

I. PURPOSE

The Learning Support Center conducted focus groups to grasp students' opinion about their '**Study and University Life Experience**' at the KIMEP University and learn about their experience with the admission process, arrival, orientation program and workshops, registration process, general education courses, LSC academic support and tutoring programs, and dormitory, medical and sport center services.

II. TECHNIQUE

The focus groups were conducted by the LSC team among the undergraduate degree and non-degree students the majority of whom have been enrolled in the Fall 2018 semester. There were four focus group interviews:

- international exchange students,
- students of different years of study from South Korea,
- freshmen students from Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan),
- Kazakhstani freshmen students (Almaty residents and regional students).

The international exchange students were invited for the interview with the help of Ms. Jeongeun Kim, Learning Support Center Peer Advisor, through e-mail messages, invitation letters (paper based).

Students from South Korea were invited for the interview with the help of Ms. Seul Lee, Advisor for Korean students through e-mail and WhatsApp messenger.

Freshmen students from different regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries who were the Dormitory residents, were invited with the help of the KIMEP Dormitory administration and residential assistants through invitation letters (paper based).

The participants were assured that their names would not be disclosed, however, students agreed that in case if top administration requested, the names might be presented.

The interviews had been based on the check list (developed by LSC staff and revised by Dr. Nurilya Shakanova, Director of the Office of QAIR) and were conducted in a conversational format. This format encouraged participants to talk freely and provide a broad range of comments and opinions.

The discussion during the first, third and fourth focus groups was moderated by Dr. Aigerim Ibrayeva, AVPSA. The student's comments and report were treated/analyzed by the Learning Support Center staff:

- Anna Marinushkina recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the meeting's notes;
 - Zhanna Baisalbekova, Student Learning Support Coordinator observed the meeting and made back up records.
- The discussion during the second focus group was also moderated by Dr. Aigerim Ibrayeva, AVPSA.

The student's comments and report were treated/analyzed by the Learning Support Center staff:

- Anna Marinushkina recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the meeting's notes;
- Seul Lee, LSC Advisor for Korean students observed the meeting and made back up records.

The focus group dates:

- Group 1, International exchange students; October 26, 2018
- Group 2, Students from South Korea; November 8, 2018
- Group 3, Students from Central Asian countries; November 15, 2018
- Group 4, Kazakhstan citizens, both regional students and Almaty residents; November 22, 2018

III. RESPONSE STATISTICS

All together 53 students participated in the discussions, among them there were 25 – BCB, 13 – CSS, 4 – School of Law, 2 – Language Center, and 9 exchange students. Gender distribution of the respondents constituted 31 females (58%) and 22 males (42%).

IV. SURVEY BRIEF:

In general, all of the respondents found their first semester at KIMEP interesting, exciting, and challenging. They are mostly satisfied with the educational process, services provided by the University, and extracurricular activities. However, students expressed the following concerns and made a number of recommendations:

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES:

ADMISSION OFFICE

- Recommendation: Develop an on-line tool for KEPT examination for regional students or arrange the entry exam in the regions:
IN PROGRESS: on-line mode of entrance examinations is currently discussed and hopefully may be introduced by May 2019;
- Recommendation: Provide an opportunity for applicants to upload more certificates:
IN PROGRESS: ER office together with CISC will add more slots for uploading certificates for forthcoming intake;
- Recommendation: Make a stress on damage deposit payment prior an arrival
IN PROGRESS: The Admission Office will include the information on the dormitory damage deposit in a scholarship letter and other materials;
- Recommendation: Review and improve the web-page for prospective students:
DONE: MCPR has redesigned "perspective students" web page and made "financial aid" and "housing" sections visible and easy accessible;
- Recommendation: Ensure effective communication through all means with potential applicants:
DONE: Case with the student who did not have to take KEPT as she had an IELTS - it was internal departmental mistake and miscommunication and responsible staff member was disciplined;
- Recommendation: Provide needed information on health insurance in time;
IN PROGRESS: Information on health insurance will be stressed in the admission eligibility and acceptance letters for further intake
- Recommendation: Provide international students with the information on several local banks to open accounts;
IN PROGRESS: Information on opening bank accounts will be stressed in the admission eligibility and acceptance letters for further intake
- Recommendation: Show a confirmation that on-line application was submitted successfully:
IN PROGRESS: ER office in cooperation with CISC will implement a pop-up window at the applicant portal, which would confirm that the application was submitted successfully (in addition to the automatically generated e-mail) -;
- Recommendation: Consider the possibility to input international students' names using English alphabet:
DONE: Requirement for international students to write their name in Russian language was deleted long time ago, and explanatory note was added next to the field.

VISA SUPPORT

- Recommendation: Provide international students with more detail and timely information on visa procedure and locations to receive:
IN PROGRESS: The International and Admission offices will inform international/exchange students of visa procedure and locations to receive in all details through acceptance letters, leaflets, website, etc.
- Recommendation: Inform international/exchange students of extra costs and need to have a certain amount of cash (Euro or US dollars):
IN PROGRESS: The International and Admission offices will inform international/exchange students of extra costs and need to have a certain amount of cash (Euro or US dollars) through acceptance letters, leaflets, website, etc.

FINANCIAL AID DEPARTMENT

- Recommendation: Timely update information on the scholarship awardees on the KIMEP University web-site:
DONE: The information on the scholarship awardees is updated on the KIMEP U web-site immediately after approval of the Academic Council.
- Recommendation: Inform all potential scholarship awardees about dates when the results are announced and ensure that everyone is contacted not only through phone calls but also in written form either by e-mail or official mail letter:
IN PROGRESS: The final decision on scholarship distribution depends on the colleges and the executive team of the University; the issue will be presented to those who are in charge;
DONE: Once the decision is made the Financial Aid Office uses all means of communication to inform the scholarship awardees;

- Recommendation: Make a bigger font for financial aid contract print out:
DONE: Current font size is 9, the bigger font will be used for the next cohort;
- Recommendation: Review the GPA requirement for US CAEF / CAUS scholarship:
DONE: The Academic Council made a decision to reduce the GPA requirement to 3.80 for US CAEF / CAUS scholarship to keep the dormitory accommodation covered;
- Recommendation: Make a stress on damage deposit payment prior an arrival:
IN PROGRESS: The Financial Aid Office will include the information on the dormitory damage deposit in a scholarship letter and other materials.

ARRIVAL TO ALMATY

- Recommendation: Ensure timely communication between the Admission Department, International Relations Office, Medical Center and Support Services Division to ensure smooth arrival (including pick up service for international students at the airport during night hours) and accommodation process:
DONE: *An on-line registration for pick up service and a bus (from outsourced company) were arranged to transport arriving students from the Almaty Airport to the KIMEP U campus by the Student Affairs and Admission Offices. The bus was available every three hours;*
- Recommendation: Calculate how much international/exchange students must pay in cash upon arrival to the KIMEP University (Euro or US dollars) and inform students in advance:
DONE: *Students are informed in advance of the needed amount of cash (in KZT and Euro/Dollar equivalent) including invitation expenses, amount of dormitory damage deposit, price of chest X-ray and medical examination, etc. through acceptance letter, freshmen checklist, IO brochures, and website;*
- Recommendation: Provide exchange students with a **"first day check list"**:
IN PROGRESS: The International Office is in the process of preparing the "first day check list";
- Recommendation: Provide all international students with IO buddies or any other peer assistants who may help them to go through all needed procedures, including obtaining an IIN;
IN PROGRESS: The International Office in addition to buddies, will involve LCS peer tutors and Dorm residential assistants to help international students;
- Recommendation: Provide international students with the information on several local banks to open accounts:
IN PROGRESS: Information on opening bank accounts will be stressed in admission eligibility and acceptance letters for Fall 2019 applicants. Bank CenterCredit will be offered to students as the first choice;
- Recommendation: Provide support in nostrification of documents:
IN PROGRESS: The nostrification function is in the process of transfer from the Admission Office to the Registry to ensure timely and efficient service;
- Develop and introduce on-line registration for a chest X-ray for international/exchange students:
DONE: *The on-line registration for a chest X-ray is available on student portal. There were 2 buses a day for three days for international/exchange students to deliver them to a medical center in the beginning of the Fall 2018 semester. The same arrangement will be done for Fall 2019 intake.*

STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORT CENTER

- Recommendation: Organize the registration of orientation program participants in a different way in order to avoid confusion and long waiting lines:
DONE: *The registration process was changed on the second day of the Orientation Program;*
- Recommendation: Keep the Academic Policies workshop for the next academic year but change the format into more interactive and engaging one:
IN PROGRESS: The peer advisors – tutors will be trained to lead the Academic Policies workshop for the Orientation Program Fall 2019;
- Recommendation: Keep the Student Planner for the next academic year but enlarge the space for notes, change paper to a different quality, and pay attention to the calendar layout:
IN PROGRESS: The Student Planner will be in electronic format for the academic year 2019-2020, a limited number of homemade hard copies will be available;
- Recommendation: Change the format of the Dormitory pizza party to more entertaining one and ensure that all freshmen are involved and not left aside:
IN PROGRESS: new residential assistants will be trained to organize ice breaking exercises, LCS staff and Residence Hall administration will supervise the activities;
- Recommendation: Remove the Academic Policies workshop for exchange students from the Orientation Program:
DONE: *Exchange students will be excused from the workshop;*
- Recommendation: Arrange a more detail and comprehensive campus tour for exchange/international students;
IN PROGRESS: LSC is developing new orientation program, which will include comprehensive campus tour with a use of orientation mobile application;

- Recommendation: Inform students that the psychological test is optional and find another approach of psychological testing of students:
DONE: *the test was not compulsory for 2018 intake;*
- Recommendation: Ensure participation of all international freshmen students in the Orientation Program:
IN PROGRESS: LSC, IO, and Admissions department are developing a strategy to ensure students participation in the event;
- Recommendation: Mix up international students with other students during the orientation to ensure bridge in and out:
IN PROGRESS: The request is difficult to address because the majority of local freshmen are not fluent in English and will not gain needed knowledge and experience during the orientation if it's conducted in English. LSC will provide the international students with a larger number of team leaders, volunteers, KSA reps to address the issue;
- Recommendation: Ensure that the representatives of student organizations communicate with international students:
IN PROGRESS: KSA members will be responsible for creating welcoming environment for international students; SA office will supervise the activities;
- Recommendation: Develop an orientation mobile application:
IN PROGRESS: An outsourced company has been selected to develop a mobile application, the contract to develop "information architecture" assignment was signed.

REGISTRY

- Recommendation: Update the Students Portal and make it better structured and friendly use:
IN PROGRESS: SA, CISC and the Registrar met to discuss the issue and came up with a number of proposals, however, it was decided to organize task-force committee that would include student representatives to ensure their satisfaction with introduced changes. The meeting is planned on 3d week of March, 2019;
- Recommendation: Solve the waiting list problem:
IN PROGRESS: WL is fully under the supervision and control of Colleges, Registrar Office only monitors a WL during the registration period and sent weekly based (twice a week during the add/drop period) notifications to Deans and CC to VPAA about a number of students being in the WL. From our side we do our best in order to provide FULL information on WL numbers (Registrar office created a special tool to monitor and manage a numbers of students on WL and administration also have another tool to coordinate WL students, they can increase a limit directly from the site and/or they can reject students from the list in case if they have a lot of other sections with available places, for example (LC administration uses this tool very often));
- Recommendation: Open additional sections for freshmen only:
NO PROGRESS: no progress so far, need decision from the Academic Affairs unit.
- Recommendation: Place a list of the courses, which are offered every regular and summer semesters along with standard course syllabi:
NO PROGRESS: pending decision of the Academic Affairs;
- Recommendation: Ensure that all faculty publish course syllabi two weeks prior the classes: *Same as before.*

COMPUTER AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS CENTER

- Recommendation: Update the Students Portal and make a clear and understandable structure:
IN PROGRESS: SA, CISC and the Registrar met to discuss the issue and came up with a number of proposals, however, the task-force committee that included student representatives was created to ensure student satisfaction with proposed changes.
- Recommendation: Upgrade L-drive and make it more convenient for use:
IN PROGRESS: CISC will set a filtering option for L-drive listing in KIMEP Mobile Application and will archive folders of inactive instructors;
- Recommendation: Check H-drive features and make possible to operate outside the KIMEP campus:
IN PROGRESS: CISC will set read/write access to H-drive for students from outside of the campus;
- Recommendation: Improve mobile application:
IN PROGRESS: a new version of the Mobile Application is under development.

INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

- Recommendation: Inform international/exchange students of extra costs and need to have a certain amount of cash (Euro or US dollars):
DONE: *Students are informed in advance of the needed amount of cash (in KZT and Euro/Dollar equivalent) including invitation expenses, amount of dormitory damage deposit, price of chest X-ray and medical examination, etc. through acceptance letter, freshmen checklist, IO brochures, and website;*

- Recommendation: Ensure timely communication between the Admission Department, International Relations Office, Medical Center and Support Services Division to ensure smooth arrival (including pick up service for international students at the airport during night hours) and accommodation process:
DONE: An on-line registration for pick up service and a bus (from outsourced company) were arranged to transport arriving students from the Almaty Airport to the KIMEP U campus by the Student Affairs and Admission Offices. The bus was available every three hours;
- Recommendation: Provide exchange students with a "first day check list":
IN PROGRESS: The International Office is in the process of preparing the "first day check list";
- Recommendation: Provide all international students with IO buddies or any other peer assistants who may help them to go through all needed procedures, including obtaining INN:
IN PROGRESS: The International Office in addition to buddies, will involve LCS peer tutors and Dorm residential assistants to help international students;
- Recommendation: Provide international students with the information on several local banks to open accounts:
IN PROGRESS: Information on opening bank accounts will be stressed in admission eligibility and acceptance letters for Fall 2019 applicants. Bank CenterCredit will be offered to students as the first choice;
- Recommendation: Provide support in nostrification of documents:
IN PROGRESS: The nostrification function was transferred from the Admission Office to the Registry to ensure timely and efficient service;
- Recommendation: Develop and introduce on-line registration for a chest X-ray for international/exchange students:
DONE: The on-line registration for a chest X-ray is available on student portal. There were 2 buses a day for three days for international/exchange students to deliver them to a medical center in the beginning of the Fall 2018 semester. The same arrangement will be done for Fall 2019 intake.
- Recommendation: Place a list of the courses, which are offered every regular and summer semesters along with standard course syllabi;
NO PROGRESS: pending decision of the Academic Affairs;
- Recommendation: Ensure that all faculty publish course syllabi two weeks prior the classes: Same as before;
- Recommendation: Solve waiting list problem:
IN PROGRESS: WL is fully under the supervision and control of Colleges , Registrar Office only monitors a WL during the registration period and sent weekly based (twice a week during the add/drop period) notifications to Deans and CC to VPAA about a number of students being in the WL. From our side we do our best in order to provide FULL information on WL numbers (Registrar office created a special tool to monitor and manage a numbers of students on WL and administration also have another tool to coordinate WL students, they can increase a limit directly from the site and/or they can reject students from the list in case if they have a lot of other sections with available places, for example (LC administration uses this tool very often));
- Recommendation: Organize team building activities for exchange students:
DONE: The International Office is organizing 7 to 10 team building activities for international/exchange students per semester;
- Recommendation: Submit financial documents to all international/exchange students, if a tour to neighboring countries is arranged:
DONE: The International Office is not responsible for organization of travelling for international/exchange students.

DORMITORY

RECOMMENDATIONS/PROGRESS:

- Recommendation: Update the online booking system to see a number of beds in each room and floor layout:
IN PROGRESS: The online room reservation system has been redesigned and upgraded. The room booking system will be open for current international students and scholarship holders in April 2019;
- Recommendation: Make a stress on damage deposit payment prior an arrival:
IN PROGRESS: The information on the damage deposit to be paid prior the move in the Dormitory is available on the Residence Hall web-page, www.kimep.kz;
- Recommendation: Make the placement and room allocation procedure faster:
IN PROGRESS: The room booking system will be open for current international students in April 2019;
- Recommendation: Improve communication with a help of residential assistants:
IN PROGRESS: All Dorm residents are assigned to a "Whats'app" group led by a Residential Assistant to share problems and situations;
- Recommendation: Do not allow stranger enter the residents' rooms without their permission:
DONE: Everyone is prohibited to enter a room during the absence of a resident;
- Recommendation: Do not enter residents' rooms during their absence without preliminary informing and their consent:
DONE: Resident Assistants usually inform all students of the sanitary inspection in their rooms in advance. In case of emergency (for example, pipe brake, fire, etc.) representatives of the Dorm Administration are entitled to enter a room without any preliminary warning as stated in the Residence Rules;

- Recommendation: Solve the problem with refrigerators in students' rooms:
IN PROGRESS: Two refrigerators were purchased for testing. Payment request for another 20 new refrigerators is with the procurement department;
- Recommendation: Solve the problem with the heating system in the Dorm:
DONE: *The problem with the heating system has been solved: corner rooms, as well as living rooms of the 2nd floor have been insulated (windows and balcony doors rubber have been replaced); There are 30 electric radiators in stock for very cold weather conditions. The temperature inside all rooms is kept comfortable;*
- Recommendation: Solve a problem with cooking stoves on the fifth floor:
DONE: *8 new electric stoves were purchased and installed on every floor;*
- Recommendation: Solve a problem with a washing machine on the fourth floor:
DONE: *All washing machines have been repaired. Moreover, a new laundry on the 2nd floor was opened;*
- Recommendation: Provide dorm residents with mirrors upon their requests:
DONE: *213 mirrors have been purchased, and installed;*
- Recommendation: Ask residential assistants and cleaners for regular control over the kitchens and penalize the residents who do not observe hygiene rules:
DONE: *The Residential assistants (RA) and the Dorm Administration monitor and control kitchens and other public rooms on a daily basis;*
- Recommendation: Repair the printer in the Computer Lab as soon as possible:
DONE: *A new printer was installed in the Dormitory Computer Lab;*
- Recommendation: Provide access to sport and movie TV channels:
IN PROGRESS: The RLHD is in process of looking for another provider of TV services with a good choice of TV channels;
- Recommendation: Provide uninterrupted operation of Wi-Fi:
NO PROGRESS: The pending solution of the CISC.

SPORT CENTER

- Recommendation: Monitor faculty's behavior and attitude in terms of student oriented environment:
DONE: *There was a meeting with all PE instructors regarding their behavior and attitude and including precisely Azhar Burkitbayeva. By her words, she let students go about twenty minutes earlier because they had valid excuses. Damir Urazymbetov is not a KIMEP employee any more. The Sports Center Administration terminated the employment contract with him;*
- Recommendation: Hire English speaking PE instructors and encourage other instructors to learn English:
IN PROGRESS: PE instructors have successfully finished the first level of English and they will enroll on the next level. So, they are in the process of learning English. It is hard to find highly qualified PE instructors with good command of English.

MEDICAL CENTER

- Recommendation: Improve communication with a help of student assistants:
IN PROGRESS: All medical staff has extensive experience in the field. They permanently improve their professional qualification through annual medial courses. They also learn English either themselves or attend language courses. In case a communication problem arises with English-speaking visitors, student assistants (2nd or 3rd year of study) provide needed help.

DINING FACILITIES

- Recommendation: Revise Grill's menu and offer more different dishes:
DONE: *The menu has been revised, including salads and pastry;*
- Recommendation: Provide a special menu each day of a week and Deliver "Subway" food style:
IN PROGRESS: The menu variety has been fixed in the contract with a catering company. It might be revised upon the end of the contract;
- Recommendation: Offer more vegetarian' dishes:
IN PROGRESS: Currently the canteen offers salads and garnish for vegetarians. It might be revised upon the end of the contract;
- Recommendation: Students would like to see menu price labels on food:
DONE: *Price labels are available for most dishes;*
- Recommendation: Review prices and keep them at a certain level:
DONE: *prices are set according to the contract with a catering company;*

- Recommendation: Review portions of dishes:
DONE: *dish portions are checked by the MC, dorm administration, and KSA representative on regular basis and in their opinion meet contractual obligations;*
- Recommendation: Make canteen staff observe hygiene norms and monitor the norms' implementation on a regular basis:
DONE: *According to the contract, the committee chaired by the Senior Doctor conducts hygiene check up every three months;*
- Recommendation: Change working hours of the Dorm canteen starting from 8:00 a.m.:
DONE: *The Dorm canteen is functioning now from 8:00 to 20:00.*

ACADEMIC ISSUES:

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure that all faculty have good command of English;
- Ensure that all courses are taught in English;
- Monitor faculty's behavior and attitude in terms of student oriented environment;
- Schedule systematic faculty peer visits to classes to ensure quality teaching;
- Place a list of the courses, which are offered every regular and summer semesters along with standard course syllabi.

LC

- Check Kazakh language state requirements for students who graduated from Kazakh schools;
- Ensure that all Central Asian students may register for the Beginner level of the Kazakh Language course;
- Combine "Academic English Listening and Note Taking" and "Academic English Speaking" courses;
- Develop clear assessment criteria and inform students about them in advance (Academic Reading and Writing I course);
- Monitor the teaching approach and attitude of international faculty and train them to teach students.

GE

- Ensure that course materials correspond with the exam questions;
- Train faculty to employ innovative teaching approaches to keep the students interested and engaged;
- Ensure that professors are ready for their classes and do not read from the slides;
- Monitor faculty's behavior and attitude in terms of student oriented environment;
- Ensure that professors published reading materials in advance;
- Ensure that professors provide clear and detail explanation of course materials and answer student' questions.

BCB

- Ensure that faculty come to class in time;
- Require faculty to check the materials they place on the L-drive.

LIBRARY

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure that faculty order modern books and course materials.