

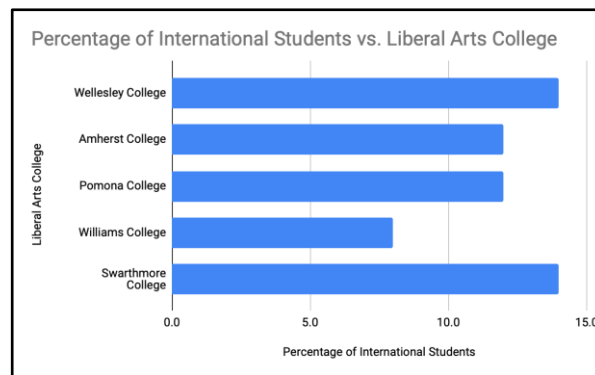
Wellesley Across the World

A Look into the International Student Experience

by: Ashi Kamra

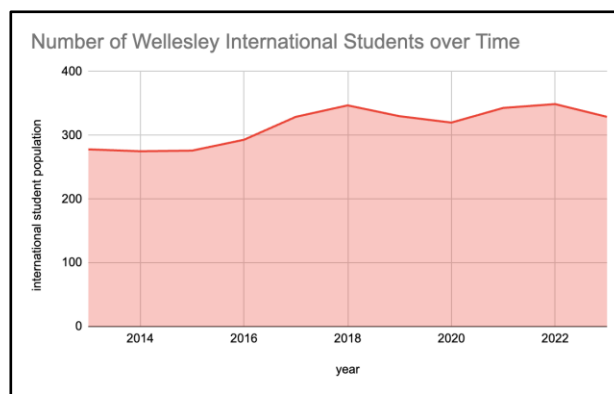
It's difficult to pinpoint what the hardest part of college is. The rising tuition, rigorous academics, social circles, homesickness—the list of hardships goes on. For students like Manya Anandi '26, however, homesickness is a bit different. Her family is thousands of miles away, 7,000 to be exact.

Anandi is an international student, a part of the 14% of sibs that make up Wellesley's student population, according to the Office of Institutional Research. Our international community is composed of students from 50 countries, the majority of whom come from China and India. It's common knowledge that the international student experience is different from domestic students—in addition to adjusting to college, they must also adjust to a new country and culture as a whole.



Data collected from the 2023-24 Common Data Set of Wellesley, Amherst, Pomona, Williams, and Swarthmore College.

But compared to other small, prestigious liberal arts colleges, Wellesley's international population is on the larger side of the spectrum. As such, Wellesley faces a group of students with unique needs too large to ignore. The size of this group of students has also stayed relatively consistent for the past 10 years.



Data collected from the 2013 - 2023 Common Data Set of Wellesley College.

With this demand, it's worth scrutinizing the experience of students like Anandi's at Wellesley. Is Wellesley College providing enough for these sibs, or is there much left to be desired?

Anandi, originally from New Delhi, India, believes Wellesley has done great. Aware of its larger proportion of international students, she finds that "they've done a great job integrating international students into the batch... Because of the sheer proportion of us, [Wellesley College] has had to have resources for us. It's easier to ignore when you have 5% than when you have 15%."

One of the resources Anandi refers to is Slater International Center, an organization established in the 1970's by two Wellesley benefactors to support international students in their transition to Wellesley, as well as "to increase intercultural understanding and establish global connection."

For many international students around campus, Slater is a lifejacket in unfamiliar waters—an assurance of safety as they dip their toes into American life. Anandi recounts how she wanted to explore investing in American stocks as a foreign citizen, and although "they can't legally answer that, they offered to set up a meeting with me and a specialized advisor... within two emails. I thought that was so wonderful of them."

For students just arriving on campus as well, [International Student Orientation](#) (coordinated by Slater and New Student Orientation) provides time to discuss visas and immigration paperwork, holds seminars like "Race in the U.S Context", and designates gathering time with students from similar regions. "I truly appreciated that we were allowed to arrive on campus a few days before domestic students to ease in," says Moji Niyamanusorn '25, originally from Thailand, "Otherwise, it would have been pretty overwhelming for me."

That's not to say that there aren't challenges posed by the College. Reflecting on her Orientation, Anandi mentions how frustrating it was that the communication was on a more American schedule. "We'd booked all these tickets way back in April, and they didn't tell us there would be things for parents to participate in till June," says Anandi, referencing the fact that her parents planned for a quick drop-off at Orientation. "We could have changed the tickets but it would have cost us a lot of time and money."

Indeed, booking international flights has to be done much earlier in advance, otherwise pricing can reach thousands of dollars—something not feasible especially for students on financial aid. Applying for admission to Wellesley is a highly selective process as an international student, more so than domestic students, as Wellesley is need-aware for international sibs. Need-aware admission means that a student's ability to pay for their education will be a determining factor in the admission decision. As such, students who may face financial burdens at home, but do not pass Wellesley's threshold for what they define as "in need" do not

receive any institutional aid and may not even get into the college itself.¹ Additionally, if they are admitted to Wellesley without financial aid, international students “will not be eligible for financial aid in future years at the College,” an inflexible policy that fails to address sudden financial hardships students may not have control over. But, for the 23% of international students in the 2023-24 year who were given aid, their packages included an average of \$86,187.00 in institutional aid.

There is no publicly available information about the number of domestic students who received institutional, need-based financial aid, and thus comparing the percentage of international students vs. domestic students who receive aid and the size of their aid is not possible.

For both Niyamanusorn and Anandi though, there is a glaring sense of friction with international students and American-born people of color. One may think the experience of belonging to one nation unites individuals across the diaspora, but first or second-generation children develop drastically different cultural understandings than their international counterparts. “Sometimes I cannot resonate with the Asian-American experience because the environment we grew up in was different,” says Niyamanusorn. “Before Wellesley, I had never lived in a place where Asians are the minority.” It is the experience of discrimination and prejudice, as a result of being a minority, that creates a sense of self and community different from someone who has lived their life in the majority.

“As an international Indian student on campus, I have not felt welcomed by American-born sibs from the desi community,” says Anandi. “I don’t know how much of this is the College’s fault. I just think the Indian diaspora is very embarrassed of Indians from India, and I think that translates into a lot of mistreatment, and misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the culture that we come with.” When encountering an individual from an international culture, it’s natural to notice differences in cultural habits. But, it is when these differences are given a hierarchy, or when one is expected to conform to all things American, that prevents students from feeling like they belong in a place they worked so hard to come to. Anandi recounts how she experienced this firsthand last year after overhearing some members of South Asian E-Board mocking her accent.

In terms of the role the College plays in all this, Slater itself may be providing wonderful support directly to international students, but what about the intercultural understanding of domestic students? How can we promote a sense of openness and compassion for those whose culture we may not understand or necessarily identify with, but who still deserve to feel like they belong. Whether that must be done by the students themselves, or the institution is difficult to determine. But, regardless these are questions Wellesley as a community and an institution must need to consider in an increasingly global world.

¹ Institutional financial aid is aid provided by the college or university itself, and not any third parties or government services.

Word Count: 1129