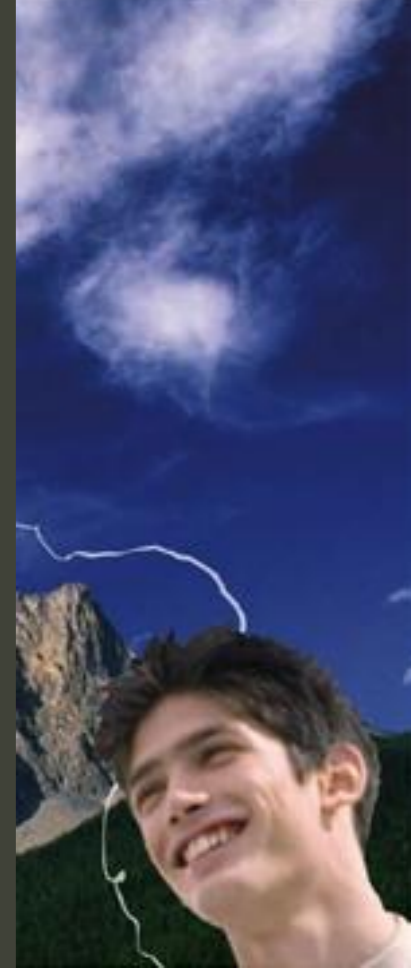
Findings from this study will give us a better sense of the shared challenges of particular groups of students, and provide Student Services and others on campus with the opportunity to improve programs, practices and policies.

They will allow us to make **informed** changes in support of student academic success as well as provide metrics by which to better assess our programs and services.



Implications

- Do our findings resonate in any way with what is happening at your institution?
- Is talking about International versus Domestic students and their related needs too simplistic?
- What are your institution's goals with respect to the various types of students and are they being supported and realized?
- Are we measuring the right things?
- Are we doing the right things?
- Are the challenges and solutions one size fits all or are more nuanced supports needed?



Food for Thought