

Summary of Student Perspectives Series Meeting, May 30, 2019

Trustees in Attendance: Thomas A. Cole, Rika Mansueto, Gregory W. Wendt

Students in Attendance: Kyle Shishkin (2nd Year, College, Undergraduate Liaison), Chris Stamper (5th Year PhD student, BSD, Graduate Liaison), Rohail Premjee (1st Year MPP/MBA student in Harris and Chicago Booth, incoming Graduate Liaison), Ege Ercan (3rd Year, College), Ram Irani (2nd Year PhD student, Physical Sciences), Zheyu Liang (1st Year, College), Michael Liu (4th Year, College), Madeleine Oswald (3rd year PhD student, Social Sciences), Paula Tanasescu (2nd Year, College)

The topic of the May 30 meeting was the experience of international students at the University of Chicago. In advance of the meeting, the student liaisons prepared a memorandum (attached) for the Trustees that included questions for discussion focusing on three areas of interest for international students: (1) student services; (2) housing; and (3) career development.

Following a round of introductions, Mr. Cole provided some opening remarks on the role of the Board of Trustees. He highlighted that the Board does not manage day-to-day operations and that the three Trustees attending the meeting would be expressing their own views and not speaking for the Board as a whole.

The undergraduate liaison then reviewed the meeting's topic and the three areas of focus for the discussion (that were subsequently discussed in the order presented below). The group was reminded that about one-third of the current graduate student population is international as are approximately 15% of students in the College.

I. Scholarship and Career Opportunities

The students at the meeting had a wide array of experiences with internships, research opportunities and employment that, in part, reflected their individual immigration and work authorization statuses in the United States. It was noted that many of the jobs posted on Handshake (UChicago's job and recruiting database) are not open to international students and that such restrictions frequently apply to scholarships as well. International students can sometimes use CPT (Curricular Practical Training)¹ and OPT (Optional Practical Training)² to get around these obstacles, but, ultimately, many American-based employers are not willing to allocate the time and resources necessary to hire students who lack permanent work authorization. Additionally, eligibility for various visas and programs that allow international students (and post-graduates, including post-docs) to work and conduct research can be quite complicated to navigate. While Career Advancement, the College Center for Research &

¹ An overview of CPT is provided at <https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/page/curricular-practical-training-cpt>

² OPT is described at <https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/page/opt-optional-practical-training>

Fellowships, UChicagoGRAD and the Office of International Affairs collectively have considerable expertise in assisting and advising international students, some students report still having to figure out their options on their own and consulting with an immigration attorney.

Some students have found success by returning to their home country for summer internships or post-graduate jobs, which can then eventually lead to opportunities in the U.S. This route can be particularly fruitful in places like Hong Kong, China and India where many global companies have a presence (and where UChicago also has centers and alumni networks). Career Advancement offers several opportunities for undergraduate students seeking experience working abroad, including Metcalf Internships and Global Fellowships. Career Exploration Treks and the Wanxiang Ambassador Fellows Program.

Ensuring that international students are aware and taking advantage of UChicago's alumni networks can be instrumental in their internship and job searches. Similarly, alumni and other friends of the University may be able to assist in facilitating interactions between international students and key employers, even if it is simply by touting the talents of our international students as interns and future employees. One student also suggested that better communication between the professional schools' career services offices (particularly those in Chicago Booth and Harris) would be helpful.

II. Housing

New international graduate students face several challenges in finding suitable housing near the University. Unlike students in the College, who are required to live on-campus during their first year, graduate students must often navigate the local rental market with little to no prior knowledge of Chicago and its neighborhoods and without being able to arrange a visit before arriving. Lack of familiarity with how leases work in the U.S. is exacerbated by the challenges of setting up utilities without a social security number or credit history, inflexible lease terms and even discrimination by some landlords who will not lease to international students at all.

In recent years, various offices at the University have developed resources to help new international graduate students in their housing search. UChicagoGRAD provides a Housing Resources website (<https://grad.uchicago.edu/life-at-uchicago/housing/>) that includes a comprehensive housing guide for new residents and an interactive map that shows how many grad students live in different Chicago neighborhoods. UChicagoGRAD also runs regular housing webinars for new students starting in February and extending through the early spring quarter. More recently, the Office of International Affairs and International House have collaborated to create the Global Mentorship Network (https://ihouse.uchicago.edu/living/global_mentorship_network/), which matches new international students with graduate student mentors who can provide advice on a variety of issues, including housing.

Since setting up a new account with ComEd was reported to be a significant hassle for new international students, the Office of the Dean of Students in the University will explore whether there are ways to make this process easier for UChicago students in the future. International graduate students can also provide input on their experiences securing housing to the newly formed Graduate Education Committee on Housing and Transportation (<https://provost.uchicago.edu/initiatives/graduate-education-working-groups-and-committees>).

III. Student Services

Students at the meeting were generally appreciative of the Office of International Affairs (<https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/>), which provides immigration services, advising and programming to the University's international student and scholar community. However, some meeting participants reported long wait times to receive acknowledgment of e-mails and delays of up to three weeks before getting an appointment. (Campus and Student Life will follow up with the OIA director to ensure that any wait time and communications issues have been addressed.)

Help with tax preparation was also identified as an area of attention for some international students given the complexity of their situation as their immigration status and/or way they are paid changes. The University does offer tax preparation advice for graduate students, including international students, but may need to explore ways of connecting students to experts more experienced with federal and state tax law as it applies to foreign nationals studying and working in the U.S.

The students had mixed opinions on the overall climate for international students at the University. There appears to be a natural tension between having space and opportunities to connect socially with other international students (including those from one's home country) and integrating with American students to have a truly immersive and culturally diverse experience while living and studying here. Some expressed dissatisfaction with the way the University presents itself to prospective international students and the actual experience it delivers. There is also some regret that since its transition to an undergraduate residence hall, International House is no longer a hub of international student programming (<https://ihouse.uchicago.edu/living/>). Similar themes around housing and social spaces have been expressed by international students at Ivy Plus institutions as well.

The students were asked about the relevance of UChicago's international centers to their scholarship and experience as students. The Campus in Hong Kong was praised as a hub for alumni as well as students doing internships and studying abroad in East Asia. Other students said that the significance of the centers depended on where students were from and their particular interests, adding that international students are typically invested in being in the United States rather than spending more time overseas.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES SERIES: SPRING 2019 MEMORANDUM

TO: Student Perspectives Series Trustees
FROM: Chris Stamper, Graduate Student Liaison to the Board of Trustees, and Kyle Shishkin, Undergraduate Student Liaison to the Board of Trustees
DATE: May 23, 2019
SUBJECT: Strategic Themes and Question Prompts for May 30th SPS Meeting

For the Spring Quarter SPS Meeting, we would like to discuss with you the experiences of international students at the University of Chicago. The diversity and perspective of international students contribute to a rich community at the University, but there are questions about whether the experience for international students could be improved. To this end, we are proposing the following themes and question prompts for your consideration, which we hope can guide our conversation when we meet:

1. **International Student Services:** The University offers a variety of services/programs (see supplemental information) through the Office of International Affairs and International House, among others, to help international students adapt to the University's rigorous standards and find a community. With the number of international students on campus rising each year (Figure 1), are there other support services that international students can benefit from? Are there improvements that need to be made to existing services/programs to accommodate for this growth?
2. **International Student Housing:** Before the University sold off many of its buildings where graduate students resided, international students were able to sign leases in a University-owned property from overseas and terminate them with few obstacles and/or consequences (e.g., being able to end a lease early upon graduating). With fewer University-owned graduate housing options, many international graduate students have the extra burden of navigating the housing market. How can the University better support students through this process?
3. **Career Development:** Both Career Advancement and UChicagoGRAD provide a range of resources to help further students' career development; however, the experiences of domestic and international students differ vastly because of employment eligibility and immigration regulations. How can we better enrich the options available to international students and empower them in pursuit of their career and scholarship goals?

We have invited a number of international students to attend the session so they may share their experiences directly. We have included their information below.

As our conversation unfolds, it would be helpful to identify how students and Trustees view these concerns differently, what suggestions there are for improvement, and to consider how we measure against our peers.

We look forward to our conversation.

Additional Information About UChicago's International Student Population

In the past ten years, the College and graduate divisions/schools have seen a steady growth in international student enrollment (Figure 1), with the exception of 2017, when graduate divisions/schools saw an increase of nearly 16%. This is largely due to the Physical Sciences Division and Social Sciences Division adding over 90 students each to their enrollments.

Currently, there are approximately 3,800 unique international students, including 850 students on post-graduation optional practical training (OPT) or a post-graduation employment benefit for international students on visas. The University continues to sponsor students' immigration well after graduation (while on OPT) ranging from 12- to 36-months post grad. During that time, the Office of International Affairs continues to be the point of contact for these alumni for immigration related guidance and information, even if they are no longer living in Chicago.

The Booth School of Business, Physical Sciences Division, and Social Sciences Division make up 65% of international graduate enrollment (Figure 2).

The University's international student (College and graduate) population is representative of over 110 countries with China, India, Canada, South Korea, and Brazil rounding out the top five (Figure 3).

Office of International Affairs

The Office of International Affairs (OIA) helps students navigate U.S. immigration regulations and procedures and provides advising services and supportive programming. With 15 full-time staff on three teams (operations, student services, and employee and scholar services), OIA is able to provide the following services:

- Immigration advising for students, scholars, and their dependent families
- Visa eligibility and immigration guidance for students, scholars, and campus partners
- Supportive programming: federal/state tax assistance, regulatory updates & workshops, pre-arrival resources, visa acquisition, etc.

Programming and Collaborative Partnerships

The University provides many services and programs that enrich the academic, research, and cultural experience of international students, visitors, employees, and families. Some services/programs of particular note are:

- **[Global Mentorship Network](#)**: A collaboration between the International House and the OIA that aims to develop and facilitate a network of support for international graduate students at the University through regular meet-ups and social events. This one-year program connects mentors with a cohort of new international graduate students. With

support from I-House and OIA, mentors foster a sense of community and provide resources for their cohorts.

- **Let's Talk:** OIA has partnered with Student Counseling Service (SCS) to provide students a chance to meet anonymously with a SCS counselor at OIA's office, without an appointment, each Monday. This service is particularly valuable for international students who may not be familiar or are uncomfortable with traditional mental health services offered in the U.S.
- **Student Organizations:** The University recognizes over 40 cultural/ethnic student organizations, providing opportunities for all students to join a community that helps to enrich diversity on campus.

Figure 1

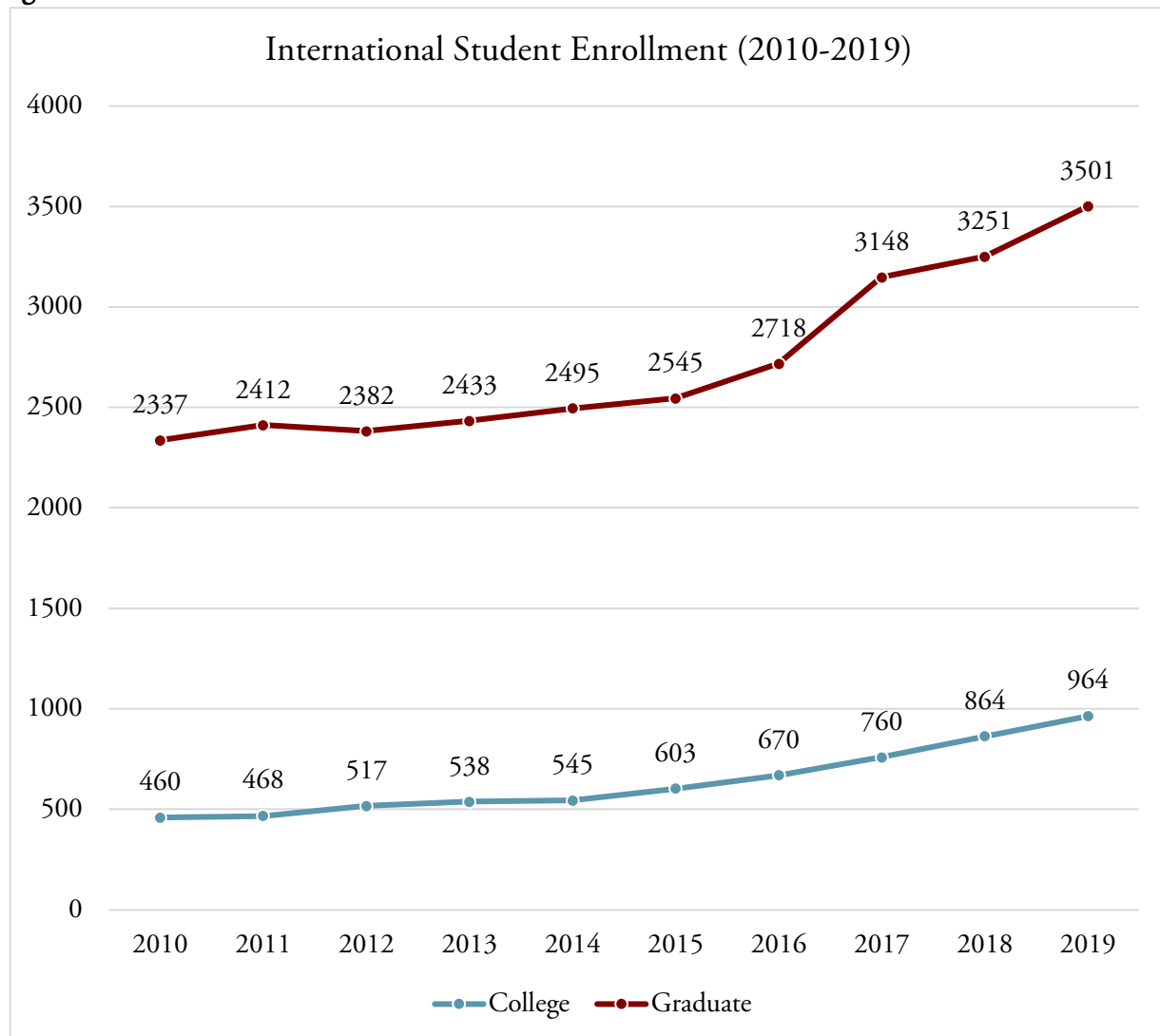


Figure 2

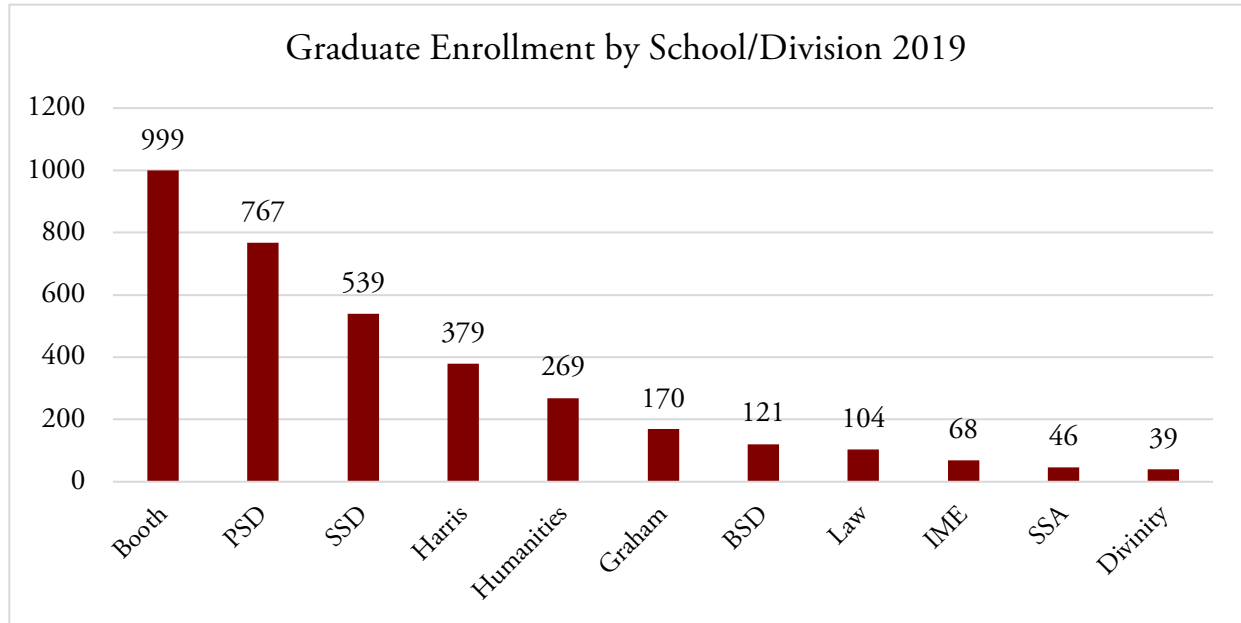
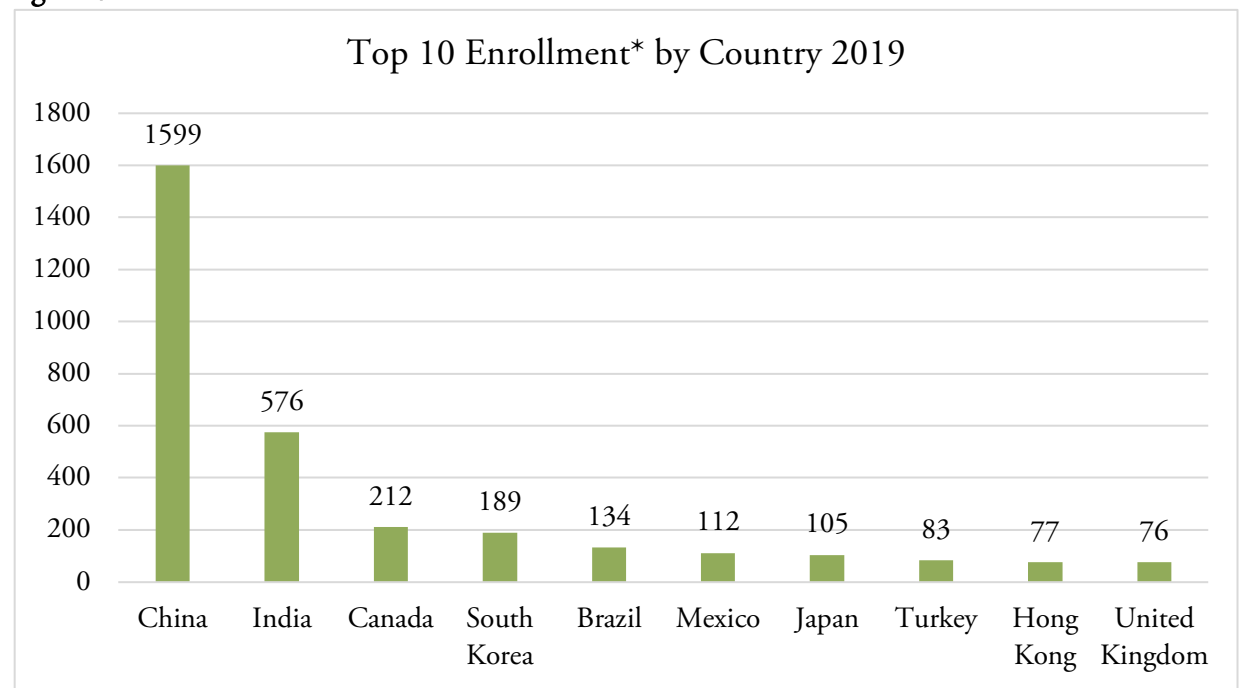


Figure 3



*College and graduate students



STUDENT LIAISONS TO THE BOARD 2018-2019

UNDERGRADUATE LIAISON: Kyle Shishkin



Kyle Shishkin is a Ukrainian-Israeli undergraduate, pursuing degrees in economics and fundamentals. His research interest in the latter division concerns the history of rationality and argumentative thought under a logical framework. Prior to his occupation as the liaison, Kyle worked on debt financing in the oil and gas sector at Concorde Capital, a premier investment bank in Ukraine. His past work experience also includes leading a transatlantic policy think-tank European Horizons, liaising for the Institute of Politics, writing for *ELLE* magazine, as well as publishing an internationally-sold book on American History. In 2015, Kyle served as a paramedic in the Anti-Terrorist Operations under the Ukrainian Military. On a recreational level, Kyle enjoys Atlantic surfing, tandem skydiving, and deep-water diving among other sports that appear dangerous. After completing his undergraduate degrees, he plans to pursue a master's degree in international relations before entering a career in real estate development and investment.

GRADUATE LIAISON: Chris Stamper



Chris is a fourth year PhD student in the Biological Sciences Division (BSD). His research combines mathematical modeling and computational biology with more traditional murine models and human patient samples to understand the body's response to influenza and flu vaccines, with the ultimate goal of bringing us closer to a universal flu vaccine. He earned his undergraduate degrees in biochemistry and English literature from the University of Virginia's College at Wise. He then worked for a year in Ireland at the intersection of biology and sociology studying respiratory syncytial virus. After returning to the United States, he worked for Eastman Chemical Company developing optical films for use in consumer electronics. At the University of Chicago, he has served as an Immunology representative to the BSD Dean's Council and as a recruitment organizer for three years, the BSD representative to Graduate Council for two years, and as the vice president of finance for Graduate Council for one year. After graduate school he intends to pursue opportunities in science policy. Originally from the rural Appalachians of Virginia, Chris is as comfortable outdoors as indoors and is an avid backpacker, whitewater kayaker, and scuba diver.

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STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE MAY 30, 2019, SPS MEETING

The following students represent a broad and diverse set of academic interests and participation in the international student life at the University.

Ege Ercan – Turkey

A third-year College student majoring in economics and a leader in the Turkish community on campus.

Ram Itani – Nepal

A second-year PhD candidate in the Physical Sciences Division (PSD). Ram serves as the secretary for PSD's social committee.

Ridgley Knapp – Incoming Undergraduate Student Liaison to the Board of Trustees

A third-year College student majoring in public policy. This past year, Ridgley served as a Class of 2020 representative in the College Council and as a leader of the College Democrats.

Zheyu Liang – China (Hong Kong)

A first-year College student majoring in public policy. Zheyu is involved in Student Government and College Council, and an active member of the Hong Kong Students' Association (HKSA).

Michael Liu – China

A fourth-year College student majoring in east Asian language and culture and an active member of the Chinese Undergraduate Student Association (CUSA).

Madeleine (Maddy) Oswald – Canada

A third-year PhD candidate in the Social Sciences Division. Maddy is member of the Social Sciences Student Executive Committee.

Rohail Premjee – Incoming Graduate Student Liaison to the Board of Trustees

A joint degree student at Harris School of Public Policy and Booth School of Business. This past year, Rohail served as the Harris School's Graduate Council Liaison and previously served on the Graduate Council's Funding Committees.

Paula Tanasescu – Romania

A second-year College student majoring in public policy. Paula is a member of the Eastern Bloc student organization and Student Health Advisory Board.

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