

Understanding Anxiety Sources Among International and Domestic Students: A Comparative Study

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Introduction

- Anxiety is **common** among college students and affects well-being and academic success.
 - Domestic** students often experience anxiety from **academics, finances, and social isolation**.
 - International** students face these stressors plus **cultural adjustment and visa-related uncertainty**.
 - Prior research shows **mixed results** on whether international students report higher anxiety than domestic students.
- ➔ **This study examined whether international and domestic students differ in overall anxiety and in their primary sources of anxiety.**

Hypotheses

- International** students will report **higher overall anxiety** levels than domestic students.
- International** students' highest anxiety source will be **visa/legal stress**.
- Domestic** students' highest anxiety source will be **academic pressure**.

Methods

Participants

- $N = 41$ undergraduates (30 domestic, 11 international)
- All were 18+, enrolled at UT Austin

Procedure

10 - 15 anonymous online Qualtrics survey

Analysis

Independent t-tests and within-group source comparisons (Friedman + Wilcoxon)

Measures

Demographics

Age, gender, major, academic year, GPA, visa status

Overall Anxiety - SAS (20 items)

"I feel more nervous and anxious than usual."

Anxiety Source Ratings (5 domains)

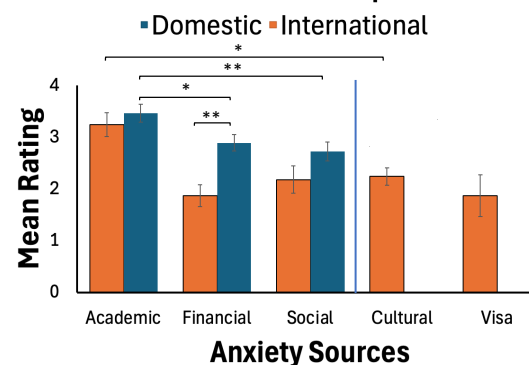
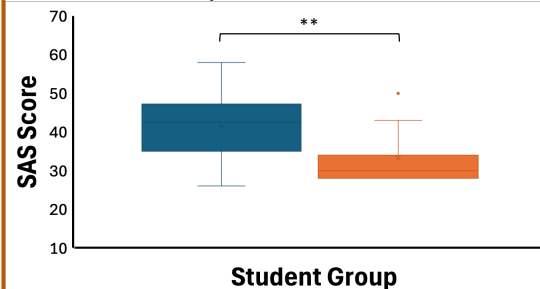
Each rated 1-5 (e.g., "How anxious do you feel about...?")

- Academic pressure
- Financial stress
- Social isolation
- Cultural adjustment*
- Visa/legal stress*

*International students only

Figures and Results

Domestic students reported **significantly higher** overall anxiety than international students.



Domestic students rated every **shared anxiety source higher** than international students, with the largest gap for **financial stress**.

- Domestic** students ranked **academic pressure** as their strongest source of anxiety, significantly higher than financial or social concerns.
- International** students showed **no single dominant source of anxiety**. Academic > Cultural, but all other domains were similar.

* = $p < .05$ corrected ** = $p < .01$ corrected

Conclusion

- Contrary to expectations, **domestic students reported higher overall anxiety and greater stress across all shared domains**. This pattern may reflect stronger academic and financial pressures or greater openness in reporting distress.
- International students showed no single dominant anxiety source**, suggesting a more diffuse stress profile or possible reliance on coping strategies developed through prior transitions.
- These findings highlight that student anxiety arises from multiple overlapping influences, and that domestic and international students face **distinct emotional challenges**. Effective support must therefore be **targeted and culturally responsive**, addressing the specific stressors most relevant to each group.

Future Directions

- Identify factors driving **higher anxiety among domestic students**.
- Examine **protective coping strategies** among international students.
- Include additional influences such as **social support and belonging**.
- Use **longitudinal designs** to track changes over time.
- Expand samples to include **more diverse and intersectional student groups**.
- Test **targeted interventions** for each group's stress profile.

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