

**Relationships Among Selected Academic and Institutional Perceptions, Attitudes,
Needs, and Expectations of Postgraduate International Students at a Private
University in Thailand**

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Abstract

This study was designed to determine and analyze the relationships among selected perceptions, attitudes, needs, and expectations of postgraduate international students at a Thai private university. These relationships were determined by using three variable sets: (1) demographic, (2) academic, and (3) institutional. The set of institutional variables was chosen as the key set to determine statistical relationships with the set of academic variables. The participants surveyed ($N = 306$) were postgraduate international students who were enrolled for at least one semester prior to semester 2, academic year 2003.

The participants were measured and evaluated by use of an instrument developed by the researcher which consisted of six sets of variables and an open-ended question. Neither the demographic items nor the open-ended question were responded to. However, the canonical analysis conducted between the set of academic variables and set of institutional variables produced statistically significant results ($p < .05$). The multiple regression and Pearson product-moment analyses produced statistically significant results between some of the academic and institutional variables. Using criteria established by the researcher, only certain results were accepted as being meaningful.

International students enrolled in American universities have often faced a number of problems that are not always recognized as important by the appropriate administrative levels of the institutions. Perhaps imperceptible and not understood by some administrators and faculty, the alienation of many international students in the U.S. has been well recognized and reported on in the collective literature on international

student relations. Some studies offered advice and potential solutions to some of the more troublesome aspects in the hope (many times vain) that realistic remedies would be implemented to ameliorate most of these seemingly intractable problems (Ciszek, 2000).

In many ways, the same problematic situations are evident in Thai private and public universities with international programs and students. However, in contrast to numerous studies of international students at Western universities, there are no generally available studies in English which pertained to international students at universities in Southeast Asia relative to their perceptions, attitudes, needs, and expectations at a institution outside of their homeland. A lengthy search yielded one study which was primarily directed at developing a model of organization management based upon a study of four private universities in Thailand (Thewphaingarm, 1998). Her study included some comments relative to international students at these four universities that pertained to the issues underlying the present study.

“Student satisfaction also reflects the quality of the program and helps promote the program’s good reputation. Furthermore, foreign students are an indispensable element of the international program; they enrich the international atmosphere. If the majority of the student body is Thai, the students will not be encouraged to communicate in English and will be deprived of one potential benefit of participation in an international program” (Thewphaingarm, 1998, pg. 127). Further, “ In addition----- administrators take institutional culture and internal environment into account because these factors can influence students’ behavior and ability to learn. The administrators have to make sure that the international environment----is provided on campus. International culture is also important; it is a mold that forms the students’ values, behavior, and thoughts” (Thewphaingarm, pg. 128).

Lastly, “All four universities studied have experienced cultural, political, economic and organizational barriers to international program management. Cultural barriers embody differences between Thais and foreign students’ learning styles and language. Thai students are familiar with non-interactive learning styles while foreign (especially Western) students prefer interactive classroom learning. Therefore, a conflict may arise between these two groups of students----” (Thewphaingarm, 1998, pg. 142).

The purpose of the present study was to focus on two aspects of international students' perceptions, attitudes, needs, and expectations relative to one Thai private university, Assumption University of Thailand. One aspect was academic in nature and the other aspect related to the institution. Because of probable differences in these aspects dependent on student level (undergraduate or postgraduate), these two groups should be studied separately. Thus, only postgraduate students were included in the present study.

Subjects and Method:

The subjects selected for the present study were all of the postgraduate international students enrolled at Assumption University for at least one semester prior to Semester 2, 2003. This targeted group contained 306 postgraduate international students from 57 countries, and included nine doctoral students, 280 Master's degree students, and 17 graduate diploma students. The targeted students were contacted by The Graduate School, which distributed the questionnaires and collected the ones returned. Several attempts were made to contact each student, e.g. by telephone and/or email, but an unknown number could not be reached. Eventually, 143 questionnaires were collected, corresponding to a return rate of about 47%.

The questionnaire used to survey these subjects contained 10 demographic items, 54 6-point Likert scale items, and an open-ended question. The instrument used was a revised version of the original which was used to survey international students at several U.S. universities relative to the same research purposes (Ciszek, 2000). Since item revisions were minor and the original instrument had sufficient validity and reliability, a pilot test of the revised instrument was not necessary. However, neither the demographic items nor the open-ended question were responded to, which unexpectedly but necessarily limited the scope of analyses conducted in the present study.

The 54 6-point Likert scale items were divided into five sets of variables. The intent of the present research was to determine if relationships existed between variables in the Academic and Institutional sets only. The Academic set of variables contained 11 items and the Institutional set of variables contained 15 items. The set of Institutional variables was selected as the "key" variable set since this study was

concerned primarily with the effects of the institutional environment on the academic variables.

Results:

A canonical analysis was performed in order to determine the relationship between the set of Academic variables and the set of Institutional variables. The proportion of variance accounted for between the two sets of variables was 70.7%.

Eleven multiple regression analyses were performed between each Academic variable and the set of Institutional variables. Table 1 contains the computed values for R^2 and other statistics that pertained to the relationship between a selected Academic variable and the set of Institutional variables. The significant R^2 values ranged from .20 to .58, $p > .05$. Table 2 contains β and other statistics which pertain to the relationship between a selected Academic variable and an Institutional variable controlling for the remaining 14 institutional variables. Only significant β values, $p < .05$ (two-tailed tests), are provided in the table. Twenty-one positive and 10 negative relationships between were found.

Table 3 contains r and other statistics pertaining to the linear relationship between each Academic variable and each of the Institutional variables. The results are provided for all of the linear relationships between each pair of variables. Four of these linear relationships were nonsignificant, $p > .05$. Twenty of the r values which pertained to the paired Academic and Institutional variables were significant and positive, and four of the r values were significant and negative.

Table 4 contains a listing of each Academic variable and the percentage of respondents who either agreed or disagreed to varying degrees with the stated item. For one Academic variable, item Q10, the majority of respondents disagreed (65.7%). For the remaining 10 items, the majority agreed (from 71.0% to 87.6%). The response to item Q41 is of particular interest because 72% of the respondents believed that less would be expected of international students academically than of Thai (native) students. Table 5 contains a similar listing for the Institutional variables. For these variables (items), the majority of respondents agreed (from 68.8% to 93.0%).

The 21 positive and 10 negative relationships included in Table 2 were derived statistically. However, statistical relationships may or may not have meaningful significance. Accordingly, the following criteria were used to identify estimated, meaningful relationships:

- 1.) R^2 must be equal to or greater than .25 (refer to Table 1). Thus, the proportion of variance accounted for between each Academic variable and the set of institutional variables must be at least 25%.
- 2.) r must be equal to or greater than .25 (refer to Table 3). A magnitude of .25 generally represents a relatively low degree of linear correlation between an Academic and an Institutional variable (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1994, pg. 119).

Application of these criteria resulted in the rejection of 11 positive relationships and nine negative relationships from the total 21 positive and 10 negative relationships in Table 2.

Conclusions:

Relative to the overall research question “What is the relationship between the set of academic variables and the set of institutional variables pertaining to postgraduate international students?”, the conclusions included the following:

- 1.) There is a relationship between the set of academic variables and set of institutional variables.
- 2.) There is a positive relationship between the following academic and institutional variables controlling for the remaining 14 institutional variables:
 - a.) “I feel uncomfortable discussing academic problems with students who are not from my homeland” (Q10) and “I feel that students and faculty should communicate only in English” (Q13).
 - b.) “There are academic support services available to help me in difficult courses” (Q21) and “I participate in campus activities sponsored by this university” (Q22).

- c.) “I feel comfortable discussing academic problems with students who are from my homeland” (Q35) and “I believe that international cultural activities should be supported by this university” (Q19).
 - d.) “I feel comfortable consulting with International Center advisors on academic matters” (Q40) and “I participate in campus activities that are sponsored by this university” (Q22).
 - e.) “Faculty have lower academic expectations of international students than for Thai students” (Q41) and “International students are not treated with respect at this university” (Q17).
 - f.) “Faculty have lower academic expectations of international students than for Thai students” (Q41) and “My decision to attend this university was based mostly on information that I read” (Q34).
 - g.) “Faculty have lower academic expectations of international students than for Thai students” (Q41) and “I feel uncomfortable when student activities are promoted in a different language than English” (Q39).
 - h.) “I feel comfortable in resolving academic problems without institutional help” (Q54) and “I participate in campus activities that are sponsored by this university” (Q22).
 - i.) “I feel comfortable in resolving academic problems without institutional help” (Q54) and “Social life at this university is more difficult for me than it is in my homeland” (Q56).
 - j.) “My coursework helps me develop my reasoning skills” (Q60) and “I believe that my experiences at this university help me adapt to its culture” (Q59).
- 3.) There is a negative relationship between the following academic and institutional variables controlling for the remaining 14 institutional variables:
- a.) “I feel comfortable discussing academic problems with students who are from my homeland” (Q35) and “I feel that academic support services are useful in reducing my difficulties” (Q48).

Discussion:

In the “Results” section, 11 positive and nine negative relationships were rejected by application of the described criteria. Accordingly, only the 10 remaining positive and one remaining negative relationships that pertained to the same Academic variable were evaluated separately.

Regarding the positive relationship between Academic variable Q10 and Institutional variable Q13, about 66% of the respondents disagreed with Q10 and about 79% agreed with Q13. This relationship appeared to indicate that the greater the tendency to use English as the medium of communication, the greater the tendency to discuss academic problems with peers. Also, faculty and other university personnel should be included as well. The overall implication is that the university’s promotion of English, not only in words or regulations, would be beneficial for international students per se.

Turning to the positive relationship between Q21 (76% agreed) and Q22 (79% agreed), it appeared reasonable to conclude that the greater the tendency to participate in sponsored campus activities, the greater the tendency to be aware of academic support services offered by the university. The implication of this relationship is that the university should actively encourage more international student participation in sponsored activities. One of the important results of this effort should be greater usage of existing academic support services and possibly revisions in these services based upon the input of international students.

The positive relationship between Q35 (71% agreed) and Q19 (93% agreed) seemed to indicate that the more the university supported international cultural activities, the greater the tendency for international students to discuss their academic problems with homeland peers. One implication of this relationship could be that some international students would know more of their peers (homeland and others) by interaction during international cultural activities. Thus, these activities should be supported and encouraged by the university.

Regarding the positive relationship between Q40 (77% agreed) and Q22 (79% agreed), greater participation in sponsored campus activities would correspond to more comfortable interaction with International Center advisors concerning academic matters. One implication could be that, since both the International Center and other campus

activities are university sponsored, international students degree of satisfaction with the university itself could be a “common denominator” in this relationship.

The majority of respondents (72%) agreed with Q41—they perceived their faculty’s academic expectations for international students to be lower than for native (Thai) students. Although perhaps atypical, the overall perception of this group was accepted “as is”. Three positive relationships were found: between Q41 and Q17, between Q41 and Q34, and between Q41 and Q39. For the latter variables, 69%, 87%, and 80% agreed respectively.

The positive relationship between Q41 and Q17 indicated that the greater the perception of not being respected at this university, the greater the tendency to feel that the academic expectations of faculty relative to Thai students would be higher than for international students. One implication might be that perceived lack of respect at this university would transfer to faculty academic expectations being lower psychologically, not in actuality. Thus, university administration should be aware of the importance of international students’ self-perceptions of respect and do more to reverse this negative situation.

Another positive relationship was between Q41 and Q34. In this case, the more international students based their decision to enroll on written material, the more they perceived that less would be expected of them academically compared to Thai students. An implication, for some potential international students, might be that careful reading and perhaps revisions in promotional materials should be undertaken to reduce this type of expectation. Also, this relationship could be due to the presence of other factors, e.g. a confounding variable(s) not identified.

The third positive relationship derived was between Q41 and Q39. Accordingly, the more uncomfortable international students felt when English was not used to promote student activities, the greater their tendency to believe that their faculty’s academic expectations of them were lower compared to native students. This relationship could be an extension of the one between Q41 and Q17 because campus activities promoted in Thai (verbal or written) instead of in English could affect their perception of being treated with respect. An obvious implication would be that the university use only English for all communications, especially regarding international students.

Two positive relationships were found relative to academic variable Q54: between Q54 and Q22, and between Q54 and Q56. For Q54, 82% agreed, for Q22, 79% agreed, for Q56, 77% agreed. Regarding the first relationship between Q54 and Q22, the greater the tendency of international students to participate in university-sponsored activities, the more they would tend to resolve their academic problems without help from the university. One explanation might be that these students, through greater participation, would have more access to peers from whom they would seek assistance in resolving their academic problems. An implication for the university is the apparent need for using campus activities to also promote its other student services, e.g. academic counseling.

The second positive relationship was between Q54 and Q56. In this case, the greater the tendency of international students to perceive their social life here as being difficult, the more they would tend to seek academic assistance from non-institutional sources, e.g. homeland peers, other friends, etc. This relationship indicated possible adjustment problems relative to overall life at this university. An implication would be that university administration should pay more attention to the non-academic aspects and interests of international students during their sojourn so that would feel more comfortable as a result.

Turning to the positive relationship between Q60 and Q59, 88% agreed with the former and 85% agreed with the latter. This relationship indicated that the more international students adapt culturally to this university, the more their overall experiences would help to improve their reasoning skills relative to coursework. This relationship illustrates again the importance of adaptation per se relative to the academic success of international students. Since the development of critical thinking/reasoning is emphasized here, the implication is that this development process could be enhanced through university efforts which recognize and respond to this linkage.

One negative (inverse) relationship was found between Q35 and Q48; 71% agreed with the former and 91% agreed with the latter. Accordingly, the more international students perceived university academic services as useful in problem-solving, the less they will tend to rely on peers from their homeland. The implication of this relationship is that the university's promotion of both the awareness and usage of its academic support services by international students is very important to their academic success.

It was noted earlier that 72% of the respondents felt that less would be expected of international students academically than of native (Thai) students. Logically, the converse would have been substantially more reasonable. This unexpected result could indicate that other items might have been responded to inappropriately, e.g. carelessly. Despite this reservation, it is reasonable to assume that the responses from this selected group of subjects represented their honest beliefs and perceptions. Whether this group's perceptions, attitudes, needs, and expectations are representative of the overall international student body can be determined by further research, e.g. by surveying undergraduate international students.

In conclusion, Thewphaingarn (1998) reported on the importance of an international environment in Thai private universities that enrolled international students. She stated that the responsibility for supporting and maintaining an appropriate institutional environment was primarily a function of university administration, irrespective of the number of international students relative to Thai (native) students. The overall results of the present study, which focused on the relationships between academic factors and institutional factors, supported her position. They also supported the importance of international student relations as reported by Ciszek (2000).

References:

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Table 1

R² and Other Statistics Pertaining to Relationship between Academic Variable and set of Institutional Variables

<u>Academic variable</u>	<u>R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Q10	.27	2.61	.002
Q21	.58	9.94	.001
Q30	.24	2.31	.007
Q31	.20	1.78	.047
Q35	.35	3.88	.000
Q40	.28	2.82	.001
Q41	.43	5.30	.000
Q49	.14	1.16	.314
Q52	.21	1.90	.030
Q54	.42	5.29	.000
Q60	.29	2.96	.001

Note. p<.05 for significance

Table 2

β and Other Statistics Pertaining to Relationship between Selected Academic Variable and Institutional Variable Controlling for Remaining Institutional Variables

<u>Academic variable</u>	<u>Institutional variable</u>	β	t	p
Q10	Q13	.36	3.88	.00
Q21	Q13	-.16	-2.34	.02
Q21	Q19	.16	2.24	.03
Q21	Q22	.59	8.27	.00
Q21	Q46	-.21	-2.89	.01
Q21	Q56	.19	2.56	.01
Q30	Q22	.34	3.56	.00
Q30	Q56	.25	2.51	.01
Q31	Q13	-.26	-2.67	.01
Q31	Q46	.26	2.65	.01
Q35	Q13	.17	1.96	.05
Q35	Q17	-.22	-2.04	.04
Q35	Q19	.27	3.08	.00
Q35	Q26	-.27	-2.82	.01
Q35	Q48	-.36	-3.49	.00
Q40	Q22	.23	2.51	.01
Q41	Q17	.33	3.25	.00
Q41	Q22	.21	2.51	.01
Q41	Q25	-.21	-2.34	.02
Q41	Q34	.24	2.44	.02
Q41	Q39	.28	3.33	.00
Q49	Q56	-.24	-2.28	.03
Q52	Q22	.24	2.43	.02
Q52	Q39	.20	2.07	.04
Q52	Q46	.22	2.24	.03
Q54	Q22	.21	2.55	.01
Q54	Q56	.41	4.77	.00
Q54	Q63	-.32	-4.06	.00
Q60	Q39	-.19	-2.04	.04
Q60	Q59	.31	3.02	.00
Q60	Q63	.23	2.60	.01

Note. p<.05 for significance, two-tailed t-tests

Table 3

r and Other Statistics Pertaining to Linear Relationship between Academic and Institutional Variable

<u>Academic variable</u>	<u>Institutional variable</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>
Q10	Q13	.32	.00
Q21	Q13	-.16	.03
Q21	Q19	.19	.01
Q21	Q22	.66	.00
Q21	Q46	.13	.06
Q21	Q56	.22	.01
Q30	Q22	.26	.00
Q30	Q56	.19	.01
Q31	Q13	-.21	.01
Q31	Q46	.19	.02
Q35	Q13	.13	.06
Q35	Q17	.08	.19
Q35	Q19	.27	.00
Q35	Q26	-.13	.07
Q35	Q48	-.29	.00
Q40	Q22	.33	.00
Q41	Q17	.39	.00
Q41	Q22	.22	.01
Q41	Q25	-.04	.32
Q41	Q34	.29	.00
Q41	Q39	.32	.00
Q49	Q56	-.17	.02
Q52	Q22	.20	.01
Q52	Q39	.23	.00
Q52	Q46	.23	.00
Q54	Q22	.26	.00
Q54	Q56	.41	.00
Q54	Q63	-.19	.01
Q60	Q39	-.21	.01
Q60	Q59	.35	.00
Q60	Q63	.24	.00

Note. p(one-tailed tests) < .05 for significance

Table 4

Academic Variables and Other Statistics

<u>No.</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	
		<u>Agreed</u>	<u>Disagreed</u>
Q10	“I feel uncomfortable discussing academic problems with students who are not from my homeland”	34.3	65.7
Q21	“There are academic support services available to help me in difficult courses”	75.5	24.5
Q30	“Advisors in the International Center are interested in helping me succeed in my studies”	76.8	23.2
Q31	“I feel comfortable consulting with my professors when their help is needed”	85.9	14.1
Q35	“I feel comfortable discussing academic problems with students who are from my homeland”	71.0	29.0
Q40	“I feel comfortable consulting with International Center advisors on academic matters”	76.8	23.2
Q41	“Faculty have lower expectations of international students than for Thai students”	72.3	27.7
Q49	“I can establish mentoring (advisory) relationships with my professors”	81.9	18.1
Q52	“International students should be allowed to participate in the design of their curriculum”	87.6	12.4
Q54	“I feel comfortable in resolving academic problems without institutional help”	81.9	18.1
Q60	“My course work helps me to develop my reasoning skills”	88.3	11.7

Table 5

Institutional Variables and Other Statistics

<u>No.</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	
		<u>Agreed</u>	<u>Disagreed</u>
Q13	“I feel that students and faculty should communicate only in English”	79.4	20.6
Q15	“I have felt unsupported by the service providers at this university”	73.0	27.0
Q17	“International students are not treated with respect at this university”	68.8	31.2
Q19	“I believe that international cultural activities should be supported by this university”	93.0	7.0
Q22	“I participate in campus activities that are sponsored by this university”	78.7	21.3
Q25	“Some of the nonacademic personnel help me to feel comfortable on this campus”	78.9	21.1
Q26	“The recreational facilities that are available are enjoyable”	83.8	16.2
Q28	“I feel that attending this university is important for my future career success”	81.8	18.2
Q34	“My decision to attend this university was based mostly on information that I read”	86.7	13.3
Q39	“I feel uncomfortable when student activities are promoted in a different language than English”	80.0	20.0
Q46	“Financial aid should be available to all international students experiencing unexpected monetary problems”	89.1	10.9
Q48	“I feel that academic support services are useful in Reducing my difficulties”	91.4	8.6
Q56	“Social life at this university is more difficult for me than it is in my homeland”	76.5	23.5
Q59	“I believe that my experience at this university help me adapt to its culture”	84.8	15.2
Q63	“I believe that Au administrators should actively promote communications only in English”	91.3	8.7