

# Investigating the Concept of Student' Satisfaction

*The Case of International Students at the  
UiO*

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# Abstract

Student mobility has increased significantly over the past decade, supported by internationalization policies within Europe and in some other countries. International students are an important part of the internationalization process of university. Attracting international students can lead to a better learning environment also for domestic students. The cross-cultural interaction can lead to diffusion of knowledge among the cultures and thus be a motivation tool for both international and domestic students. This is why it is important to make sure students are satisfied with their life in university. This research is focusing on international students' satisfaction at the UiO.

Students satisfaction and students' overall experience with university is highly debated topic in the academic literature. The literature on student' satisfaction and their perception of the educational experience is very complex. Views of the authors on the concept of students' satisfaction are quite diverse. Two threads of perspectives are apparent: the academic and the social.

One of the main interests in this research was to see the connection within student diversity and their engagement in life of higher education institution. Another point of interest was to observe whether the ethnical background of international students shapes student engagement, satisfaction and gain. The data was collected from the 15 international master degree students of the University of Oslo. Even though the study is exploratory and it is not possible to make any final conclusions from the findings, the analysis of the replies allows monitoring the current attitude of students towards their educational experience at the UiO. The analysis reveals that social dimension of the educational process is important for students regardless their ethnical background and study program. Since academic and social dimensions seem to be intertwined, the dissatisfaction with the social dimension can lead to dissatisfaction with the academic dimension and vice versa. Hence, social aspect as well as academic aspect of the educational process should not be underestimated when trying to improve student' satisfaction with university.

# Preface

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# 1 Theoretical background

## 1.1 Introduction

Educational institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of quality considerations in delivery of teaching, research programs and service. This is due to the increasing numbers of students entering the education system and government funding increasingly being tied to assessment of the quality of the teaching and research programs at educational institutions (Shago 2005). Recruiting students has always been an important activity for the higher educational institutions. However, the rapid expansion of colleges and universities, significant increases in college education costs combined with demographic shifts in the population may force colleges to think differently about the role of student satisfaction for their survival. Various evaluation methods have been used in many European higher education institutions in order to find out the needs of students and as an attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). Continuous improvement of quality is a philosophy. Within this philosophy is a set of broad principles and values that provide guidance on how to restructure and improve organizations (Frasier 1997:7). Continuous quality improvement requires an organization to meet or exceed the customer's expectation of quality (Frasier 1997:8).

Higher education institutions are becoming more business-like. Similar to the importance of satisfying customers to retain them for profit-making institutions, satisfying the admitted students is also important for retention. It might be argued that dissatisfied students may cut back on the number of courses or drop out of college completely. Hence, the satisfaction-intention-retention link for students in higher education should be studied and carefully managed (Kara 2004:1).

In the growing literature on academic quality there is often extensive debate about the meaning of the term (Green 1994). Many have suggested that 'academic quality' is amorphous, non-measurable, or so ambiguous in its meaning, deeming it inappropriate for public intervention (Dill 2007). Harvey and Green (1993:2) put forward a number of ways of viewing quality. Firstly, Harvey and Green mention the traditional view that quality is linked to the idea of exceptionally high standards. Secondly, quality is seen as consistency focusing on processes and set specifications that it aims to meet. Thirdly, quality relates to relevance to its purpose while fourthly quality is equated with value for money at the heart of which is the

notion of accountability. Fifthly quality is seen as transformative because education is not a service to the customer, but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. On this follows two notions of transformative quality in education i.e. enhancing and empowering the consumer.

While quality in other sectors was often associated with the idea of customer satisfaction and market adaptation, one can find a range of translations of quality within higher education (Stensaker 2007:113).

This thesis is about students' satisfaction with universities, and, in this case, with the UiO. I have developed an interest in researching several issues connected to student diversity and their engagement in the life of the higher education institution. Are students with certain characteristics more engaged than others? Does the ethnical background of international students shape their engagement, satisfaction and gain? According to NSSE, among others, international students are more engaged in the study process (Kuh 2003). This fact has promoted me to research international students' satisfaction with university.

In my thesis I will contribute to the main knowledge about students' satisfaction with higher education institutions, by adding factors that are important in determining satisfaction experienced by international students of the university.

## **1.2 Reasons Why Students Satisfaction Has Entered the Political Agenda**

The globalization of education has intensified competition among universities, not only for local, but also for international students. The elimination of socioeconomic barriers and the opening of opportunities to connect people more closely in time and space are among the dramatic benefits associated with globalization (Mavondo et al. 2004).

Higher education is adapting to the context of a globally competitive knowledge economy. At the same time, a global knowledge society is also developing. It is characterized by rapid social and cultural change, diversity and contestation (Altbach et al. 2009). Universities have always been affected by international trends and to a certain degree, operated within a broader international community of academic institutions, scholars, and research. Yet the reality of the 21st century has magnified the importance of the global context. The rise of English as the dominant language of scientific communication is unprecedented, since Latin dominated the



academia in medieval Europe. Information and communications technologies have created a universal means of instantaneous contact and simplified scientific communication (Altbach et al. 2009).

Globalization is a key reality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has become the leitmotif of our age. “Globalization is a process or a set of processes which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power.” (Beerkens 2004:13).

“Globalization ‘encouraged’ higher education to become more business-like. For example, higher education is increasingly expected to interpret international student recruitment from an economic perspective...During the late 1980s and particularly the 1990s, higher education institutions gradually started seeing fee-paying students as a source of revenue and this led to the development of an international market for higher education students. In this market the strategy of some institutions is to attract foreign students to enroll in one of their regular programs against far higher tuition fees than regular national students have to pay” (Maassen and Cloete 2006: 17). Altbach et al. (2009) defines globalization as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT); the emergence of an international knowledge network; the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions. And speaking about emerging international knowledge network, the internationalization of higher education is today’s main trend. Because globalization has driven universities to be more business-like in nature, the student has become the main customers, who must be satisfied with the product for which he or she is paying. This is why student satisfaction analysis is an important area of focus for every university, in order to provide high quality education and campus facilities.

Universities and academic systems themselves have developed many strategies to benefit from the new global environment and attract nonresident students (Altbach et al. 2009). The more nonresident students are attracted to particular university, the more responsibility this university has in terms of satisfying these students. That is why analyzing the reasons which make students travel long distances and pay tuition can be useful for the future international activities of such institutions.

The term ‘internationalization’ refers to the activities of higher education institutions, often supported or framed by multilateral agreements or programs, to expand their reach over national borders.

Internationalization activities and policies can serve a broad variety of objectives. These include diversification and growth of financial input by the recruitment of fee-paying foreign students as well as broadening of curricula and educational experiences for domestic students in foreign partner-institutions. Another objective is to develop regional networking in order to allow a more cost-effective use of resources and to provoke a process of collective institutional learning and development, or the enhancement of the quality of education and research by bringing students and staff in the realm of international competition. Activities developed in the context of internationalization encompass joint research projects; student exchange programs; staff mobility projects; specially designed programs aimed at foreign students; joint curriculum development initiatives; and specific initiatives in the context of university development aid policies, etc. Most contemporary universities are engaging in some or most of such activities, often managed by an international office. At a higher level internationalization of higher education can also be understood as the “process of systematic integration of an international dimension into the teaching, research and public service function of a higher education institution” (van Damme 2001:417). The Bologna Process reflects enormous progress in regard to the integration of higher education in Europe by creating a common structure of degree and qualifications frameworks. It aims to bring uniformity and quality assurance across Europe while promoting transparency, mobility, employability and student-centered learning (Altbach et al. 2009). Compared to other European countries, which are competing for perspective students, Norway has the advantage of no tuition-fees. This provides a huge incentive to a prospective student, who wants to study abroad. However, the high costs of living can present a challenge.

The enormous challenge confronting higher education is how to make international opportunities equally available to all. Today cost remains an enormous barrier to accessing to higher education. “Even where tuition is free, students have to bear indirect costs such as living expenses and often loss of income.” (Altbach et al. 2009)

The students and scholars most likely to take advantage of the range of new opportunities in a globalized higher education environment are typically the wealthiest or otherwise socially privileged (Altbach et al. 2009).

Internationalization of higher education is increasingly confronted with limits and difficulties, which directly or indirectly relate to general quality challenge in higher education (van Damme 2001:428)

“Internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of a higher education institution” (Beerkens 2004:16).

“Internationalization has been very prominent at regional and international level. The Bologna Process and Lisbon Strategy in Europe are the clearest examples of international engagement at this level, with the first drawing more than 40 countries into a voluntary process of enabling a European Higher Education Area” (Altbach et al. 2009).

“The Bologna Process reflects enormous progress in regard to the integration of higher education in Europe by creating a common degree structure and qualifications frameworks. It aims to bring uniformity and quality assurance across Europe while promoting transparency, mobility, employability and student- centered learning.

It is difficult to generalize globally, the mission of most institutions in most countries today is to teach less of the basic disciplines and offer more in the way of professional programs to a far wider range of students than in the past” (Altbach et al. 2009).

Contact and interaction across borders is a rather fundamental aspect of academic activity. In that sense, internationalization at institutions of higher education is no new phenomenon (Tjomsland 2004:10).

“The academic profession is under stress as never before. The need to respond to the demands of massification has caused the average qualification for academics in many countries to decline. It is possible that up to half of the world's university teachers have only earned a bachelor's degree (in China only 9 % of the academic profession has doctorates, 35% in India). The academic labor market has increasingly globalized, with many thousands of academics crossing borders for appointments at all levels” (Wikipedia). Many countries, such as France, offer scientific visas for young researchers.

This has led to “brain drain” in some countries. The “brain drain” trend refers to foreign student perception of satisfaction with their university. Satisfied students perform better in their studies, and have lower drop-out rates. Therefore, successful students are more attractive to the labor market and have better of finding employment in the country of studies, compared with unsatisfied students.

However, recent trends show that “brain drain” transforms into “brain circulation”. This occurs when people, who left their home countries for a better life abroad are reversing “brain drain” and transforming it into “brain circulation”, as they return home to establish business

relationships or to start new companies. The highly educated and skilled people who migrate legally from poorer to richer lands are the very ones that Third World countries can least afford to lose (Saxenian 2005). Saxenian (2005) gives the examples of India and China.

The costs and benefits of the “brain drain” and circulation of talent are hotly debated. International mobility of skilled workers can generate global benefits by improving knowledge flows and satisfying the demand for skills. Foreign skilled workers contribute to economic growth and achievement in host countries, particularly to research, innovation and entrepreneurship (Cervantes and Guellec 2002).

The old pattern of one-way flows of technology and capital from the core to the periphery is being replaced by a far more complex and decentralized two-way flow of skill, capital, and technology between differently specialized regional economies (Saxenian 2005).

### **1.3 Internationalization of the Student Body**

As mentioned above, universities have always been affected by international trends. Higher education drives and is driven by globalization. It trains the highly skilled workers and contributes to the research base and capacity for innovation that determine competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy. It facilitates international collaboration and cross-cultural exchange. One of the most visible aspects of globalization is student mobility.

Student mobility has increased significantly over the past decade, supported by internationalization policies within Europe and in some other countries. Institutional rankings and pressure on financing are likely to continue to boost student mobility and global competition for international students, increasingly of Chinese or Indian origin, and attracted by English-speaking destinations. Geographical mobility of faculty, predominantly south-to-north and east-to-west, is likely to continue, driven by salary and superior infrastructure (OECD).

One of the trends that encourage student mobility is massification. Many scholars refer to the question on how higher education has responded to the challenge of massification. The "logic" of massification is inevitable and includes greater social mobility for a growing segment of the population; new patterns of funding higher education; increasingly diversified higher education systems in most countries, generally an overall lowering of academic standards; and other tendencies. Massification is not a new phase; this is a “deeper stage” of an ongoing revolution in higher education (Altbach et al. 2009).

Technology is helping in the production of skilled labor through online education, which, in turn, can open up Higher Education to the less advantaged. In many developing countries new technologies are also often considered the key for increasing access to higher education. “The impact of ICT has significantly changed the speed of production, use, and distribution of knowledge, as evidenced by the increased publication of scientific papers” (World Bank 2002).

Gornitzka et al. (2008) discusses the notion of the “European dimension” in higher education and research and about the internationalization of national knowledge systems. Internationalization leads countries to adopt and imitate each other’s policies, and to increased differentiation and specialization.

“The mobility of international students involves two main trends. One consists of students from Asia entering the major academic systems of North America, Western Europe, and Australia. The other is within the European Union as part of its various programs to encourage student mobility. Globally, international student mobility largely reflects a South-North phenomenon” (Altbach et al. 2009:7). In the case of Russia, it is an east-west and west-east phenomena, as well as a region-centered tendency.

“The rising international mobility of skilled human resources can have positive as well as negative effects on countries at all levels of development” (World Bank 2002). According to the UNESCO report, during the period 2000-2007, the number of internationally mobile students in Central and Eastern Europe increased from 131 to 200 hundred students.

Universities have established partnerships with academic institutions in other countries in order to offer degrees and different academic programs; to develop research projects; and to collaborate in a variety of ways.

Analyzing student satisfaction cannot help improve the equality of access to higher education institutions but it can motivate the institutions to establish new quota programs and/or trans-institutional partnerships that might allow students from different backgrounds to get educated.

OECD (2011) classifies foreign students as those, who are not citizens of the country in which the data is collected. And international students are those who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study.

More than 2.5 million students are studying outside their home countries. Estimates predict that this number will rise to seven million international students by 2020. The flow of

international students has been a reflection of national and institutional strategies but also the decisions of individual students worldwide. The mobility of international students involves two main trends. The one consists of students from Asia entering the major academic systems of North America, Western Europe, and Australia. Countries within the United Kingdom, as well as Australia and Canada have adjusted visa and immigration requirements to attract foreign students. They are highly motivated by the desire to maintain economic competitiveness and realize financial gains by enrolling large numbers of full tuition-paying internationals. The other trend is within the European Union as part of its multitude of programs to encourage student mobility (Gornitzka et al. 2008).

Higher education institutions are forming a large number of bilateral collaboration agreements. Student mobility has become more formalized. The Quality Reform of Norwegian higher education has been fully implemented since January 2004. One of the major features of the reform is the radical aims it sets for internationalization at institutions of higher education (van Damme 2001).

The Quality Reform in Norwegian higher education emphasized the need to facilitate the progress of student exchanges; and an increased participation in institutionally-anchored exchange programs has been encouraged. Moreover, Norwegian education institutions produce separate plans and establish separate offices for internationalization.

Although student mobility is often seen as a traditional way of internationalization, the considerable administrative capacity at the level of universities and colleges signals that even the traditional ways of internationalization (student mobility) come in the guise of formalization and regulation. While internationalization 15-20 years ago was often taken care of by enthusiastic individuals, the present tendency is to centralize, all decision-making and responsibility concerning internationalization. Of course, the development may easily be related to trends of quality improvements in research and education; increasingly professionalized academic support functions; and a focus on scholarships regardless of national borders. It means that formalization and institutionalization have an effect on the frequency of international mobility and cooperation (Gornitzka et al. 2008).

Internationalization is a priority within all sectors of the Norwegian education system; and universities and university colleges are constantly working to accommodate international students.

Higher education has become one of the most important mechanisms for economic and social development. The massification of higher education is generally supported since it is

considered to be an investment with an economic return for both for individuals and society (Kleshchukova 2005:10).

Even if the issue was well defined in global terms there is a need to understand the factors that impact student satisfaction at a local level. The factors that relate to student satisfaction with university life have received much attention in educational literature since the late 1960's. Numerous factors have been studied, to include: peer interaction, social life, faculty-student interaction, intellectual development, academic performance, gender, age, social class etc. (Okun and Weir 1990). Despite this research, there is still an obvious lack of consensus in how satisfaction should be defined and measured, and how its determinants can be assessed. It is clearly a very complex construct. The determinants of satisfaction are undoubtedly multifactorial, and vary from person to person, as well as from institution to institution. The finding of only weak correlations between individual factors and any measure of satisfaction should, therefore, not be surprising. Nevertheless, studies to identify local determinants at the institutional level are justified given the importance of student satisfaction as an outcome in its own right, and its linkage to other issues, particularly student grades and student retention (Lee et al. 2000).

According to the website "Study in Norway" ([www.studyinnorway.no](http://www.studyinnorway.no)) nearly 12,000 foreign nationals are currently enrolled at Norwegian institutions of higher education. International students may apply for admission to a variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The total amount of students at UiO is 27,700. To increase internationalization means to increase student mobility, making new partnership agreements with foreign institutions and so on. In order to do this it is crucial to understand what is really important for the student, and what makes the student feel satisfied with the university. Understanding this fact will pinpoint the strength and drawbacks of the institution, and help improve them.

## 1.4 Research Questions

*What are the underlying theoretical and empirical factors that constitute student satisfaction?*

Sub-questions:

**1.1** What is student satisfaction?

**1.2** What factors influence the satisfaction of international students at UiO, and how.

**1.3** Are current ways of measuring student satisfaction relevant when higher education becomes more internationalized?

The case of University of Oslo will be used for this survey. The research instrument is a self-completion questionnaire that will be distributed via internet (email); and/or the face-to-face interviews, in order to do an in-depth study of student satisfaction.

Data will be compiled after receiving student responses. Students will be selected by a random sample from various faculties of the UiO, according to defined criteria, such as international graduate students of male and female gender.

## **1.5 Exposition of the Chapters**

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the concept of student' satisfaction and the reasons it has entered the political agenda. This chapter also highlights the effects of globalization on higher education.

Chapter 2 describes the challenges the University of Oslo faces and its internationalization ambitions.

Chapter 3 focuses on literature review of students' satisfaction, and the perspectives of different authors on the factors that may influence student' perception of their educational experience.

In Chapter 4, the research design and methodology is discussed with special reference to the research instrument used to collect data.

Chapter 5 focuses on the data obtained, survey results and the analysis of main findings.

Final reflections and suggestions for further discussions are presented in chapter six.



# 2 University of Oslo

## 2.1 Internationalization Ambitions and Strategy

University of Oslo is the oldest and largest university in Norway, situated in the Norwegian capital of Oslo. The University of Oslo is internationally ranked as Norway's leading university. It has made and continues to make significant contributions to the nation's research, innovation and education. Currently the university has about 27,700 students and employs about 6,000 people. The university has consistently been ranked among the world's top 100 universities by the Academic Ranking of World Universities; in 2010 it was ranked as the best in Norway, 24th best in Europe and 75th best in the world. The 2011 QS World University Rankings ranked the university 108th in the world.

The University's main aim is to develop UiO into a first-class international university, where the interaction among research, education, dissemination and innovation shall be at its best. International cooperation has a long tradition at the University of Oslo. Through bilateral agreements and international cooperation programs, the University maintains relationships with distinguished universities and educational institutions around the world. University of Oslo has exchange agreements with over 500 universities around the world. Student mobility is an integral part of the University's study programs. The broad range of courses and programs in English has made the University of Oslo an attractive destination for a growing number of international students ([www.uio.no](http://www.uio.no)).

The internationalization process is on the agenda. Establishing more and better international programs, recruiting more foreign students and increasing the number of international lecturers participating in study programs are some of the main ambitions of the University. In 2004, The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU) was established, as an administrative agency under the Ministry of Education and Research. SIU is a knowledge- and service organization with the mission of promoting and facilitating cooperation, standardization, mobility, and the overcoming of cultural barriers to communication and exchange within the realm of higher education on an international level (Ministry of Education and Research). The aim is to contribute to the excellent international reputation of Norwegian education and to assist the higher education sector in their promotional initiatives. The center is charged with the important task of coordinating national

measures according to the official Norwegian policy within the field of internationalization. The web portal [www.studyinnorway.no](http://www.studyinnorway.no) is the single most important element in the promotional strategy. This is a Meta portal where most of the content is linked to other websites, such as the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, the Norwegian authorities etc. ([www.siu.no](http://www.siu.no)).

The University of Oslo has developed a strategic plan for the next decade. University's strategy for 2010-2020 (Strategy 2020) was adopted by the University Board on April, 2010. Strategy2020 establishes a focus, as well as a level of ambition, for all UiO activities during the coming decade. According to the strategy document, the overriding goal of the University is to strengthen its international position as a leading research-intensive university through a close interaction across research, education, communication and innovation.

“The University of Oslo must strive for quality in all of its activities and strengthen a culture that promotes continuous quality improvements” (Strategy 2020). In 2002 the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) was established. It is an independent agency with the task of carrying out external quality assurance of higher education and tertiary vocational education in Norway. NOKUT also handles applications for general recognition of foreign qualifications.

The University of Oslo is expected to do more in the face of global and national challenges. The university is operating in a global labor market for scientific employees, where mobility is increasing. This entails better opportunities for international recruiting. International mobility is an important factor promoting quality. In order to achieve this, according to the Strategy 2020, faculties and academic units should improve their recruiting practices, e.g. through active searches in international academic units.

The number one objective for the University of Oslo is to become the university that transcends borders. The University of Oslo shall promote pioneering research, education and communication, and be sought after as an international partner (Strategy 2020).

## **2.2 Challenges**

A stronger focus on internationalization requires investment in Norway's improvement of language skills in research, instruction and administration. Challenges that international students might face in Norway can be related to language. The University of Oslo itself has

the challenge of making campuses more internationalized and accessible for international students, as well as improving the system for welcoming and integrating international students. The question of investment in language courses for international students is frequently raised in the articles of the student' newspaper "Universitas"

*"The Norwegian language can be a barrier when it comes to attracting international students. Norwegian language training will also be part of the strategy to make Norwegian educational institutions more attractive, but in many cases a range of courses in English can be a good solution" (Tora Aasland, the minister of research and higher education).*

The lack of places to take Norwegian language courses has been brought up in discussions on the Univeristas.no website. Even though English is the language of academic communication, in a country like Norway, where Norwegian is the spoken language, language courses may be of value for the integration of new students.

*"In order to take part in a larger process of integration, both academic and social, it is not enough to rely on English as an academic language. There are a lot of issues that cannot be mediated through any other language. For example, it would be pointless for an international student to read Henrik Ibsen in English while in Norway" (Jens Kihl, member of the Left Alliance and leader of the Norwegian Language Youth).*

Preserving and developing of the Norwegian language as the language of scientific research is another challenge of higher education institutions in Norway. Especially when the internationalization processes dictates the need for English as the language of scientific communication, we can question whether it is necessary to choose between Norwegian as an academic language, or internationalization. Dag Simonsen, philologist at the Norwegian Language Council, stated that the Norwegian language is at risk within academia, especially in research publications. «When it comes to publishing research, especially within the social sciences, there has been marked increase in publications in English, at the expense of Norwegian. Norwegian academic terminology is in danger of not being developed. An effort needs to be made in this area» ([www.unoversitas.no](http://www.unoversitas.no)).

According to [www.universitas.no](http://www.universitas.no) some factors may have led to the fact that few international students are actively participating in student societies at the University of Oslo. Of course language can be a barrier. That is why measures for improvement of integration at the university are needed. International students are no longer viewed as a separate group. The Department of Student and Academic Affairs has started taking measures, such as, the “Language tandem”, which is a system in which a Norwegian and an international student learn each other’s language. There is also an activity calendar that has been designed to assist international students. The concern is that the sufficient adjustments must be continuously made, which would enable students to be more included in student life. The main responsibility for integration lies not with the students, but with the university itself.

University of Oslo has ambitious plans for the next ten years in promoting itself within the international educational market. According to Strategy 2020 “the University of Oslo will be more visible, attractive and engaged in the international arena than it is at present”.

Internationalization and successful participation in various EU efforts will help UiO meet national objectives. By strengthening its international network and international recruiting, the university will ensure that there is adequate knowledge and essential expertise for further development of Norwegian society. However the internationalization process might give effect on the institutional level as well. Attracting international students can lead to a better learning environment also for domestic students. The cross-cultural interaction can lead to diffusion of knowledge among the cultures and thus be a motivation tool for both international and domestic students. This is expected to result in a more homogeneous and stable world where the best from each culture is integrated and synthesized (Pedersen 1991). Integration of international and domestic students can help international students faster adapt to a new environment and turn their focus on studies. Meanwhile for domestic students it might be helpful to become more aware and sensitive to different cultures. This together can create an international learning environment where students don’t feel a gap between international and domestic student division. Interacting and communicating and collaborating together international and domestic students can contribute to an internationalization process of the University.

This objective shall be achieved by transcending geographical, academic and institutional boundaries. The University of Oslo envisions itself as an action-oriented, engaged university contributing to the development of society, and will become an even better place in which to work and study.

# 3 Literature Review

## 3.1 Student' satisfaction

The main focus of this chapter is to overview literature about student satisfaction. Therefore, the first research question will be discussed in this chapter.

Education is one of the key drivers of economic growth. Within an increasingly competitive market in the higher education sector, university student satisfaction is an important component in attracting and retaining high achievers, who, in turn, improve the reputation and standing of the university. Increasingly, the funding models for universities are dependent on indicators of research achievement and student satisfaction (Wikipedia).

First of all, it is necessary to define the notion of satisfaction and especially student' satisfaction. **Satisfaction** - a fulfillment of need or desire, the pleasure obtained by such fulfillment. "Satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure or disappointment attained from comparing a product's perceived performance (outcome) in relation to his or her expectations. If the performance falls short of expectations, the customer is dissatisfied. If the performance matches the expectations, the customer is satisfied. If the performance exceeds expectations, the customer is highly satisfied or delighted" (Wikipedia). **Student' satisfaction** is defined by Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker and Groggaard (2002: 185) as students' assessments of the services provided by universities and colleges. Student satisfaction is a continually changing construct in the Higher Education environment due to repeated interactions (Elliott and Shin 2002). It is a dynamic process that requires clear and effective action as a result of an institution listening to its students. Student satisfaction is a complex construct influenced by a variety of characteristics of students and institutions (Thomas and Galambos 2004: 252). Student satisfaction is an overall response not only to the learning experience of a student (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002).

## 3.2 Perspectives on Students' Satisfaction

The literature on student' satisfaction and their perception of the educational experience is very complex. Views of the authors on the concept of student' satisfaction is quite diverse. Each author has their own perspective regarding the needs of students in the university. Some authors support the so called "managerial dimension" of student' satisfaction: the university is

an enterprise and the students are the customers. Therefore in order to satisfy students, the customer approach should be applied in the universities.

The most controversial point of view is that of students being a customer of the university, due to the fact that universities are becoming more business-like. For example Elliott and Shin (2002) mean that globalized competition has stressed the strategic importance of satisfaction and quality in the battle for winning consumer preferences and maintaining sustainable competitive advantages. Hill (1995) suggests that the primary customers of the universities are the students, and so Higher Education is increasingly recognizing that it is a service industry and is placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of students. Moreover, focusing on student satisfaction not only enables universities to re-engineer their organizations to adapt to student needs, but also allows them to develop a system for continuous monitoring of how effectively they meet or exceed student needs (Elliott and Shin 2002: 197). Furthermore, researchers argue “that relationships are important and that the overall market orientation of organizations needs to be translated to a relationship level in order to be effective” (Helfert et al. 2002:1119).

According to Seymour (1972), developing many happy satisfied customers, whether they are students, parents of students, alumni, or industry employer, should be a primary goal of higher education. Thus, focusing on enhancing the customer satisfaction at colleges and universities is crucial in developing customer value (Seymour in Kara and De Shields 2004:4).

Students can be regarded as customers of the universities. Therefore, it is important for the university to focus on its customers, and to meet their expectations by providing quality education. Mamun and Das (1999) completed a study and pointed out some factors that would attract students. These included *library facilities*, *laboratory facilities* and *internship assistance* as some of the key factors for student satisfaction.

Higher education institutions can attract students designing world class libraries, classrooms, computer laboratories, and other facilities. Students spend a considerable amount of their time using these university facilities, thus providing potential opportunities to influence student satisfaction.

A study done by Haque et al. (2011) identified independent factors that can affect student satisfaction based on services offered by universities. These include quality of teaching, student research facilities, library book collections and services, campus infrastructure, canteen facilities, space for group discussions, sport programs, ICT (PC and Internet) facilities etc.

According to Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996) most prior satisfaction research has not included performance as a direct antecedent of satisfaction (e.g. Bearden and Teel 1983; Oliver and DeSarbo 1988). Service performance has become a central construct in marketing research, especially in combination with service quality. In the context of higher education, service performance which includes implicit quality is especially influenced by two factors: professors and course content. In the service context, quality is a subjective measurement and depends on tangible and intangible attributes (Mont and Plepys 2003; Pariseau and Daniel 1997). The *intangible* nature of higher education makes it difficult for students to effectively evaluate factors such as the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the quality of student servicing. The *tangible* elements associated with the “education”- service include educational technology and computers, classrooms, and library facilities.

In the article “Student satisfaction and quality of service in Italian universities”, Petruzzellis, D’Uggento, Romanazzi (2006) also regarded students as customers of universities and made the conclusion that universities need to adopt a customer centric approach. They analyzed common factors such as: lecture halls, laboratories, equipment, library, dining hall, dormitories, leisure activities, language courses, scholarships, internet access, exam booking, contacts with teachers, administrative services, tutoring, counseling, internship, international relationship and placement.

Students have increasingly begun to see themselves as consumers or customers of a service organization, and linked with this is the high expectations of standards and efficiency from the educational institutions. Therefore, customer satisfaction is becoming increasingly important. Occasionally, expectations of international students are not met by universities (East 2001), which may have attracted these students by overstated and zealous marketing techniques. Berno and Ward (2002) found that a lack of satisfaction was associated with poorer adaptation in international students. They suggest that the difference between expectations and experiences is associated with overall adaptation: the bigger the discrepancies, the poorer the psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Research shows that international students have lower perceptions of services offered by their universities than their domestic counterparts (Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, and Ling 2004).

Some authors address several perspectives of students` satisfaction, because student satisfaction is a complex construct with various antecedents, and these are not the same as in the actual customer satisfaction models (Elliott and Shin 2002). Tinto (1982) formulates a student integration theory of persistence or retention based on the relationships between

students and institutions. He argues that retention involves two commitments on the part of the student. The first commitment is the goal to obtain a college degree; and the second one is the decision to obtain that degree at a particular institution (institutional commitment). Overall, the combination of the student's goal and institutional commitment affects retention at a particular institution. Under this perspective, it is important to match the student's motivation and academic ability and the institution's ability to meet the student expectations (Kara and De Shields 2004).

To grasp the complexity of the learning experience, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to student satisfaction. For many students, "the process of studying not only represents acquisition of certain skills and theoretical knowledge; it is also related to personal growth and social development (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002:185).

By turning the focus towards the course content, the subject quality will be one of highest priority (Scott 1999). According to Elliott and Shin (2002:198) "a university's product is more than its academic program. It is the sum of the student's academic, social, physical, and even spiritual experiences". Furthermore, satisfaction is positively influenced when there is positive perception of the quality (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann 1994). Finaly-Neumann (1994) ascertains that dominant predictors of instructional satisfaction include clarity of instructional tasks, professor feedback and identity of instructional tasks. BC College and Institute Student Outcomes report (2003) states that higher satisfaction ratings can be gained when the students are provided with a curriculum that meets their expectations and needs, especially through focusing on high quality instruction and opportunities to develop their skills.

Tertiary education involves adjustment to new academic and social environments. The demands of these new environments can create stressors that may strain interpersonal relationships, undermine self-esteem and jeopardize academic performance (Khawaja and Dempsey 2008). Such demands are often more complex for international students, who have to adapt to a new culture, language, academic, and social environment (Mori 2000).

When reviewing literature on student' satisfaction it is possible to notice that some authors also support both dimensions: social and academic. For example, Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002) underline that there are some reasons to be cautious when applying the satisfaction approach in higher education (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). Due to the theoretical discussion, satisfaction



is explained in different ways: feelings and emotions are not completely taken into account as variables in the satisfaction process (Wirtz and Bateson 1999). There is a difference between institutions and subject-fields concerning the most important student satisfaction factors (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). The product is the sum of the student's academic, social, physical and spiritual experiences; research in this field does not show a consistent pattern for student satisfaction (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). They found that the important factors are close to teaching and social climate. In other words, students "require experience with the product to determine how satisfied they are with it; and it is based not only on current experience but also all past experience, as well as future or anticipated experiences" (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann 1994:54-55).

Besides academic quality, Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker and Grogaard (2002) assert the quality of university support facilities is very important in achieving students satisfaction. They examine how overall student satisfaction in Norway can be broken down into component assessments, referring to broader aspects of the student' learning experience. They see student satisfaction as students' assessments of the services provided by universities and colleges. They broke the concept down into several sub-categories, such as:

1. Quality of teaching (academic and pedagogic).
2. Quality of supervision and feedback from academic staff.
3. Composition, content and relevance of curriculum.
4. Balance between different forms of organized teaching activities and self-tuition.
5. Quality of support facilities.
6. Quality of physical infrastructure
7. Quality and access to leisure activities.
8. Social climate.

In more detail, Guolla (1999:88) states that "a student's satisfaction may be influenced by poor classroom facilities of which an instructor may have limited resources to change". So, the campus environment can be seen as a web of connected happenings that influence student satisfaction (Elliott and Shin 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to enhance "the perceived value by providing services or service attributes not provided by the competition" (Claycomb and Martin 2001:391). Researchers (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002) found that smaller institutions have more satisfied students than larger institutions, and additionally different environments within the institution can have different influences on students.

A. Butcher and T. McGrath (2004) discussed the needs of international students in New Zealand in three categories:

- academic needs of international students
- social needs of international students (including health and safety)
- financial needs of international students

Khawaja and Dempsey (2008) compared international and domestic students of Australian universities. In their study they aimed to compare the international and domestic students on a range of variables.

Thomas and Galambos (2004) investigated alternative measures of general students' satisfaction, using multiple regression and decision tree analysis with the chi-squared automatic interaction detector algorithm.

Student' satisfaction with university has individual, institutional and social benefits. From an institutional point of view, satisfied students are more likely to continue in their studies and succeed academically, and this is likely to enhance the financial position and reputation of the institution. Successful universities realize that it is very important to retain enrolled students rather than concentrate on attracting new ones. One reason for this is because a competitive advantage can be gained through student satisfaction (Elliott and Shin 2002) and they can be marketed in the university's marketing tools. Satisfied students make effective public relations agents." Highly satisfied students "engage in favorable word-of mouth publicity". Word-of-mouth from satisfied students lowers the cost of attracting new customers for the university and enhances the university's overall reputation, while that of dissatisfied students has the opposite effect (Fornell 1992). Also, they can return as graduate students, recruit prospective students or regularly donate as alumni. The most mentioned relationship-building practices are referrals, testimonials, and visits to customers' sites by potential customers." Understanding the underlying dimensions of student satisfaction and the factors that contribute to student satisfaction has several potential benefits and applications for institutions, students, and society (Wikiversity).

As mentioned above, the literature on student' satisfaction and student' perception of academic experience is very complex. Two threads of perspectives are apparent: the academic and the social. The authors supporting one or the other perspective mention the factors that can affect students' satisfaction with their university. Many authors underline the importance of the same factors (for example Harvey (1995) and Hill (1995). They both mention library

services, accommodation services, course content, teaching quality, catering service, academic workload and so on.

In addition in 2001 UCC Student Services Evaluation Report analyzed student' satisfaction using the following categories: general climate, admissions/records, academic advising, financial aid and awards, counseling, assessment center, athletics, health clinic, computer labs, library, bookstore.

Table 1 Factors mentioned in the literature.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Academic advising</b>	<b>Social activities</b>	<b>Learning experience</b>	<b>Student support service</b>	<b>Library</b>	<b>Course content</b>	<b>Quality of instructions</b>	<b>Adaptability</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>ICT</b>
Roberts, Styron (2008)	X	X	X							
Mamun, Das (1999)					X					
Haque (2011)				X					X	X
Mont, Plepsys (2003)				X		X	X			
Zeithaml et al. (1996)				X	X					
Petruzzellis et al. (2006)			X	X	X		X	X	X	X
East (2001)				X						
Berno, Ward (2002)								X		
Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002).	X	X		X		X				X
Neumn (1994)	X			X		X				
Guolla (1999)			X							X
Elliot, Shin 2002										X
Harvey, Hill (1995)				X	X	X	X		X	
UCC Student Service Evaluation (2001)	X				X					X

To sum up all of them, it is possible to define several most frequently mentioned in the literature factors that might affect the satisfaction of student. Table.1 demonstrates the authors and factors they mention in their research.

In total we can see that the following factors are frequently mentioned in the literature that has been used in this research: academic advising, students support service, library facilities, quality of instructions, computer facilities.

Therefore I will try to find out whether they are the factors that can affect student' satisfaction with university, by handing out self-completion questionnaires to students of different faculties of the University of Oslo.

### 3.3 Analytical Framework

Beside these most frequently mentioned factors, there are also some other factors that are mentioned in the literature. It is possible to divide them into two perspectives: academic and social. But those two perspectives are not clear cut, since some of the factors can match both perspectives. For example, retention is a factor that can be affected by the academic quality, but also by the service facilities of the university. Academic advising is, on one hand, a service, but on the other- an academic function. Campus services and facilities can belong to the social perspective, but also to the academic one (for example, reading rooms and so on). The table below demonstrates the mentioned perspectives.

Table 2 Demonstration of frequently mentioned perspectives

<b>Perspectives</b>	<b>Academic</b>	<b>Social</b>
<b>Factors</b>	Retention	Social Integration
	Academic Advising Services	Campus Services and Facilities
	Academic Experiences	Campus Infrastructure
	Quality of Instruction	Social Activities
	Intellectual Growth	Classroom Facilities
	Preparation for Lifelong Learning	Library Services and Collection
	Academic Performance	Campus Canteen Facilities

In order to measure student' satisfaction, some authors, for example Aldridge and Rowley (1998), suggest that organizations should seek to respond to incidents that lead to dissatisfaction as they arise. On occasion, individual incidents may lead to dissonance, and the formulation of a complaint. Continued perception of poor quality will lead to disconfirmation, which may be expressed through course and module questionnaires, and other formal measurements of student summative evaluations. Disaffirmation occurs when the student ceases to be an effective member of the educational community. This withdrawal may be exhibited through formal withdrawal, or through failure. On occasion, disaffected students

will remain in the institution, and continue to perform poorly; although disaffected, they may feel that they have no option but to continue with their studies. These students are likely to be vulnerable to dissatisfaction, disconfirmation and dissonance. Also, the approach for assessing the quality of a service is to measure the students' perceptions of quality. Service quality is the comparison of what customers feel that organizations should offer, compared to their performance perception of the service provider (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

And students are able to judge the quality of the service, because they have various performance experiences in the university (Selnes 1993).

We can empirically investigate student' satisfaction by finding out students' opinions about the factors mentioned above.

# 4 Research Design and Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

International students are no different from domestic students besides the fact that international students study not in the country that they come from but in a new, foreign country. International students ensure the financial and cultural well-being of tertiary institutions. That is why they have many expectations and demands from the new to them educational institution. In addition, Hellsten (2002) found that the expectation of being “taken care of” by the host community and institution was prevalent among the international students. That is why considering the many expectations that international students have and problems they face adjusting to a new country and learning environment, it is important for educational institutions to be aware of students needs and expectations, and take steps to identify, measure, meet and exceed those expectations which are under their control (Sherry et al.2004:2).

Research into the specific needs of international students is limited. This has resulted in international students being expected to adapt to the existing system (Mavondo et al. 2004).

The strength of the study is that international students from different countries took part in the survey, and most of them are master students. It means they are experienced students and are motivated to study. Mavondo (2004:44) in their research on international students say that “the style of teaching and the characteristics of the learning environment vary from country to country and are grounded in political and economic conditions, traditions and social and cultural values...Therefore, understanding the potential role that students can perform in an academic environment provides educators and administrators with the knowledge to help students adapt to a new environment, develop open-minded thinking, gain particular skills in problem solving and enhance their overall educational outcomes”.

Most satisfaction measures are developed relative to a standard or referent base. The most common measures reflect actual experience relative to expectations (Oliver 1980). Any discrepancy between expectations and the actual experience leads to disconfirmation; i.e., positive disconfirmation increases or maintains satisfaction and negative disconfirmation creates dissatisfaction (Andreassen and Lanseng 1997). They also recognize that achieving student satisfaction is not a one-way process; it demands from the student the ingredients of

motivation, hard work, interest, skill, forcefulness and a willingness to study in addition to the institutional support provided.

## **4.2 Research Methods**

This is an exploratory type of research, which is a particular type of descriptive study. The purpose of exploratory research is to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person. The need for such a study could arise from a lack of basic information on a new field of interest (Bless and Higson-Smith 1995:42). There are two alternatives for the design of exploratory and descriptive research: the case study and the survey. The case study is a detailed and thorough investigation of a few cases; whereas the survey entails the collection of information on a wide range of cases, each case being investigated only on the particular aspect under consideration (Bless and Higson-Smith 1995:43).

The analysis of data will be done using qualitative research strategy. It means the emphasis will be made on “words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman 2008:366). Therefore, the emphasis will be on discovery and exploration rather than hypothesis testing. As mentioned by Creswell (2003:182), qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. The use of qualitative methods assures closeness to the persons in the situation, thereby providing the background to the quantitative data (Krathwohl 1998:229).

Qualitative research method makes it possible to study a subject in depth, however, it has some weaknesses. The generalization of results is usually questionable in the qualitative study. Designing a qualitative research, one has to keep in mind, that generalization of results has to be rather theoretical than numeric (Flick 2008). In this research, the qualitative research design was used in order to determine current levels of students’ satisfaction with various aspects of education and student life experiences at the University of Oslo.

## **4.3 Population and Sampling**

The purpose of sampling, as mentioned by Gorard (2003:57), is to use a relatively small number of cases (the sample) to find out about and draw conclusions relating to a much larger number (population). Population, according to Bryman (2008:168), is the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected. Sample- is the segment of the population that is selected for investigation.

In this study, the population was comprised of the international students at the University of Oslo from Blindern campus. The non-probability sample of international master students was used. It means the sample was not randomly selected, and that some units in the population were more likely to be selected.

The Convenience sampling method was chosen for practical reasons. Due to summer break at the university, it was a challenge to get in touch with students via email, since the university email was being checked infrequently by the students (as it was later discovered). That is why the international students who participated in this research are those who were available at that time. This does not mean that they represent the whole population of international master students of the UiO. However, the fact that they have different backgrounds and are taking master degree at the UiO, marks them as different than international students in general.

The students were first contacted via Facebook (the request on participation in the research), and then were contacted via email, in order to send the questionnaire itself. Not all the students that were contacted via Facebook replied to the request. Those who did reply also agreed to forward the questionnaire to friends, who are also international master degree students at the UiO.

## **4.4 Administration of the Questionnaire**

In this study, a self-administered questionnaire was used to gather information from the respondents. The questionnaire was developed using questions from surveys on student satisfaction and students engagement (Australasian survey of Student engagement 2010). The questions were modified. The questionnaires were administered at the end of the spring semester 2011, via email. This method did not deliver a satisfactory response rate; therefore, it was decided to continue during summer time in order to ensure a valid sample.

Basically, there are three ways of administering a questionnaire: the face-to-face interview, the telephone interview, and the self-administered questionnaire (Corbetta 2003:142). In this study the last option was adopted.

### **4.4.1 Advantages of Self-Administered Questionnaires**

Advantages of self-administered questionnaires, according to Corbetta (2003:146), are:



- Considerable saving on cost. No considerable costs were spent on this questionnaire. The main instruments used for creating, administering and analyzing the questionnaire were: PC, internet; also pen and paper for making notes;
- Filling in of questionnaire can be done at leisure. This was a very important criteria, since most of the students were off-campus, having summer break;
- Greater guarantee of anonymity than in a face-to-face interview. In this study, the questionnaire does not contain any means of identification, except gender, faculty and study program. The questionnaire contains questions where a respondent is asked to give his/her opinion on the given issue. This is why it was important to preserve the confidentiality of all responses;

*“All of your answers are confidential, and any information that identifies you will not be shared with anyone. The responses you provide will be used for research purposes only, and when survey results are reported, your answers will be combined with the answers of others so that you cannot be identified.”*

- Location is irrelevant. In this research, the international students were having summer break, some were traveling home, while other were on vacations;
- In addition, this is environmentally friendly research, since the questionnaire was filled out electronically and minimum amount of paper was used.

Bryman (2008:217) also emphasizes the main advantages of the self-completion questionnaire: cheaper and quicker to administer, absence of interviewer effects, no interviewer variability, convenience for respondents.

#### **4.4.2 Disadvantages of Self-Administered Questionnaire**

Corbetta (2003:147) gives the following disadvantages for the self-administered questionnaire:

- Low percentage of returns (often well below 50%), partly because there is no interviewer present to urge compliance. Every valid, completed and returned questionnaire was valuable in the given Convenience sampling. That is why there was a risk of low response rates;

- Sample bias due to the self-selection, since those who respond tend to be different from those who do not, therefore, it is unlikely that we will have a random sample of the entire population;
- No control over completion of the questionnaire, which might be filled in, for example, by a family member. Indeed, there is no evidence that the questionnaire was personally completed by the student;
- Fewer questions can be asked than in face-to-face interviews. In fact, some respondents skipped some issues, where additional comments were to be provided.

That is why face-to-face interviews would have been more helpful.

Bryman (2008:219) speaks about similar disadvantages; also mentioning that there is a risk of missing data and the inability to collect additional data; and that questions cannot be read as a whole.

## 4.5 The Questionnaire

All the participants were given the same questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions with sub-questions, and required about 15 minutes to complete. In total, respondents had to answer/assess/comment on 45 items in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained questions indicating two dimensions, academic and social. The questions N1 2, 7, 8 reflect the academic dimensions (16 items); and questions N 3-6 and 9-13 (17 items) reflect the social dimension. Questions 14-18 (5 items) are more neutral in nature (overall learning experience). Questions 19-23 are the information about the respondent (gender; the year they enrolled at the UiO; years completed; subject area; faculty). Besides the ones mentioned above, there was one optional question where the students were asked to suggest improvements of any aspects of the UiO.

The levels of student satisfaction were measured by assessing four types of answers (poor/fair/good/excellent; very little/some/quite a bit/very much), yes/no; or answers in which respondents marked the sentences that applied to him/her.

Factors that affect student satisfaction the most, according to different authors, were discussed in the literature review chapter. Among them are academic advising, students support services, library facilities, quality of instructions, computer facilities, general climate, social integration, academic experiences, campus infrastructure, classroom facilities, feedback and assessment and student workload. According to Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002:185) student'

satisfaction is their assessments of the services provided by universities and colleges. That is why I designed my questionnaire to help me gather student assessments of the factors mentioned above. The sum of the questions used in the questionnaire can shed a light on the current tendencies of international students' satisfaction with the UiO.

The questionnaire was administered to students of the University of Oslo. Most of the students were positive about answering the questions in the survey. A total of 25 questionnaires were distributed, and 15 valid and completed questionnaires were returned. Fifteen international students shed a light on some common tendencies in the attitude of international students.

The gender of the respondents was: 13 Female and 2 Male. It can be questioned why the majority of the respondents were female students. I have no data to learn whether there are more female international students than male at UiO, but according to Statistics Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2009) by the year 2008 the percentage of women foreign citizens in tertiary education in Norway was 58,6%. The UiO is one of the largest universities in Norway, which means that these figures can be applied to the UiO as well. This may mean that the fact that the majority of respondents are female students is not a coincidence. In general, the percentage of women in tertiary education in Norway has increased since 1980.

## **4.6 Variables**

Student satisfaction is the *dependent* variable in my research. The student satisfaction and intentions model incorporates the 15 *independent* variables, which were derived from the education, service quality and satisfaction literature. These variables represent six higher order dimensions (faculty, staff advising, classes, student partial college experience, satisfaction and intentions).

## **4.7 Academic and Social Dimension**

Measures of student satisfaction cover two dimensions: academic and social. The survey contains the questions that cover both of them.

Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002:1) in their article on the student satisfaction (domestic students) say that “the academic and pedagogic quality of teaching is crucial determinants of student satisfaction. However, social climate, aesthetic aspects of the physical infrastructure and the quality of services from the administrative staff should not be underestimated when trying to

improve student satisfaction and opportunity for learning.” It means the academic quality is always important for a student. But what role does the social dimension play in the student’s understanding of quality of the university. And do they affect each other. And is there any difference between the factors that affect domestic students and international students of the same university (the example of the UiO).

In the study done by Khawaja and Dempsey (2008:30-46) the “results demonstrate that in comparison to domestic students, international students had less social support, used more dysfunctional coping strategies and had greater incongruence between their expectations and experiences of university life. The results endorse the significance of providing high quality supportive and orientation programs to international students.”

The questionnaire contained 16 issues on the academic dimension and 17 issues on the social dimension.

The social as well as the academic dimension is very important. Students cannot be totally satisfied with their academic environment, if there is no one to talk to or share their opinions within the classroom. So the stronger the relationships among the classmates, the more effective and productive the academic communication is. This is probably why, probably, most of the international students answered that they would like something more than just lectures-seminars study, when answering questions about their academic experience. They would prefer to actively participate in debates or discussions during the class. This could be one of the ways of socializing with the classmates.

## **4.8 Validity and Reliability**

“How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln and Guba 1985:290). It is necessary to mention the validity and reliability of this research.

Bryman (2008) writes about the relevance of validity and reliability in qualitative research. Moreover, even writers who do take the view that the criteria are relevant have considered the possibility that the meanings of the terms need to be altered. For example, the validity of measurements, by definition, seems to carry connotations of measurement. Since measurement is not a major preoccupation in qualitative research, the issue of measurement validity might have little relevance (Bryman 2008:376). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and

assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide an alternative to reliability and validity. They propose two primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study: trustworthiness and authenticity.

At the same time, reliability is also fundamentally concerned with issue of consistency of measures (Kleven 2008:63). However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that: “Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]”. Validity is a property of inferences, and the relevance depends on what kinds of inferences were drawn. A self-completion questionnaire was used as a measure in this research. Questions from the Australasian survey of Student engagement (2010) were taken as an example in this research, because the aspects that may affect student’ satisfaction were mentioned in the Australasian survey as well. Some of the questions were taken from that survey and modified to fit with UiO. Since the Australian survey was completed with larger amount of students (30,000 responses from 35 higher education institutions), the questions were considered reliable, and valid for the research of students’ satisfaction with the UiO.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher’s perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. The sample represented in this study is relatively small, that is why it is difficult to claim the validity of the conclusions; and the exploratory purpose of this study does not allow to draw any general conclusions. But even in the small sample of the respondents it is possible to track some tendencies in students’ perception of their educational experience at the UiO, and to test the concepts used in the literature on student’ satisfaction. It would be interesting to see if the academic and social perspectives are really as applicable to the students themselves, as the authors claim in the literature.

Another fact that allows me to say that the research sample is valid, and that further discussion on this topic can be achieved, is because the group of respondents consists of:

- 1) international students of the UiO (which is the main criteria of the sample);
- 2) students that are enrolled in various master programs of the university, which makes the survey reflect the tendency throughout different programs;
- 3) students from different countries, which demonstrates the diversity of students at the UiO.

# 5 Findings

## 5.1 Introduction

This research is focusing on international students' satisfaction at UiO. Among the respondents are students from Eastern Europe, Western Europe, South America, Africa and Middle East. It is possible to notice some slight differences in how students with different cultural background accept the university. The system of education, and the methods they are used to from their home country can affect their expectation from the educational system in Norway. Since all of the students came to Norway to get a Master degree, they should have already attained Bachelor degree comparable to Bachelor degree in Norway. This means that these students have already studied at university, whether in their home country or elsewhere. This also means that they have something with which to compare their educational experience. It goes without saying that each of them had their own expectations from higher education in Norway, at least to some degree. Higher education places a big emphasis on meeting student expectation, but since all people are different, it is impossible to meet each person's expectations. So it is natural that some students would be unsatisfied with one or more aspects of their educational experience. All the respondents had some aspects that they would like to improve and some aspects with which they were completely satisfied.

Also, all the students have their own interest and goals in their studies. That is why it is obvious that the respondents paid attention to the aspects they were interested in and wrote their suggestions on improvements. Some students actively use the library and pay more attention to what it has to offer. Some students use the internet resources more, making the library collection less important to them.

Out of the 15 respondents, 13 are females. It can be a coincidence. Since this study is exploratory, and the sample is a non-probability sample, it means all the respondents were those who were available at the time of research. I have no data to prove whether there are more female international students than male at the UiO, and so I am unable to say that it was NOT a coincidence.

The fact that the study is exploratory, and it is not possible to draw any final conclusions from the findings, still makes it feasible to observe the current attitude of students. The respondents write things they are more concerned about, and would like to change. Some of these aspects are mentioned by several respondents.

## 5.2 The Survey Results

This chapter focuses on the main results of the survey and students' perceptions of experiences with academic and social issues. Therefore the second research question "What factors influence the satisfaction of international students at the UiO, and how" is to be answered in this chapter.

Almost all issues in the questionnaire were answered. In addition, students were given freedom to give any additional comments or suggestions for improvement of any aspect of the university. The respondents were equally active answering about academic, as well as social issues. This can be due to the fact that the dimensions were not clearly defined and many questions could reflect both dimensions. Students' attitudes to their experience at UiO varied from "not satisfied at all" to "very satisfied". The word "satisfaction" was not used in the questionnaire, in order to avoid making any preliminary conclusions. It was only used in the heading. Instead, students were asked to assess or rate the particular aspects defined in the questionnaire. In their additional comments, students did not use the term "satisfaction", but instead wrote their suggestions for improvement, or aspects they would like to positively remark.

The common feature was that almost everybody mentioned something about the methods of teaching and the delivery of the course material. For example:

*"I'm also not satisfied because I think there is no pedagogy: the fact that you may be a great researcher does not mean you can be a great teacher too. Researcher and teacher are not synonyms. You need a good preparation for being both researcher and/or teacher."*

What can it say about international student satisfaction? The fact that students are not satisfied with the teaching methods does not reflect on their overall satisfaction with the university. Despite the fact that additional comments were made, regarding methodology improvement, only three students answered "no" to the following question: "are you satisfied with the methods of instructions that are used during courses?" In addition, regardless of the negative experience with the course methodology, the course content was satisfactory for all the respondents.

Questions about academic experience generated some negative responses. For example, the question “to what extent has the UiO contributed to broad general education and job-related knowledge and skills”, most respondents answered negatively: “very little” or “some”.

*“I really think that there is a huge distance between students and teachers. . . From my point of view, there is a reason why there’s a building calls university, that is, there is reason why the building exists and I’ve seen that the physical place is getting loose since the system is not made for interaction between teachers and students inside this place.”*

Table 3 Profile of the sample

<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Country</b>
Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies	Humanities	Iran
Chemistry	Mathematic and Natural Science	Iran
Software Engineering	Mathematic and Natural Science	Germany
Economics	Social Sciences	Russia
Economics	Social Sciences	Columbia
Language	Humanities	France
Psychology	Humanities	Russia
Molecular Biology	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	Germany
Higher Education (6 responses)	Education	Brazil, Tanzania, Iran, South Africa, Latvia, Russia
Peace and Conflict Studies	Social Science	Iran

Perhaps the reason for not getting enough job-related skills is due to the lack of communication and the “distance” between students and teachers? Perhaps the fact that they obtained sufficient course materials through course compendium and information from the



lecturer is not enough for a person, who wants to be competitive in the labor market? Therefore, the communication during the class as a means of socializing with the academic world can be the key aspect of the academic process. It means that the social dimension is closely associated with the study process.

Students from different study programs participated in the survey. Table 3 demonstrates the profile of the sample. The highest number of respondents was from the faculty of Education. These international students represent different cultures, which can help better understand the needs of students from various backgrounds.

As described in the previous chapter, the questions in the questionnaire reflect two dimensions: academic and social.

## **5.3 Overview of the Answers**

### **5.3.1 Academic Dimension**

Most of the students were quite satisfied with *academic advising* and *quality of instructions*. However, some of the respondents commented that they would prefer to have more interactive discussions during classes, instead of lectures, followed by seminars some days later. Teachers should be more pedagogical and use modern methods of teaching. The main point that was covered was that exercises and workshops during the lectures were preferred to just seminars. Keeping in mind that these are all international students, the importance of communication during classes is an interesting point. Students try to be effective members of the student community, which means they are eager to participate in class discussions, communicating with their classmates, while creating their own educational community.

The idea of a facilitative working group which coordinates relations and invokes debate between the international student body and the host institution is useful. One such example is an infusion approach undertaken in South Australia (Leask 1999). This approach has been developed for the inclusion of international content within the teaching curriculum and methodology. The infusion approach requires that the staff of the institution develop new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

However, on the question about how the students would rate their entire educational experience at the University of Oslo, most of the respondents replied positively: “good” or “excellent”. Only one student answered “fair”. There might be a reason why. This student is

enrolled in the Master program and is struggling with completing her master thesis. It has taken her more than three years- much longer than expected. The overall frustration and fatigue about the academic aspect of her educational experience can be the reason.

As for *feedback and assessment*, some students are missing the feedback on the exams or at least the answers to past exams. They could use this information as a chance to “learn from their own mistakes” and improve their knowledge on the subject.

Mullins et al. (1995) also found out that international students prefer enthusiastic teachers, who have good presentation skills, and provided detailed, regular prompt feedback. East (2001) found similar expectations from international students: quality teaching; responsiveness of the university to their education needs; improvement in their English language skills; and ability to interact with local students.

Also, more communication between teachers and students is wanted.

*“I think there is a problem in multidisciplinary programs, they are like a remote island between 2 beaches; the teaching staff of each major could not be helpful and supportive for my multidisciplinary program; I wanted to contact some of the instructors. . . I think my program supervisors are really busy; it seems they have so much work to do; they may need some help and assistant.”*

Speaking about *student workload*, most of the respondents (9 students) not only study, but also work. The main reason for this is the lack of financial resources. This showed that they spend less time studying. The average amount of study hours for those who work is 4 hours a day. Those students who don't work spend approximately 6-7 hours studying. In the case of Norway, as one of the most expensive countries in the world, many students, domestic and especially international, feel that they have to work in addition to studying. By coming to Norway all applicants are granted a student residence permit and are automatically granted part-time work permission, allowing students to work no more than 20 hours per week. Most students take advantage of this opportunity.

It was observed that there is almost no relationship between being employed and satisfaction. Those students who were employed were not more satisfied than those who were not working. There is no difference between those who took further studies and those who did not.

### 5.3.2 Social Dimension

Part of students' expression of satisfaction is linked to factors not related or partially related to their educational experience itself. There are, for example, students housing characteristics and other student' support services that can influence satisfaction levels. But all available support facilities are designed to make students' academic life easier, and comfortable. On the question regarding accommodation facilities, most students answered "good", and mentioned that there have been some problems either with the facilities of the building or with contacting people responsible for the student housing. For example, some of the buildings must be renovated.

As for the *library facilities*, it has been observed that there were not enough reading places in the library on Blindern campus. Regarding library collection, all the respondents were satisfied and answered with "good" and "excellent". Those who use it appreciate the help of the librarians, even though there are "*not enough of them*". It goes without saying that UiO library is one of the most visited places on campus. It is used for studying as much as it is used for social interaction. There, students can find a quiet environment to prepare for classes; or classmates can meet for a cup of coffee and chat in one of the student cafés. However, according to the questionnaire, there are those who have never used the university library for academic purposes. The reason for this, as mentioned above, is because there is not enough reading room, especially during exams periods. How is it possible to be a student and never attend the library? It can be that many students prefer to surf the internet by using university's remote access to search for books or articles. Most of the students were satisfied with computer facilities, pointing out that there is "*great electronic journal coverage*".

*"The library facilities are very good and the web access (VPN) is especially important for us international students that undertake part of the course abroad."*

As for the *general climate*, students were satisfied with their educational experience at the UiO and would recommend it to others. One out of 15 respondents had a "fair" educational experience and would not recommend the university to others; however, the respondent would recommend it as an experience.

Language- based intercultural contacts turned out to be very important to international students- this helped students socialize in a new environment. Attending Norwegian classes

and participating in various student groups, such as buddy system, helped most of the international students become accustomed to a new country. However, some respondents expressed an interest in social events geared at students, suggesting that these should be advertised online and be accessible even to those, who are not often on campus.

*“I would encourage more intercultural activities that could mix Norwegian and International students maybe as a way to promote Norwegian history, economy, arts, culture, gastronomy, traditions, etc.”*

For new, or less successful students, or those lacking in English skills, there has been a suggestion to organize “academic” buddy -groups.

*“...it would be great to encourage “academic” student buddies who encourage and support students to catch up and have a better study progress.”*

According to Biggs et al. (2001) learning the culture of the host institution is a major element for a successful transition into a new learning environment. The process of enculturation into the academic knowledge and implicit disciplinary know-how is often perceived as unavailable to new students. It is a process which is acquired by trial and error rather than explicit learning (Hellsten 2002).

The respondents who participated in the questionnaire were asked one extra question about their choice of country for their overseas studies. To them, Norway seemed like an attractive choice, because higher education is free, and there are no semester fees. Even the harsh climate conditions did not prevent them from coming to study in Norway.

In order to help students overcome loneliness, it is imperative to develop a social network through a planned buddy system, which would include both domestic and international students (Wang 1993 in Sandhu 1994).

At the start of every academic year, UiO initiates the buddy-system, which helps to introduce the new students to the city of Oslo, the student life and etc. During their first week at UiO “buddies” are the first people that new international students will meet at the university. These may be alumni of the university or current students, who share their impressions about the international students’ life in Oslo. It is important that the “buddies” give a positive first

impression and provide constructive comments about the student life. A “buddy” may very well be a frustrated student, who has not been satisfied with his/her academic experience at the university, but has agreed to participate in the “buddy”-program. According to the questionnaire responses, a week is not a long enough period to get familiarized and become accustomed to the university. Students expressed a desire to have the buddy -system last longer, so that they can receive guidance from more experienced students- “academic buddies”, all throughout the year. This would give “weak students” a chance to “talk to someone” about their studies. The first year is always the most difficult one. Both physical and psychological acclimatization to a new country, climate, and environment is a challenging process. But at the same time, this process is voluntary. People are different - some may feel more comfortable studying alone, while others depend on outside support. Some adapt faster to a new environment, while for others it takes longer time. For some international students, Norway is the first foreign country in which they have studied, outside of their home country. This creates a language barrier, especially if they have never had to use English as their primary study language. Additionally, it is difficult to establish the sense of belonging once in a new country. That is why it is important to have social and academic support, and someone with whom to consult in case of a crisis.

The importance of communication for a better learning environment was underlined in Chapter 2. The integration of international and domestic students, and the communication throughout the academic process, seems to be very important for the students. A new international student can be overwhelmed with the amount of new information and may find it very challenging to cope alone. In addition, the lack of student/teacher communication during classes can add to the overall level of frustration. The student’s first impression, which is very important, can be ruined and they may quickly become disillusioned with the education process. Therefore, the student’s expectations, which were established prior arriving in Norway, may not match the reality he/she faces once at the university. In fact, according to the responses obtained from the questionnaire, international students feel there is a lack of student/teacher communication, as well as international/domestic student communication. This may be a reason why international students feel dissatisfied with one or several aspects of the university.

Since both academic and social dimensions seem to be intertwined, dissatisfaction with the social dimension can lead to dissatisfaction with the academic dimension, and vice versa.

# 6 Final reflections

## 6.1 Introduction

One of the main interests in this research was to see the connection between student diversity and their engagement in the life of the higher education institution. Another point of interest was to observe whether the ethnical background of international students shapes student engagement, satisfaction and gain. Traditionally, students' assessment of teaching has been preferable tool for improving education given at universities and colleges (Saroyan and Amundsen 2001 in Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). One of the findings in this research was that for international students, the quality of teaching, although essential, is not the most important part of their learning experience.

In this chapter I will present some discussions on the results of the survey, in light of the aspects I have discussed in the chapter 3, and in the end I will present some suggestions for changes or improvement.

This study highlighted the importance of ascertaining student' perceptions of their academic and non- academic experience, as it relates to their student life at the University of Oslo.

My research question was formulated as follows:

*What are the underlying theoretical and empirical factors that constitute student satisfaction?*

The overall research question was further divided into following sub-questions:

1.1 What is student satisfaction?

1.2 What factors influence the satisfaction of international students at UiO, and how?

1.3 Are current ways of measuring student satisfaction relevant when higher education becomes more internationalized?

## 6.2 Reflections

The first research sub-question was discussed in Chapter 3, using literature review on students' satisfaction.

Traditionally, the domestic approach dominated the area of student' satisfaction. Nowadays, higher education has become more internationalized. Higher education institutions compete

for students, and that is why attracting and keeping students satisfied may become more important.

Internationalization encompasses international cooperation, such as academic exchanges that pre-date the current era of economic competitiveness that exists between many large higher education systems (Donaghue 2008).

In the literature review chapter, the assumption was presented that student' satisfaction may reflect several perspectives, for example, social and academic. The two perspectives of students' satisfaction were discussed. However, several authors supported the view regarding student' satisfaction as a complex construct. Tinto (1982), for example, was quoted as one of the authors who emphasized that student' integration and retention is based on the relationships between students and institutions. According to my findings, this statement can be questioned. It seems that not only is the student/institution relationship important, but so is the interaction among domestic and international students. Common academic activities are quite important for students to feel welcomed in the student life. Elliott and Shin (2002: 198) stated that "university's product is more than its academic program". I have found that the above statement also reflects in the results of my research.

According to OECD (2011), the number of foreign students enrolled in tertiary education more than doubled since 2000 in many countries. Norway is among them. Over the past three decades, the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million to 3.7 million worldwide. Growth in the internationalization of tertiary education has accelerated during the past 34 years, mirroring the globalization of economies and societies. It has also expanded the capacity at universities (OECD 2011). The fact that Norway does not have tuition fees for international or for domestic students, combined with the availability of programs taught in English, most likely explains the robust growth in the number of foreign students enrolled in the higher education institutions of Norway. In addition, the introduction of tuition fees for international students in Sweden and the economic crisis in some European countries contributed to the increased flow of international students to Norway. But is the absence of the tuitions fees the only reason that attracts and retains students? At the same time, domestic students seem to be able to afford to study abroad, and the main destinations are USA, Germany and France, where tuition fees do exist ([www.siu.no](http://www.siu.no)).

English has become the language of scientific communication. The dominance of English-speaking destinations reflects the progressive adoption of English as a global language. This

fact may encourage non-English speaking countries to establish programs taught in English. Enrolling international students not only can help raise revenues from higher education, but it can be part of a broader strategy to recruit highly skilled immigrants.

The fact that the student body has become more internationalized makes the institutions find new ways to retain students and make sure those international students are satisfied with all aspects of the institution. Elliott and Shin state that globalized competition has stressed the strategic importance of satisfaction and quality in the battle for winning consumer preferences and maintaining sustainable competitive advantages. In this case the concept of “student’ satisfaction” can lean towards a consumer approach of higher education (Barnett 1992 in Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). As it was discussed in Chapter 3, this is the most controversial point of view on students’ satisfaction. This concept can be a “tool for building a bridge between more traditional and academic views on how to improve higher education, and more market-oriented perspectives” (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2002). Even though the approach to students as customers of higher education is the most arguable in literature, the approach might be applicable to international students. They are the main reason higher education has become more internationalized.

Internationalization encompasses students’ exchanges, cooperation between higher education institutions, and increasing the mobility of students and staff. Students with different ethnical backgrounds, habits, educational experiences, and expectations come to the UiO to get higher education. The question is: is it possible to measure satisfaction of such diverse group of students? According to the results of the survey that was conducted in this thesis, the ethnical background does not make any difference in what students want from educational institution. Students from the Middle-East are just as equally satisfied or dissatisfied with aspects of the university, as students from Africa or Western Europe. They came to Oslo open-minded and ready for the challenge of studying in a new country. Learning the culture of the host institution is a major element of a successful transition into a new learning environment (Biggs 2001). These students have made an attempt to adapt to what the UiO has to offer them, regardless of their expectations prior arriving in Norway. At the same time those expectations most likely contributed to the levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of their educational experience. This is the reason why determining international student satisfaction with current measurement methods can become less relevant. Instead of asking



satisfied students, it may be beneficial to ask those who were less satisfied, and had to quit in the middle of their studies.

One of the main focuses of this study was to research issues associated with student diversity and their engagement in the life of higher education institution.

As it was mentioned in previous chapters, student' satisfaction is a complex construct. There are many different definitions of student' satisfaction in literature. Some connect satisfaction with expectations; some define it as students' assessments of the services. But most of the authors use a mix of aspects that may affect students' satisfaction, such as: academic advising, students support services, library facilities, quality of instructions and computer facilities. These aspects were taken into account in the questionnaire. The Australasian survey of student engagement (2010) was used as an example for my questionnaire, where all of the above aspects were taken into consideration when composing the questions. Some questions were taken from that survey and modified to fit the environment at UiO. Since the Australian survey was tested on a larger group of students (30,000 respondents from 35 higher education institutions), the questions were considered reliable, and valid for the research of student' satisfaction at the UiO.

The second research question was addressed in Chapter 5. While enrolled at the university, students pay just as much attention to academics as they do to the social dimension of their student life. These two aspects seem to be intertwined. That is why one of the main findings, based on the comments of the respondents', can be formulated as follows: dissatisfaction with the social dimension can lead to dissatisfaction with the academic dimension and vice versa.

The last question is to be addressed in this chapter. Mavondo (2004) underlines that characteristics of a learning environment, which vary from country to country, must be taken into account when measuring the levels of satisfaction of international students. But if this way of measuring relevant when higher education becomes more internationalized? Not only is students' satisfaction measurable, but so are the ways in which satisfaction can be achieved. The only thing that may be difficult to measure is finding the right mix of aspects that would allow the university to determine whether students are totally satisfied with the educational institution. Student' satisfaction is probably one of the main goals of any institution. But there are many ways of reaching that goal. All students are different, especially when higher education becomes more internationalized. The question if whether social aspect is of the

same importance as the academic aspect in the educational process. Every student has their own demands and expectations from the educational institution. One of the findings in this survey was that the social dimension of the educational process is just as important as the academic dimension, in order for students to be satisfied with their educational experience. Student' satisfaction and integration of international and domestic students are very important for universities. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, satisfied students can provide a competitive advantage for a university, which can be used as its marketing tools. Satisfied students can be the ambassadors for the university, even after the completion of their studies, and their return to the home countries. Satisfied students provide "word-of mouth" publicity by sharing their experiences about the university.

In the Norwegian context, students' satisfaction is similar to that of other countries, but has a number of its own challenges. As opposed to English-speaking countries, Norwegian higher education institutions face additional challenges recruiting international students due to the possible language barrier. Internationalization goals and objectives of the UiO, as well as some of the challenges were addressed in the Chapter 2. For international master students overcoming the language barrier may seem almost unattainable due to the lack of available language courses. The respondents of the questionnaire revealed that students would like to have more social and academic interaction between domestic and international students. Can it then be assumed that knowledge of the Norwegian language would help international students integrate into the Norwegian society? Several respondents answered "yes" to this question. In this case the educational institution has to find ways to integrate academic and social aspects of the educational process, while ensuring that students do not forget the main reason they enrolled in the university, to study.

There is another dilemma in the context of Norwegian higher education: the internationalization process versus the Norwegian language. Since the language of global scientific communication is English, why use the native language for publications? On one hand, language preservation and development is important, but it does not correspond with internationalization trends.

## 6.3 Implications

The findings of this research suggest that international and domestic students are quite similar in terms of what satisfies and dissatisfies them in the process of education. This may have implications of globalization in two areas: the partial disembodiment of institutions from their national contexts, and the growing role of global public and private goods in education and research (Marginson and van der Wende 2007).

If we were to presume that international and domestic students have the same academic expectations, quality of teaching would obviously be one of the main criteria. But as for the social dimension, international students have several suggestions for improvements. Social and academic dimensions seem to be interconnected, and improvement in the social context may enhance students' academic achievement.

Similarities between domestic and international students may have correlation when evaluating students' satisfaction with universities in general. Qualitative research is helpful in evaluating the current situation among the students. Since this study is exploratory, and the main purpose was to get insight into the situation, it is impossible to generalize from it or make any conclusions, but instead make suggestions for further research. This illustrative study was conducted due to lack of information in this field of interest. The next step can be to perform qualitative research with a larger and randomly selected sample of participants. A larger segment of respondents may show a broader picture of international students at the UiO.

## 6.4 Suggestions for Further Research and Development

Hellsten (2002) suggest exploring the international perspective in terms of what the educational offerings mean for these students. In any consideration of the future of higher education, the international and global aspects must be taken into account (Marginson and van der Wende 2007). The fact that global economic competition is seen as knowledge-driven has magnified national policy interest in the sector (Marginson and van der Wende 2007). In order to stand out in the competitive international educational market, universities have to find ways to distinguish themselves from other higher education institutions, to attract potential students. Frequent evaluations of student satisfaction can be helpful in maintaining and improving the quality of universities.

The internationalization agenda is still in its infancy, leaving room for further development and implementation of curriculum planning, design and practice. In addition, Hellsten (2002) encourages taking responsibility for the internationalization of the higher education curriculum (Hellsten 2002).

Kara and De Shields (2004) suggest that the concept of student satisfaction should not be misinterpreted. It should be based on the long-term interests of students and society, and the institutional goals and commitments. It is the quality of the experience and relationship that benefits both a higher education institution and its society. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the student, university, and society.

The global society benefits from a strong educational system. The educational market is becoming more competitive, and institutions are competing for the best students. This is why it is important for students to thrive in the educational institution, and, in turn, the institution should strive to provide its best, both academically and socially. Students attend universities to gain knowledge, and knowledge is a key factor in the development of society.

Further research in this field is needed. In this research only a small sample was analyzed. Perhaps a quantitative study conducted with a larger population of respondents, would allow us to make generalizations and reach some conclusions regarding students' engagement in learning process and satisfaction with their educational institution.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A- Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
<b>UiO</b>	University of Oslo (Universitetet I Oslo)
<b>NOKUT</b>	Norwegian Agency of Quality Assurance in Education (Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet I utdanningen)
<b>SIU</b>	The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Senter for internasjonalisering av høgre utdanning)

## Appendix B- Questionnaire

*Thank you for taking your time for answering my questionnaire. Your answers are very important for my research on students' satisfaction with the University of Oslo.*

# QUESTIONNAIRE

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## Academic processes

### *Quality of instructions and Feedback and assessment*

1) **How would you rate:**

- **The responsiveness of teaching staff to your requests/questions?**

Poor fair good  
excellent

- **The communication between students and teaching staff?** Poor fair good  
excellent

- **The clarity of instructions.** Poor fair good  
excellent

- **Did you get the information you wanted to know during the courses?**

Yes No (explain)

- **Are you satisfied with the methods of instructions that are used during courses?**

Yes No (explain)

### *Academic experiences*

2) **To what extent has your experience at the UiO contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in the following areas?**

- **Acquiring a broad general education** Very little some quite a bit  
very much

- **Acquiring job-related or work-related knowledge and skills**  
Very little some quite a bit very much

- **Writing clearly and effectively** Very little some quite a bit  
very much





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### Computer facilities

8) How would you rate:

- **The University's IT facilities?** Poor fair good  
excellent
- **The access to the computer rooms?** Poor fair good  
excellent
- **The quality of equipment?** Poor fair good  
excellent

### Social Integration

9) To what extent does UiO:

- **Encourage contact among students from different economic, social and ethnic background?** Very little some quite a bit very much
- **Provide the support you need to socialize?**

Very little some quite a bit very much

### If you are an international student

10) **Did you take Norwegian language courses?** Yes No

11) **If yes, did it help you to socialize more and understand Norwegian society?** Yes No

12) **Write what else helped you to socialize?**

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### Campus infrastructure

13) How would you assess :

- **The security on campus?** Poor fair good excellent
- **Your campus infrastructure?** Poor fair good excellent

## Overall learning experience

14) **In this academic year have you seriously considered leaving your current institution? Mark all that apply.**

- No
- Yes, to improve career prospects
- Yes, for academic reasons
- Yes, for another reason, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

- Yes, for convenience or
- Yes, for financial reasons or to reduce study costs
- Yes, to obtain better quality education

**15) What are your plans for the next year? Mark all that apply.**

- Continue with current study
- Move to vocational education and training
- Change to another degree study/qualification
- Shift to another university
- Leave university before finishing the degree
- Leave university having completed the degree/qualification

**16) How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at University of Oslo?**

Poor    fair    good    excellent

**17) If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution (UiO)?**

Yes                  No

**18) Would you recommend the University of Oslo to people who want to apply for degree studies?**

Yes                  No

*General info*

**19) Your gender?**

Male    Female

**20) In what year did you start in the UiO?**

2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011

**21) How many years of your qualification have you completed?**

- None, in first year
- One year
- Two years
- Three years
- More than three years

**22) What is your major area of study (e.g. accounting, education, psychology, law)?**

**23) Your faculty \_\_\_\_\_**

*Suggested improvements.*

**Please take a moment to make further comments or suggestions for improvement of any aspects of UiO mentioned above.**

**Thank you very much for your participation in the survey!**

*All of your answers are confidential, and any information that identifies you will not be shared with anyone. The responses you provide will be used for research purposes only, and when survey results are reported, your answers will be combined with the answers of others so that you cannot be identified.*