



Student Services and Study Environment at SLU

Results from an Inquiry to International Students at Masters' level

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Introduktion

In order to improve the study environment, SLU regularly surveys the social situation for students at the university. Three surveys have been done so far, but this is the first time an English version is submitted. The English version addresses non-native students at all campuses within SLU: i.e. students at master level where International students are the prime target group. The questions posed are just slightly adapted to the International target group in order to allow comparisons with the answers from the Swedish students. The areas covered are student work load, equal opportunities and student services at the university.

The survey is submitted on the Internet simultaneously at SLU:s four campuses. (In 2010, the questionnaire was open for three weeks in April.) The purpose is to get an overall view of the social situation regarding matters that can be improved by the university. Therefore, no detailed questions about grants, loans or housing facilities are posed, even though these factors are very important for students' performance. The survey is in broad outline and aims at discover insufficiencies; therefore further investigations may be an outcome.

Hopefully, the university will learn more about foreign students' expectations and experiences of their studies at SLU. However, the results of inquiries like this are always under the influence of zeitgeist, and single incidents can make disproportionate big impact, due to bad timing.

The presentation starts with a description of the typical International and Swedish student respectively followed by the results for each question.

This is an international student at SLU 2010:

The typical international student at SLU is a male, 25-30 years old coming from Asia or Africa and studying at SLU Uppsala (according to these 193 respondents). He has got too much to do, due to demanding studies, but at the same time he describes his workload as "overall reasonable". He would like to have a part-time job during the semesters, and his (few) written comments tell us that he think it is expensive in Sweden and that he would have expected more student benefits, such as discounts on buses and services from the university regarding for example housing.

The atmosphere in his group of students is good, the average student has not met derogatory comments or discrimination. But it seems like the information is lacking; he is neither familiar with the law of non-discrimination nor the Student Health Care Center.

When he has thoughts of leaving Sweden, changing university or education, it is due to his economic situation. At the top of his wish-list of Student services at SLU comes Career advice, followed by an International Students' help-desk. He would also like some activities for International students within the Student union. According to his view, students' different needs and background have to be taken better into account. His comments tells us that he feels frustrated when he get e-mails from the university or from the student union in Swedish only, and he would like SLU to have more information in English available.

This is a typical Swedish student at SLU 2010

According to the results of the Swedish enquiry, the typical Swedish student is a female, she is younger than her International student mate; 22-24 years old. She does not to the same extent as the international students have “too much to do”, and if so, it is more due to mandatory moments than demanding studies, it is also more common for her to have time consuming hobbies that takes time from her studies. Compared to her international student mate, she would not to the same extent like to have a part-time job,

She thinks that the atmosphere in the student group is good, and she has not been exposed to derogatory comments. She is content with her education and the university. She would like to have more student-counselling and she thinks that the university should do more in order to take students views into account.

The comments from the Swedish students are not as clear-cut as those made by the international students. One reason is of course the larger amount of comments in Swedish. An explanation may be that Swedish students have the advantage by expressing themselves in their native tongue, whilst most of the international students write their comments in their second language, which may have a repressing effect.

The students

After excluding duplets and administrators testing answers, 183 respondents remained; 120 men and 63 women. During spring 2010, there were totally 340 students enrolled at the English Masters’ programs. The answering frequency is consequently 53 percent, as can be expected from web-based questionnaires. Most of the students in this survey are 25 or older, which is obvious due to the fact that they are studying at advanced level.

International students age

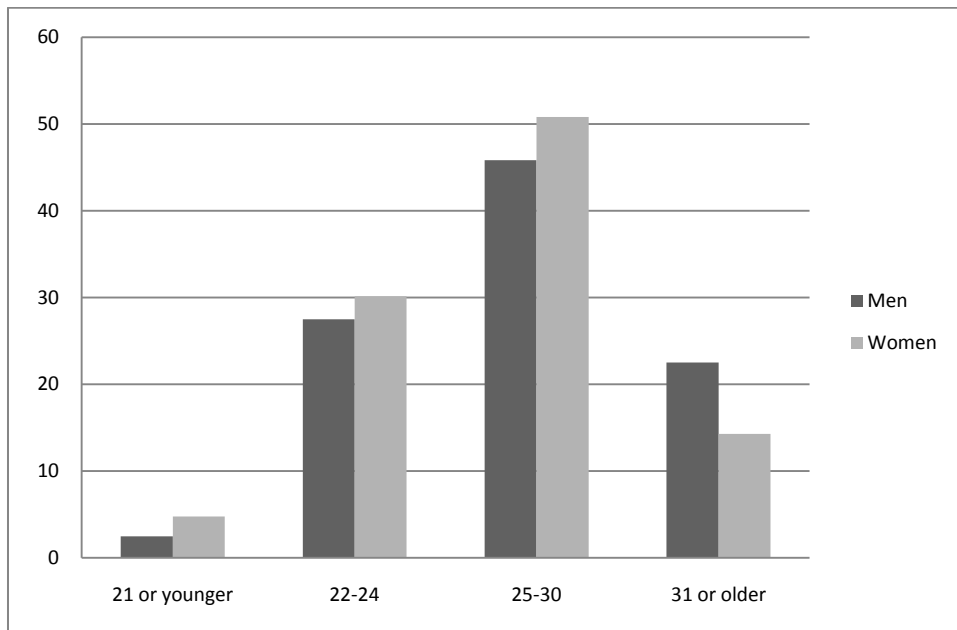


Fig 1 How old are you (Percent)

Where do they come from

As presented below, most of the international students come from Asia. It is worth noticing that most students from Asia and Africa are men, while the majority of students from the different European countries are women. This is of course an expression of traditions and culture. This is the last year Swedish Higher education is free for students from non EU-memberstates, the diagram below implies that a decline in the number of International students at SLU is to be expected.

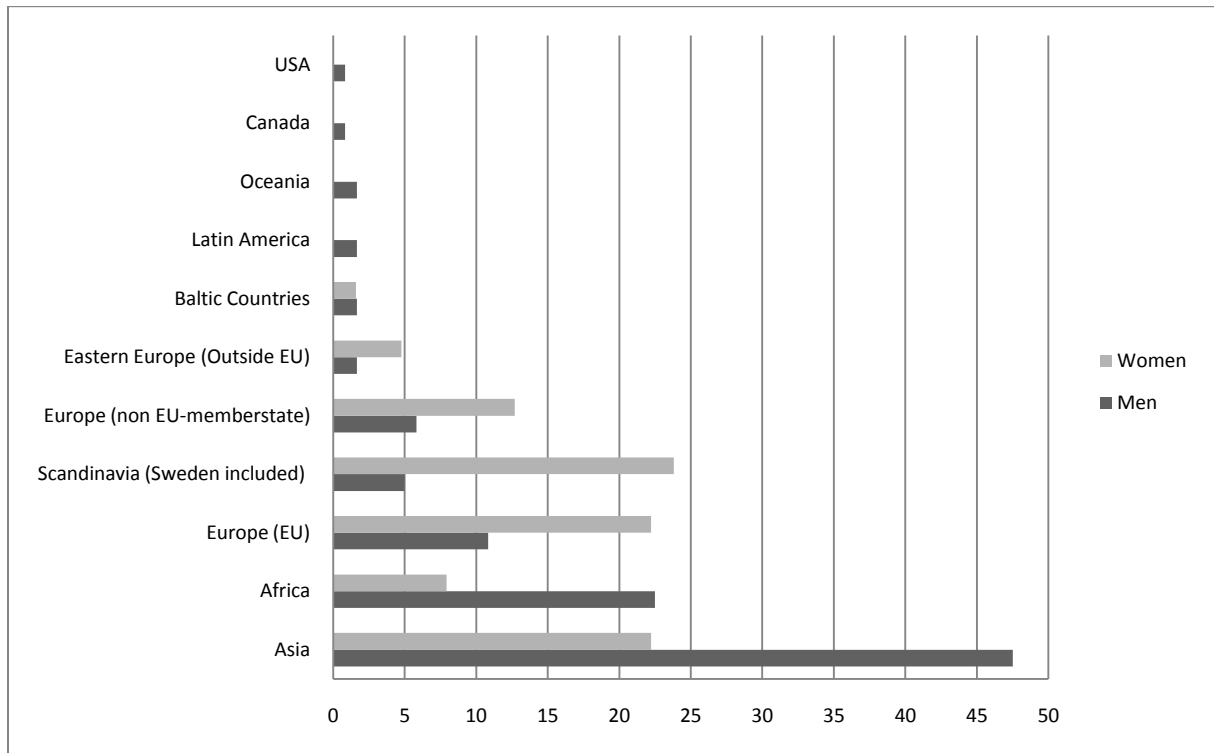


Fig 2 Where do you come from? (Percent)

What takes time from studies

It seems to be the studies per se that keep the International students busy. It is worth noticing that women to a higher extent than men answer that they have time consuming hobbies or a family situation that takes time from their studies.

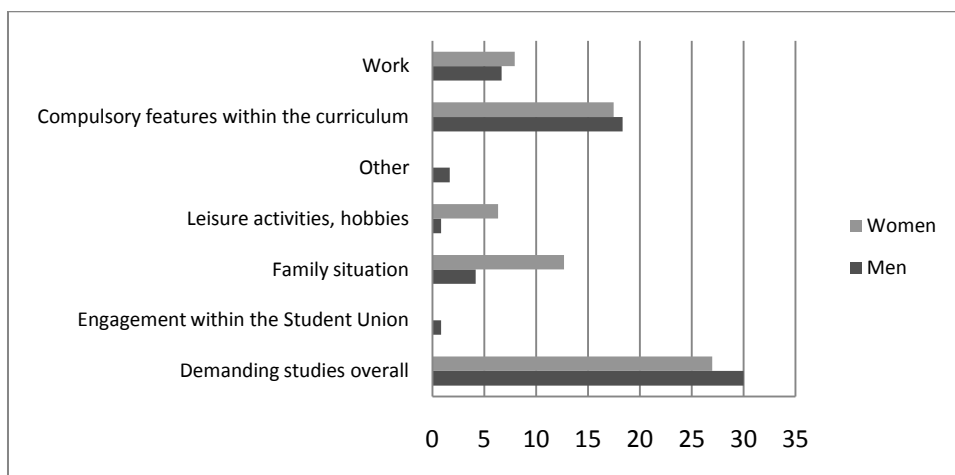


Fig 3 If you have too much to do is that due to any of the following reasons? (Percent)

The question about why the students have too much to do is one of few where there are differences between International and Swedish answers. Activities within the student union and leisure activities seem to be more common among Swedish students. It can also be noticed that some of the written comments in English indicate that the International students would like activities arranged by the Student Union addressed to them.

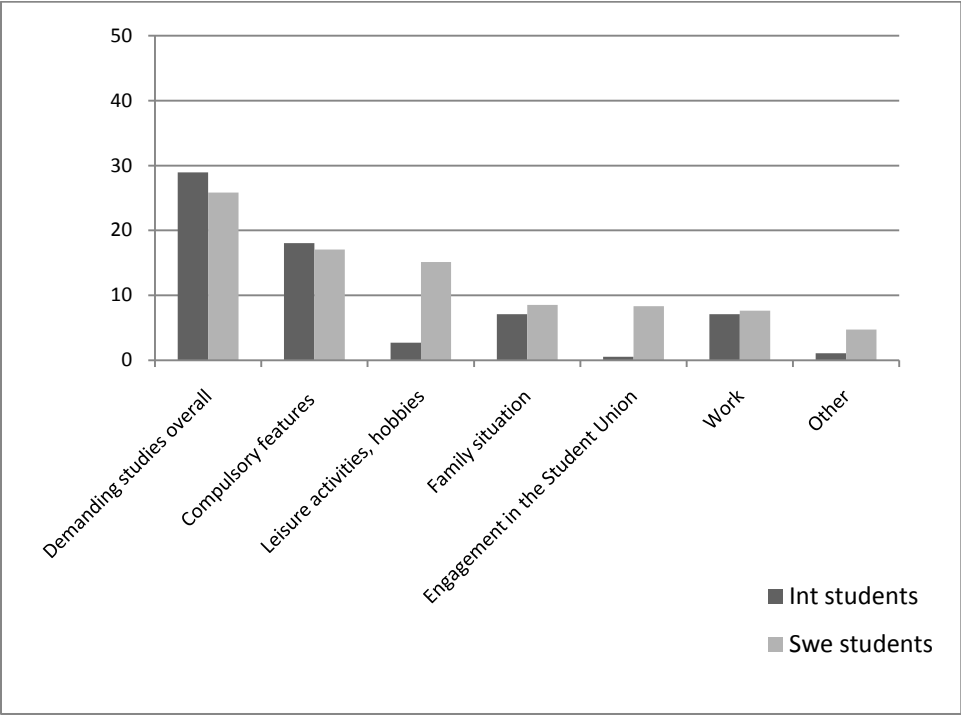


Fig 4 International and Swedish students compared (Percent)

Workload

As presented below, international students think that their workload is “overall reasonable” or “varies a lot between courses”. According to these answers, the international students’ perceptions of their workload seem to be equal between men and women. This is not the case for Swedish students; there are differences between the Swedish male and female students’ perception of their workload that can not only be explained by their different choice of programs. We do not have any data, nor can we find anything in the written comments that explains this difference.

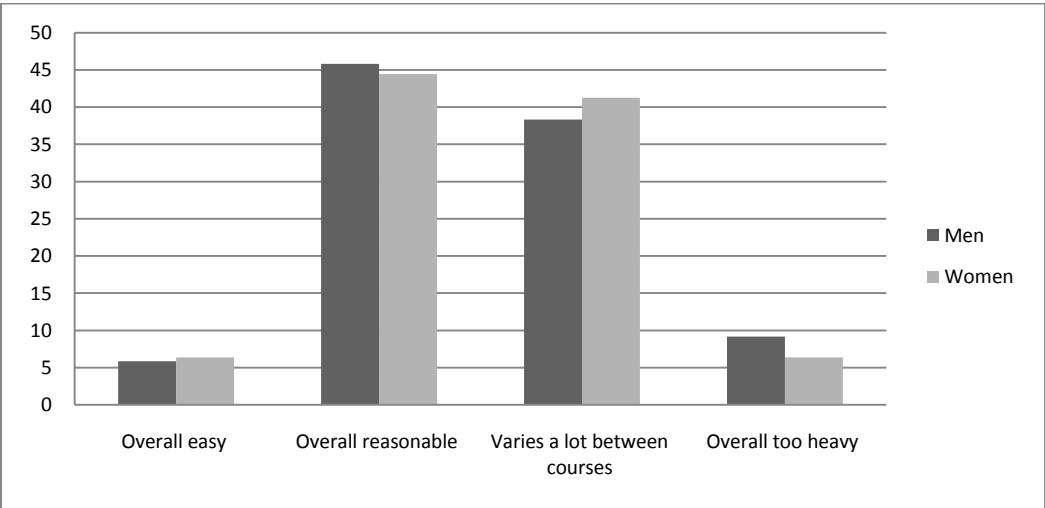


Fig 5 How would you describe your workload? (Percent)

Parttimework among international students

Compared to the answers in the Swedish questionnaire, it is more common among the International students to answer that they *would like* an extra job during semesters. It is also more common among female than male students to work during semesters, a difference not exposed in the Swedish results. It is worth noticing that female international students more often come from European countries.

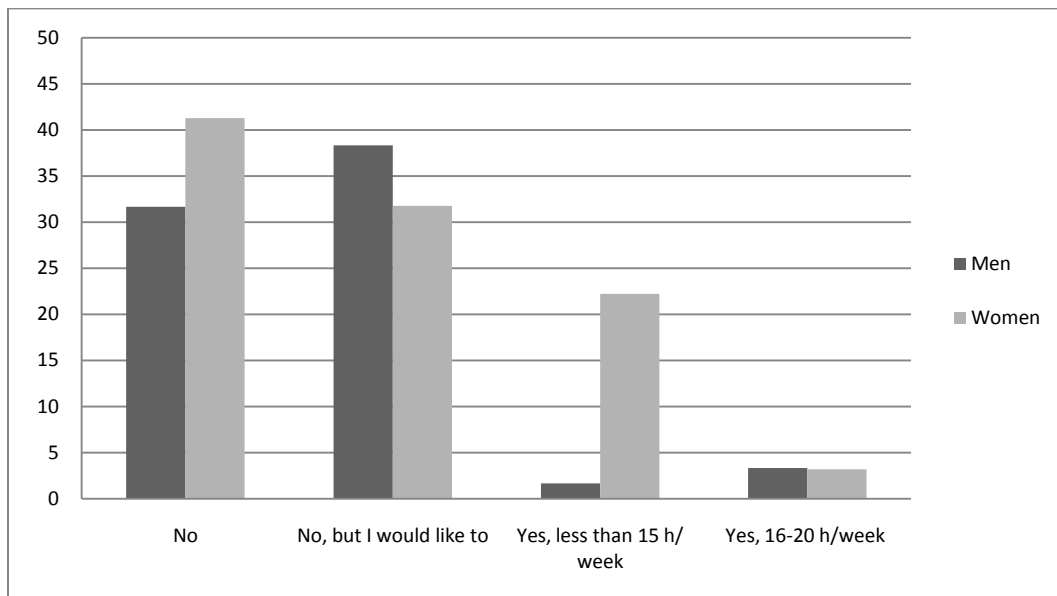


Fig 6 Are you working (parttime) outside your studies (during the semester)? Percent

Are the students considering to change education or abandon their studies?

Some of the undergraduate programs at SLU have had an examination rate lower than expected. Different investigations have been done in order to find out why and when students quit their education. Therefore, questions about abandon the studies, and the possible reasons for doing so are posed in this query as well. It should be pointed out though, that the examination rate is not strikingly low among International students. It is more common among international students to consider leaving SLU for another university in another country.

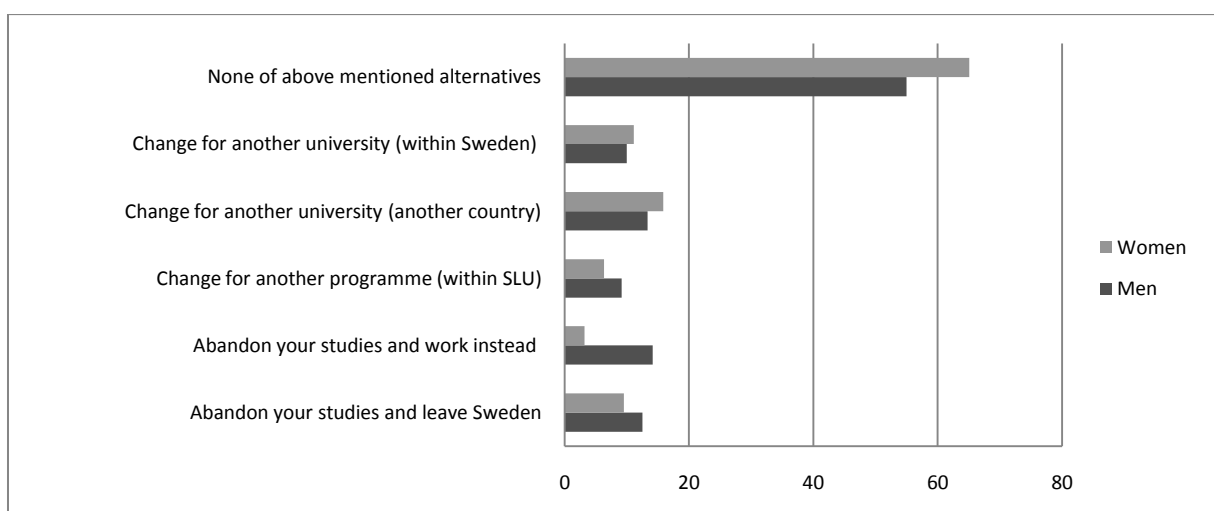


Fig 7 Have you seriously considered any of the following alternatives? (percent)

To the international students, an additional question about reasons for leaving Sweden was included. However there are not many students who consider leaving Sweden. The most common reason for considering leaving Sweden are “economic”, followed by “personal reasons”. Among those students who have answered that they have seriously considered abandon their studies, students from Asia have to the greatest extent answered that the reasons for this are economic.

Reason/ Country	Economic	Personal	Education has not met my expectations	Other
Africa	5	8	3	2
Asia	19	8	6	7
Eastern Europe (Outside EU)	1	0	1	0
Europe (EU)	1	3	1	1
Europe (non EU-memberstate)	2	1	0	0
Oceania	1	0	0	0
Latin America	0	2	0	0
Scandinavia (Sweden included)	0	1	1	3
Total number:	29	23	12	13

Fig 8 Number of students, reasons for leaving Sweden by country.

Health problems related to the study situation

The arrangements for Student Health Care vary between the different campuses at SLU. In order get a picture of student needs and see if their needs are met, some questions concern the students’ health and if they have been provided with information about the Student Health Care Centre. The question posed is if the students have felt any physical or mental symptoms that they (themselves) relate to the study situation. The pattern concerning students’ health is the same as among Swedish students, more women than men have answered that they have these kinds of problems.

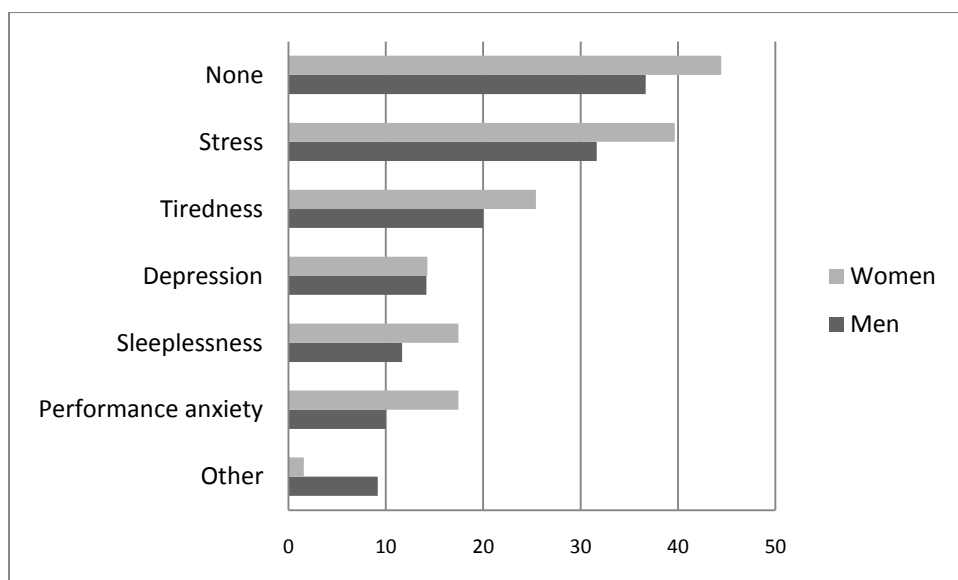


Fig 9 Have you had any health problems related to your study situation ?(Percent)

The question concerning the Student Health Care was slightly modified compared to the corresponding questions in the Swedish version. The reason was that it was judged more essential to know to what extent the given information has gotten through to this group.

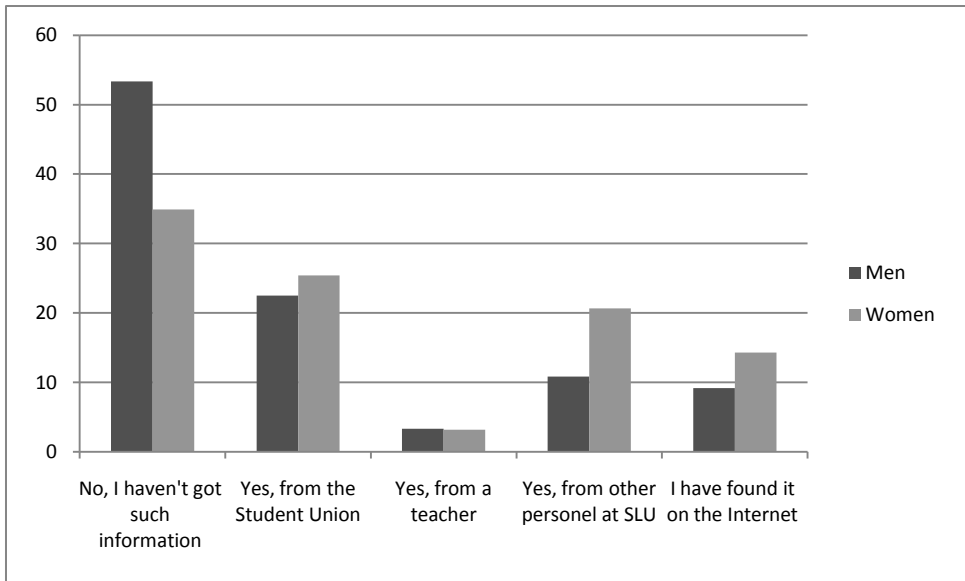


Fig 10 Have you been provided with information about the Student Health Center? (studenthälsan) Percent

Discrimination or other improper behaviour

According to the answers, there are not many students who have noticed, or been exposed to, improper behavior in general. However, the proportion of students who have noticed discrimination or derogatory comments according to ethnic background is larger than among the Swedish students. The written comments refer to situations where non-european students feel discriminated or situations where they have been talking to each other about assumed discrimination. Participating in different kinds of projects, teachers' grading, comments from teachers or other students are some examples mentioned. No students at all have answered that they have noticed improper behavior according to sexual orientation or disability.

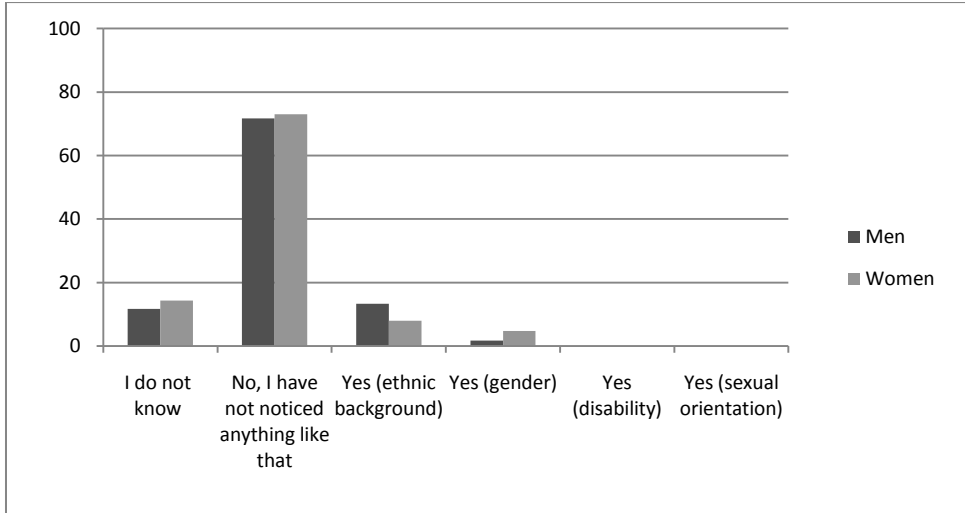


Fig 11 Have you noticed any form of derogatory comments, harassment or discrimination?

Student services

The question about student services is difficult to interpret, because it is easy to wish more of anything connected to service. Perhaps it is relevant to notice within what areas most students would like more and at the same time look at the proportion of students who “don't know” or think the university

provides adequate service. The two areas where International students think SLU:s services are insufficient or lacking are Career advice and an International students help desk.

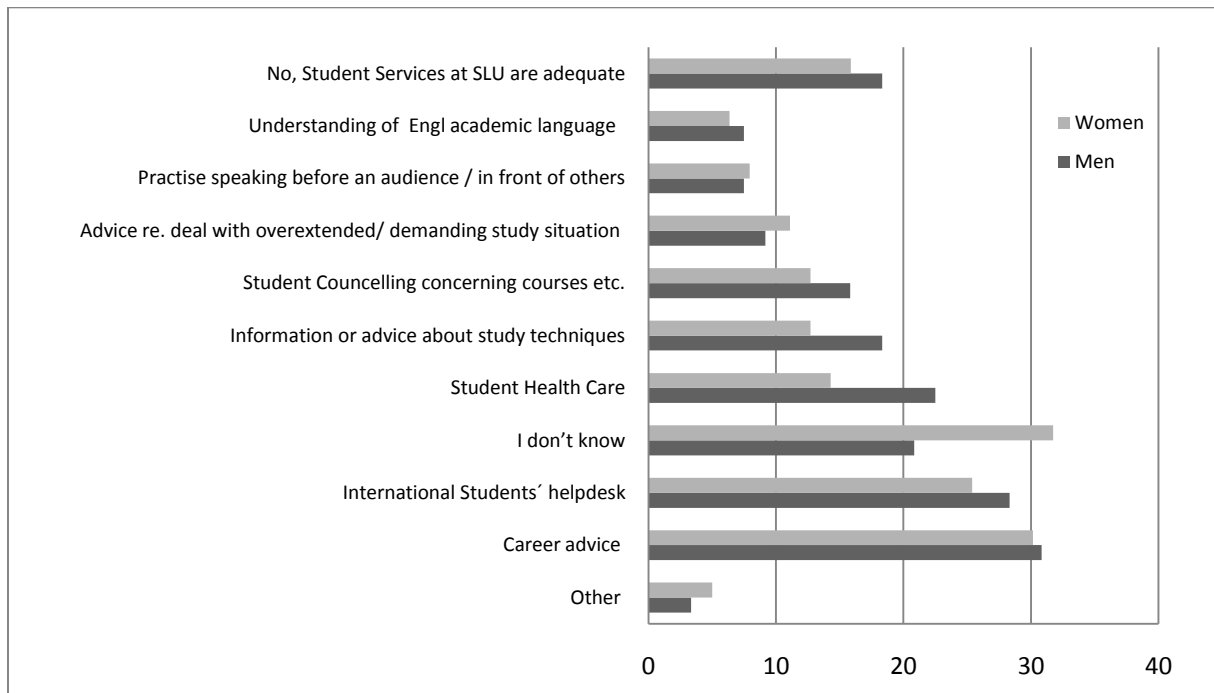


Fig 12 According to your opinion, are the Student Services provided by SLU insufficient or lacking?

Another way of addressing the question of services and students' needs is to ask within what areas they would like to see more efforts from SLU:

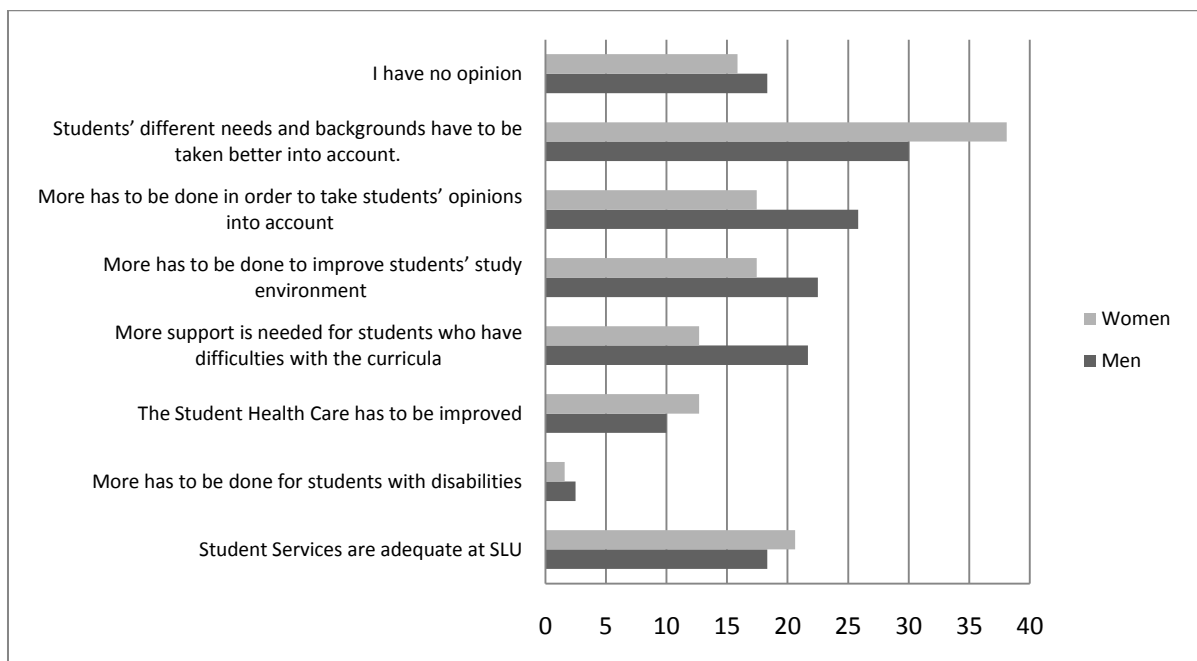


Fig 13 According to Your opinion, Is there a need for further efforts in order to improve the situation for students at SLU? (Percent)

Written comments

Many of the written comments are of the same kind as in the Swedish version; the demands for coded examinations, criticism of bad planning of courses, or lack of general information concerning the

courses in due time. The students are for example noticing that teachers do not provide information on the web-pages for the courses, but often send it out - quite late - on the e-mail instead.

More specific for the international students are the discontent of the information. The information given by the university, even via e-mail, (and by the student union) is, according to the international students, too often in Swedish only. There are some of the respondents who point out this as excluding. One student writes that he/she likes SLU, but would like more “international” activity. *“When the university takes on international students, it should be planned for.”* There are also students who are disappointed at the Student union; they would like activities for non-native speaking students.

The few comments about harassment, discrimination are two- sided. On the one hand, there are students that like it here very much, who are very content and describe Sweden as an open-minded and secure country (with a tough winter). On the other hand there are students who have met cultural misunderstandings, who feel discriminated in grading, who have met teachers and students who have misbehaved in such a way that they feel discriminated.

Affordable accomodation, studentrestaurants (with better prices) and discount on buses are also mentioned as areas where more could be done for international students.

Concluding comments

Autumn 2010 was the last time Swedish Higher Education was free of cost for students from outside the European Union and a decline in the number of International Master Students is to be expected in the future. The cultural mix of students will most likely change, since a majority of the International students at SLU today are from Asia and Africa, i.e. countries outside the European Union.

The results from an eventual coming survey might differ as a result of the fact that students who pay for their education may have different expectations. However; there are some lessons that can be learned immediately. Let us start by discussing which they are!

Uppsala October 2010

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Data: Olof Ingesson/Krister Ågren