



User Research Report and Personas

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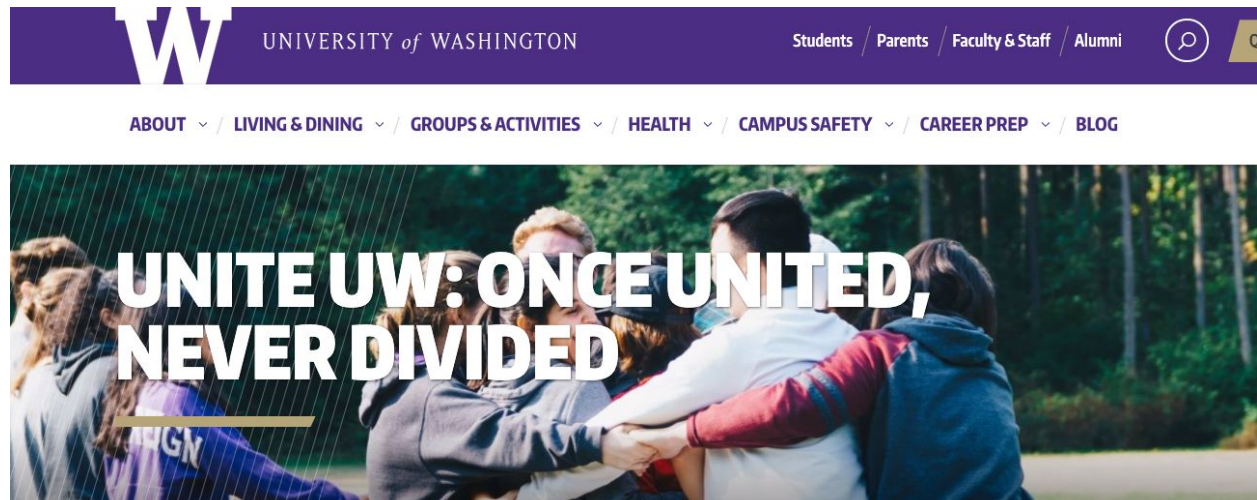
Problem Brief

The problem space that we seek to address is the ongoing social separation amongst local and non-local students contributing to a loss of exchange at the University of Washington. Our final project aims to explore solutions for mitigating the gaps between domestic and international students to bring about greater cultural awareness and empathy at the school.

Existing Solutions

Existing Solution 1: Unite UW

<https://www.washington.edu/studentlife/uniteuw/>

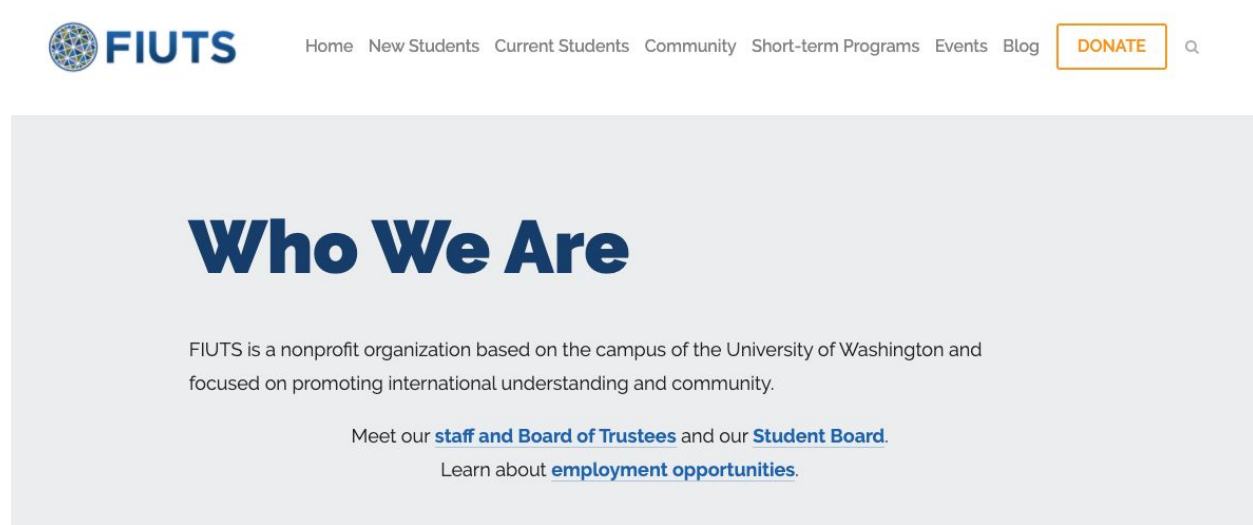


The first existing solution that we investigated is the student life program at the University of Washington called 'Unite UW'. It is an eight-week cultural exchange program that aims to connect international and domestic students at UW. The program is open to all students, but students that are interested must go through a lengthy application process in order to be part of it. Every quarter, a new cohort of accepted students have the opportunity to embark on a three-day retreat at Pack Forest, Washington with student leaders, called facilitators, along with Unite UW administrators.

At the retreat, Unite UW administrators host a variety of organized games and team activities on a daily basis to encourage student bonding. On the second day, they have a deep talk session in large groups; students will talk about their experiences and how that has shaped them as a person. Students get the opportunity to understand other cultural perspectives about life, in general. After the retreat, students coming out of it tend to build a strong bond with each other, as the motto of Unite UW is "Once united, never divided." However, the drawback about Unite UW is that, as closely as the students interact with each other, not everyone will end up having friends. Some students find it very challenging to connect with the same people after the program ends, especially the more introverted ones.

Existing Solution 2: Foundation for International Understanding Through Students (FIUTS)

<https://www.fiuts.org/>



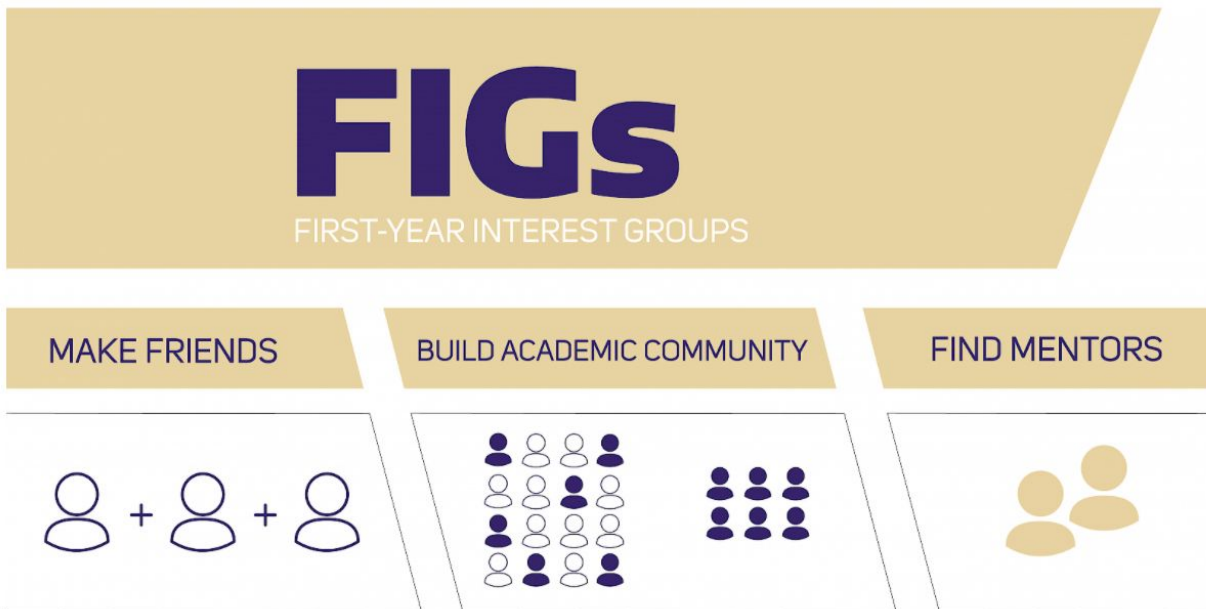
Another existing solution that is relevant to this problem space is a program called the 'Foundation for International Understanding through Students' (FIUTS). FIUTS is a non-profit organization at the University of Washington. Its vision statement explains that "FIUTS envisions a global community, tied to the Pacific Northwest, in which people are connected through friendship, mutual respect, and a commitment to international understanding" (fiuts.org, 2018). This shows that they work closely, not only with the university, but also with the greater Seattle area community. The program encourages community members to volunteer to host international students, and local students are also encouraged to apply to be facilitators, ambassadors, or education volunteers. International students from different countries are encouraged to befriend one another through this program. On the other hand, facilitators tend to have a little or formal relationship with the students because of the power dynamic involved in being a facilitator.

The first part of the program for international students offers them a comfortable transition to the University of Washington. However, after the organized activities of FIUTS, first-year international students are left on their own on campus, as the majority of the volunteered facilitators tend to be seniors, juniors, or sophomores. Most of them do not share the same classes as the facilitators, and in most cases, they do not share the same interests, either. It is suggesting to us then that this program too falls short in some respects for fostering international and local students' relationships over the long term.

Existing Solution 3: First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs)

<https://fyp.washington.edu/first-year-interest-groups/>

First-year Interest Groups (FIGs)



The 'First-Year Interest Groups' (FIGs) at the University of Washington is the third existing solution that is related to our problem space. FIGs is an official UW program and course opportunity for freshman UW students. It is characterized by dividing students into 'interest group' classes that count as general education credits for students that are enrolled. Academic advisors recommend that freshmen students join a FIG, as its objective is to guide them in meeting other first-year students that have a high probability of sharing the same major as them. Thus, incoming freshmen may enroll in a FIG class that is tailored toward their intended major. Most first-year students that sign up for a FIG will end up taking the same level and type of courses with a familiar group of students over the course of their education at the UW.

These groups of freshmen have the potential to build an academic community that may last throughout their educational journey. For example, students who are mutually interested in medicine can choose to enroll in a biology FIG class, and these students may develop friendships and study groups that have the potential to continue well beyond their undergraduate experience. The vision of FIGs is to support a smoother transitional experience from high school to university for freshmen. Making friends in a large environment like UW might be challenging, so FIGs offer a climate that eases some of these social challenges.

Students have found it to be less stressful to make friends in this type of cohort-like environment, and the long-term collaboration with familiar people that FIGs offer makes it advantageous. On the other hand, it is limited to freshman students, and students that transfer to the University of Washington later in their university career do not have the opportunity to join this program.

Summary of Existing Solutions

	Unite UW	FIUTS	FIGs
What does the existing solution do well?	Unite UW brings international and local students together through social programs. The program organizes many social gatherings where students can mingle with one another with the primary focus being on valuable cultural exchange.	FIUTS brings the Seattle community and international students together through cultural exchange. Volunteering community members host international students, and they exchange their cultural experiences with each other.	FIGs connects first-year students through shared academic interests. Because they typically group students by major, students have a greater potential to maintain their friendships throughout their university experience.
Where does the existing solution fall short?	The application process excludes many students from participating. Introvert students oftentimes will not even bother to apply. Students looking to join generally find the application process to be extremely dissuasive.	Local students are mostly uninvolved in this process. It focuses more on the community and international students. Some international students will still find it difficult to connect with local students.	It is limited only to freshmen students. After the first year without having friends, students are on their own for the rest of their schooling. It disadvantages transfer students and other students that do not take any FIGs classes.
How are they similar?	Unite UW, FIUTS, and FIGs are all programs that facilitate the process of diverse groups of students meeting each other and forming lasting relationships. They are in-person programs that enable students to meet and know each other. Finally, all of these programs are existing solutions to our problem space that are affiliated with the University of Washington.		

Stakeholder Groups

International students at the University of Washington

One of the primary stakeholder groups for our project is **international students** at the University of Washington (Seattle campus), as they are the most affected by our problem space. International students are defined as students whose permanent residence is from outside of the United States, such as Asia, Australia, Canada, Africa, or Europe. According to the University of Washington Registrar, they make up 16.8% of the student population. From our preliminary research, we learned that culture shock is one of the main factors contributing to social distancing between international students and local students. International students are the most susceptible to culture shock as their home culture is likely to diverge the furthest from American culture, from social practices and cultural norms, which increases the likelihood of them distance themselves from the local community.

Out-of-state students at the University of Washington

Our second stakeholder group is **out-of-state students** at the University of Washington (Seattle campus), which are defined as students whose permanent residence is in a state outside of Washington, such as Oregon, Texas, Massachusetts, or Arizona. According to the University of Washington Registrar, they make up 21.8% of the student population. In a similar way to international students, out-of-state students too may find it challenging to form connections with local students due to the unfamiliar environment, which makes them another target stakeholder group that is relevant to our problem space. Even though the cultural disparities across different parts of the United States may be less pronounced than those from out of the country, becoming familiar with the unique social climate of Washington is still a hurdle and may be less strenuous from the insight and experiences that local students have to share.

In-state students at the University of Washington

Our third target stakeholder group is **in-state (local) students** at the University of Washington (Seattle campus), which are defined as students whose permanent residence is from regions within Washington state. According to the University of Washington Registrar, they are the majority of the student population, making up a total of 61.2%. In-state students are more likely to have already-established social circles and therefore less difficulty integrating

themselves to the University of Washington culture. However, there is a loss of valuable cultural exchange when they do not make an effort to form connections from people from dissimilar backgrounds. The efficacy of the solution we choose to move forward with will depend on the participation of in-state students, who may need to be incentivized somehow to reach out to non-local students. It will be crucial for them to share their knowledge and experiences in order to help non-local students become accustomed to the local culture and ease their transition to an unfamiliar environment.

User Research

Surveys Data and Implications

Links to survey results:

1. [Survey Questions](#)
2. [Survey Results Spreadsheet](#)

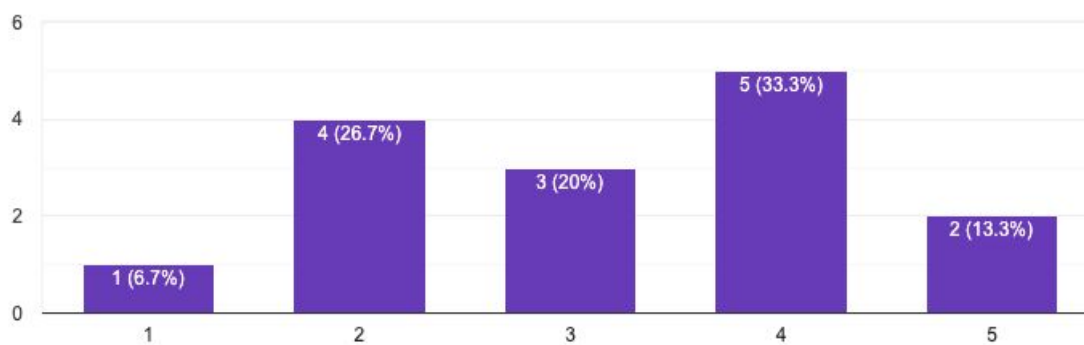
The two primary objectives of conducting the survey were to gain statistical data on the interactions between international and non-international students as well as to gain insight into the overall social interaction between students. We believe this was an effective way to conduct research, as it allowed us to learn about the perspectives of many students in a short span of time. The survey was mainly targeted towards UW (Seattle campus) students, as they were not only the most accessible audience but also the most relevant stakeholders towards our research. The questions revolved around the goal of understanding how international and local students interact, how comfortably they integrated into the University of Washington upon entry, and their degree of satisfaction towards these interactions. It is important to bear in mind that, aside from the screening questions, the questions local and out-of-state students were asked were the same, whereas the questions asked to international students were different as we found it easier to analyze the results when separated into the two groups.

Mainstream social media platforms, such as Facebook and Snapchat, were used to distribute the surveys, as well as broadcasting the survey via email and sharing it with our individual peer groups. Our efforts proved to be highly effective; within a one-week time frame, the survey we conducted managed to collect 72 responses from approximately 75% non-international students and 25% international students. Considering our scope of research, it is worth noting the fact that non-international students heavily outnumber international students. Granted, the sampling size differed by a large margin; when asked about the relationship with the opposite group 67% of international students rated their satisfaction with local students as at least a 3 (out of 5) while half of the non-international students rated their satisfaction below a 3 (see survey results on the following page). This suggests that non-international students are more open to interactions with international students than we had initially expected. The vast majority of the survey respondents expressed an interest in a potential app or other solutions to help connect various groups of students, which allows us to conclude that most students are indeed seeking for more chances of diverse social interactions at the University of Washington overall.

How satisfied do you feel with your current relationships with local students?



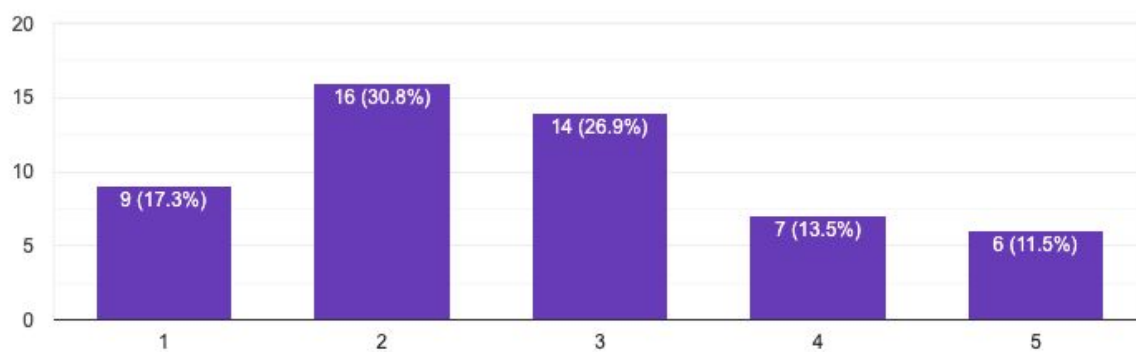
15 responses



How satisfied do you feel with your current relationships with international students?



52 responses



Interviews

Stakeholder Interview 1

We interviewed a **first-year student from Washington** to understand the experience of a local student at the University of Washington with respect to their socialization habits. We decided that conducting the interview via Zoom was the most appropriate means of research, as people tend to be more open and upfront about their personal experiences by speaking in-person in comparison to other methods, such as emailing or texting. Some of the key questions they were asked included: “How has your overall experience been at UW been as a local student and what do you wish was different?” and “What demographic would you say most of your close friends are?” We believe that their responses to these questions can offer us insight into the attitude and willingness of our stakeholders towards potential solutions.

Key insights:

- They felt that they had not done or explored much, as they had “a few friends from high school who came to UW” with them, and they are mostly satisfied with the circle of friendships that they have currently. They expressed a willingness to expand it in the coming years.
- They wished that it is easier to talk to people in cultural and career-focused clubs and build networks. They tried to join a few at the beginning of the year, but it was difficult to fit in as a newcomer without other connections within the club already.
- Most of their friends are also from Washington state and of the same ethnicity (South or Southeast Asian), as well as some Caucasian students.

Stakeholder Interview 2

Another interview that we conducted was with a **first-year student from Vancouver, Canada** in order to see their perspective of being an international student from a neighboring country. We did the interview on Zoom as it is the most similar research method to an in-person interview. The key questions they were asked were, “How has your overall experience been at UW been as an international student and what do you wish was different?” and “What demographic would you say most of your close friends are?”. We asked these questions because we are curious to learn if the experience at UW would differ for international students who lived closer to the U.S. in comparison to the students that were further from their home country.

Key insights:

- The majority of their friends are local in-state students, but also have friends from other states, such as California and the East Coast.
They expressed that the majority of their close friends are East Asian, but they also have some Caucasian friends.
- They said that Seattle and Washington, in general, is very similar to home (British Columbia) and did not really experience culture shock or language shock here at UW.
- They have expressed that they have enjoyed their experience at the UW overall.

Stakeholder Interview 3

Our third stakeholder interview was with a **third-year international student from Japan**. We sought to gain insight from the point of view of an international student studying at the UW from an entirely different continent and home culture. From there, our goal is to explore what could be improved so that students that share a similar background as them may have a better experience at UW. We conducted the interview on Zoom as with the other interviews, as live video is the closest substitute to in-person interviews. The key questions that they were asked included, “Out of your dorm, do you find it easy to meet other students?” and “Where did you meet your international friends?” We believe that their experiences can provide us with information about the struggles that international students face in socializing with others at UW.

Key insights:

- They explained that it is easier for them to socialize with other international students than local students. They described their situation in this way: “I hesitate to talk to local students, and they hesitate to talk to me.”
- They expressed that the vast majority of their friends are international students because their English is easier for them to comprehend than that of local students. They felt that the language barrier greatly dissuaded exchange between them and native English (and typically local) students.
- They met their international friends through mutual friends, at parties hosted by international students, or other events and organizations affiliated with the University of Washington (i.e. FIUTS, cultural RSOs).
- The interviewee told us that when they used to live in a dorm, they had seven roommates that were all from within Washington state. They expressed that they got along fairly well with each other and would oftentimes eat together in cafeterias.


User Personas

Please visit the following links to view larger versions of these personas:

Persona #1: <https://jayque xtensio.com/n7dr75s0>

Persona #2: <https://jayque xtensio.com/sbqtwje0>

Katie Park



"I'm passionate about microbiology, and want to build strong connections for my career and personal life"

Age: 18
Character: International
Living Situation: Dorms

Personality

Invert	Extrovert
Thinking	Feeling
Sensing	Intuition
Judging	Perceiving

Goals

- Build friendships as a new student
- Learn about campus events and opportunities
- Explore the Seattle area

Frustrations

- Challenging language barriers
- Hard to meet local students outside of classes
- Prefer to meet people online

Bio

Katie is a first year international student from China majoring in Biology. As a first year, they decided to join a FIG and has made many connections there but would like to know more students around campus. They are interested in connecting with local students in order to learn more about the area and improve their social communication skills. It's been a challenge since it's difficult to meet students from cultural and language barriers, and they prefer to chat online.

Interests

Music, Plants, Events, Gaming, Languages


Motivation

Cultural Growth	
Personal Development	
Social Connections	

Social Desires

Forming study groups	
Having similar interests	
Attending Events	
Social media posts and feeds	
Cultural Connections	

Jason Henson



"What's up deugs! I'm an aspiring INFO major!"

Age: 19
Character: Local Student
Living Situation: Commute

Personality

Invert	Extrovert
Thinking	Feeling
Sensing	Intuition
Judging	Perceiving

Goals

- Meet new students in alternative ways
- Learn about different cultures from other students
- Creating life-long connections with others

Frustrations

- Not having time for Unite UW or FIUTS as a commitment
- Being socially shy
- Unsure how to approach new people

Bio

Jason is a second year student at UW looking to connect with other students from different social groups. They have lived in Washington for years and in the past have been involved with international clubs in high school. They wanted to join UW Unite and FIUTS but didn't have time in their busy course schedule to commit to the organization. So far, they have met new people through classes and group projects but want to build a stronger circle of friends and meet people with their interests.

Interests

Sports, Food, Events, Travel, photography

Motivation

Cultural Growth	
Personal development	
Social Connections	

Social Desires

Forming Study Groups	
Having similar interests	
Attending Events	
Social media posts and feeds	
Cultural Connections	

Conclusion

The user research that our team has conducted, from our surveys to interviews, has shown that there is a general trend of dissatisfaction from both local and non-local students about their relationships with each other. In particular, the most significant finding from our research was that local students were even more dissatisfied overall with their relationships with out-of-state students than vice versa. This insight suggests that, with the right encouragement, local students may be more open to opportunities to reach out and forge relationships outside of their established friend groups than we had anticipated. While the existing solutions do a great deal already to help cultivate an environment where diverse groups of students can mingle, such as FIUTs and Unite UW, they are evidently insufficient to address the concern of a lack of intercultural understanding at the University of Washington, as they tend to occupy the same niche. As our next steps in this project, we will work together to consider the feedback and concerns that our stakeholders have expressed to develop a more innovative solution to bridging this cultural divide between diverse student populations.

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Appendix

Interview Notes

Local student: a person from Vancouver, WA

1. How has your overall experience been at UW been as a local student and what do you wish was different?

1. UW has been better than I expected. I was pretty worried about meeting new people as a freshman but I've gotten to know a handful of people now. I do wish, however, it was easier to talk to people in career-focused clubs and build a network there. It's pretty intimidating if you don't already know people in the club and so it's hard to get involved.

2. What demographic would you say most of your close friends are?

2. Most of my close friends are S/SE Asian (Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese, or some mix) and some are Caucasian.

3. What are some negative and positive impacts you've felt at UW?

So far, I haven't done or explored much. I am, however, pretty happy with the little circle I've made this year but definitely want to expand it in the coming years. Personally, a negative "impact" I suppose I've felt at UW is the "clique-edginess" of a lot of cultural and career-driven clubs. I tried to join a couple at the beginning of the year but it was pretty hard to fit in with everyone who already knew each other. I guess it just didn't seem that welcoming to newcomers who didn't already have a connection.

A freshman from Vancouver, Canada

1. How has your overall experience been at UW been as an international student and what do you wish was different

1. Good, most friends are local students. Being away from home is lonely sometimes, but technology helps. No, I am happy with how it is now.

2. What demographic would you say most of your close friends are

2. Asian and white. More Asian, mostly Washington students, but also people from California and some from the East Coast.

3. What are some negative and positive impacts you've felt being an international student

3. Positive: people know more about Canada now, with our healthcare system
Negative: None

International student 2: a person from Japan

1. How has your overall experience been at UW been as an international student and what do you wish was different?

I met a French girl and a Chinese girl in the first week after I came from the homestay program offered by (FITUS) and I stayed with them in the first two weeks so they have been my best friends, which is very sweet. As of local students, I lived in a dorm and had 7 roommates who were all freshmen and they were very nice. We could go to cafeterias together, we are more like family than friends.

2. So, out of your dorm, do you find it easy to meet other students? (both local & int)

International students, yes, local students, no. I could join the parties of other international students and meet other international students. I hesitate to talk to local students and they hesitate to talk to me.

3. Where did you meet your international friends?

My int students have other int students and have parties so we meet at the parties through other friends. Sometimes there are local students in the parties, but mostly no. There was one guy who was a local student but he was a transfer student who was new to UW so he wants to meet some friends.

4. What demographic would you say most of your close friends are?

The majority of my friends are international students, our English is easier to understand than local students (language barriers). Cultural difference is also a barrier, but it is not as big. As some local students are interested in international cultures. I have been to frat parties with my roommates (who are local students) but I don't really know nor connect with the people there.

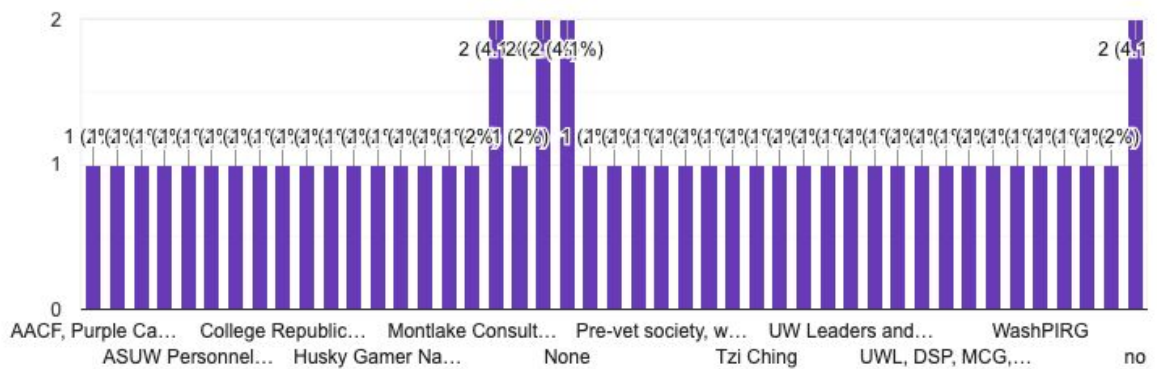
5. With the friends (int and local) you have right now, are you guys close?

I think we are really close, I guess, I hope they feel the same way. I talked with my best friend from France today, she is in France now, bc of the corona. We talked for 2 and a half hours, I can't do that with normal friends, so we're best friends, I guess. As of dorm friends, the time we spent together is really good, we feel like we can talk about anything to each other.

Survey Results

Are you apart of any on campus organization if so which one(s).

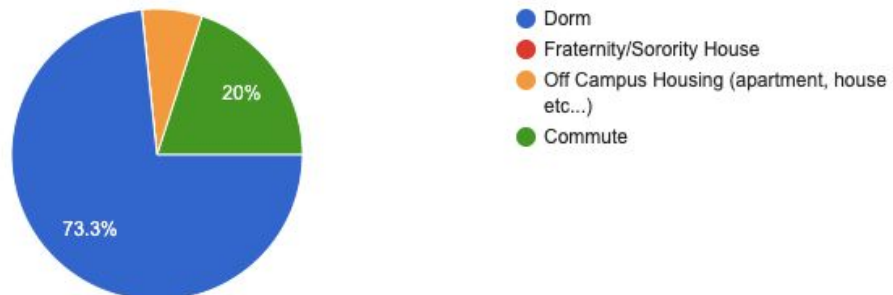
49 responses



These questions are for international students

Where did you live your first year at university

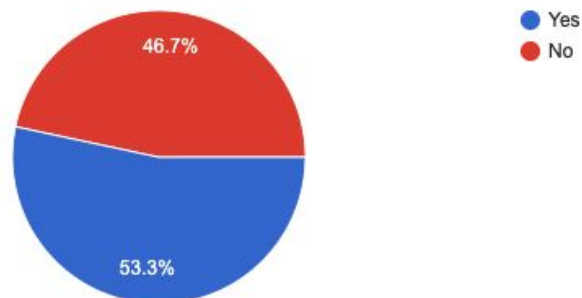
15 responses



Did you have a hard time adjusting to UW? (Regarding socializing or connecting with other students)



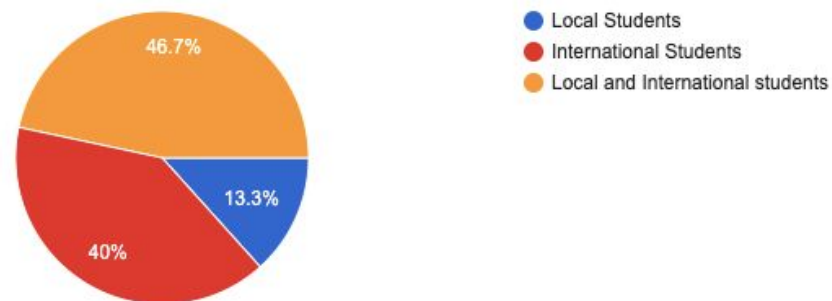
15 responses



Which of the following most accurately describes your close friends.

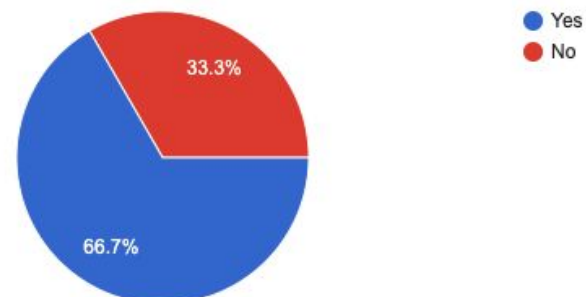


15 responses



Do you find yourself gravitating towards other international students when looking for friends.

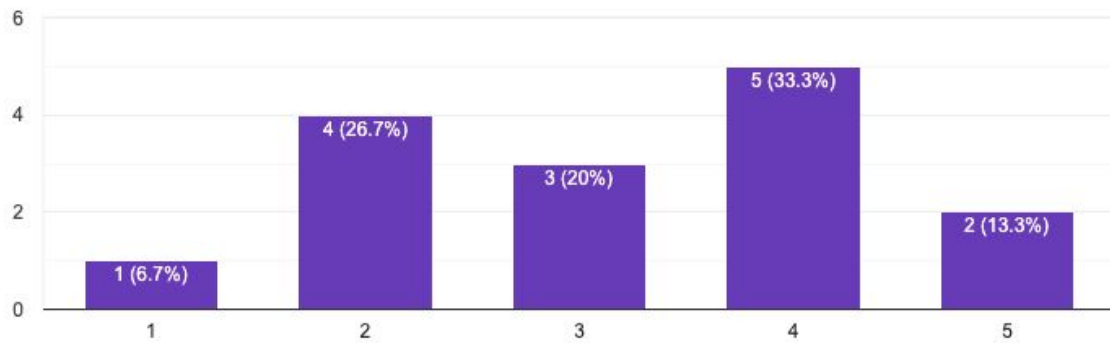
15 responses



How satisfied do you feel with your current relationships with local students?



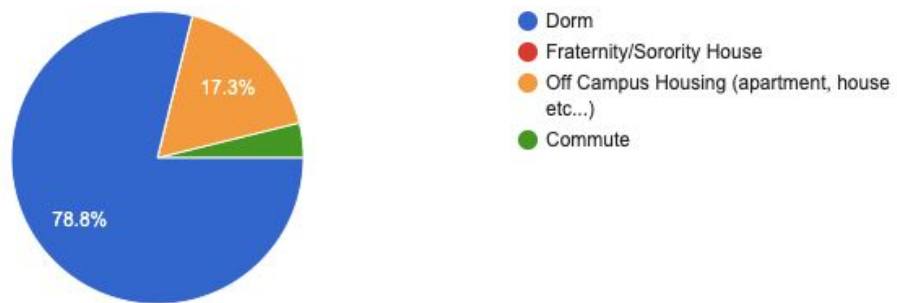
15 responses



This is for local and out-of-state students

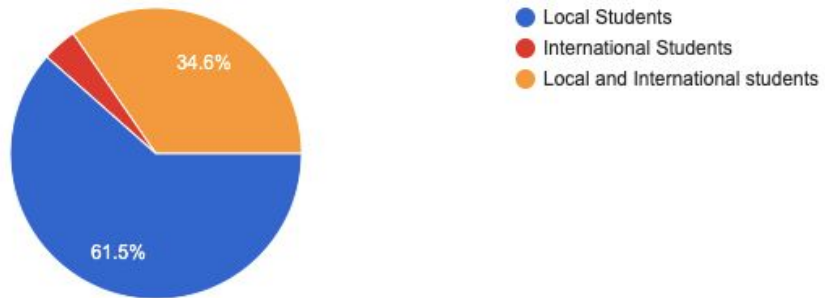
Where did you live your first year at university

52 responses



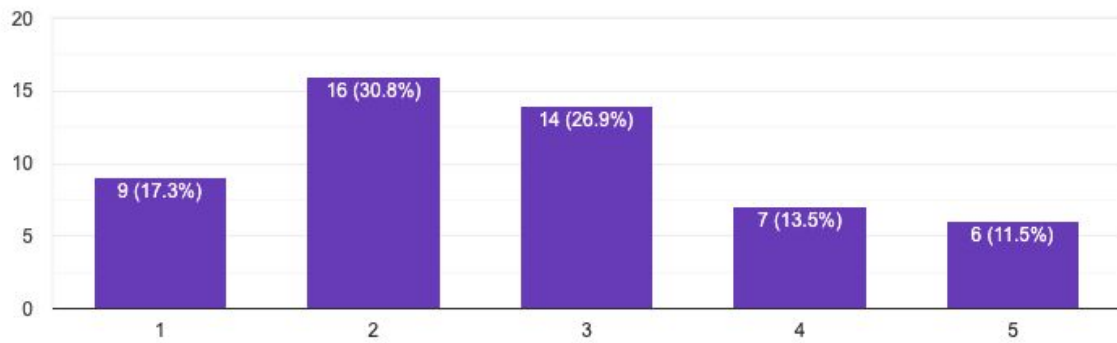
Which of the following most accurately describes your close friends.

52 responses



How satisfied do you feel with your current relationships with international students?

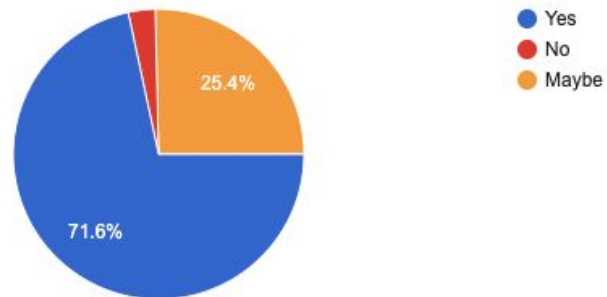
52 responses



Social app (all students)

Would you be interested in an application that focused on creating connections between university students from different social groups?

67 responses

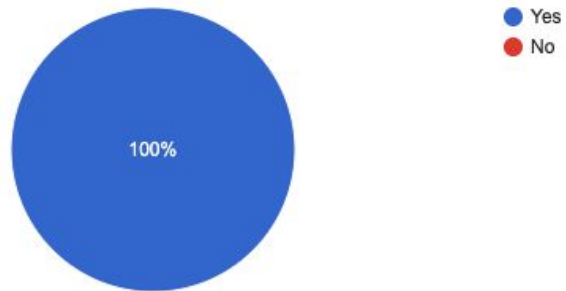


Screening Questions

Are you a University of Washington student



51 responses



Which of these following options most accurately represents you.

68 responses

