

INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT IUP

Megan Bond
Department of Anthropology
Indiana University of Pennsylvania - Epsilon of Pennsylvania

International students from India comprise the largest percentage of all international students studying in the United States (Schukoske, 2007). Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) has over 700 international students representing 75 different countries across the globe, many of them from India. The Eberly College of Business at IUP has strong ties with the Peoples Educational Society in Bangalore, India, drawing large numbers of students to make the journey of approximately 7,000 miles and remain in a new culture until they obtain their degree. This fall, more than 60 students from Bangalore arrived in Indiana to pursue graduate degrees in business (Eberly College of Business and Information Technology). These students having lived in the United States for approximately four months have undoubtedly experienced many changes in their lives from educational aspects to their living arrangements and everyday routines. My research topic focuses on the changes these students undergo as they transition from life in India to Indiana. I assume that these students have employed various methods to ease their adjustment to living and working in a different culture, especially through social ties to other Indians at IUP and organizations such as the Indian Student Association and the Office of International Affairs. I would like to examine the differences in responses between male and female Indian international students regarding differences in class styles, living arrangements, and social lives and the changes these differences may reflect.

My hypothesis is that there will be marked differences in the educational and living and social arrangements of the Indian international students between IUP and India. These international students have moved thousands of miles away from their home nation in pursuit of an education. Living in a different culture for an extended period of time, the students would undoubtedly face issues of adjustment. The transition between India and Indiana poses challenges to the lifestyles that these students are accustomed to living at home. In regard to their education, my hypothesis is that the Indian students will find more flexibility in their education at IUP based on the assumption that the curriculum in India would tend to be more prescribed and that the class styles would reflect a different cultural work ethic. I speculate that this cultural work ethic would involve a greater amount of academic responsibility and homework and more lecture-based classes marked by a distance between professor and student. In their living arrangements, I

hypothesize that a majority of the students have not lived outside of their family home before moving to the United States. Socially, it is my conjecture that these Indian international students would make their closest social connections in the United States among themselves. This idea is based on my casual observations of Indian students in the Copper Beech housing development, where I have seen groups of Indians socializing together on many occasions.

Furthermore, I hypothesize that there will be a difference between the responses of male and female Indian international students in some aspects of their transition from their life in India to life in the United States, notably in the category of living arrangements. My assumption is that females are more likely to have a smoother adjustment to living independently from their families because of possible past involvement with household responsibilities in their homes in India. I presume that these women would be more closely connected to household activities in comparison to their male counterparts, who seem more likely to be removed completely from such domestic responsibilities. The fact that the male and female students are both attending IUP for similar educational experiences reveals that both sexes would have had a comparable educational background in India which would not lead to significant differences in their responses regarding differences in class styles based on sex. Their social arrangements in the United States are also likely to be related, regardless of sex, because of their shared experience of migrating to a new culture in pursuit of an education.

The population I researched is comprised of these described of international students from India, especially focused on those that have arrived in the United States approximately four months ago. To obtain a sample of this population, I spoke to some of the students with whom I am personally acquainted to gain personal contacts. I began correspondence with the current president of the Indian Student Association (ISA) and was able to make additional connections to Indian international students through this social organization.

The sample with which I conducted my research was located entirely through these personal contacts which then led to a snowball sample. Through connections that I made with four Indian neighbors that had recently arrived from Bangalore and the president of the ISA, I located thirty-five other Indian international students that were willing to complete a questionnaire about their experiences. My sampling frame was able to grow considerably because of the recommendations of the five initial informants.

My primary method of data collection will be the utilization of a four-page questionnaire to determine background information about these students' past experiences, and questions pertaining to their education, living arrangements, and

social lives both in India and Indiana. I distributed them to forty Indian international students between the dates of the 12th and 16th of November. On the 26th of November, these questionnaires were collected and thirty-one (77.5%) of them were completed. One informal interview was scheduled and completed with a 23-year-old male from Bangalore on the 6th of December.

The analysis of my data was a qualitative analysis of the personal experiences of the students drawn from their responses to the questionnaire and the informal interview. The respondents' answers on the questionnaire revealed the information presented and served as evidence for the confirmation or negation of the hypotheses.

Demographic Results

There were thirty-one respondents. Of these, 18 were male and 13 were female, a population that is 58% male and 42% female. The population was composed entirely of graduate students. The majority (68%) were between the ages of 22 and 25. In the male population, 72% fell within this age range. A slight majority of females (53%), however, reported being in the younger age range of 18 to 22. Most have been living in the United States between 3 and 6 months. 72% of the males and 100% of the female respondents have been living in Indiana for this period of time.

Educational Aspects

There was not a significant difference among the Indian international students' duration of IUP education. 45% reported that they will be studying at IUP for the duration of the graduate degree while 39% are attending IUP for only an academic year. The remaining 16% are at IUP for only the Fall 2007 semester.

The main reasons to the students' choice to attend IUP were split between IUP having a relationship with their educational institution in India and an international exchange or study abroad program. Twelve students (approximately 39%) selected each of these reasons to explain their choice. The remaining students chose the "Other" category of the questionnaire, writing in responses that included preferences for IUP's accreditation with The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and the low-cost of an IUP graduate education.

The top academic specializations for these Indian international students are found within the Eberly College of Business and Information Technology. Approximately 90% of all respondents are members of Eberly College. Notably,

the all of the female respondents belong to this College. Finance is the top major for both sexes with other business specializations being highly significant among this student population. The main draw for Indian students at IUP is the business curriculum. The fundamental explanation for this trend is related to the strong ties that the Eberly College of Business and Information Technology has with the Peoples Educational Society in Bangalore, India.

Figure 1

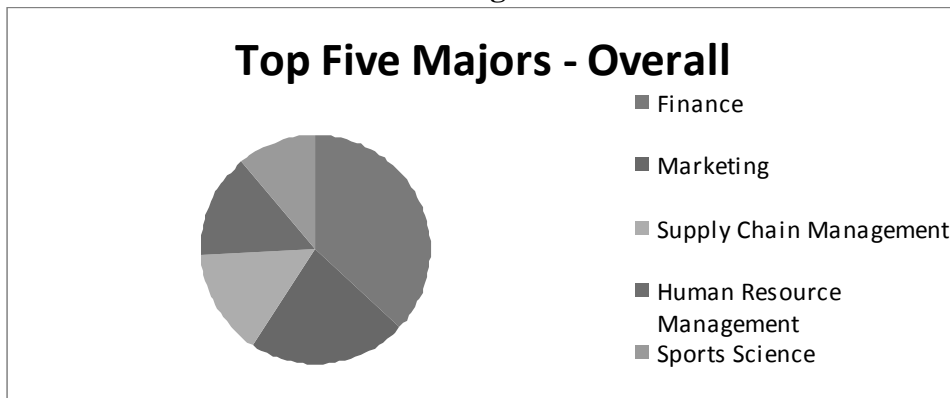


Figure 2

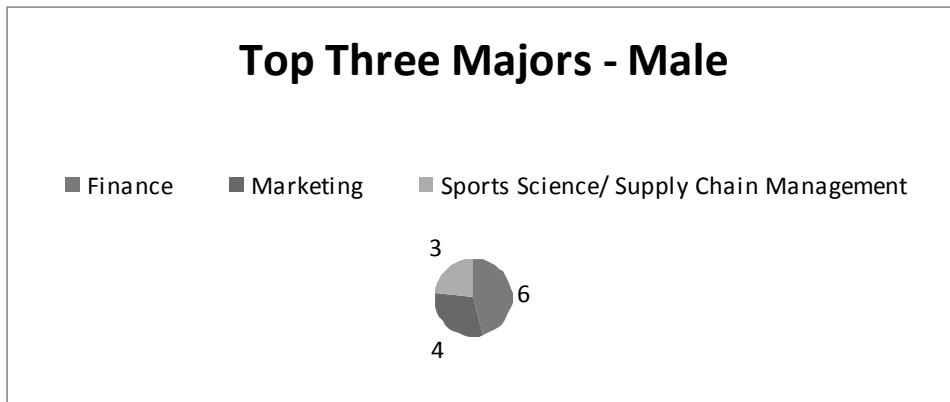
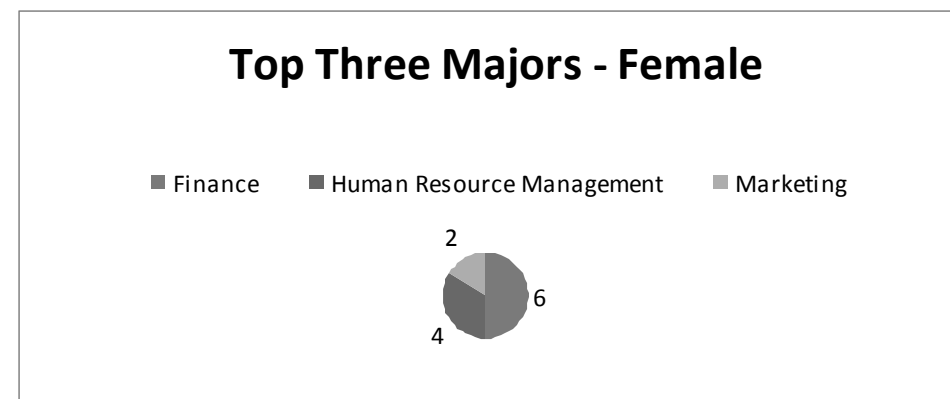


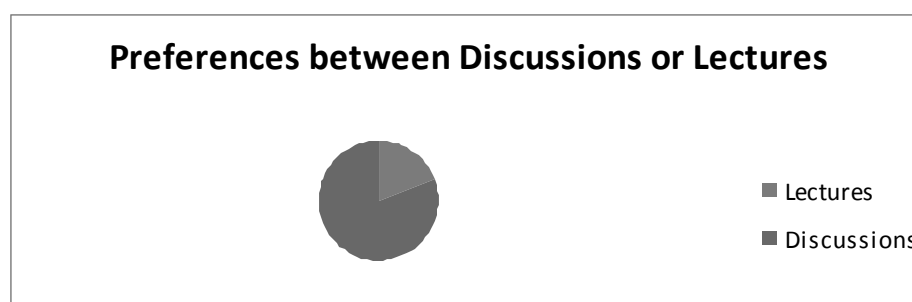
Figure 3



All of the Indian international students responding to the questionnaire earned their undergraduate degrees at an Indian educational institution. Therefore, each of them is experiencing American styles of education for the first time. More than half (18 students) of the respondents agreed that there are significant differences between styles of class instruction in India and at IUP. In response to an open-ended question on this topic, the Indian students stated that classes at IUP are more practice-oriented than those they had taken in India. They emphasize the importance placed on group projects and teamwork-oriented exercises, interactive lectures, and presentations at IUP. The students also mentioned the flexibility of the classes that they experience at IUP. One respondent stated that classes at IUP seem “more customized to extract the most out of students.” They find the professors at IUP to be “more approachable” and more likely to encourage class discussions.

When asked whether they preferred classes based on lectures or discussions, approximately 80% (25 students) answered that they had a preference for discussion-based classes. 74% of the students agree that classes at IUP are more discussion-based than classes in India. Male students tend to favor discussion-based classes more than their female counterparts. 89% of males reported a preference for discussions. A smaller majority (69%) of females shared this preference.

Figure 4



Responses regarding other differences in their education between India and Indiana in the areas of the importance placed on tests, class sizes, the importance of class attendance, and the amount of homework assigned were not as significant as the preference for discussion-based classes.

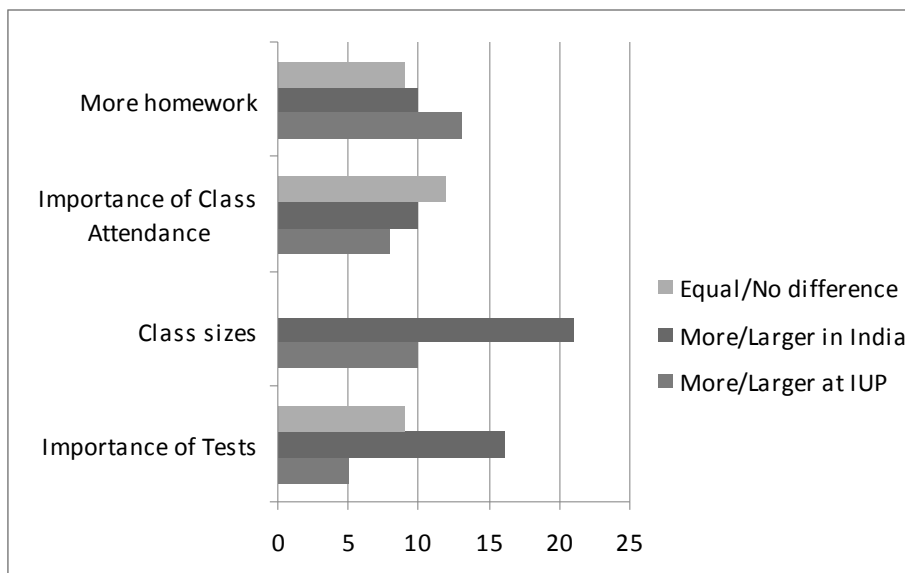
In regard to the importance placed on tests, responses among the female respondents indicated that the differences noted were insignificant. The largest percentage of females (only 38% or five students) specified that there is more

importance placed on tests in India. Among males, however, the responses were more considerable with 61% (11 students) agreeing that tests are given more importance in India. In total, 52% find that more importance is placed on tests in India with 29% claiming that there is no difference between the two nations and 16% believed that tests were given more importance at IUP. Overall, the conclusion is that tests are given slightly more importance in India. Some explanations for this opinion were expressed by the respondents' answers to open-ended questions regarding differences between education in India and at IUP. One student wrote that exams are comprehensive in India and IUP exams tend to be given at certain intervals covering only the determined material. Another student noted that open-book exams are entirely new to him and did not exist during his education in India.

The responses to the question of whether India or IUP had smaller class sizes had the opposite effect of the preceding question. Among the male population, the distribution of responses between the two options was relatively equal with the option that there are smaller class sizes at IUP at 56% (10 students) and smaller classes in India at 45% (8 students). Conversely, among females 85% (11 students) stated that class sizes at IUP are smaller than class sizes in India. In total, the responses of the questionnaire convey that approximately 68% (21 students) think that IUP offers smaller class sizes.

In regard to the amount of homework and the importance of class attendance, differences in responses by both sexes were insignificant and almost equally distributed among the three responses.

Figure 5



Life in Indiana

For nearly every Indian international student included in these results (97% or 29 students), their move to the United States marked the first time that they had ever been to this country. Just two of the respondents, both male, had traveled to the United States in the past.

All of the respondents live in the Copper Beech residential community, where they create an enclave for Indian students. Possible explanations for the popularity of Copper Beech townhomes and apartments include the listing for Copper Beech on the website of the IUP Indian Student Association, the website of Copper Beech complete with up-to-date information on amenities, leases, policies in addition to pictures of their properties, the amenities that Copper Beech provides including full sets of furniture and appliances, and the high capacity of the Copper Beech community which can accommodate many students. The group of Indian international students in this research population lives among each other in this community, almost entirely living with only Indian housemates. Only one student in the population does not live with all Indian housemates. Approximately 65% of these students were acquainted with their current housemates in India. The other students met their Indian housemates in other ways such as Internet communities (12% or 4 students) or at IUP (10% or 3 students).

Most (95% or 17 students) of the male Indian students had lived outside of their family home before attending IUP. Conversely, only 39% of the female Indian students have previous experience with living on their own. As a result of this significant difference, the two sexes have experienced different degrees of adjustment to life in Indiana. The majority of females not only has to make the transition to living within a new culture but must also adjust to life outside of their family homes. The female Indian students cite responsibilities for cooking and doing household chores as the most notable differences in their lifestyle between India and Indiana. Another significant difference relates to the amount of freedom that the females feel they are experiencing for the first time.

The male population, however, has more familiarity with living independently. This experience is reflected in their responses. The males wrote about more broad differences between the cultures of the United States and India. The top difference that they cited involves "different standards of living" between the two societies as the most important difference in their living arrangements. Their past knowledge of living outside of their family home is also suggested by their responses that leases are more flexible in India. Other

reasons they mention include lower rent costs in India and the ease of procuring the proper ingredients for cooking in their home country.

Language

Most Indian international students at IUP report that they never have difficulty understanding the English that their professors and fellow students use. Twenty-three (74%) of the respondents shared this view. Males and females have similar perspectives on this issue with 73% of males and 77% of females reporting that they never have difficulty with English comprehension. The explanation for the high degree of their command on the English language lies in India's colonial past. A former British colony, English is a language that unifies a linguistically diverse nation and provides the opportunity for its citizens to easily participate in the global economy. The majority of the students have been taught primarily in English for over a decade. Nearly 80% (25 students) of the respondents indicated that the language of instruction of their education has been English for this amount of time. The shortest amount of time that all of a student's courses have been taught in English is reported as 1-3 years. Only one student has had such limited experience with English as the primary language of instruction. The other 16% (5 students) have been taught only in English for the past 3-10 years.

In their personal lives and among their Indian friends, the students indicate that they use both their native language and English regularly. Eighteen respondents (58%) prefer to use the two languages interchangeably among their bilingual friends. The largest group of males (13 students or 73%) speak both languages regularly. The female respondents report that they prefer speaking English among friends (62% or 8 students). The reason for this difference between the two sexes is unclear.

Social Ties to Indians and Indian Culture Locally and Globally

Twenty-two (71%) of the Indian international students in the research population revealed that most of their friends in Indiana are also Indian. Males (61% or 11 students) and females (77% or 10 students) have a group of friends that is mostly Indian. A great majority, 30 of 31 respondents, are involved in the Indian Student Association. The goal of this organization is to support Indian international students, promote friendships, and provide advice (IUP OHRL). Nineteen students (approximately 61%) use the services of the Office of International Affairs, the IUP office providing assistance to IUP's over 700 international students. Some of the students also engage in activities that they enjoyed in India. Most females (69% or 9 students) report that they do not partake in

organized Indian cultural activities in Indiana. Slightly more than half (56% of 10 students) of the male research population does participate in cultural and recreational activities at IUP. Of these 10 male students, 8 play in a cricket league together. Other activities include India Day, the largest event held by the Indian Student Association annually, and other cultural events.

Despite the more than 7,000 miles separating the Indian international students and their family and friends, a majority of the students indicate that they communicate with people at home in India through telephone, e-mail, and other forms of internet communication a few times a week. In the overall research population, approximately 52% of the students communicate with people in India at this frequency. Many of the males (61% or 11 students) connect with family and friends at home at the rate of a few times a week. Females are more likely (62% or 8 students) to contact people in India almost daily.

Although technology exists that can allow the Indian international students to reach people at home on a regular basis, there are many aspects of the lives in India that cannot be experienced in Indiana. In an open-ended question regarding things the students miss most about India there were a variety of responses. The thing that most Indian students at IUP found that their lives in Indiana were missing was genuine Indian food. According to 23 respondents, Indian food was a major component of their lives at home that they miss intensely. Across both sexes, food was the most frequently cited thing. In an interview with a 23-year-old male student from Bangalore, he revealed that he and his roommate have taken a taxi to an Indian store in Pittsburgh. On their last trip, they spent nearly \$400 on their bill and brought home many cooking necessities including 120 pounds of rice, spices, teas, and jars of chutney imported directly from India.

Students also commonly report missing family and friends. One respondent wrote that the thing she missed most about India was "the fact that I'm in a place that's MINE." Indiana and India have significant differences with which the students continue to cope. The Indian international students at IUP have been engaged in the process of adjusting to life in Indiana for several months. The changes they undergo are made more tolerable by their connection to their homes and their cultures. Their Indian friends, customs, social networks and the creation of their enclave at Copper Beech contribute to making a difficult adjustment more tolerable.

The fact that these Indian international students have experienced many changes in most aspects of their lives over the past few months leads to the conclusion that there are marked differences in the styles of education, living arrangements, and social ties for Indian students. Educationally, the students are

currently engaged in graduate programs that are likely to be more practice-focused and oriented towards class participation. The hypothesis that Indian classes would be more lecture-based in comparison to those at IUP is supported by the responses. That classes at IUP would be seen as more flexible than classes held in India is also supported by the open-ended responses written by several students without prompts on the topic. Indian classes requiring more homework than classes at IUP was an assumption that is not supported by the respondents. There is no significant conclusion regarding the location where more homework is assigned. Males and females tend to agree on the topics related to education. They have similar educational histories and are pursuing the same education; therefore, they are inclined to have responses that are generally alike. In the perception of the population, responses indicate that classroom dynamics comprise the most significant differences in education between India and Indiana.

The hypothesis that the Indian international students would be largely living outside of their parents' home for the first time is unsupported by the responses. The majority of males, who tend to be slightly older than the females, have experience with living outside of their family home and their responses regarding differences in living arrangements reflect their familiarity with independent living. Females, conversely, are more likely to be living outside their family home for the first time. This clear dissimilarity between the sexes supports the hypothesis that the male and female Indian international students would have differences in their responses, especially related to living arrangements. Females, tending to be younger than their male counterparts, have little experience with household responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning and cite these responsibilities as the biggest change in their living arrangements since they moved to Indiana. The hypothesis that the females would have more domestic ability and an easier adjustment to living in the United States because of their learned skills was false. The Indian females studying at IUP are most likely to be from middle-class families that can afford to hire domestic help. Therefore, these students were probably not required to learn to cook or clean and never needed to until they arrived in Indiana. The males, with more experience outside of their family home, do not mention cooking or cleaning responsibility as a new issue that they have to deal with in Indiana. Living arrangements is the research category with the most notable variation between the sexes.

The hypothesis that the Indian international students are likely to have their closest social bonds with other Indians is supported by the evidence. Indian students report that "most" of their friends in Indiana are also Indian. All of the students, save one, live in an entirely Indian household. Equally high proportions of Indian students are members of the Indian Student Organization, a cultural resource designed to forge connections between Indians at IUP and ensure a source

of social support and cultural celebrations. The fact that many Indian students knew their Indian housemates when they were back in India makes their associations stronger because of the direct ties to their homes. Males and females are similar in this regard, probably due to the similarity of their collective experience.

Past experience emerges as the most important predictor for perceived differences between India and Indiana between the sexes. Males and females in this research population share comparable educational, social, and cultural backgrounds that provide responses that tend to be close to one another in these categories. Males and females differ in past experience in the category of living arrangements, and that category represents the most significant changes between India and Indiana for the entire population as well as the most significant differences between the sexes.

The most important discovery of this research is centered on the Indian student enclave at Copper Beech. The Indian international students have created their own community within Indiana where they are able to maintain social and cultural ties to India and provide support for one another as they undergo the same adjustment. They have their own distinct community in which they can converse in Kannada, organize games of cricket, or devise plans for acquiring their favorite Indian spices. Their enclave is a fascinating example of the importance of maintaining cultural connections.

Bibliography

Eberly College of Business and Information Technology. "Eberly Builds Partnership with Bangalore, India." News for Alumni and Friends. 25 October 2007 <<http://www.iup.edu/news/alumni/ecobit/>>.

Office of Housing and Resident Life. "Cultural Resources." 2 October 2007 <http://www.iup.edu/house/apfa_2004.shtm>.

Schukoske, Jane E. "Backgrounder: Students from India." Institute of International Education. 25 October 2007 <<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=25086>>.