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Student
Satisfaction
Awards

Student Satisfaction

A 2019 Global Overview

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The Global Student Satisfaction Awards empower students across the globe to review their study experience and determine the best universities. It is an open call to both students and universities to contribute to the transparency of study choice, and to the quality of education worldwide. In this way, we aim to give recognition to the best educators and award those universities which have achieved the highest student satisfaction ratings.

Real stories have never been more important for prospective students. That is why we wanted to create the only student-powered global university overview, no matter the size or history of your institution. Our research has shown that students want to know how other students experienced studying a specific programme. This helps them make a more informed choice based on their personal needs.

For universities, reviews can be a valuable opportunity to show and share more aspects of their institution and programmes, as well as receive direct, constructive feedback on their curricula and campus offers.

The Global Student Satisfaction Report 2019 represents an in-depth analysis of student experiences, exploring what students are content with, and where they would like to see improvements. The report slices the results by regions, allowing higher education professionals and industry experts to discover where students report having more satisfactory study experiences. During this report we try to explore whether student experiences differ around the world based on key study experience factors, as well as other characteristics.



Global Student Satisfaction Awards

This report is brought to you by:

Studyportals

We are *the* international study choice platform, hosting over 3,500 universities across 114 countries and reaching 36 million prospective students from all around the world in 2018 alone.

Founded in 2009 as a project subsidised by the European Commission and supported by many international student associations, Studyportals has grown stronger and more determined with each year.

Our mission is to make the world understand the power of learning, and we do this by making education choice transparent and accessible to students worldwide. With our platforms, we enable students to search for programmes and connect with the right universities.

We are dreamers, doers, and former international students ourselves, who have come together from over 35 countries, determined to make one dream happen:

Empower the world
to choose education

IELTS

IELTS is the International English Language Testing System, the world's proven English language test. IELTS was one of the pioneers of four skills English language testing over 30 years ago, and continues to set the standard for English language testing today.

IELTS is jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English.

As internationally focused organisations, we are committed to academic excellence and cultural understanding – ideal providers of international English testing.



Global Student Satisfaction Awards

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Shorelight Education

Shorelight Education is reinventing the international education experience for students worldwide.

Based in Boston, the company works directly with top-ranked, nonprofit American universities to build innovative programs and high-touch, technology-driven services that help talented students thrive and become global citizens.

US News Global Education

U.S. News Global Education (USNGE) was founded in September 2016 by U.S. News & World Report and Shorelight Education.

USNGE combines U.S. News' authoritative rankings, analysis, and editorial content with Shorelight's expertise in supporting international students who want to study at U.S. colleges and universities.

This combination uniquely positions U.S. News Global Education to help international students, education counselors, and higher education institutions achieve their goals.

The Pie News

As an independent media, recruitment, and events company, we do our best to connect the global community of professionals working in international education.

Our goal of doing this is through multiple outlets, like keeping the world up-to-date with the latest international education news, a board of available jobs in education, and having a yearly award celebration for the innovations and achievements in international education.



Global Student Satisfaction Awards

Executive summary

This report examines the results of a global survey on levels of student satisfaction across different countries and focuses on ten custom regional clusters. The analysis describes the data collected from more than 45 thousand reviews coming from both domestic and international students, covering over 209 nationalities and reviewing higher education institutions in over 151 countries.

Overall, students around the world report being very satisfied with their study experience, with an average reported student satisfaction score of 4.21 on a scale from 1 to 5. Master's and PhD students reported higher levels of satisfaction than Bachelor's or Short courses students. Unsurprisingly, older students also reported higher levels of satisfaction than younger students. What was interesting was that international students reported being more satisfied with their study experience than domestic students, as students often cross borders for education in order to access a better-quality education than the one provided in their home country.

In addition to overall satisfaction with their study experience, students also rated their experience high in terms of admission process (4.05), student-teacher interactions (4.00), quality of programme (3.99), student diversity (3.95), quality of student life (3.93), career development (3.93), level of difficulty (3.93), campus infrastructure (3.88), with a few points of improvement as well with regards to the cost of living (3.64) and scholarships and funding (3.55).

Student satisfaction with their study experience is inherently subjective and dependent on the students' own reference frames and expectations, but also on the promises made by national education systems and universities.

Universities can actively improve student satisfaction by:

- ✓ Actively managing student expectations, sharing both the positives and negatives;
- ✓ Proactively helping students navigate the complexities of financing their studies;
- ✓ Using student feedback to improve their service offering.

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Part One

Understanding student satisfaction

Education as a service

The Higher Education sector is complex and continuously evolving. It involves a wide range of institutions, from *public* institutions teaching to large numbers of students, to *private* providers featuring the niche research hubs, to colleges devoted to liberal arts and religiously-oriented institutions, open to a broad public or exclusive in their offer.

Education institutions are usually well embedded into society and work closely with their stakeholders. The value created in universities is not related to a physical process, but is rather built upon the knowledge, learning and relationship forged during the education experience. These relationships are built with academics, researchers, public partners, business investors and students engaged with university services.

Universities are committed to a high mission of serving society and advancing fields of knowledge. Furthermore, universities also need to create value for their multiple stakeholders, such as their own professors, academic and non-academic staff, as well as business and industry relations, and of course their student body and alumni.

For students, the value perception of a university is becoming more important than ever, as institutions globally have been seeking to attract an increasing volume of students. Once considered a privilege reserved for the elite, education has become far more accessible over the past centuries. This has resulted in universities needing to evaluate how they can meet the needs and expectations of their students better, find ways to differentiate their value proposition and create a great educational experience for all students.

Education as a service

Service performance is usually measured against the ability of an organisation to create value and meet the needs of both its users and stakeholders. In higher education, this translates into providing a study experience that matches students' expectations: delivering quality education in adequate structures.

The core of the service within higher education is embodied by the student's learning experience, where we see the student as a co-creator of the experience. Therefore, even within the same classroom, one student can be experiencing a transformative educational experience, while another can experience a monotonous, or uninspiring one. That is because the role of the student within education is dual, involving both the student as a productive resource, as well as a contributor to quality, satisfaction and perceived value.

The role of the university is equally important in co-creating the service experience, as universities bring forward resources to enable the learning experience, facilitate a growth environment and support the student.

Thus, the learning experience is a complex and multifaceted interplay of interactions inside and outside the classroom, emerging through time. Students often associate learning with sentiments of adventure, pleasure and happiness when gaining knowledge, or describe their learning experience with the metaphor of a "discovery journey".

In this report, we want to focus on better understanding the education experience by exploring student satisfaction through self-reported reviews, which testify to the differences in student experiences around the globe in various education systems, university types and classroom sizes.

What is student satisfaction?

Satisfaction is a core component of what keeps people motivated and engaged, and helps them achieve long-term goals. Student satisfaction is similarly important for universities as it represents both the level of well-being of students, and how well the institution is doing at meeting the expectations of their students.

From an economic perspective, satisfaction comes from the ability of a good or service to satisfy a need or perform a function. It depends largely on the trade-off between the emotional, physical, and financial resources put into a process and its results: in other words, it depends on outcomes matching expectations.

From a student perspective, service expectations can vary greatly, depending on the individual resources the student already has, their personal needs, values, goals and aspirations, as well as preconceptions based on experiences of their peers.

What is important to mention is that satisfaction is a subjective and personal evaluation, and that even two people with similar backgrounds can experience and evaluate their service experience differently. However, few things usually stand out: students are typically satisfied when they feel supported by their institution, experience a diverse and stimulating learning experience and when the learning experience helps them advance their career goals.

All these aspects have been included in gauging student satisfaction in a reliable and comparable scale. Nevertheless, satisfaction is based upon beliefs and feelings students project on their education: it often changes depending on the country, culture, and university students belong to, as well as their life and career goals.

Regardless of their belonging, students' voices are important in creating a global overview of assessing the performance of services and how universities can best serve their mission.

Why does student satisfaction matter?

Understanding students' needs enables institutions to react, adapt and help students create a fulfilling experience in collaboration. Therefore measuring and understanding student satisfaction can play a pivotal role in improving service provision and offering a better education experience.

Measuring student satisfaction can help universities understand which areas are exceeding expectations and can be used to promote the institution, and which areas are otherwise falling behind and need improvements.

Student satisfaction can similarly rate university performances based on the study experience, excluding aspects related to publications, prestige, or academic outreach. While highly important, these aspects seldom influence the average student experience: student overall satisfaction is a more significant indicator of the ability of a university to serve its student body.

Satisfaction score can be used to understand the ability of an institution to achieve students' well-being and keep them motivated and engaged during and after their studies. This can help informing new students and correcting expectations so that is easier for them to find their most fitting course of study.

Last but surely not least, a measure of student satisfaction is also relevant for prospective students, seeking to make the best decision for them personally. This measure can be used to make study choices easier and education more transparent. Understanding students' perceptions allows universities to provide service improvements and align their strategy with their mission and objectives.



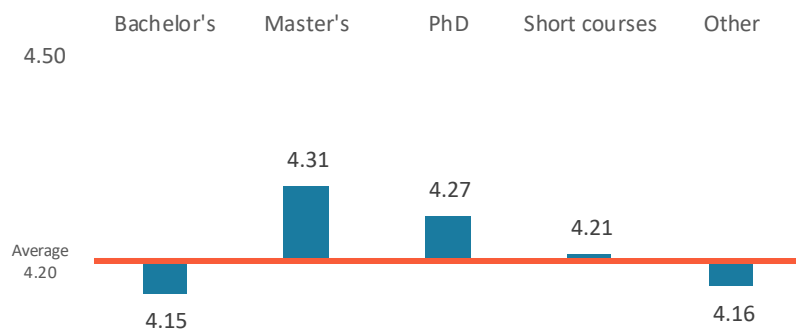
Students are very satisfied with their overall study experience

4.21

average student satisfaction score

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Differences in satisfaction by study level



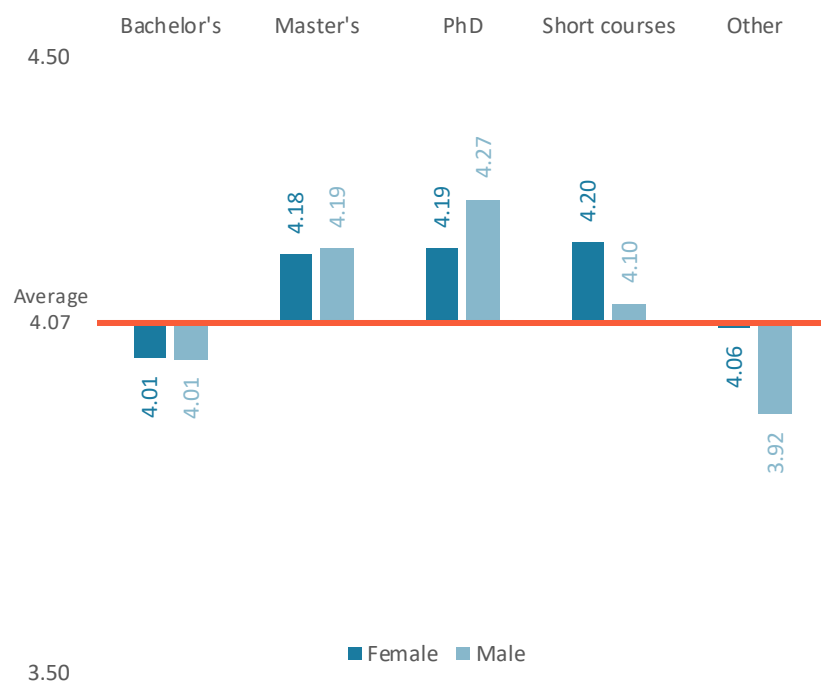
On average, regardless of their study level, students seem to be satisfied with their study experience. Master's students report the highest satisfaction score of 4.32 (n=13,463), followed by PhD students with 4.27 (n=985), short courses students with 4.22 (n=448) and last, Bachelor's students with 4.15 (n=29,717).

In the larger scale of things, the differences between study levels are rather negligible, and point towards the education experience in itself being satisfactory. Most universities offer a consistent study experience across study levels, with some points of improvement possible on Bachelor's level. Bachelor's students, who score slightly lower than average, specify a lack of teacher-interactions due to larger class sizes, as well as sometimes the sheer difficulty of switching to a more demanding education system than they had previously experienced during their high school.

3.50

	Average	Median	Mode	SD	Reviews
Bachelor	4.15	4	4	0.86	29,737
Master	4.31	4	5	0.84	13,404
PhD	4.27	5	5	0.96	985
Short courses	4.21	5	5	1.00	447
Other	4.16	5	5	1.08	1,158
Total	4.20	4	5	0.87	45,731

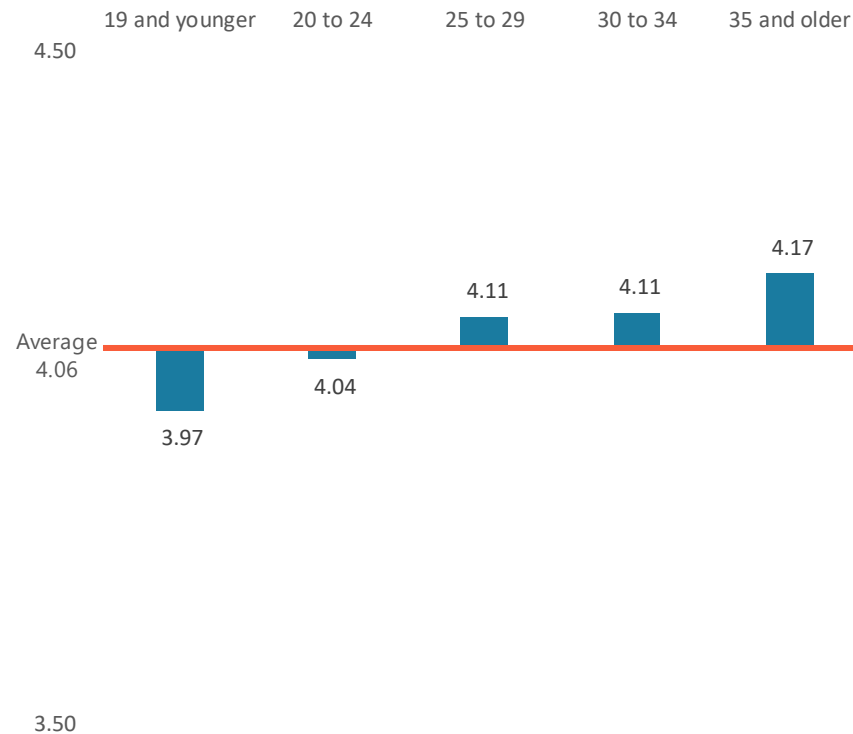
Differences in satisfaction by study level depending on self-reported binary gender values



Students rate their study experience similarly, regardless of their gender, for both Bachelor's and Master's studies, but differences do appear among PhD and short courses students: interestingly for PhD courses, women report overall better study experiences than men. However, since the sample sizes at the PhD level are smaller, it is difficult to assign the differences to one particular factor.

		Average	Median	Mode	SD	Reviews
Bachelor	Female	4.01	4	4	0.79	7,324
Bachelor	Male	4.01	4	4	0.84	6,368
Master	Female	4.18	4	4	0.81	2,403
Master	Male	4.19	4	4	0.82	2,833
PhD	Female	4.19	4	5	0.90	156
PhD	Male	4.27	4	5	0.83	275
Short courses	Female	4.20	4	5	0.97	204
Short courses	Male	4.10	4	5	1.06	178
Other	Female	4.06	4	4	0.88	234
Other	Male	3.92	4	4	1.00	233

Differences in satisfaction by age divided into custom age brackets

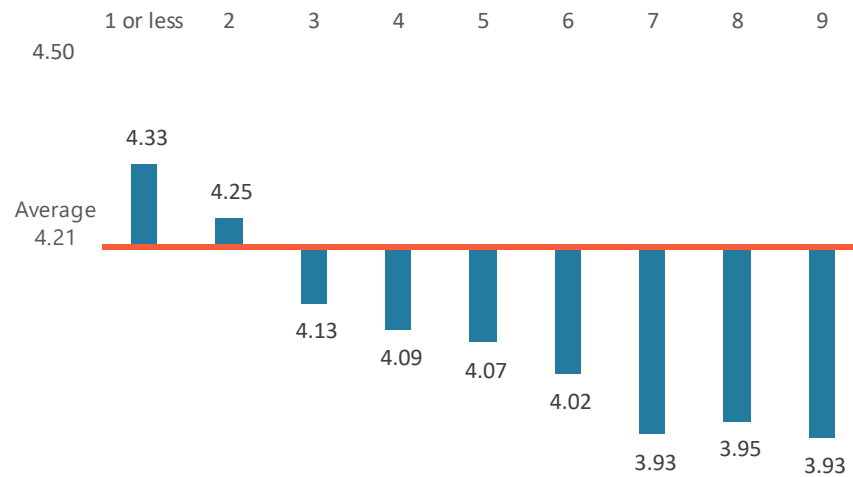


We found a positive relationship between age and satisfaction. The older the students, the higher they rated their education experience, with students 19 or younger rating their experience with 3.97, while students 35 or older with 4.17. These differences are sensible given that expectations have a strong influence on satisfaction. As students learn more about what to expect from a university experience, they adjust their expectations accordingly and focus on the value the university experience brings to their lives.

	Average	Median	Mode	SD	Reviews
19 and younger	3.97	4	4	0.69	2,125
20 to 24	4.04	4	4	0.81	9,985
25 to 29	4.10	4	4	0.86	4,799
30 to 34	4.10	4	4	0.91	1,745
35 or older	4.17	4	5	0.93	1,375
Total	4.06	4	4	0.83	20,029

Years studying

Differences in satisfaction by years into higher education programmes

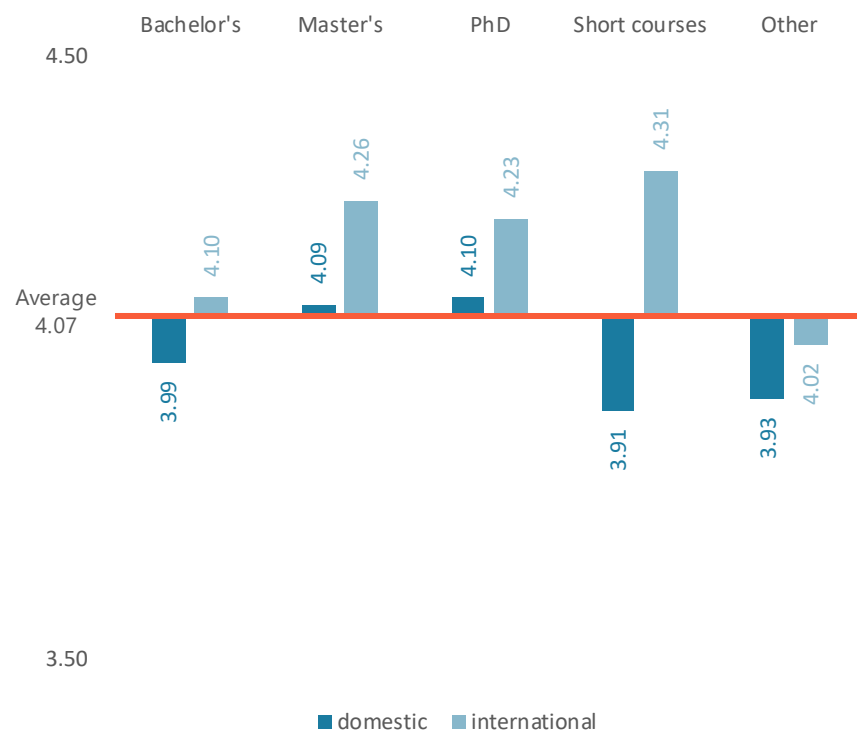


Interestingly, as students spend more years studying, their satisfaction with their studies does decrease slightly, though not significantly, starting at 4.33 for students studying for a year or less, to 3.86 for students pursuing a degree for 9 years. It seems that students are more satisfied when completing their study journey sooner.

3.50

	Average	Median	Mode	SD	Reviews
1 or less	4.33	5	5	0.89	19,001
2	4.25	4	5	0.87	6,223
3	4.13	4	4	0.85	7,122
4	4.09	4	4	0.81	9,755
5	4.07	4	4	0.83	3,889
6	4.02	4	4	0.85	1,519
7	3.93	4	4	0.94	490
8	3.95	4	4	0.96	181
9	3.93	4	4	1.03	80
Total	4.21	4	5	0.87	48,252

Differences in satisfaction by study level and origin of the student group



Overall, the reviews were fairly split among domestic (47.4%) and international students (52.6%). International students report having a better study experience, with an average score of 4.17, compared to domestic students (average score of 4.01). This difference holds true for all study levels and years of study.

These findings are not as surprising given that students often cross borders for education in order to access a better quality education than the one provided in their home country.

		Average	Median	Mode	SD	Reviews
Bachelor	domestic	3.99	4	4	0.77	12,642
	international	4.10	4	4	0.83	5,894
Master	domestic	4.09	4	4	0.78	3,035
	international	4.26	4	4	0.80	4,007
PhD	domestic	4.10	4	4	0.81	163
	international	4.23	4	5	0.89	340
Short courses	domestic	3.91	4	4	0.96	156
	international	4.31	5	5	1.00	235
Other	domestic	3.93	4	4	0.87	241
	international	4.02	4	5	1.04	240
Total		4.07	4	4	0.81	26,953



International students are more satisfied with their overall study experience

4.17

average student satisfaction score

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Part Two

Dimensions of student satisfaction

3.99

**average score for
quality of programme**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

One of the most important criteria for students when choosing a study programme is the quality of the programme and the education students can expect to receive. Among 21,567 students, 42% of them rated the quality of the programme with a 4, and 32% with a score of 5. Only 6% of students rated the quality of their programme low (either 1 or 2 score). This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

The quality score rates the ability of a programme to meet student expectations on a range of aspects defining learning quality. This score includes delivery and content of classes, teaching, and materials available to students.

This dimension is telling on how the quality of learning is determinant to their whole study experience. For most students, the quality of programme was very closely connected to the overall level of satisfaction with their study experience.

Quality of programme

Among the reasons for students to rate the quality of their programme as high, students mentioned great teaching, quality lectures and seminars, practical classes that help students gain relevant experience, instructors that can easily explain and illustrate complex concepts, as well as the quality of the course materials in terms of case studies or other resources available to students.



"Studying at UBA Law School was probably the most gratifying experiences of my life. The Law programme is the strongest and best rated one in the country, with a formidable career prospect, great teaching level, and a very high quality of lectures and seminars. After the third/fourth year, the student has to pick an orientation to his studies. I chose Public International Law and I found that the level was even higher than in the first part of my studies, and that UBA prepared me to excel in international competitions and face in-depth programmes in top-level American universities. Can't recommend it enough."

Argentinian student about studying at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina
Rated the programme quality 5 out of 5

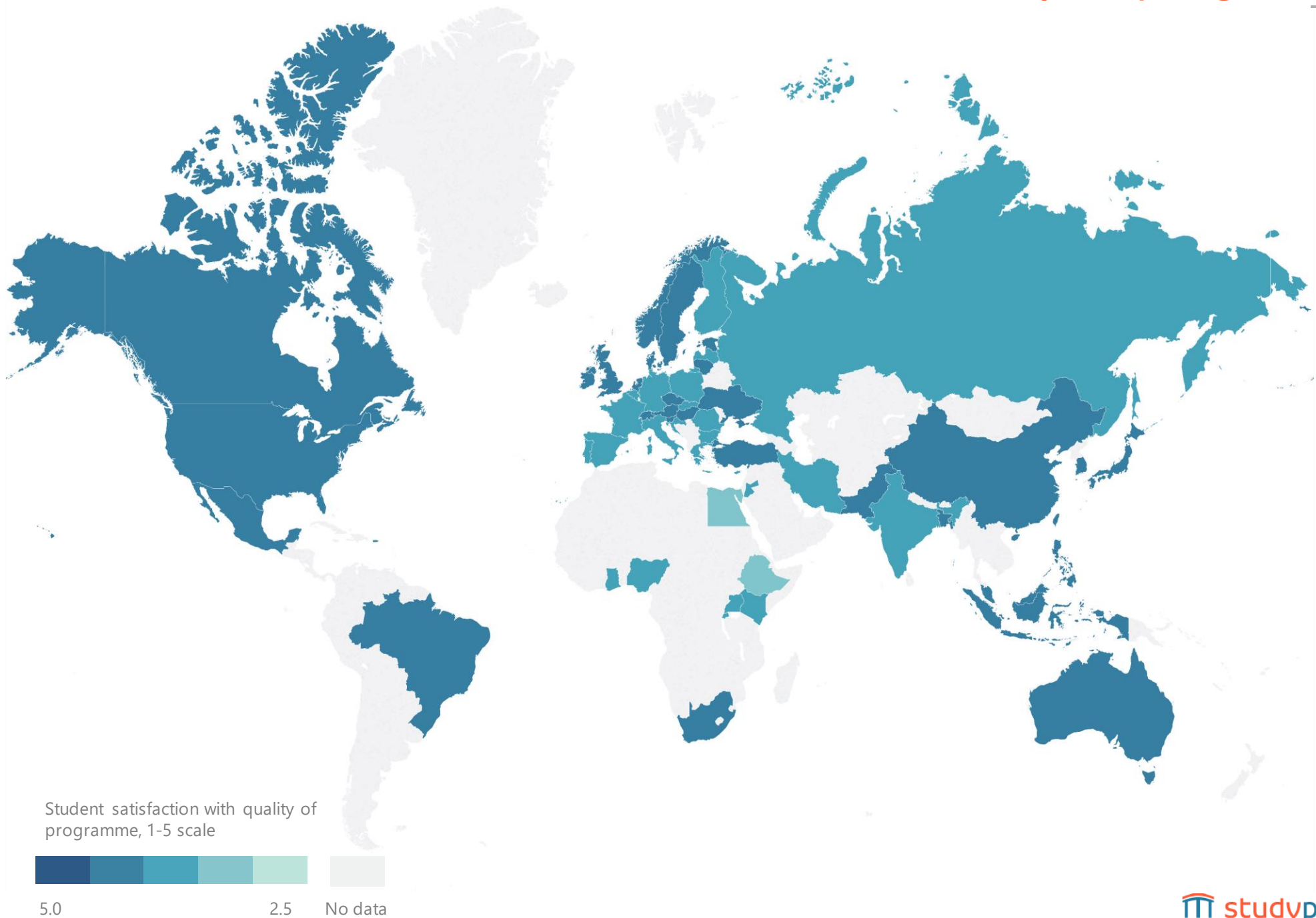
While only 6% of all reviews contained a low programme quality, the students primarily mentioned issues such as outdated curriculum or study methods, focusing on memorising rather than understanding, or in some cases being offered a basic or unchallenging curriculum instead of the quality education they had originally expected.



"Mansoura University's methods of teaching are not efficient at all, It focus on the quantity not the quality and how much the students can memorize not understand. [...] The curriculum is old and not updated to what medicine has reached today; we're study things [that] are no longer used."

Egyptian student about studying at Mansura University in Egypt
Rated the programme quality 2 out of 5

Quality of programme



3.93

**average score for
level of difficulty**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

In evaluating the level of difficulty students were asked how satisfied they are with the challenges in their studies. While selectiveness can be autonomously checked by looking at fall-off rates and drop-outs, the level of difficulty tries to estimate how close a programme's demands are to student standards.

The level of difficulty gauges course requirements, pace demanded, and overall challenge level not as a measure of a programme's attrition, but as a measure of match with the expected level.

Among 24,055 students, 40% of them rated the quality of the programme with a 4, and 30% with a score of 5. Only 7% of students rated the quality of their programme low (either 1 or 2 score). This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Level of difficulty

Overall, students satisfaction is high when the level of difficulty is challenging enough to contribute to personal or professional growth. The difficulties students overcome during their studies bring a sense of accomplishment. When perceived as fair and well-structured, demanding programmes have a positive impact on self-esteem and university perceptions.



"Studying at the UoL was a challenging experience: it required a total re-organisation of priorities and exerting self to the maximum of capacity. However, as the process went on, rewards came via the ability to think and make decisions in a new, different and much more effective way. The official credential as a result is a pleasant and much deserved addition to the skills, knowledge, and good practices acquired throughout the study process."

Ukrainian student about studying at the University of Liverpool, United Kingdom
Rated the level of difficulty 5 out of 5

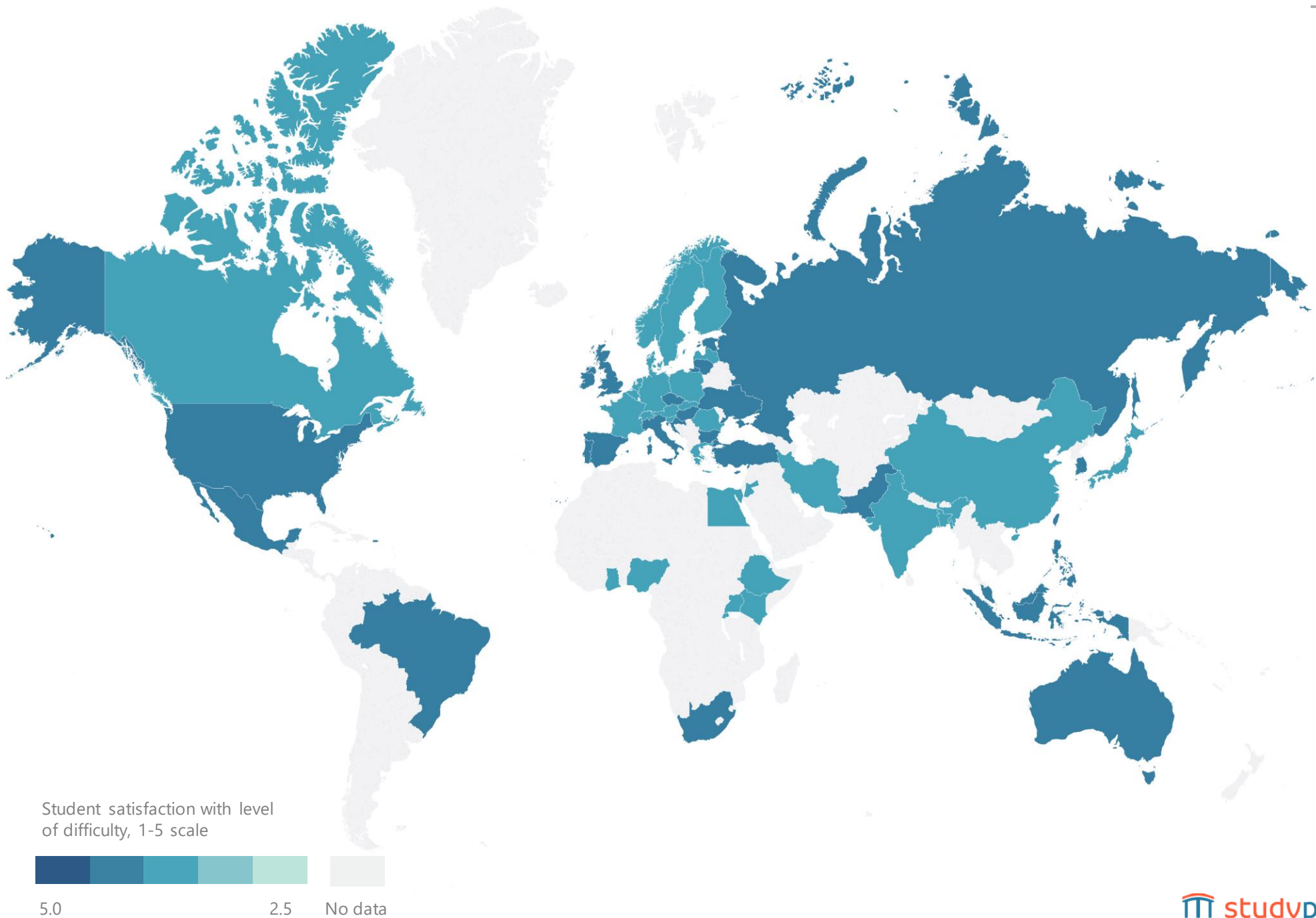
While only 7% of all reviews mentioned a low level of difficulty, often times that was seen as a negative, students feeling that they were not really being prepared for their future careers since they were not really being challenged by their education. Furthermore, some mentioned that since the exams were multiple choice format, it was easy to pass without studying hard.



"My overall studying experience wasn't what I expected it to be. Social life was outstanding but the school didn't really have the program I was looking for. Courses were very easy, almost reminded me of high school, which is not good especially if you're trying to be prepared when you graduate and enter into the workforce."

American student about studying at Minnesota State University Mankato, USA
Rated the programme quality 1 out of 5

Level of difficulty



Word map for reviews mentioning challenge

Out of the words representing the level of difficulty, *challenge* appeared to be one of the most representative. The word (both in noun and verb form) was mentioned in 1,090 reviews out of 48,771 documents. 21 out of 49 documents mentioning *reward* also contained the word *challenge*, hinting towards the fact the two often coexist, and that no education experience is complete without overcoming challenges. Students often reported being *overwhelmed* initially, but also used positive references to learning *new skills*, being *intellectually* challenged, and seeing *progress* in their development.



The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.

4.00

**average score for
teacher-student interactions**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Being part of a broader community of scholars involves direct interactions with prominent academics. The teacher-student interaction score tries to represent how satisfied students are with their teachers: it hinges on the availability of lecturers, their openness to confrontation and – in general – how helpful, interested and engaged they are with students.

Among 21,643 students, 36% of them rated the level of student-teacher interaction with a 4, and 37% with a score of 5. Only 8% of students rated the student-teacher interaction of their study experience low (score of 1 or 2). This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Student–teacher interactions

Students were generally satisfied with the student-teacher interaction. Many of them mentioned enablers of classroom interactions such as small numbers, motivated personnel, and the delivery method comprising workshops, group assignments, and a more personal approach to learning.



"The studies are very nice, there is always people wishing to help, it's the professors, co-students, students from other years and students across the fields of study. The study groups are small, about 30 people, everyone knows everyone. There are learning zones, where a student can always meet other students from his/her own and from other fields."

Uzbek student about studying at the University of Southern Denmark, Denmark
Rated student-teacher interactions 5 out of 5

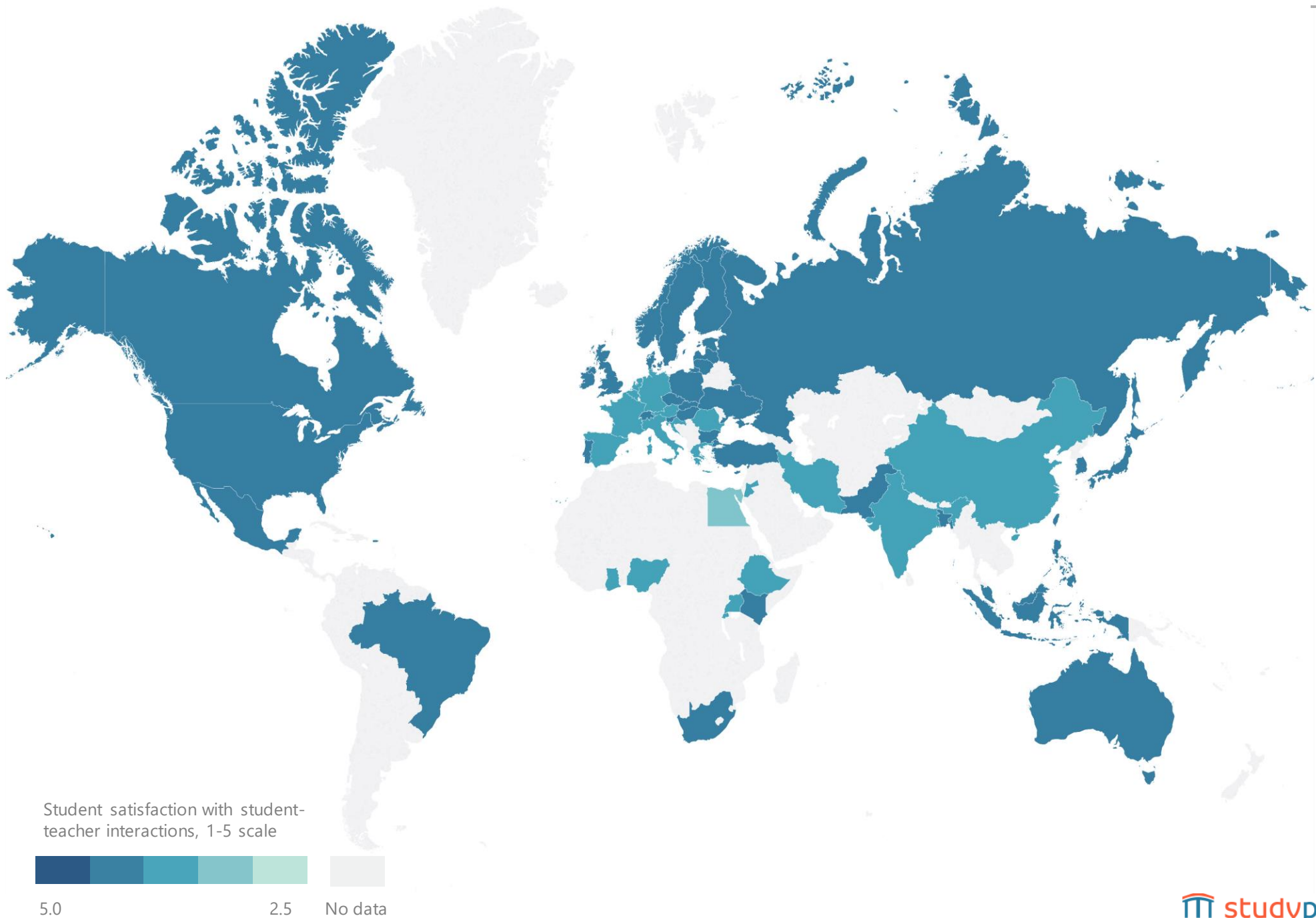
Among the most frequent issues, students named lack of support when writing essays and theses, and the lack of quality teaching personnel. Complaints about unprepared, ill-mannered, or simply unmotivated professors were rather frequent.



"This rather intensive three years made me learn to think and write in an academical manner. We've had very professional and excellent professors, although they were not that approachable. [There] existed a clear and distant gap between a student and a professor. In these three years not one professor has ever known my name."

Belgian student about studying at Leuven University, Belgium
Rated student-teacher interactions 1 out of 5

Student-teacher interactions



Student-teacher interaction

Word map for reviews mentioning teacher

The word *teacher* appeared in 2,882 documents and is often associated with positive adjectives such as *good*, *great*, *helpful*. Naturally, students often reflected on their own interactions with their teachers, sometimes referencing *positive interactions* where teachers were particularly *helpful* and other times seeing the interaction as an *improvement point*.



The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.

4.05

**average score for
admission process**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

The paperwork required to enrol in a programme can be a major dissatisfier during the student journey, as well as difficulties accessing information related to the admission process or slow response rates from universities. A higher than average score in this indicator points to institutions with an excellent admission process, exceeding students' expectations. This is awarded by students thinking the process was streamlined, the support outstanding, and the information complete.

Out of the 23,905 students who rated admission process satisfaction, 74% awarded their universities with a grade of 4 or higher. A little minority of dissatisfied students – 7% – graded the admission process 2 or lower. This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Admission process

Several students discovered the importance of good bureaucracy and office support, and many of them left enthusiastic reviews of their admission process. Opinions were generally positive when university staff was able to reply in a fast, comprehensive manner. Streamlined online application processes were particularly appreciated.



"I just got accepted and the semester starts September, but so far, it has been a great and wonderful journey. The application process was quite straightforward and simple and I was nominated for a 50% scholarship because of my grades. In addition, the university support unit is/was always there to answer whatever questions I had. Great experience so far!"

Nigerian student about applying to University of Liverpool, United Kingdom
Rated the admission process 5 out of 5

Students were particularly dissatisfied with admission processes with long waiting times, or where the procedure was unfriendly to international applicants.



"I don't feel that my experience could have been improved by much once I was there, although the admission process before arriving was very difficult. It was all done through a website that was very unclear and confusing. There is also not much information given about visas for international students."

Briton student about applying to National University of Cordoba, Argentina
Rated the admission process 2 out of 5

A world map illustrating student satisfaction with the admission process across various countries. The map uses a color scale from dark blue (1) to light green (5) to represent satisfaction levels. Countries like Canada, the United States, and Australia show high satisfaction (4-5), while many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America show lower satisfaction (1-2). The map includes a legend at the bottom left titled 'Student satisfaction with admission process, 1-5 scale'.

A horizontal bar chart with five segments of decreasing width from left to right. The segments are colored in a gradient: dark blue, medium blue, teal, light blue, and very light blue. To the right of the bar is a legend consisting of a small square followed by the text '0.00'.

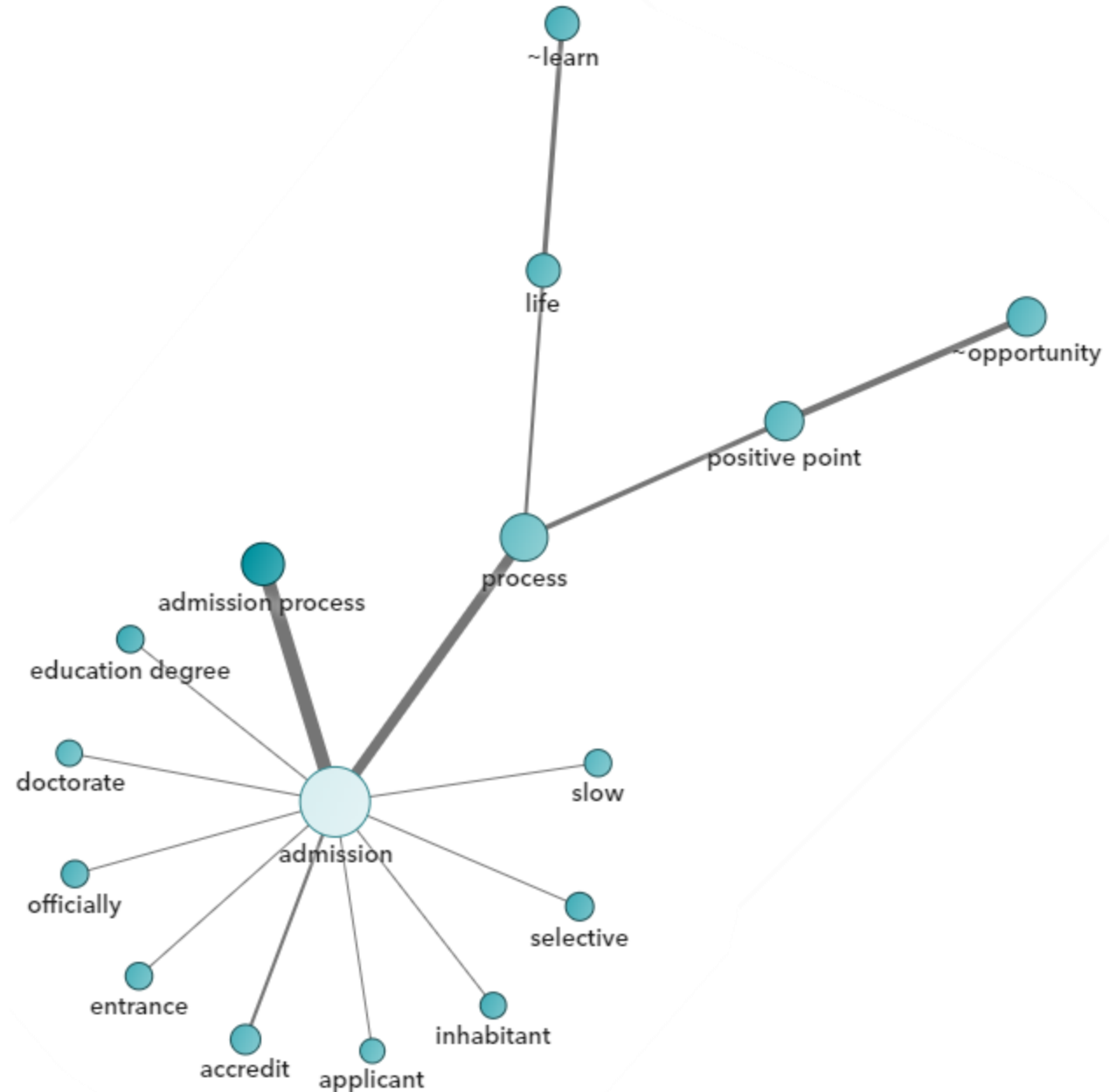
No data

Admission process

Word map for reviews mentioning admission

While only 127 reviews mentioned the term *admission*, sometimes it was associated with the mention of neutral words such as *officially*, *admission process*, *accreditation*, *applicant*, and only a few qualitative descriptors such as *slow* or *selective*. When linked to the admission process, some students pointed it was a 'must do' in order to make the most of their *opportunity* to continue their education.

The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.



3.88

**average score for
campus infrastructure**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Student experience could hardly be the same without the physical infrastructure and support personnel characterising life on campus. The campus infrastructure score encompasses all aspects of student life connected to facilities, service, university staff, etc. While an external influence usually, as universities are spending more and more of their budgets on state-of-the-art campus infrastructure by investing in new buildings, libraries, sports facilities or cafeterias, better understanding of the connection between campus infrastructure and the student experience is of critical importance.

Student satisfaction with campus infrastructure highlights their expectations of the ability of university structures to help them in their academic pursuit.

Satisfaction values were collected from 24,013 respondents: while most of them answered positively – with one-third rating 5 out of 5 – the average grade is less enthusiastic than for the other indicators, showing that there is room for improvement. This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Campus infrastructure

While not being the core of extensive reviews, campus infrastructure was mentioned in many student reviews. Among the most frequently mentioned aspects of this indicator were excellent facilities, especially the ones regarding sports and leisure. Campus infrastructures appeared linked to welcoming and stimulating study experiences. In addition, students often mentioned campus atmosphere and safety as key aspects contributing to their education experience.



"The university is one of the best I've seen. The campus "bubble" gives a real sense of community and safety."

British student about studying at Linnaeus University, Sweden
Rated campus infrastructure 5 out of 5

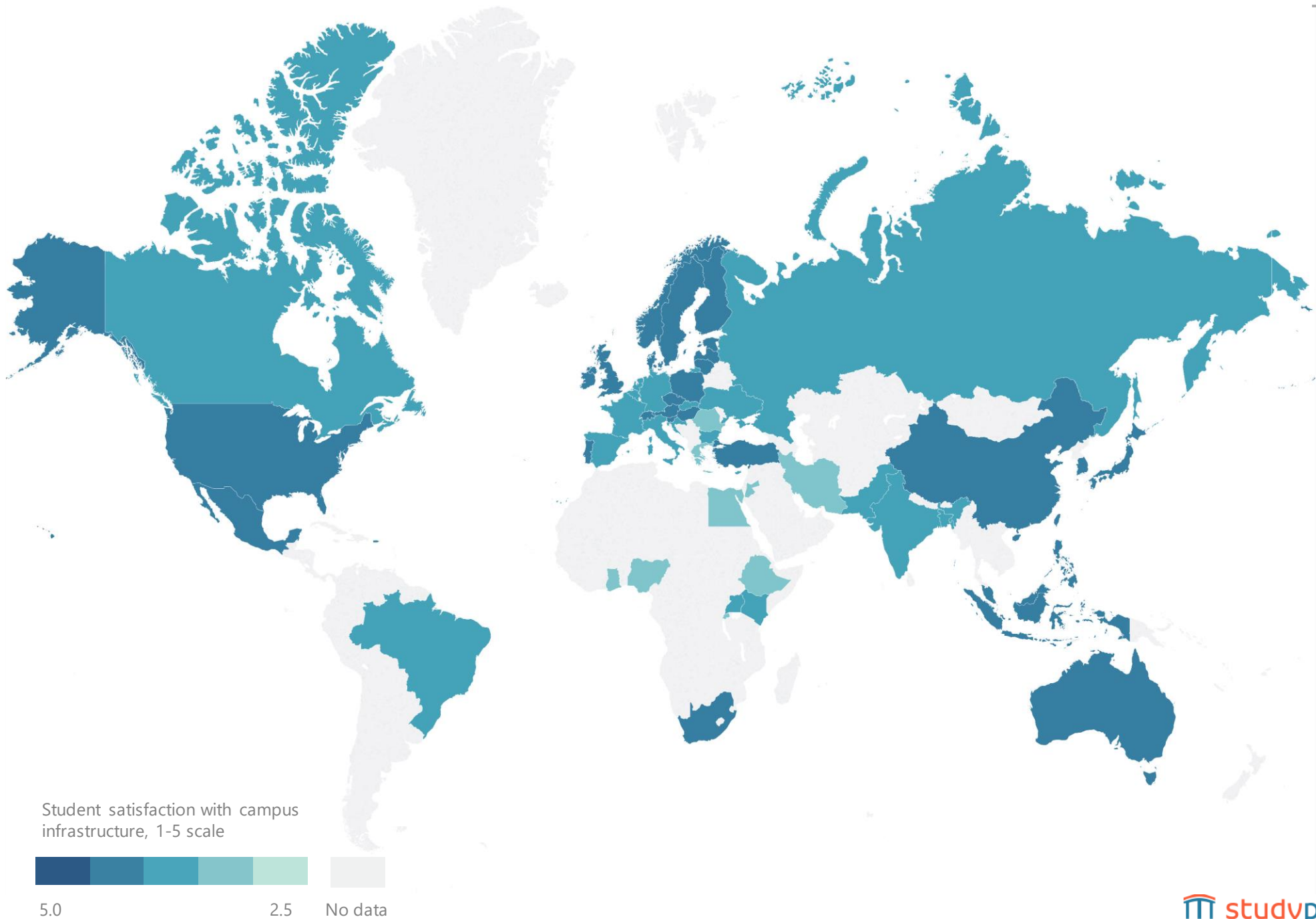
Campus infrastructure surfaced as an alternative to unsatisfactory learning or student life. Campus infrastructure was pivotal in fostering social interaction and participation in the international student community.



"There is a problem about most of the universities in Turkey. They don't have a campus life, activities, in short, things to improve student's vision, social life, relationships with people. [...] I think a person without social skills won't be able to rush into life."

Turk student about studying in Uludag University, Turkey
Rated the campus infrastructure 1 out of 5

Campus infrastructure

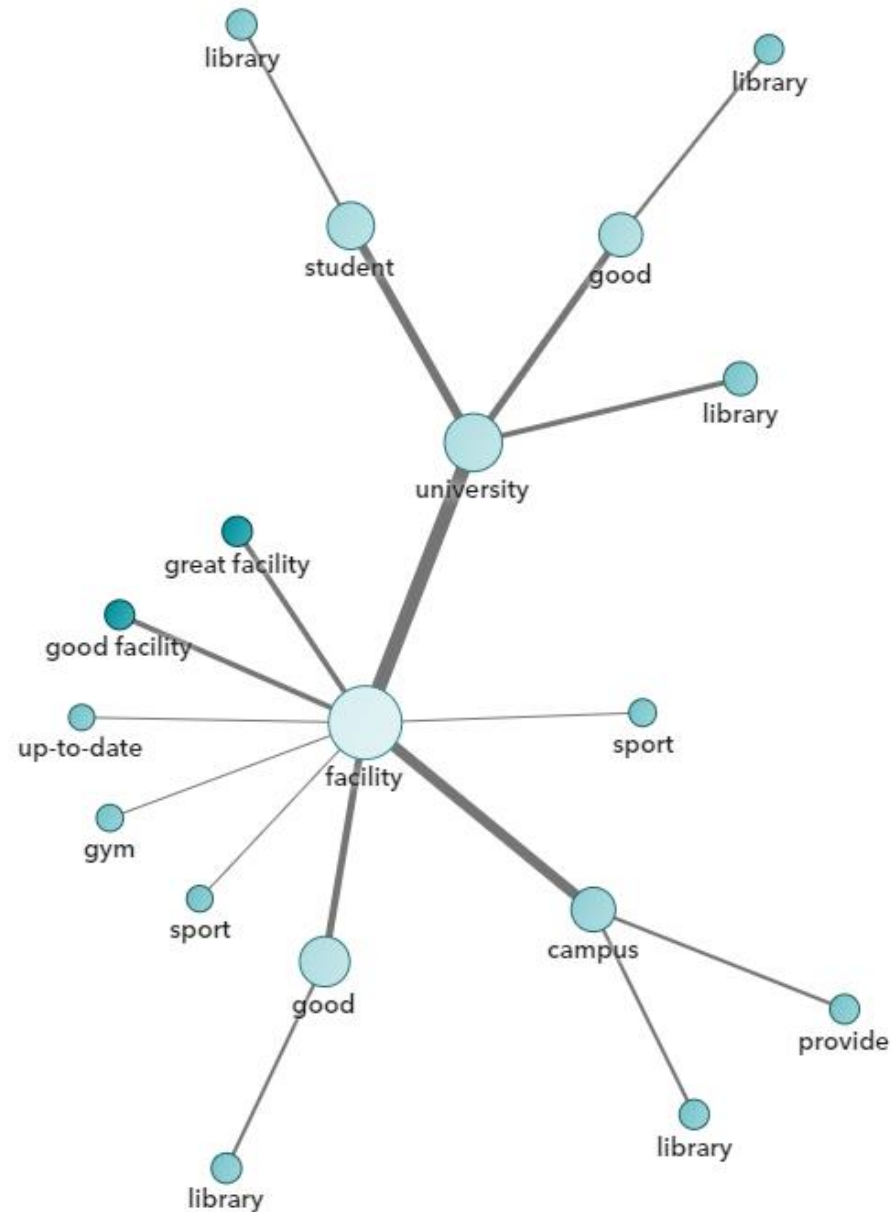


Campus infrastructure

Word map for reviews mentioning facility

The term *facility* was mentioned 1,308 times by students, often in relation to positive descriptors such as *great*, *good*, and *up-to-date*. The facilities that students referred to the most in their reviews were the *gym*, *sports center* and *library*, and therefore the ones we recommend universities focus on the most.

The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.



3.93

**average score for
career development**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

While career development cannot comprise the whole set of personal benefits linked to higher education, it points at one of the main functions of pursuing a degree. Students expressed the degree to which their study programme contributed to enhancing their employability.

This category covers some aspects of personal growth as well as the way universities can help in job search, after graduation placements, and the development of skills and attitudes valuable to the work environment.

23,971 students expressed their satisfaction with how well their institutions were able to help them fulfil their work goals. This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Career development

Several students understood the value of a life-changing experience, and many of them left enthusiastic reviews of their universities. For many of them, higher education was not only a driver of professional improvement, but also a key part of personal growth. Their study experience seems often read in retrospect on how helpful it has been to their development.



"Studying in Eindhoven University of Technology was definitely a life changing experience for me. High level educational environment with close collaboration with industry which provides an ideal platform for young engineers to develop their career, and of course a fun place to be and enjoy your student life!"

Iranian student about studying at Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands
Rated career development 5 out of 5

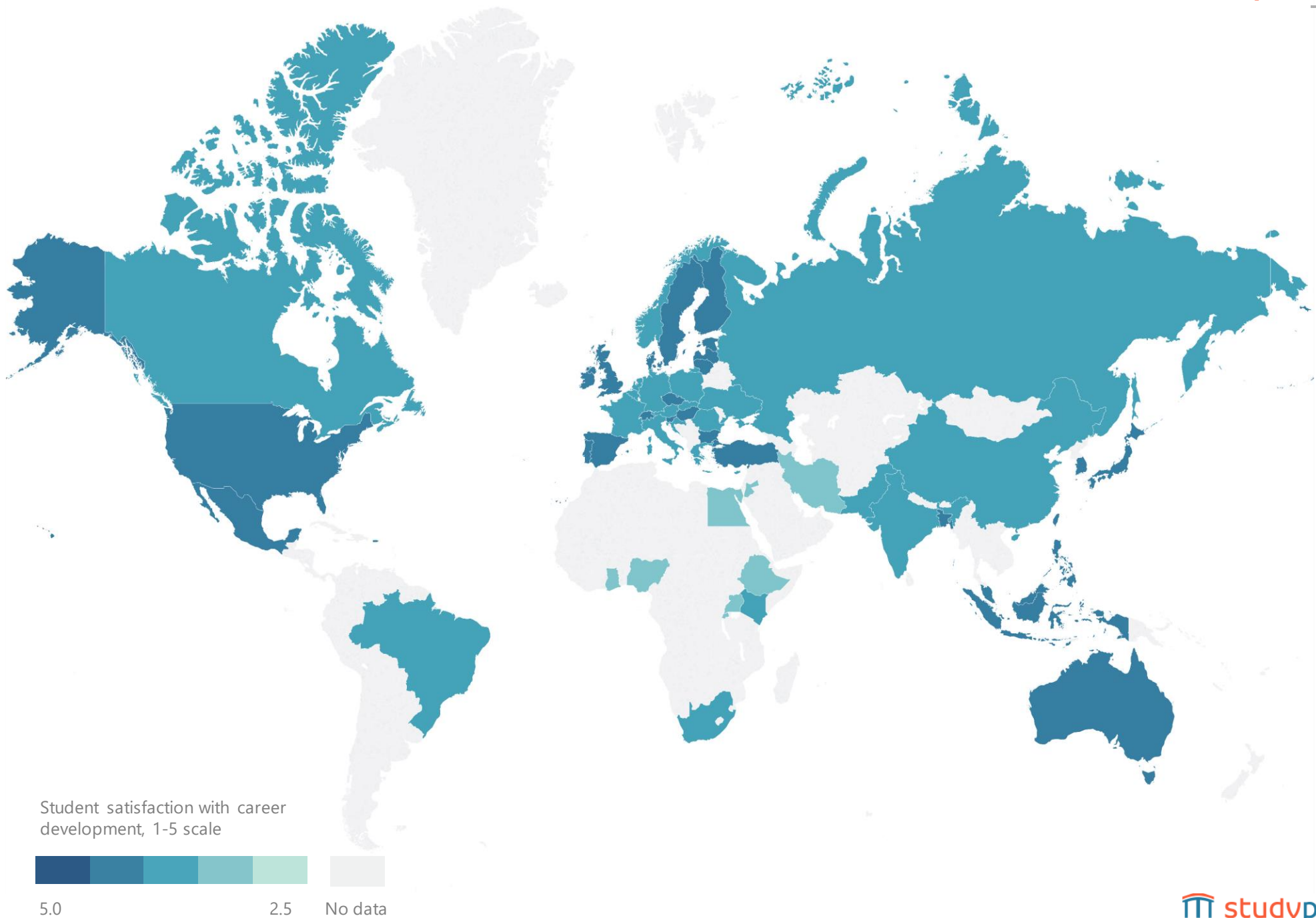
Student expectations were sometimes unmet. Among the factors that discouraged students the most was a perceived mismatch between the skills they learned during their study and the skills they needed as preparation for what many of the called the 'real life': some students viewed their study experience as untethered to the working environment.



"The course I undertook (Honours degree in Finance and Investment) was [...] not organised well enough with certain modules seemingly not relevant enough to properly benefit students in the long-run when they commence employment upon graduation. The lack of support, contacts and links to companies for internship opportunities could be improved vastly as well."

Malaysian student about studying at Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland
Rated career development 3 out of 5

Career development



Word map for reviews mentioning grow

The terms *grow* or *growth* were mentioned a total of 436 times by students, often in relation to terms such as *professional growth*, *realising*, *mature*, *key*, *fortunate* and *personal experience*. Students mentioned in their reviews that they appreciated universities helping them in their career development but also in their personal growth.

The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.



3.95

**average programme score on
student diversity**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Students were asked if their study experience matched their expectations of student diversity. Rather than measuring the effective presence of students from different backgrounds, this dimension looks at students' perceptions.

They rated their universities on their capacity to foster an atmosphere where minorities and different perspectives were valued and encouraged. This includes engaging and welcoming people from different countries, cultures, religions, age cohorts, genders and backgrounds, including people with special needs.

Out of the 21,526 reviews collected on this topic, 38% of them gave a score of 5 out of 5 possible points. This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Student diversity

Student diversity seems to be largely appreciated and is generally seen as a proxy for inclusivity and fairness in academia. Diversity was overwhelmingly perceived to be a positive point, making social interactions easier and more meaningful for international students.



"Aub is a very inclusive and diverse university that really accepts and welcomes with open arms people from all walks of life. There's a lovely mix and feel good feeling around the campus which is great to come to and makes you want to come in and work at uni (rather than stay at home). If you're looking for a university that's going to engage with you and actively wants to include you in their family AUB is the one for you."

British student about studying at The Arts University Bournemouth, United Kingdom
Rated student diversity 5 out of 5

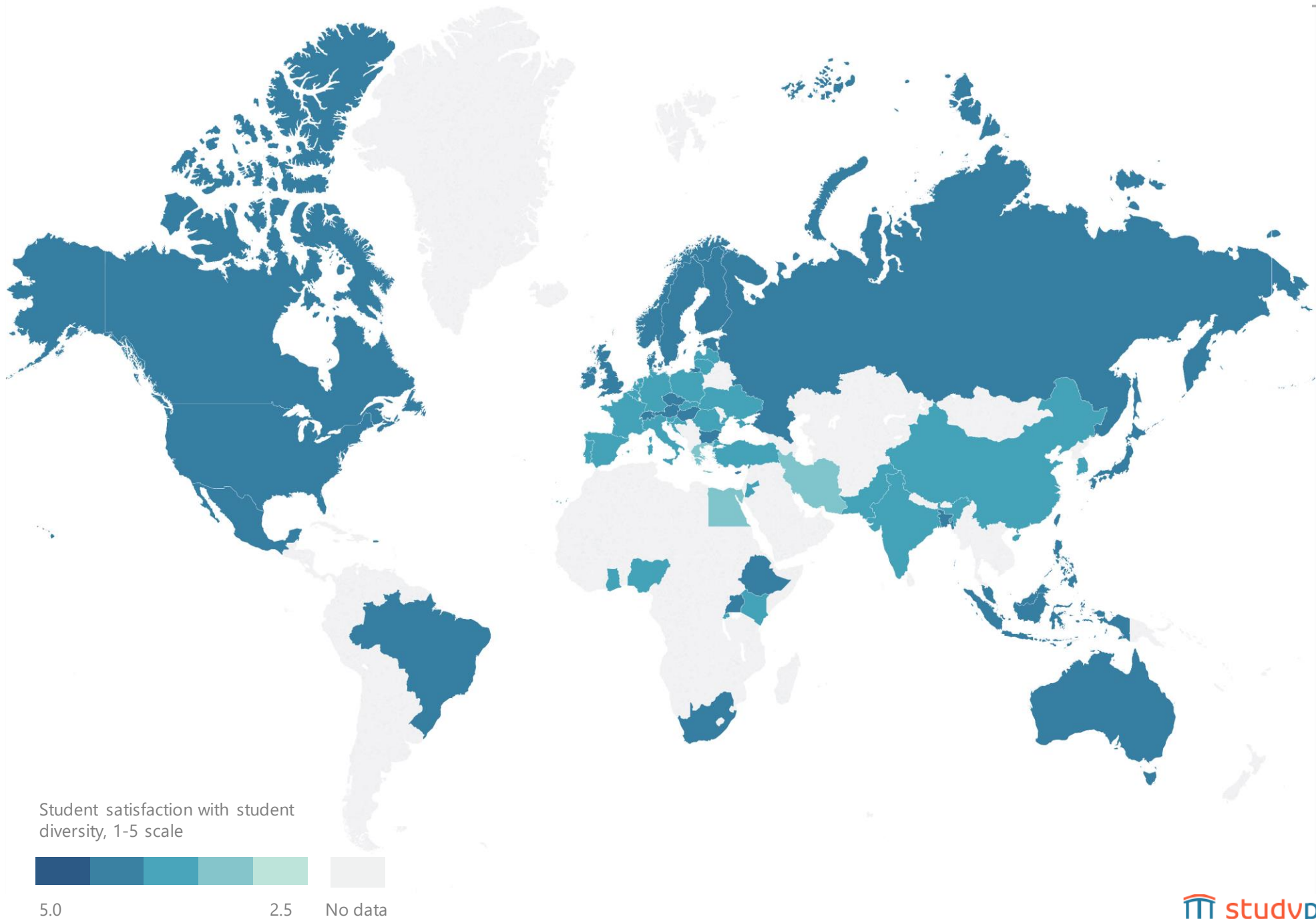
Satisfaction with student diversity wasn't always high. Some students recounted negative personal experiences describing courses which were branded as 'international' and did not live up to their promise.



"What the University should do to improve is to work better on the student's selection. I consider that the university is admitting almost anyone and they are not looking to have a diverse group. More than 90% of the group come from the same country and more than 80% are men."

Colombian student about studying at Arden University, United Kingdom
Rated student diversity 1 out of 5

Student diversity



Word map for reviews mentioning diversity

Diversity (and similar forms) appeared 1,157 times throughout the student reviews. Often times *diversity* was primarily associated with *student diversity* but also *cultural diversity*, *student interactions*, *nationalities*, and *social life*. Students often appreciated being able to interact with students from different cultures, nationalities or continents, and appreciated universities that facilitated these interactions.

The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.



3.55

**average programme score on
scholarship and funding**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Students were asked to voice their satisfaction on the role of universities in financing their studies. Such indicator sheds light on the perceived role of the university in securing financial support: it largely depends on how helpful, involved, and collaborative the institution was during the process rather than the amount of funds available.

Students who did not apply for any funding programmes were asked to skip this question. Nevertheless, 20,178 reviews have been collected, with 55% of them awarding high ratings (4 and 5 out of 5) and 19% low ratings (1 and 2). This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Scholarship and funding

While not many students were the recipients of scholarships or were admitted in study support programmes, their expectations were met in some cases. Students showed higher regard for universities that were engaged in securing scholarships and helping or guiding students through various financial applications than for those that didn't.



"I also like that it is a university that takes care of its students. I am one of the many students that is working in the university on a working scholarship and I also know many graduates that are working in good positions in different departments of the university."

Turkish student about studying at Bahçeşehir University, Turkey
Rated scholarship and funding 5 out of 5

Negative comments about scholarship and funding were usually directed either to the lack of support programmes or the problems in accessing such programmes.



"Although the lectures were good in a multicultural setting, I faced financial constraints after completing 80% of my module, then dropped out of class. The school should make provision for students in need of such assistance."

Sierra Leonean student about studying at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands
Rated scholarship and funding 1 out of 5

A world map illustrating student satisfaction with scholarship and funding across various countries. The map uses a color gradient from dark blue (representing a score of 1) to light green (representing a score of 5). The legend at the bottom left indicates the scale: 1 (dark blue), 2 (medium blue), 3 (teal), 4 (light green), and 5 (very light green). The map shows that countries like Canada, the United States, and Australia generally have higher satisfaction levels (scores 4 and 5), while many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America have lower satisfaction levels (scores 1 and 2).

A horizontal bar chart with five segments of decreasing width from left to right. The segments are colored in a gradient from dark blue to light green. To the right of the bar is a legend consisting of a grey square and the text '0'.

3.93

**average programme score on
quality of life**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Expectations of student life often extend beyond the campus space. Students expressed their satisfaction with the life outside the university. They evaluated their satisfaction with the city where they lived, and the extent to which the experience matched their needs, the social inclusion, general atmosphere on campus, and student groups.

Student satisfaction with the quality of life was generally high among the 24,411 reviews collected. This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Overall, student life was seen as a vehicle and a time to develop many of the soft-skills needed after graduation, as well as a strong social circle; explore their personality, discover new interests, and contribute to personal development.

Quality of student life

Many universities are located in beautiful and historical cities, which positively affects the quality of student life. Students also mentioned factors such as the help and support from mentors and student buddies which contributed to making their study destination feel welcoming and the experience comfortable.



"Bonn is a very beautiful, cozy and comfortable city to live in. With perfect transportation system, mostly nice and warm weather (winter is not "German" at all, maybe slightly), nice and helpful people, atmosphere is perfect for living and studying here. After 7 month of living here, I call Bonn my second home!"

Georgian student about studying at University of Bonn, Germany

Rated quality of life 5 out of 5

Most negative experiences echoed the lack of attractiveness of the city or area where the institution was located. The negative impressions were usually based on uneventful cities or a campus location too distant from the city center; these issues had an impact on the overall study experience.

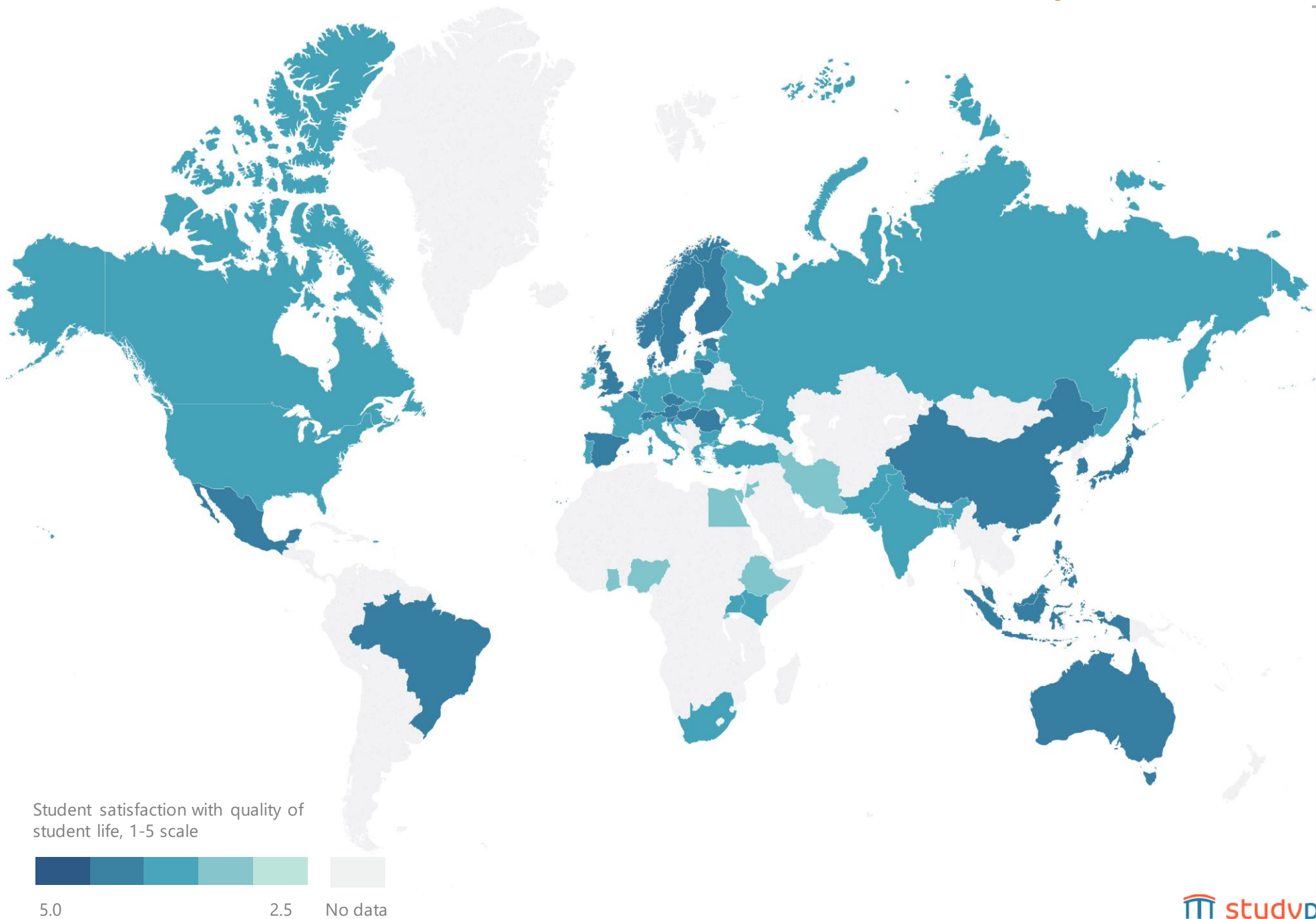


"The student life is not the same as other universities which are not in central London, and this can be a downside. It is not as sociable as there is no 'student area' where everyone lives after living in halls."

British student about studying at University College London, United Kingdom

Rated the quality of life 1 out of 5

Quality of student life

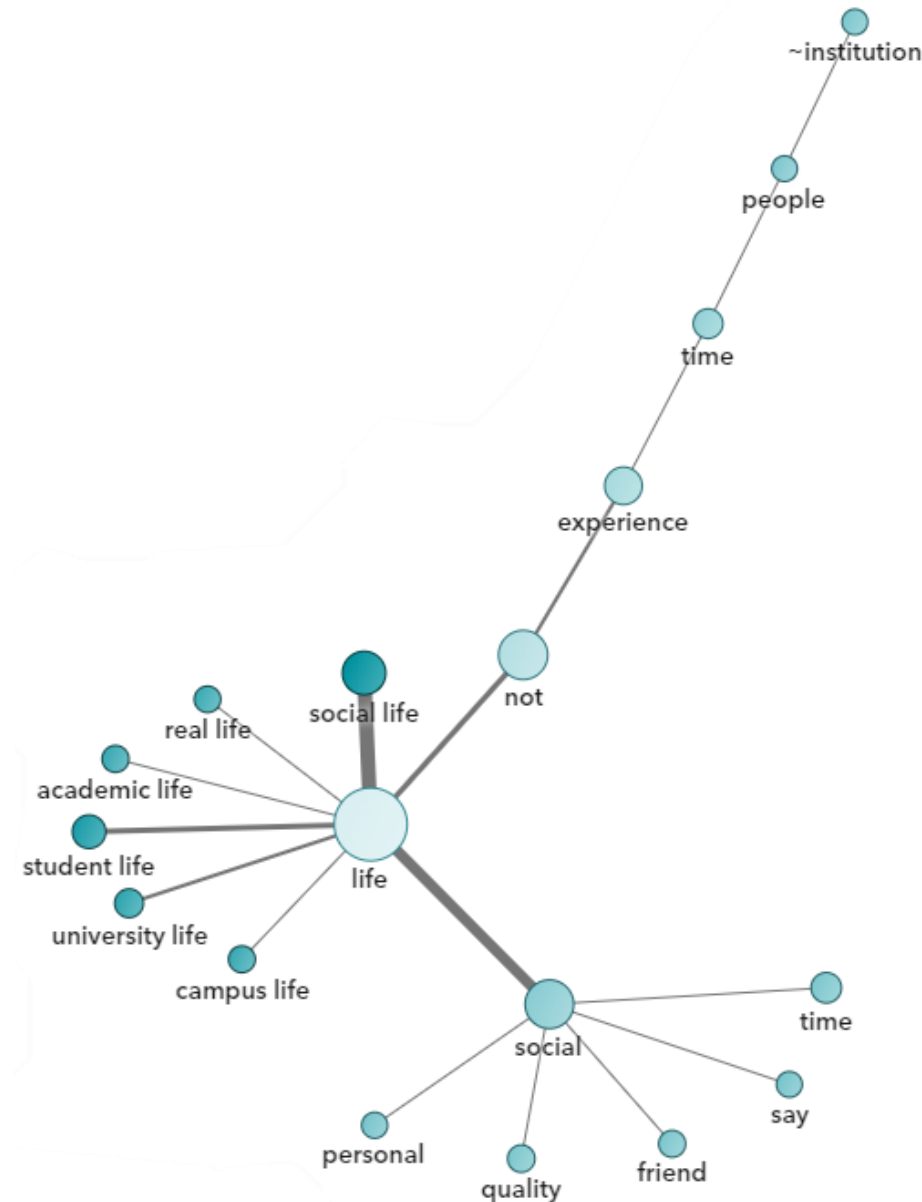


Quality of student life

Word map for reviews mentioning life

Over 2,591 reviews mentioned the term *life*, often in relation to the students' *social life*, *academic life*, *university life*, or *campus life*. Social life seemed to be the most popular theme, with students often reflecting the *time* aspect, as well as their *personal* time, or the *quality* time they could spend with their *friends* as aspects they deemed important during their education experience.

The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.



3.64

**average programme score on
cost of living**

(on a scale of 1 – 5)

Budget limitations can significantly impact student experience, and higher cost of living can be a major hindrance while studying. High satisfaction regarding the cost of living means that the study programme allowed students to live comfortably, without incurring in excessive costs for food, housing, and transportation.

The 15,237 students rating this indicator were generally more lukewarm than for the other dimensions, with an equal spread of respondents on grades from 3 to 5 (27%, 29%, and 28% respectively). This score is based on both domestic and international student reviews.

Cost of living

Cost of living encompasses many aspects of student life. In particular, most of students mention accommodation and their 'social life' expenses as the most troublesome to manage. Transportation and cheap alternatives to the campus canteen are usually highly appreciated.



"The University offers excellent student support and a fantastic range of clubs and societies to get involved in. Price of living is affordable and the area is well connected by public transport."

British student about studying at University of Glasgow
Rated the study experience 4 out of 5

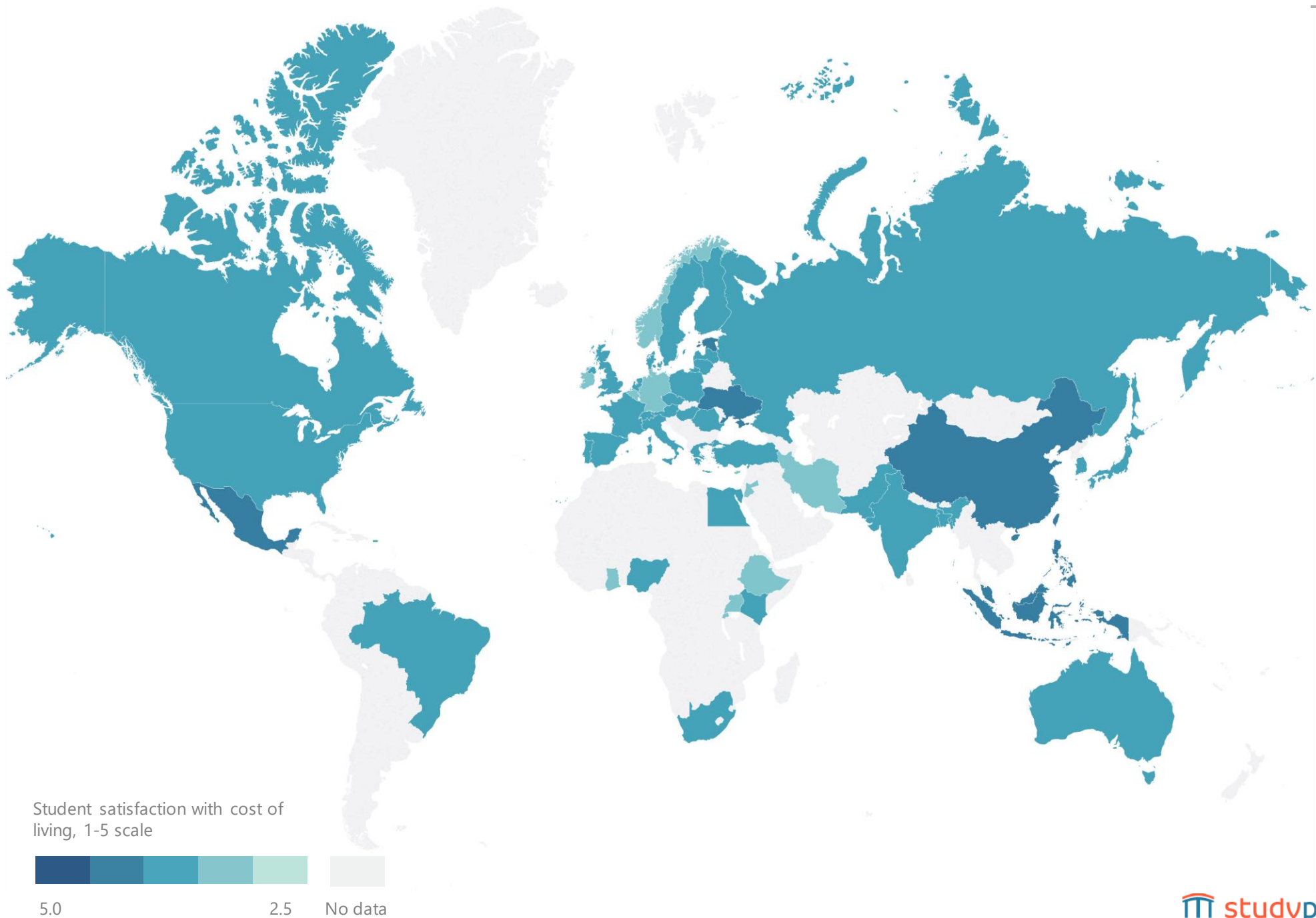
Too high cost of living may spoil part of the study experience. While it is difficult to understand which of this rating is due to high expectations and which is due to actual financing problems, high cost of living can harm the overall feeling toward a programme. Moreover, students seem to bundle tuition fees and cost of living in a study allowance mental account.



"Tuition fees and cost of living was quite expensive and made it difficult to enjoy being in Canada while constantly being worried about finances."

Kenyan student about studying at Carleton University, Canada
Rated the cost of living 1 out of 5

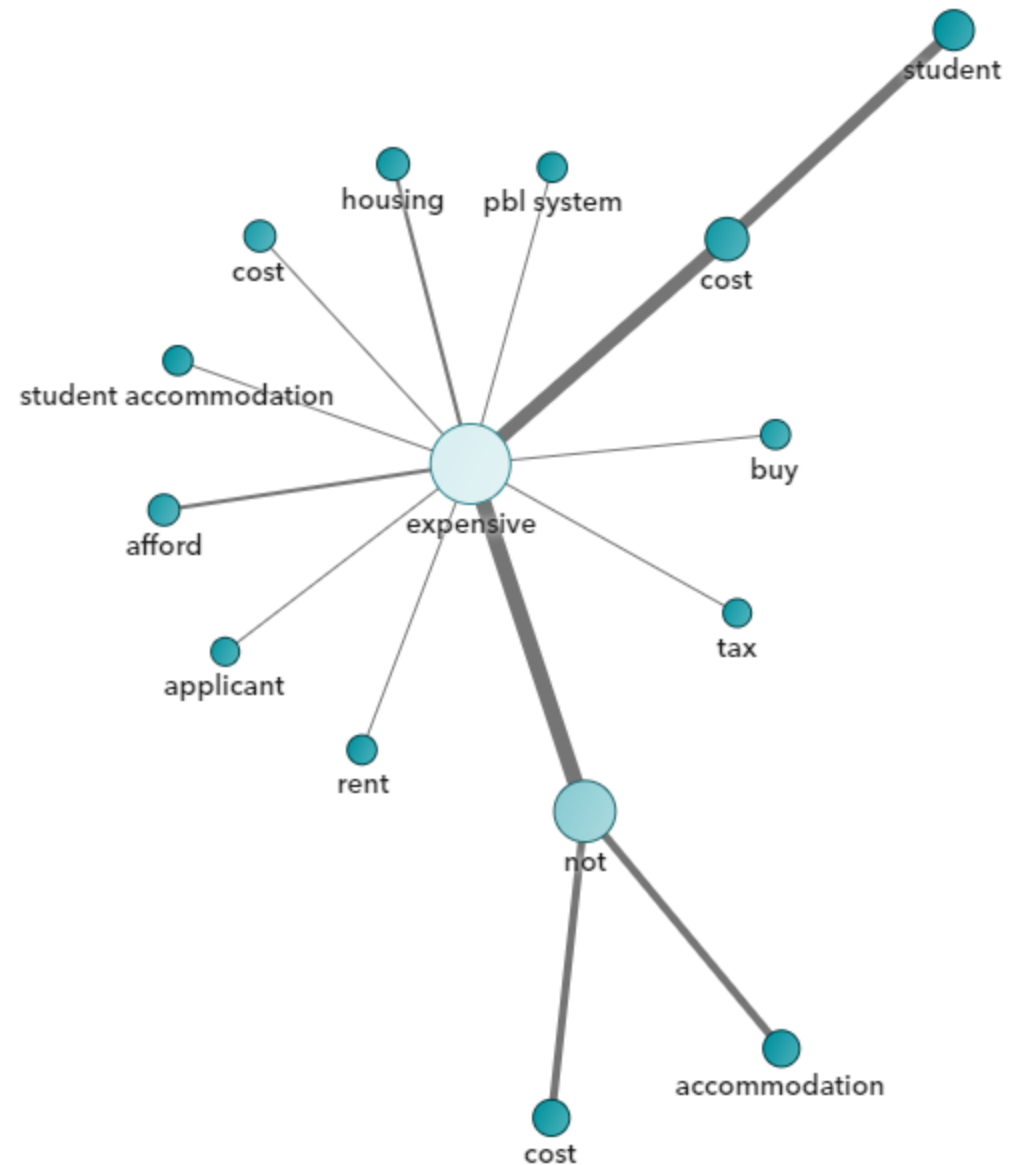
Cost of living



Word map for reviews mentioning expensive

In terms of cost of living, a key term that we identified was *expensive* which was mentioned in 197 instances, often being used in association with *student accommodation*, *affordability*, *rent*, *housing*, or *taxes*. This goes to show that students could use more university assistance in terms of finances to support students.

The *word map* highlights the instances a word occurs (circles) and the time it was mentioned aside another in the same review (line). For more information about the text analysis, please refer to the [methodology](#) part.



Part Three

Key destinations & student satisfaction

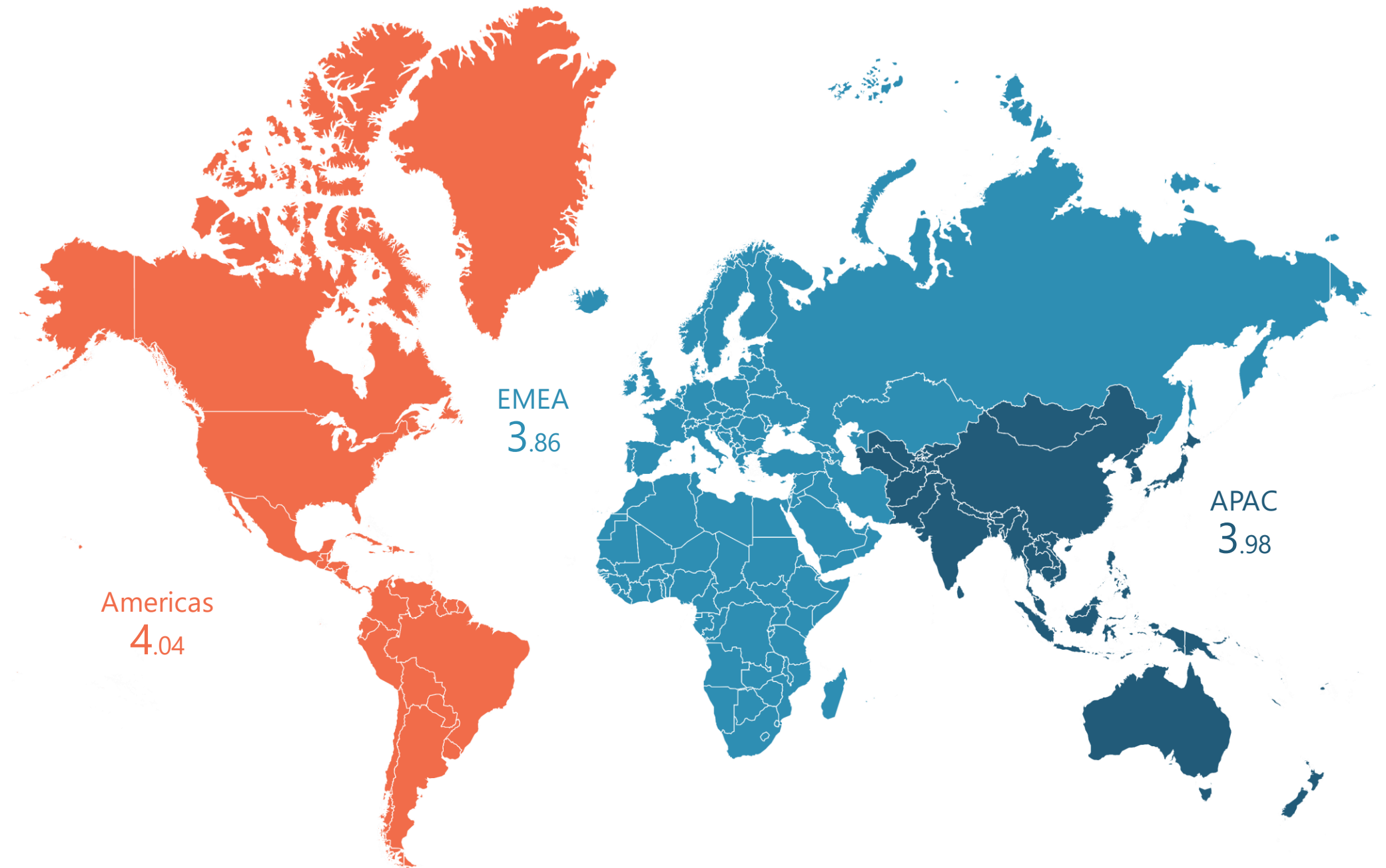
Regional ledger

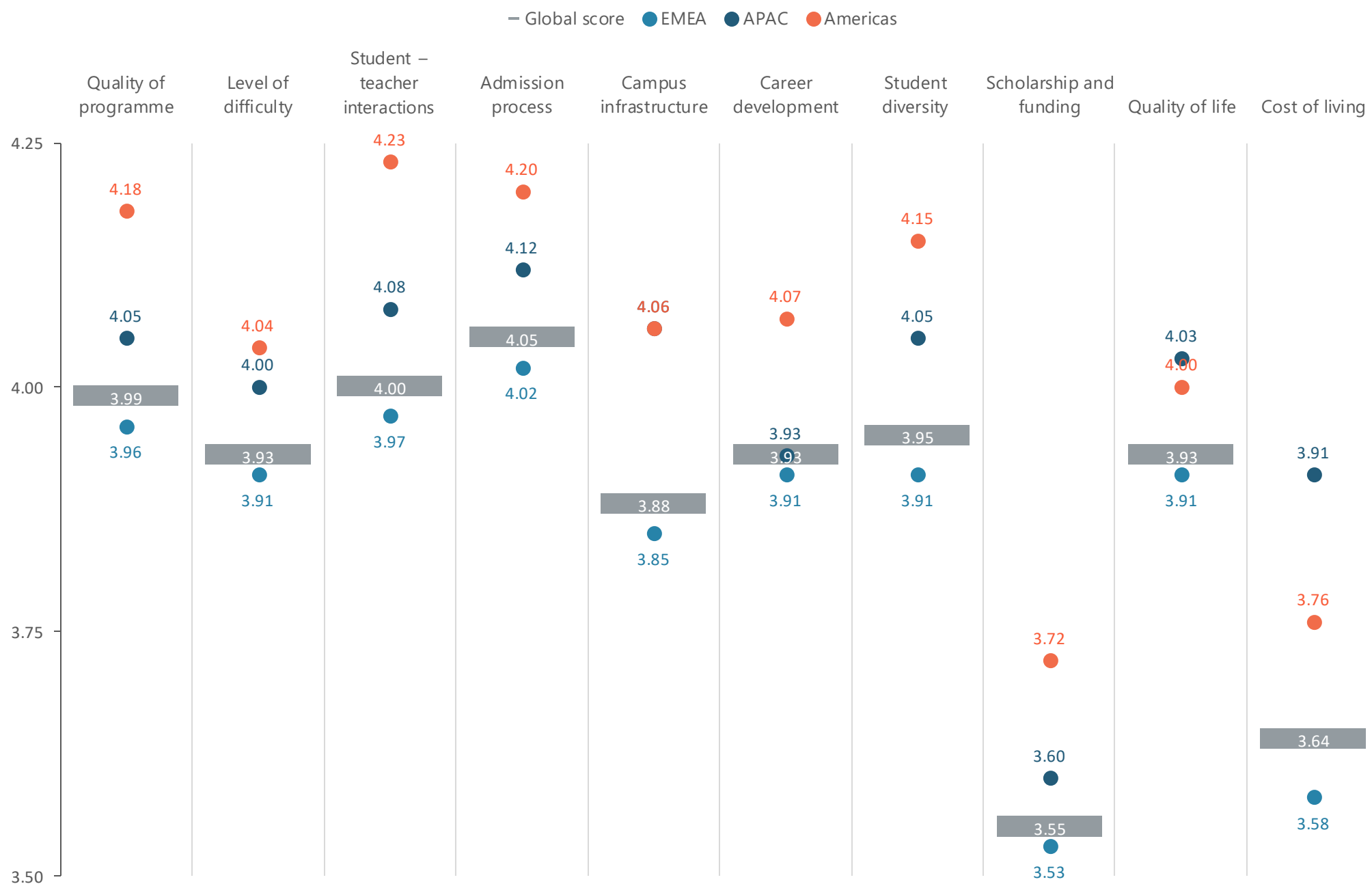
Student stories differ by their background and the country they are studying in. Different education systems, tuition fees, and strength of regional academic infrastructure change individual study experiences. The following regions tried to be comprehensive of the main country groups worldwide.

The body of reviews collected partly reflects the country student population, including a larger share of international students for countries well engrained in international education. This regional ledger brings forward the countries with the largest number of reviews rather than its sheer population size.

In the following charts, the *global average score* by dimension has been displayed as a grey bar. The scale of each chart has been adjusted to show differences among the same group.

Regional overview





Custom regions

While students represent a dynamic, mobile, and rather international group, not all countries can be duly represented in this study. A group of 10 custom regions has been represented in this report.

The regions have been selected trying to represent the major destinations for international student. These study destinations have been arranged to group either similar higher education systems or comparable cost of studying.

Charts and descriptions illustrate and compare levels of satisfaction among students in different countries: as the GSSA scores are not representative of a ranking but represent student well-being, the data is indicative of *perceptions* rather than *performance*. The scale of each chart has been adjusted to highlight differences and allow comparisons across countries within the same custom region.

1. United Kingdom & Ireland



"Student information are made available in the student portal [...] a comprehensive website where a student can find all sorts of information and notifications needed in his/her whole stay in the university. The admissions committee has also been very responsive and helpful in making sure the process was smooth."

Filipino student about studying in Dublin, Ireland



"The teachers are passionate, dynamic and very responsive to any query. They are always there for any need we may have. Cambridge University's collegiate system provides the perfect environment for creating a relaxed community of friends and co-students. There are endless possibilities to meet new people through the wealth of student societies ranging from sport, to performing arts, to tea."

British student about studying in Cambridge, the United Kingdom

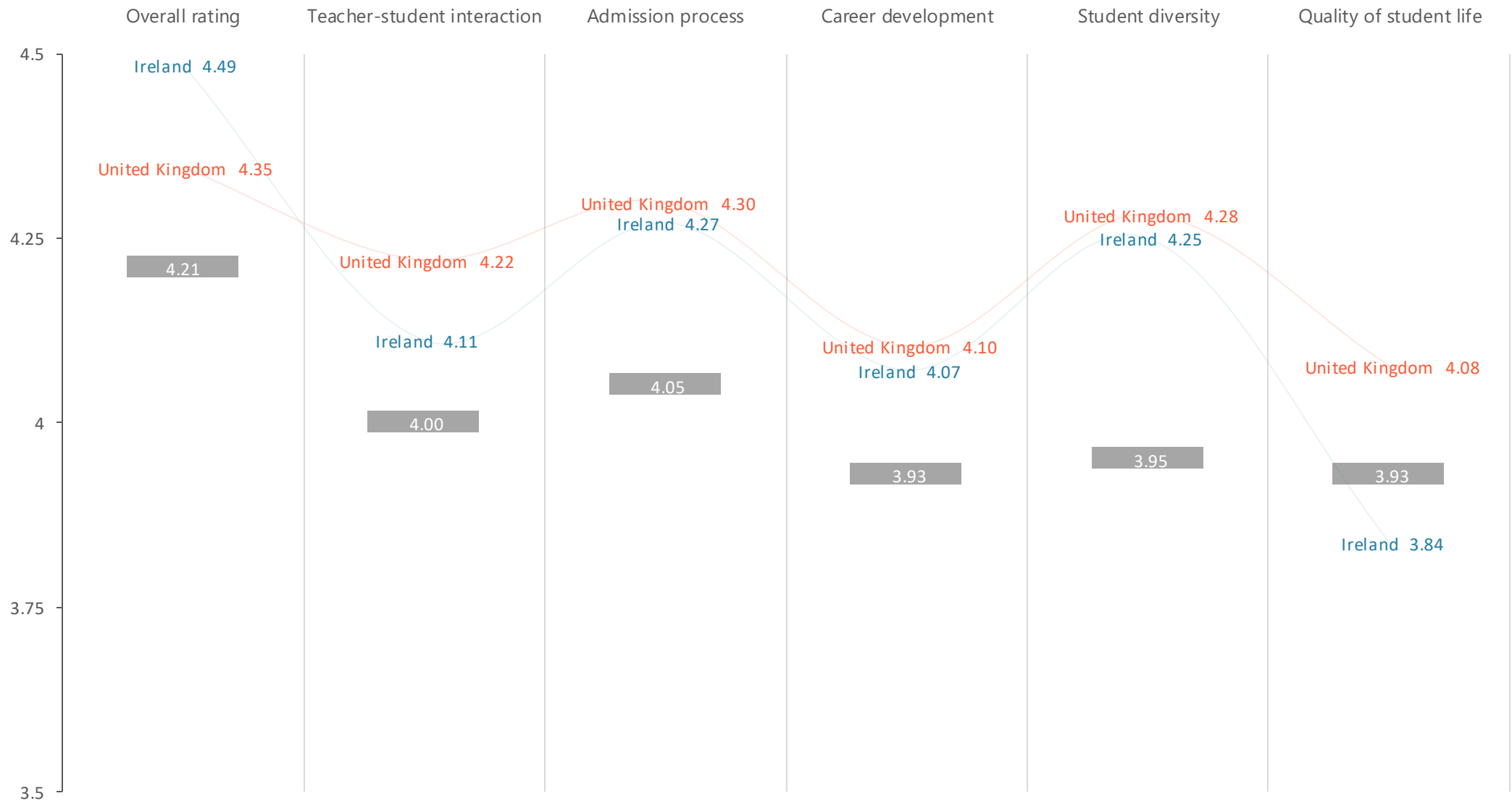
Within Europe itself, a sizeable part of the student population eyes the attractive English-speaking countries of Ireland and the United Kingdom. These countries act as a global hub for students from all over the world and their institutions came to a great length to enrich student life and student experience. Both countries score far above average in most dimensions.

Interestingly, students from Ireland looked at their overall satisfaction in a more positive way than their British counterparts, despite rating other aspects with lower grades.

Best feature: Admission process. Many international students rewarded universities that took care of their student admissions and helped them at the beginning of their study experience.

Improvement point: Student life quality. While satisfaction levels in this category do not rise any red flag, the quality of student life could be further improved, especially making organized activities more inclusive.

1. United Kingdom & Ireland



2. Benelux countries



"Give a push to your career.

Great university with lots of resources, quality in education and overall living life."

Spanish student about studying in Brussels, Belgium



"You have a lot of free time because in this program you're meant to read and learn the material by yourself so that you can discuss it and teach others in tutorial groups. Of course, you'll also have lectures. If you're pretty independent this program is made just for you! You'll also have to participate in studies made by fellow students or research which can be quite fun and most of the practical ones are interesting."

Luxembourgian student about studying in Maastricht, Netherlands

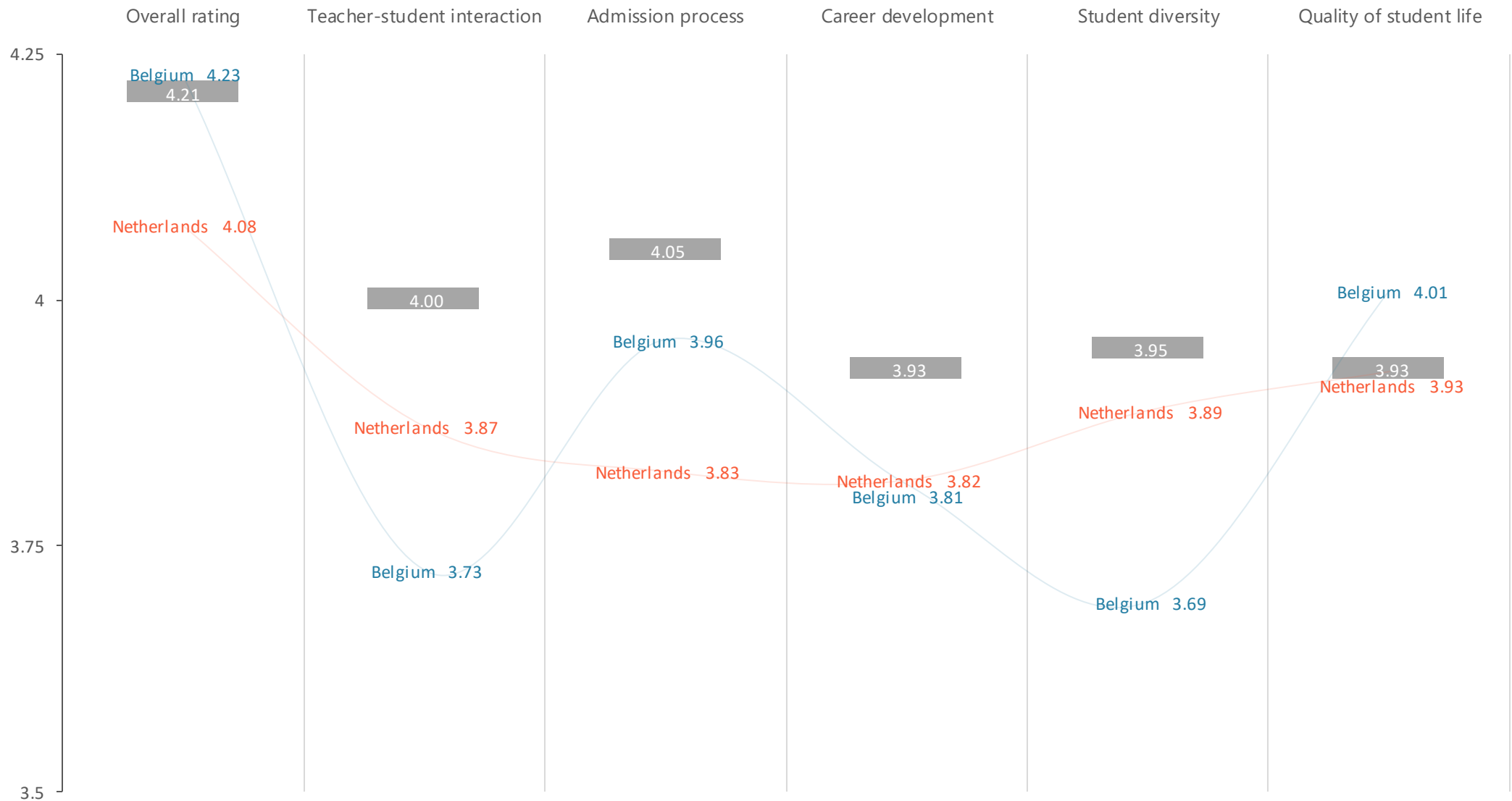
Students from Belgium and the Netherlands are generally happy about their overall study experience. However, when asked to evaluate single aspects of their experience their answers were way more critical. In particular, they seem to be hardly satisfied by the interaction with their teachers and their career prospects. It might be good to mention that the grading system especially in the Netherlands is more stringent than other European countries, and therefore students might be accustomed to using more stringent grades.

Best feature: Quality of student life.

Improvement point: Student diversity. While universities in Benelux have reached a great degree of internationalisation, this aspect did not translate effectively into improved student experience.

Study in Holland, 2018. *Dutch grading system. You may find that the Dutch grading system is different from your own.* [online] Available at: <<https://www.studyinholland.nl/life-in-holland/dutch-grading-system>> [Accessed 09 May 2019].

2. Benelux countries



3. German speaking countries



"Frankfurt School provided me with a friendly, highly educational environment. The school has a great career service system that benefits students in exploring their career paths and finding great opportunities in German jobs market."

Vietnamese student about studying in Frankfurt am Main, Germany



"UBIS also offer us unique identity with no stress for exam (no exam) and it focus on our classes' work participation that help us in real world along with assignments (weekly and end of the subject) and presentation. This experience help us to build confidence and skills that are needed in the world of business."

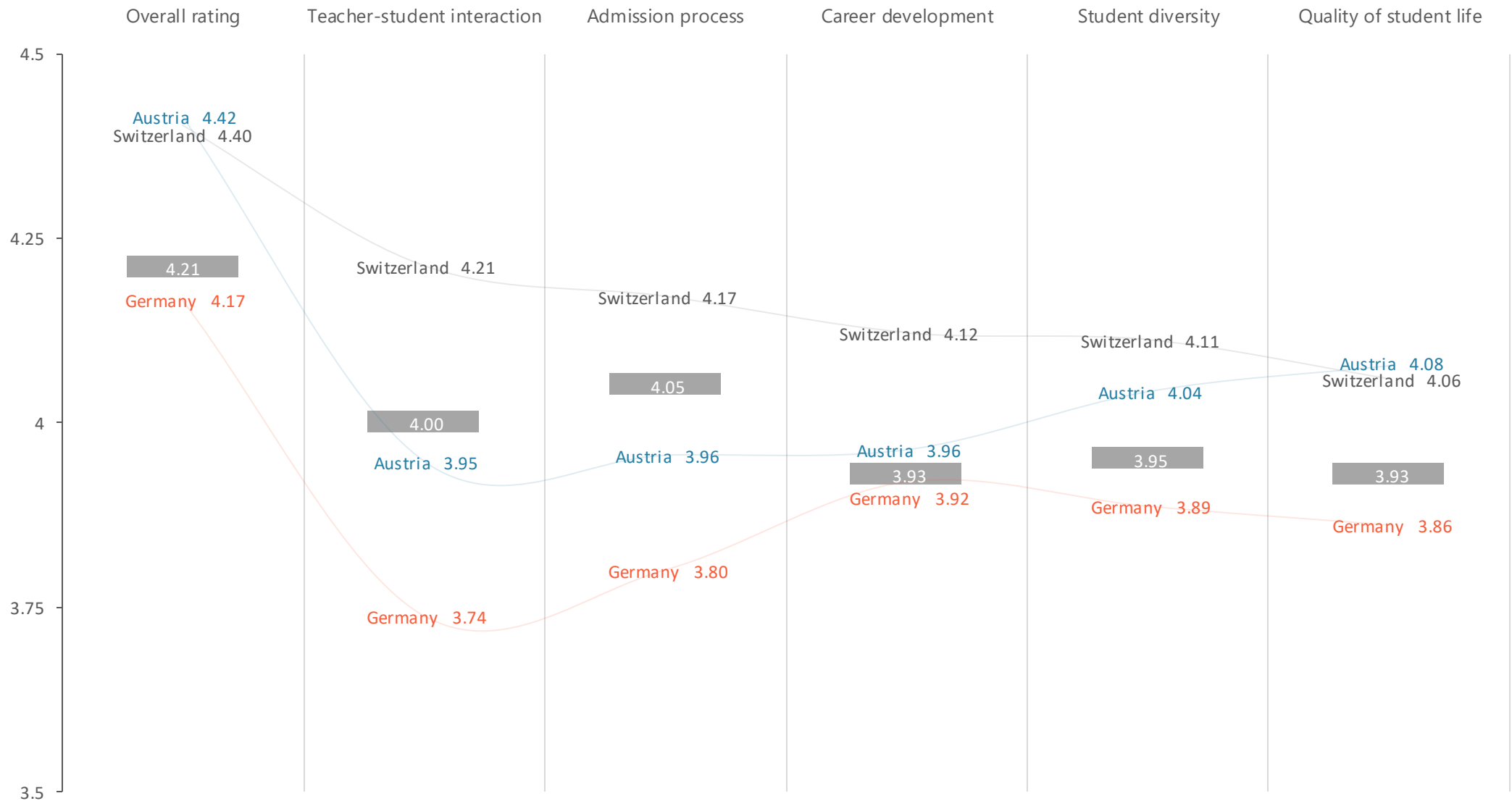
Myanmar student about studying in Geneva, Switzerland

The German speaking regions usually abbreviated in DACH represent a large chunk of central Europe. Their education system is often regarded as comprehensive, affordable, and linked to career development. Nevertheless, students were largely disappointed by lots of features of their experience. This finding matches previous studies confirming that students from Germany and Austria expect more than their peers in higher education. Swiss universities usually score better than their peers, with students particularly appreciating the smaller classrooms, the ability to directly interact with their teachers and very experienced lecturers.

Best feature: Career development.

Improvement point: Teacher-student interaction. Students complain about professors who are either arbitrary in grading, outdated in teaching, or disconnected from their students.

3. German speaking countries



4. USA & Canada



"I feel that the relationships I built with professors in University exponentially improved my written work and pushed my ideas to innovative and exciting places."

American student about studying in New York, USA



"You need to be really active (and proactive) to be socially engaged on campus. Good place to work on one's shyness and confidence building. Great teachings, responsible professors, beautiful campus. To me, undergraduate education is about building the foundation of a healthy, rational, creative mindset of students. UBC provided me such environment to shape my mindset.."

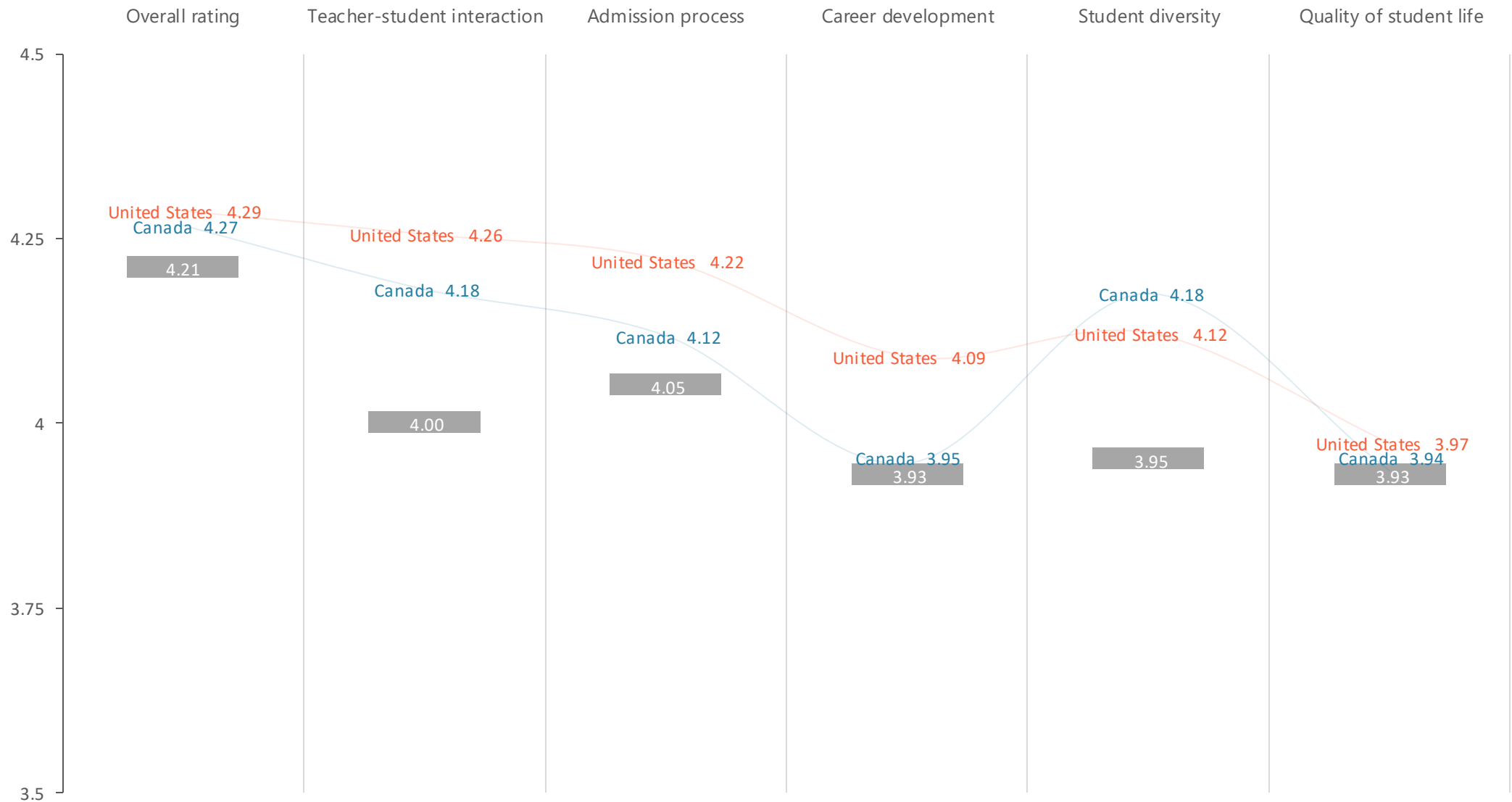
Chinese student about studying in British Columbia, Canada

North American universities are renown for their academic outreach and variety of campus life. Students from US and Canadian colleges rewarded their universities with generally positive scores, mentioning the personal class room experience in smaller colleges, as well as great professors pushing their students towards academic excellence, and collaboration with other scholars. Of course with so many institutions located in both countries, it is difficult to condense student perceptions and experiences in just one viewpoint.

Best feature: Teacher-student interaction and student diversity.

Improvement point: Quality of student life. This score is comparable to the world average and sheds a light on the perceived importance of life outside the classroom in comparison to teaching-related features.

4. USA & Canada



5. Near East



"Al-Quds University has a very diverse environment, you get to meet a variety of people everyday from students to academics to even board members. As for the academic experience, it was wonderful, the professors really helped sharpen my understanding of many concepts, not to mention improving my lab skills and figuring out how and why everything works the way it does. Overall, Al-Quds University was a turning point in my life, in many aspects, and all in a good way."

Palestinian student about studying in Jerusalem, Israel



"I'm a Liberian, therefore coming from a post war country to study Molecular Biology and Genetics is challenging. The program is difficult, but there's very high Job prospect as the need of growth and development in the Liberian health sector increases by the day. The student diversity and social life both impacts me to grow as a human, learning life, different culture and society. They also keeps me motivated as a foreign student to learn from Turkey and use knowledge and experience to contribute to the growth and development of Africa and other third world countries."

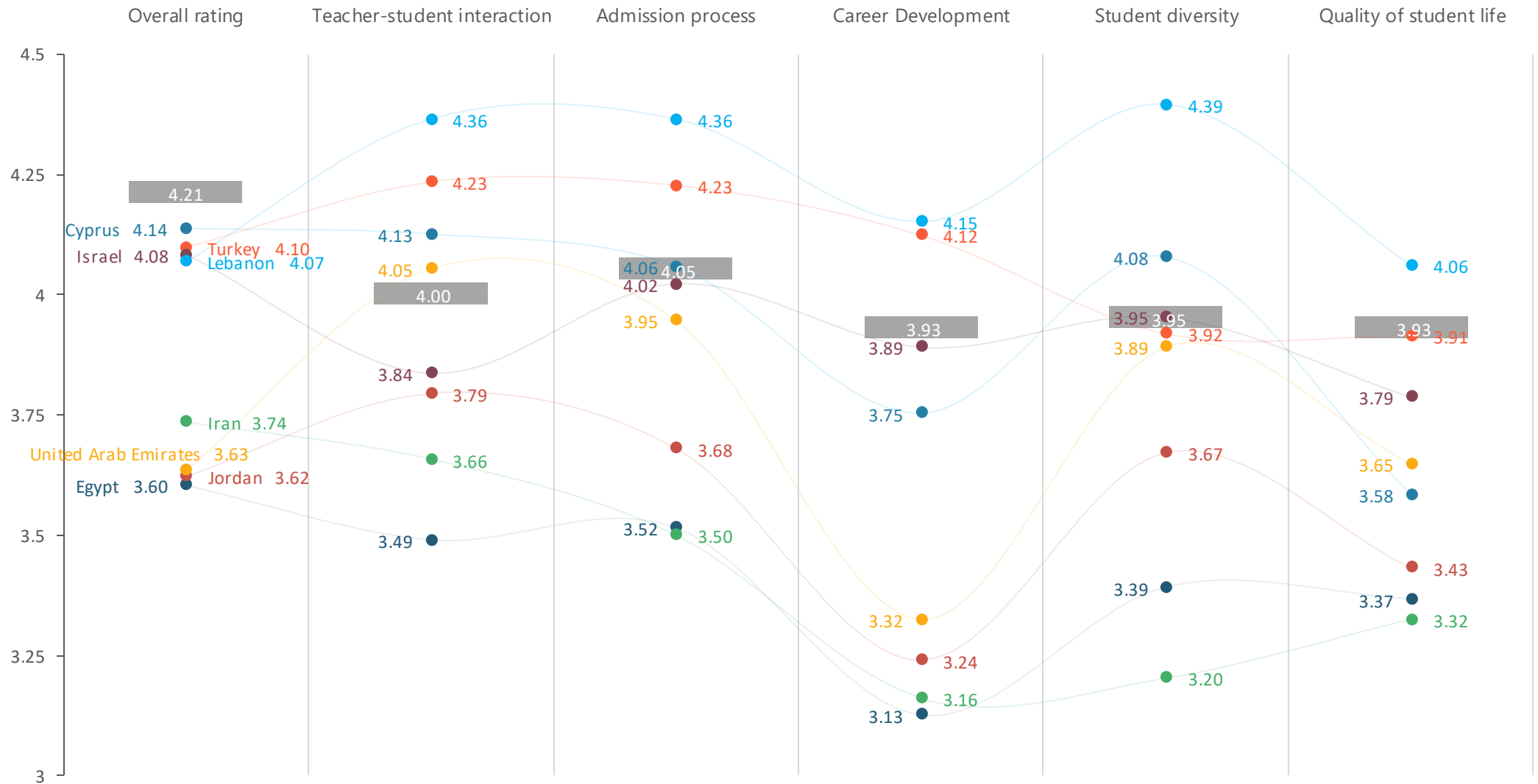
Liberian student about studying in Istanbul, Turkey

At the junction of three continents, higher education in the Near East has the potential to become a regional connection for students from diversified backgrounds. While this opportunity is within reach, some universities fail to achieve high expectations from regional and international students. Students expressed their feelings with marked national differences. Turkey is especially focusing on increasingly attracting more international students from the region, and offering them access to education opportunities that surpass those in their country sometimes, offering new opportunities for students.

Best feature: Teacher-student interaction.

Improvement points: Student diversity and career development.

5. Near East



6. Northern Europe



"There are very innovative and multidisciplinary programs available (much in the spirit of the city itself) and the facilities are improving on a rapid pace. The city itself is an ideal environment for higher education studies - it's extremely young and international, with a buzzing start-up community. I found the study environment to be excellent for a person that enjoys independence and control over their studies."

Finnish student about studying in Malmö, Sweden



"To be honest, [my course] really helps to gain the internal and external experience in the new tech-world, Actually, the teaching method totally differs from my home university, and very great accommodations and I would really like mention this in Finland the professors are like friends to you, so kind and patient."

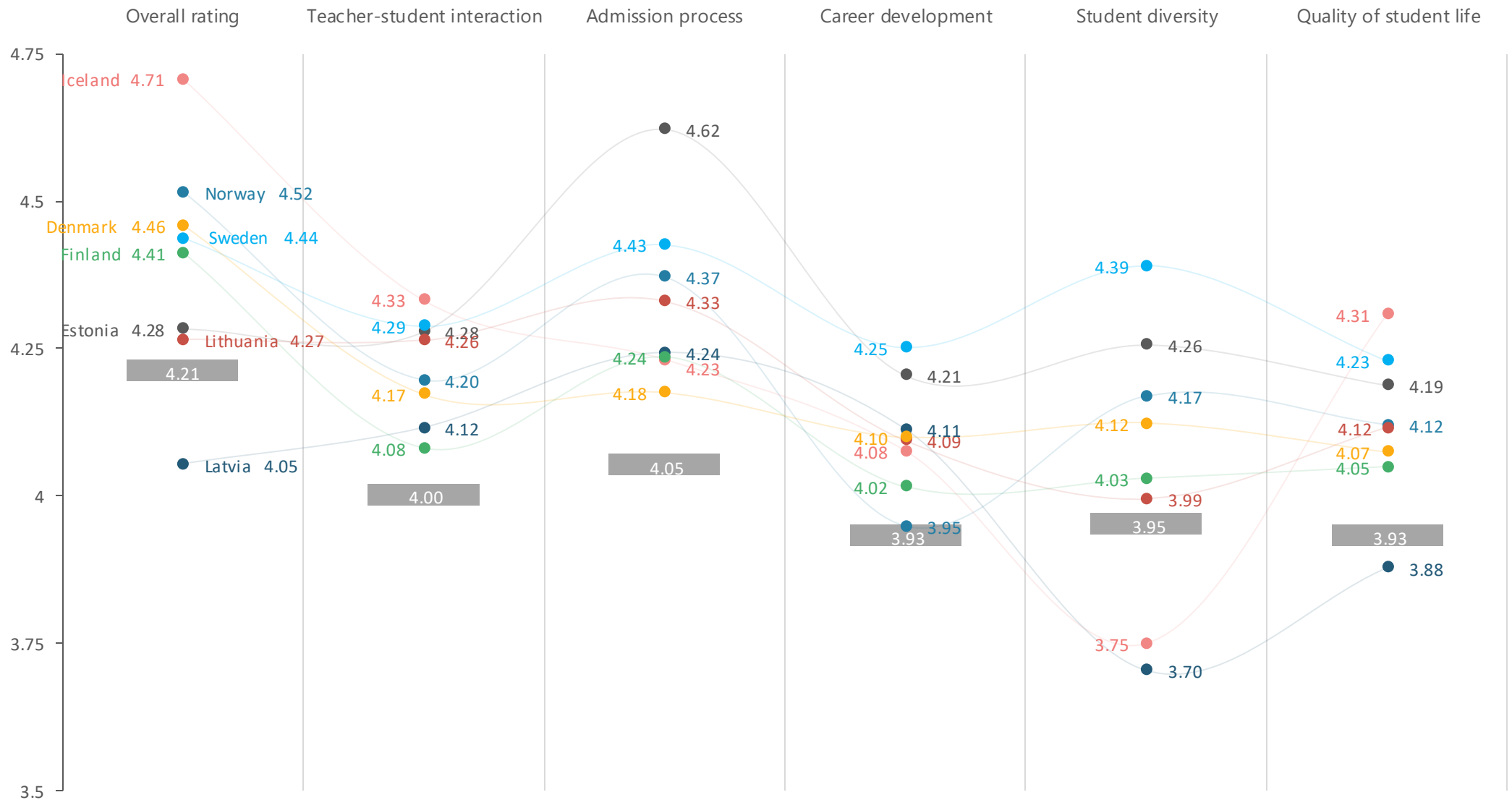
Indian student about studying in Kouvola, Finland

Within Europe itself, students report having the best experience studying in Northern Europe. Countries such as Norway, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland score among the highest student satisfaction ratings within this region and are well known for having some of the most innovative education methods in the world. Problem-based learning is far more common in this region than in other parts of the world, and students often mentioned being encouraged to combine their theoretical knowledge with practical applications. Another aspect students often mention within the region is the fact that teachers are very approachable, and the distance between teachers and students is lower than in other regions, contributing to a feeling of inclusivity.

Best feature: Quality of student life.

Improvement points: Student diversity.

6. Northern Europe



7. Australia and New Zealand



"It was a new and eye-opening experience. The lecturers were very friendly, inquisitive and encouraged student participation. The school has various clubs, hence, not only do you get quality education but also expand your social circle. I gained confidence from this experience too."

Singaporean student about studying in Brisbane, Australia



"With its world renowned staff and industry leading researchers, The university of Melbourne offers opportunities like no other. With teachers who engage with us the students and provide intellectually stimulating content, I find myself progressing through my studies with ease and satisfaction. The courses stay relevant and are tailored to your ambitions. Additionally, the campus offers more than most other Australian universities with its open spaces and brilliant community."

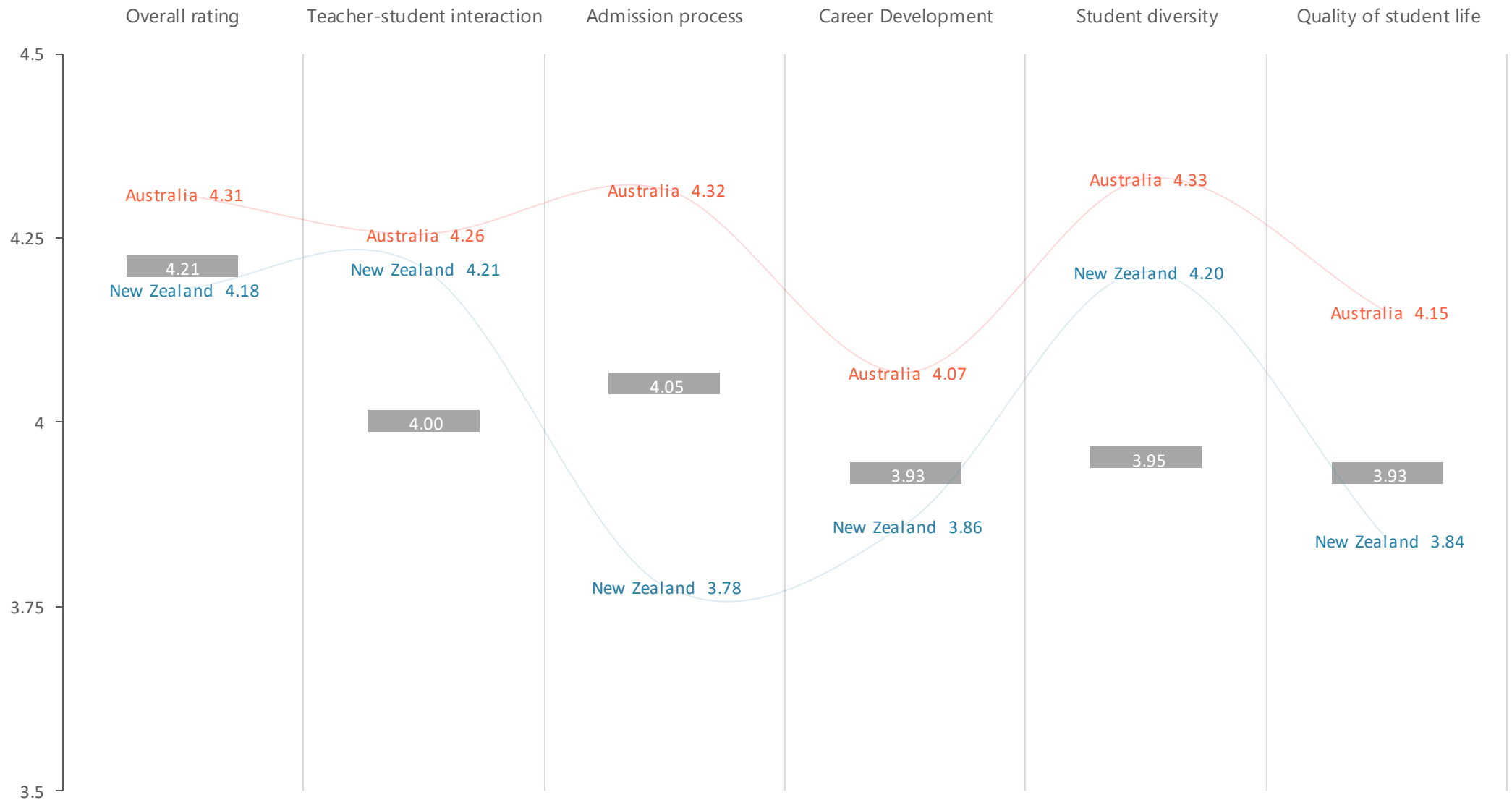
Australian student about studying in Melbourne, Australia

Australia and New Zealand feature among the most developed countries in Oceania. Their outstanding academic environment puts efforts in achieving global outreach and excellent services. These aspects are rewarded by students and materialise in a good satisfaction level. As both countries attract an increasing number of international students, they have quickly become a global and regional international education center. Students often mentioned quality education, truly international environments, great teachers, stimulating course content, just to mention a few of the positive aspects of studying in Australia.

Best feature: Student diversity.

Improvement points: Career development.

7. Australia and New Zealand



8. Latin Europe



"This University is very similar to my home University. It has the same structure and very similar way of functioning and performing classes. It is also a very good combination of theory and practice and there is a lot of group work, projects and presentations. Also, there is a lot of exchange students which is a plus."

Croatian student about studying in Spain



*"The teachers are amazing, I really loved the overall courses and the way they thought it, they clearly loved what they were doing and it was good energy passed to us.
My favorite part was the group works and even a project done with a the head of communication of Decathlon. Highly beneficial and instructive.*

We have wonderful study trips, great integration with the integration week."

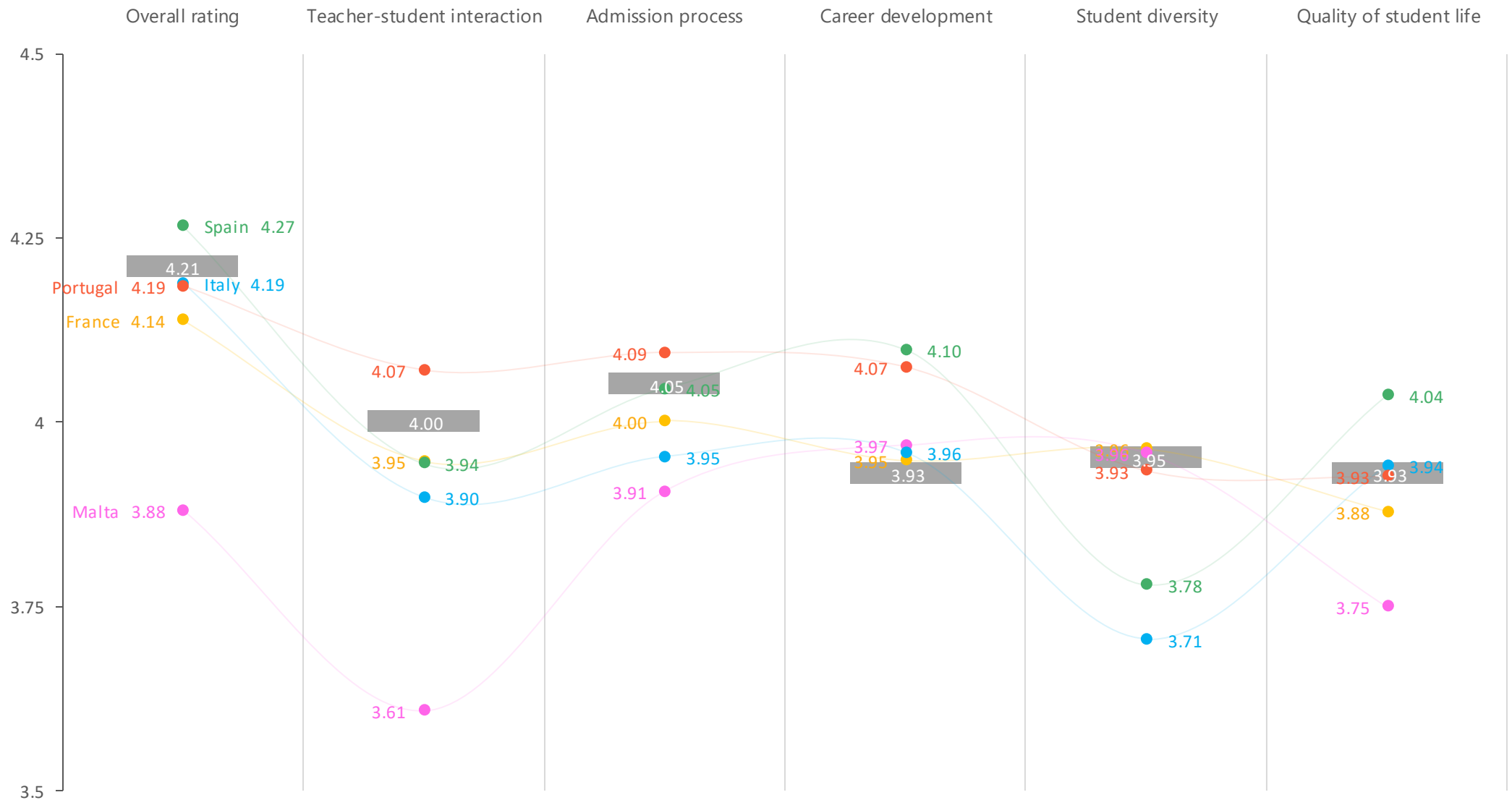
Zimbabwean student about studying in Lisbon, Portugal

Universities in South-Western Europe often struggle to differentiate themselves within the higher education landscape. These difficulties reflected on overall student satisfaction, among the lowest in Europe: pupils criticise the lack of student diversity and the below average teacher-student interaction. On the bright side, the social interactions are things students really appreciate, together with the great student life, warm, historic cities, and the ability to learn new Latin languages. These universities are also hubs for exchange students in Europe, being seen as a great place to study for a semester or two, and make connections with other European students and universities.

Best feature: Career development.

Improvement points: Student diversity.

8. Latin Europe



9. East and South East Asia



"I think most of the professors were very approachable and friendly, passionate about what they taught. I particularly enjoyed the opportunities offered to do field research abroad (China, India...), and the many symposiums organized by the various departments that gave one a glimpse of how what we were learning was being applied in the real world."

Japanese student about studying in Tokyo, Japan



"The faculty are totally proficient in their subjects, but most importantly, they were, and still are, true mentors. And extra advantage was to study Culture in Malaysia, where you had great study cases all the time. The visa process needs to be fixed in order to unleash the true potential of the university campus."

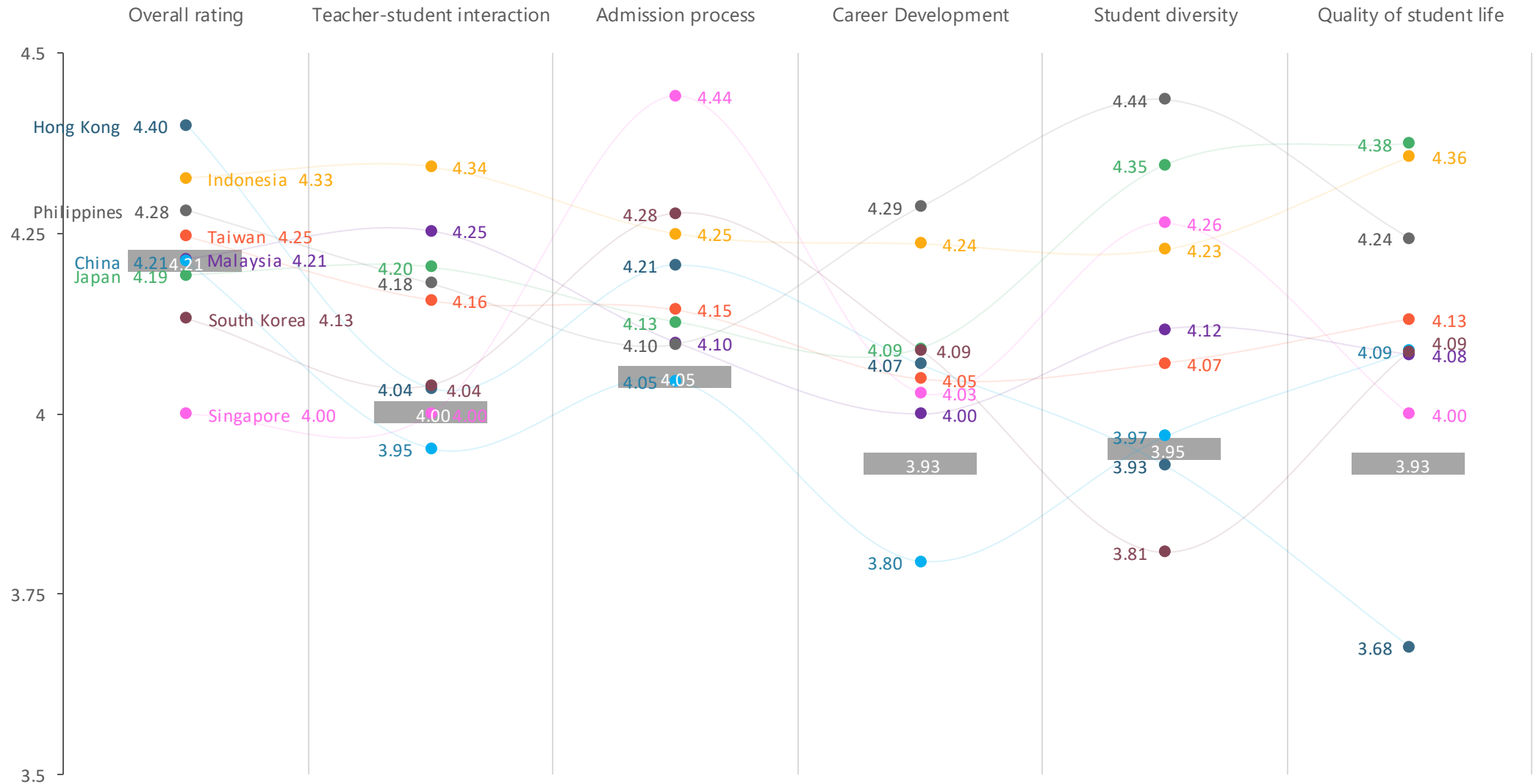
Mexican student about studying in Semenyih, Malaysia

Asian students are generally happy about their universities: higher education institutions in East and South East Asia are able to match the expectations, especially in terms of admission process and perceived student diversity. As Hong Kong, China, Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia become strong regional higher education hubs, they are also increasingly attracting more international students and going up in international rankings. In addition, these universities seem to facilitate great career development opportunities for their students and are working towards better admission systems while focusing on fostering a quality student life.

Best feature: Quality of student life.

Improvement points: Overall rating. While students in Asian universities find many features matching or exceeding their expectations, they tend to see their experience with less enthusiasm.

9. East & South East Asia



10. Latin America



"Studying [...] in Mexico City, was one of the best decisions I have made in my life.

The University campus is beautiful, located in the business center of the city. The university has a humanitarian perspective and is a safe place for diversity and self expression. [...]

Overall, my experience was very satisfactory and I will always be grateful and proud of having taken part of such an institution."

Mexican student about studying in Mexico City, Mexico



"The quality of teachers in general is incontestable, given the level of requirement to become a professor at Usp. People in general are very cool, communicative and there are always small groups where you can identify. There are also many parties and events, all sensational. Without a doubt studying there was a complete and very important experience for my life."

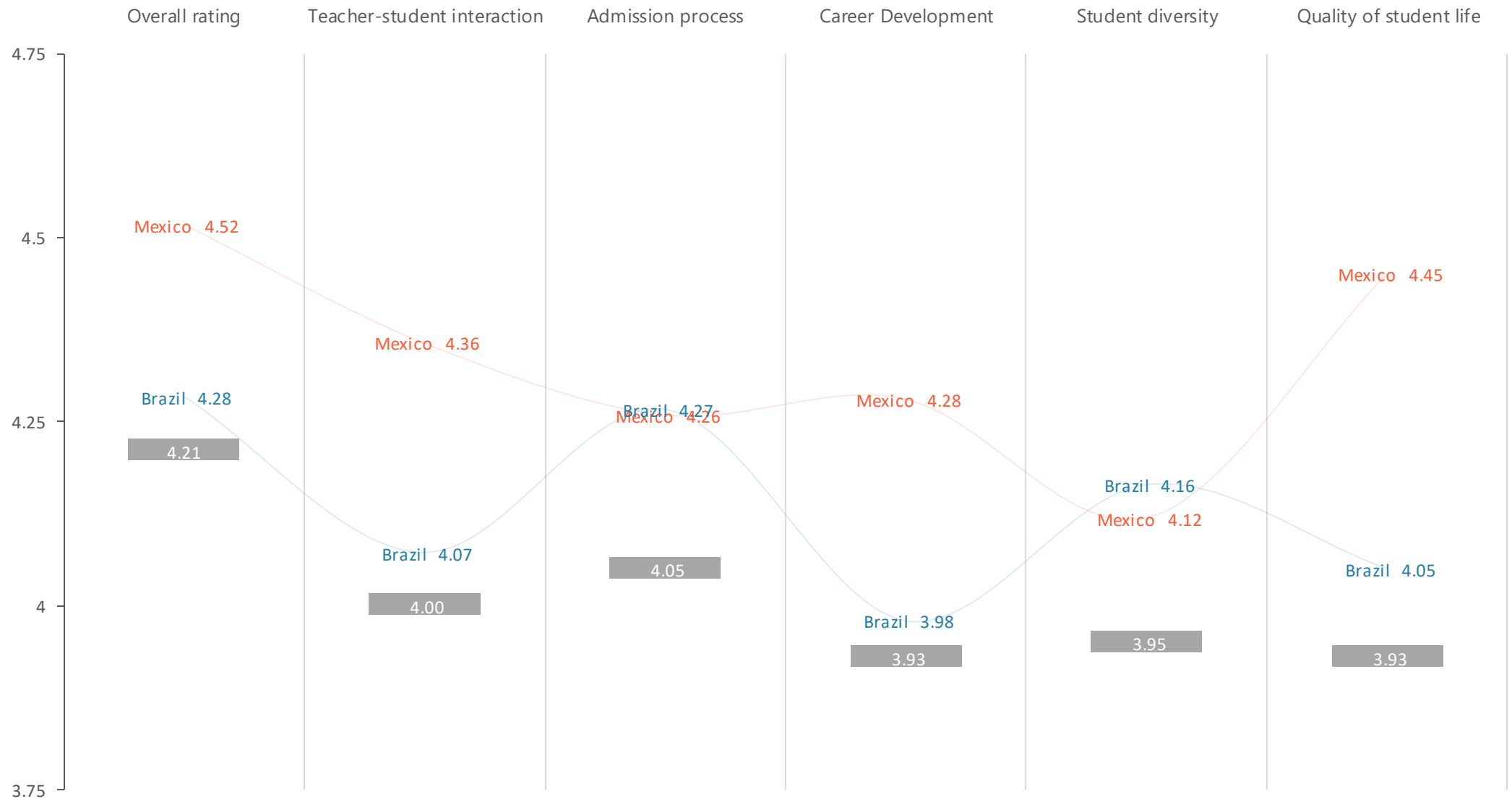
Brazilian student about studying in Sao Paulo, Brazil

Mexican and Brazilian students are among the most satisfied students worldwide. This positive attitude towards experiences is common across South America and reflects on high satisfaction scores on the composition of students' body and the quality of student life. Students often mentioned appreciating the quality education they received, in addition to the amazing student life facilitated around the university. Students mentioned being encouraged to learn, explore and innovate and continuously improve. However, some students wished universities would do more to foster industry connections and help them find relevant jobs once they graduate, facilitate career fairs or give them personalised advice on future jobs.

Best feature: Quality of student life.

Improvement points: Career development.

10. Latin America



Part Four

Afterword

Afterword

Never before have we had a more complete overview of different student experiences around the world. While previous studies in the past have focused on understanding student experiences with either specific levels of education, or within a specific country or territory, ours is the first truly global attempt to better understand student experiences around the world.

What did we learn about education experiences around the world? We've learned that each student's experience is rather unique, subjective and dependent on a multitude of factors. However, we also learned that overall, education is a truly enriching factor in everyone's lives, regardless where they live, of their field of study, whether they complete just a Bachelor or strive for a PhD.

Students spread over more than 147 countries and territories reviewed their study programmes rating their educational experience. Regional differences were often large in aggregate: while students in Mexico are enthusiastic about their studies, their Dutch counterparts seldom awarded their institutions with full scores. Some of these differences in rating university experiences come from experiences with different education systems around the world, which are incredibly varied to begin with, but are also rooted in cultural phenomena, student expectations, governance and sometimes even just lifestyle choices.

Expectations played a key role in student satisfaction, with many institutions delivering upon promise and thus ensuring their students are satisfied with their study experiences. Other institutions attracted students but failed to deliver upon all their students' expectations; however, this is more the exception to the rule than the state of affairs.

Afterword

We hope that reports like these will ignite conversations about what fulfilling study experiences look like around the world, and encourage more students to contribute theirs in order to bring about more transparency in higher education, helping students identify institutions that really focus on student wellbeing while delivering quality education and increasing career outcomes, as well as giving pointers to universities that want to improve upon the value they help deliver their students.

Globally, satisfaction levels are rather high and enrolled students are very likely to leave positive reviews of their universities. Even no-so-great study experiences that scored fairly average in many of the dimensions in analysis were give a high overall score. This means that students look back at their studies as positive, worthy experience. Education has a transformative effect on people's lives, and therefore governments around the world should encourage and facilitate as many of their citizens, young or old, to pursue a degree whether in their home countries or abroad.

This aspect is confirmed by the strong emphasis on the personal growth and development promoted by higher education, with many reviews describing education as a "life changing experience". Interestingly, this aspect happened regardless of the career prospects promoted by universities. Rather than students being happy because of their studies, they are happy *because they can study*.

Among this group of satisfied pupils, international students stand out as the most motivated, enthusiastic, and grateful to their universities. Some of them come from underprivileged backgrounds, and look towards higher education as some that can grant them social mobility and a way to improve the world; some of them come from a more established environment and see studying as a way to join an international community of experts, establishing a meaningful connection with the world.



"My perspective of life has changed. The faculty helped me to see life from a different angle, I mean that if I am a good listener, ready to learn and bold I can achieve my goals. I like that I've learned from my teachers, from people around me, from work [...] to expand my horizon and to not limit myself, to believe in me."

Bachelor's student from Romania

Part Five

Methodology

Review collection

The Student Satisfaction Awards are based on reviews written by students. In the reviews, students can rate their study experience on a scale from 1 to 5 by assessing their satisfaction in eleven areas: overall, quality of programme, difficulty of programme, student-teacher interaction, campus infrastructure, life quality, career development, student diversity, scholarships and funding, and admission process. In addition, students can describe and argument the score they have given.

Both domestic and international students were invited to contribute reviews in order to provide a rich and varied overview of student experiences globally. Studyportals allows students to give their study experience a score through its specialised review collection service.

Reviews have been collected through the [Studyportals platform](#). The reviews that you can find on Studyportals are personal assessments that students and alumni can leave regarding their student experience at a certain higher education institution. They are a combination of ratings and text descriptions. Through these reviews, we are addressing actual experiences from current students or alumni.

We ask students to rate their experience based on a range of factors such as programme, institution, social life and overall experience. We strive for high-quality reviews that help other student in their choice. This means comprehensive, relevant, and informative evaluations.

Review collection

Studyportals manages a network of platforms listing English-taught programmes worldwide. On one hand this has the advantage of offering a global coverage and capturing the interest of highly mobile international students; on the other hand, listing English-taught programmes cannot be representative of all studies taught in a different language. This aspect brings a more comprehensive representation of universities – and countries hosting them – where English is the most widely spoken language. Regarding the time boundaries of this sample, most of the reviews come from students whose expected graduation date falls in the two years preceding 2020.

How are reviews collected?

We ask students and alumni that we're in contact with to rate their experience in several areas. The way we get in touch with students is via multiple channels, such as institutions, via our ambassadors and directly through our portals.

Collecting and assessing reviews

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Three main criteria assess the quality of a review:

- Reviews have to include at least one of the four required areas: the institution, the program, social life or overall experience;
- Text-wise, reviews should have a minimum length of 20 characters;
- Reviewers should have studied at their institution with a maximum 5 years ago (as of today).

Market coverage

Out of the universities included in the study, 31 collected more than 150 reviews, 53 between 100 and 150, 187 between 50 and 99, 766 between 10 and 49 reviews.

On average, each university collected 41 reviews.

	Group	Universities	Average reviews
1	UK & Ireland	272	20
2	Benelux	112	50
3	German	299	17
4	US & Canada	561	4
5	Near East	140	26
6	Northern Europe	173	26
7	Australia New Zealand	59	11
8	Latin Europe	465	20
9	East and South East Asia	237	5
10	Latin America	54	5

Please note that 2168 institutions collected less than 10 reviews and thus have not been considered relevant to the purpose of this study. However, their numbers are included in the count of universities per group as well as the average reviews per university.

Text analysis

The reviews selected as representative of each category have been chosen based on the overall description of the strength or improvement point they highlight. The selection was meant to stay true to the topic of the review even when part of their text has been excluded.

Each document illustrates a personal opinion of a student and does not pretend to be exhaustive of the entire sample. Its value is mostly illustrative and sheds light on students' perceptions either for positive or negative aspects of study experience.

Word maps

Due to the various nature of the reviews collected the main word associations have been analysed through text analytics automated filters. This has been possible using the text-parsing function embedded into SAS Viya analytics engine. Results from its parsing filter have been manually refined to sift the most relevant word while dropping non-significant or too vague terms. It should be noted that none of the words commonly associated with a value judgement have been excluded.

Results are represented in the word map charts as plotted by the SAS algorithm. The size of each circle remarks the relative number of occurrences of a word in the total number of reviews; the line connecting each circle represents the instances linked words appear in the same document.

The word chosen as the initial circle for the word map has been included in the chart caption.

Measures

Overall student satisfaction

How would you rate your overall study experience?

Quality of programme

Overall, what did you think of the programme? When reflecting on your classes, materials etc., did they meet your expectations?

Programme's difficulty

Was the demand of the programme acceptable? Were you able to keep up the pace, while still having challenges along the way?

Teacher-student interaction

How helpful, engaged and interested were your teachers with you? How easy was it for you to interact with them, during or after class?

Admission process

How helpful, engaged and interested were your teachers with you? How easy was it for you to interact with them, during or after class?

Campus infrastructure

How was the infrastructure on campus? Did it support you in your academic pursuits? (e.g. facilities, services, staff etc.)

Measures

Career development

Did the university provide support for your career development? (E.g. extracurricular courses, workshops and conferences, help in finding internships, etc.)

Student Diversity

How diverse/friendly was the atmosphere at your university? (E.g. different countries, cultures, religions, age, gender, special needs, etc.)

Scholarships and funding

If you applied for a scholarship, how cooperative and helpful was the university in this process? (Skip this question if it doesn't apply to you)

Quality of life

How was your everyday life? Especially when thinking about the city where you lived, did it satisfy your needs and expectations?

Cost of living

Did you manage to live comfortably and within your budget during your studies?

Why the star rating?

Used by major services like Amazon and Netflix, the Star Rating system has the benefit of being familiar to customers and has become an integral part of the digital review options. This makes simple visual feedback very easy to produce, as seen in Amazon product listings.

Moreover, the star rating allows for a quick and intuitive understanding for most users and smoothens cultural differences (e.g. using a scale from 1 to 5 in numbers might mislead students from Germany where 1 represents the highest grade). Star ratings are more comprehensive when covering a large number of different aspects (11 in this analysis).

The star rating was used against several aspects of student life. While user-friendly, it also has limitations. For instance, respondents cannot express total dissatisfaction with a negative score, driving the average on the higher scale of the spectrum: this phenomenon is commonly referred to as 'range compression'. The satisfaction scores cannot be understood as a global ranking but best highlight the difference across similar groups.

Data cleaning

Reviews usually contain a lot of spurious data. The selection applied to this dataset has been applied filtering the reviews with unrealistic or unverifiable information: graduation dates not in a feasible range (e.g. '2045', etc.), or from students rating 'zeros' without descriptions. Similarly, bogus reviews, random text, offensive and unjustified, and duplicates have been amended. Furthermore, additional criteria have been applied in case of unfeasible information for specific analysis. This applied to respondents that filled thoroughly all survey fields but had unfeasible answers for a single field: their answers have been considered in the general count but not in the specific dimension answered.

Further reading

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