



**Establishing an International Student Presence
on Your Campus:
Model Practices and Recommendations**

A resource provided by the International Student Services Committee of the
International Recruitment Council
Office of Global Affairs
State University of New York (SUNY)

Establishing an International Student Presence on Your Campus: Model Practices and Recommendations

Internationalization is a growing need in our global community. Some institutions have a well established program, while others are beginning their involvement in this area. As more institutions are recognizing the ability and benefit to enrolling more international students, it is essential to evaluate the level of service that should be provided to this population. This is not only designed for those institutions that are just beginning an international program but also as a tool for those increasing their enrollments.

These recommendations are meant to reaffirm the importance of providing a welcoming and supportive campus environment for international students choosing to study at one of the State University of New York institutions. Therefore, we hope this message will underscore and support the model practices of those SUNY campuses that have established solid reputations for their international student programs.

We recognize that campus internationalization efforts expand to a variety of initiatives including non degree and exchange students as well as scholars (J and/or other visa types). However, the term “international student” in this context refers to a nonimmigrant pursuing a full course of study with F-1 status and an I-20 “Certificate of Eligibility” issued by the institution. The following recommendations and model practices focus on F-1 degree seeking students; however, these concepts can certainly be applied to other international populations.

I. Mission Statement

The college should have a clear mission or goal in mind for bringing international students to the campus. For example, the college administration may believe that international students will boost the college’s enrollment and thereby improve their “bottom line.” International students may indeed bring added and welcome revenues to the campus. The faculty may have an entirely different motivation such as wanting to add a more diverse, cosmopolitan element to the student body. Whatever the reason for increasing international recruitment efforts, the institution should recognize that such a plan entails a concomitant responsibility and an ethical obligation to provide services to these students once they accept the offer of admission. Establishing and communicating a clear college mission of internationalization can assist in building campus support and allow for future growth. These efforts are integral to successful internationalization as reflected in recommendation #6 from SUNY and the World Strategic Plan: “Strengthen campus-based services for international students, scholars and employees, including immigration, English language, international admissions policies and procedures, and ongoing orientation and support services, in order to enhance retention and future recruitment prospects, and to facilitate opportunities for these SUNY citizens to contribute long-term to the New York State economy and New York’s innovation agenda.”

II. Staffing

- A. Nothing is more important to the success of an international student program than the human resources that make it happen. A poorly trained staff can be detrimental to the international program’s success. Conversely, a well-trained, well-equipped and compassionate international

staff can make the experience a memorable one for the students and allow that program to flourish. Some key questions to determine if staffing is adequate are:

1. Do you have enough staff and do you have the appropriate staff working in your international program office? You can't get by on temporary workers or student workers.
 2. Do you have people who have international experience and immigration training or inclination and ability to be trained for the role? Federal regulations require that your campus staff has immigration training on an initial and continuous basis.
 3. Can they communicate effectively with non-native speakers in clear English?
 4. Do they have the background, training, and experience to deal effectively with people from other cultures, backgrounds, and age groups?
 5. Is there a support system in place to encourage and allow them to seek training and attend conferences that will enhance their competencies?
 6. Do they have the proper office space and resources as well as office support staff?
- B. In order to comply with federal regulations the college must identify a "Principal Designated School Official (PDSO)" to be responsible for the administration of the F-1 visa program. Additional Designated School Officials (DSOs) can also be appointed to assist. All of them must be prepared to use the DHS database, known as "SEVIS" (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) and to comply with all government policies and procedures regarding the issuing of I-20s and the maintenance of the SEVIS database. Failure to comply with SEVIS requirements can result in the school losing its permission to admit international students. The PDSO and DSOs must be U.S. Citizens or Permanent Residents.

III. Admission Standards

- A. There is no absolute national standard for the admission of international students whether it is a community college, college, or university. Each institution has its own administrative structure that determines the admission criteria. There are obvious similarities among the campuses at varying levels. The following list is intended to be a general description of the basic requirements that the State University of New York institutions use for the admission of international students. However, individual colleges may have special requirements or procedures not outlined here. Regardless of specific requirements, it is important to have the information posted clearly on an international application section of the campus website. It is also helpful to provide translation assistance options for clarity and better understanding.
1. *An application form:* You may choose to utilize your campus' domestic application with supplemental forms or create an international application to address the basic information required for international applicants. The SUNY Application and Common Application are application options. Campuses which have opted-in to the SUNY recruitment strategy are strongly encouraged to use the SUNY Application in accordance with the recruitment strategy procedures.
 2. *Transcripts and proof of completion of secondary school:* This proof varies from country to country. Verification requirements will also vary from campus to campus. Some institutions will use books, websites, training, or other resources like Education USA offices to validate records. Others may require the use of a foreign credential agency (like WES, ECE, or other NACES members) especially if awarding transfer credit for post secondary studies.

3. *Proof of financial support:* This could include official bank documents and/or sponsor verification which is required to issue the immigration document as well as when applying for the visa. Institutions may use a campus version and/or the SUNY Foreign Student Financial Statement.
 4. *Proof of English language proficiency:* Every college has its own requirements, often depending upon what kind of ESL program the college offers. A TOEFL or IELTS score (or another type of test score) may or may not be one of the requirements. Some institutions may require completion of the SUNY English Proficiency Report.
 5. *Copy of biographical page of passport:* This is extremely useful for name accuracy in creating immigration documents.
 6. *Additional requirements:* Colleges may ask for other information to aid in their admission process. These may include SAT/ACT/GRE scores, essays (SUNY's Autobiographical Essay Form), letters of recommendation, interviews, supplemental handouts with biographical information, dependent information forms, etc.
 7. *Test Scores:* Colleges may require students to provide standardized test scores in addition to language proficiency requirements. These may include SAT, ACT, or GRE results.
- B. Colleges that process a large number of applications from international students every year would do well to have admission staff dedicated to reviewing international documents. The world of education systems outside the United States is complex and sometimes confusing. Fraud and forgery are genuine concerns in some countries. Understanding international credentials is not a simple process and requires years of training and experience through workshops, conferences, and collaboration with colleagues. A lax admission process or applying the same standards to domestic and international admissions can lead to future problems. The effective and efficient working relationship between the International Student Services and Admissions Offices is essential to success. Some questions that will help a college improve the admission of international students are:
1. Is the college authorized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to issue I-20s to prospective F-1 students? If so, does the college have a primary designated school official (PDSO) and an adequate number of DSOs?
 2. Does the college have any domestic branch campuses that enroll international students? If so do the branch campuses have at least one DSO? Are the branch campuses SEVIS-certified?
 3. Does the college have at least one person dedicated to the admission of international students?
 4. If so, does this person have adequate training opportunities and resources including support staff?
 5. Is the admission process for international students clear and straightforward for the student and the campus community?
 6. Does the international admissions office have established communication paths for international students such as a website, email address, and forms specifically for international applicants?
- C. If the admission process is well-designed and well-run it will complement the recruiting efforts. The admission staff should work closely with credential evaluation agencies and overseas advising centers. They should attempt to verify documents received from applicants by whatever means is available. Colleges that accept documents at face value run the risk of

getting flooded with frivolous applications and fraudulent documents and could reflect poorly on the institution.

- D. Once an applicant complies with the college's international admission requirements, the college sends the student an I-20 Certificate of Eligibility which is required to begin the process of obtaining a visa. International students must obtain an F-1 visa to study full time in a degree-granting academic program. The I-20 should accompany a pre-arrival packet of information to assist the student with preparing for both their visa interview as well as arrival to campus. This will vary greatly depending on the institution. Some topics to address may include: visa application preparation, SEVIS fee payment instructions, travel arrangements, housing, health record requirements, orientation schedule, arrival deadlines, registration information, transfer credit evaluations, advance standing credit, and emergency contact information.

IV. Student Services

In addition to providing government mandated services to this population, campuses should offer a range of services on the campus to support and retain international students. This is a critical component to establishing or growing an international program. The following list is a starting point for these services:

A. Essential services include:

1. *Orientation Programs:* Most colleges and universities that welcome foreign students provide an orientation program for new students. These programs may last anywhere from a few hours to a day to a week or semester long. A well-organized orientation program is a good indication of a higher quality international student program.
2. *Academic Advising:* The academic advising process at every institution will vary and often resides with the academic department; however, international students may require specialized academic advising due to their unique visa situation and educational background. At the very least, collaboration with Academic Departments may be useful to assist this population in meeting their immigration requirements for enrollment.
3. *Immigration Advising and Processing:* This is another critical "must" for international students. The interpretation of U.S. immigration laws and policies can be a challenging process with grey areas. A good international student advisor can help students avoid making costly mistakes related to their immigration status.
4. *Health Insurance Program:* As medical costs climb higher in the USA, it is absolutely essential to have insurance coverage for accidents, injuries, or serious illnesses. While immigration regulations do not require F-1 students to have health insurance, SUNY requires health insurance coverage for all international students. To find more information on the SUNY Policy on health insurance standards, visit:
http://www.suny.edu/sunypp/documents.cfm?doc_id=51
5. *Physical and Mental Wellness Services:* It is essential to incorporate international students into your current physical and mental wellness resources. However, there are some special considerations. Mental wellness, in particular, can be a new concept to many international students; however, it can be very useful for these students to deal with issues of adjustment and personal natures. Colleges should encourage them to make use of these facilities. Your offices will also have to prepare to confront specific issues that international students face as well as make necessary cultural sensitivity adjustments in serving this population. Your

current disability services (physical/learning) should prepare for the inclusion of international students in the services they provide and how this will impact their service delivery.

6. *Housing & Meals:* Whether you offer on campus housing or connections to local housing, establishing housing guidelines and resources will be essential for newly arriving international students. It is very important from the onset to establish how you will address housing and meals during all school breaks.
7. *Transportation:* Students are responsible for their general transportation; however, the campus may already have resources in place such as discounted public bus passes or a campus bus system. The campus may also wish to assist students with their initial arrival transportation to campus including picking up the student from the local bus station or airport or at a minimum provide instructions on arriving to campus. School breaks may also impact transportation availability so it is essential that you establish how you will address this potential impact for students.
8. *Library, Computing, Internet Access, and Online Services:* The first thing many students look for when they arrive on a new campus is a place where they can check their e-mail account. You may want to include a computer and library session introducing them to the campus resources as part of orientation.
9. *English as a Second Language (ESL):* Depending on your admissions requirements, you will need to provide different levels of English language programming that should include writing assistance, tutoring resources, supplemental language courses, or full time ESL courses. Regardless of the English requirements for admissions, your academic support services must be prepared to meet the needs of non-native English speakers.
10. *Testing Services:* This could include both accommodations to your placement testing system for non-native speakers as well as potential accommodations to your general testing resources if desired.
11. *Tutoring Programs:* There should be special consideration for international students who need extra help outside of class on various subjects such as history or English composition. Equally, international students may also be resources to your Tutoring program as tutors in various subject areas. Your campus should prepare for the inclusion of international students in your current remedial programming and the impact it will have on services.

B. Future areas of consideration should include:

1. *Assessment Tools:* When either establishing a new program or growing an established program, it is important to survey student satisfaction. Ideally, this should be done upon arrival to capture information related to admissions, pre-arrival processes and counseling provided abroad by third parties, to be utilized in assessing the effectiveness of recruitment efforts. In addition, an on-going survey of student satisfaction with services and campus life will be critical to retention efforts.
2. *International Students Association:* If the college has any sizable population of international students, you may want to consider establishing a student club. Some campuses have associations for students from one particular country, for example, a Korean students association or a Chinese students club while others have a general International Club welcoming all cultures. This is an opportunity to involve the international students into the campus internationalization efforts through programming. These clubs can include American and immigrant populations if interested as well.

3. *Food Service:* As your international populations grow, auxiliary services should be made aware of dietary preferences, restrictions, and scheduling considerations of different cultures. Some campuses may even highlight international cuisine.
4. *Financial Aid:* Most financial aid in the U.S. comes from the federal government and is therefore restricted to citizens and permanent residents of the United States. However, international students may be eligible for scholarships depending on the requirements. This assistance may be with your Financial Aid office or another office on campus.
5. *Student Employment Office or Career Center:* International Students who have an F-1 visa may be eligible to work on or off the college campus if they meet certain conditions.
6. *Student Activities:* International students should be encouraged to participate in organized campus events. This will enrich the experience for everyone.
7. *Sports, Athletics, Intramural Teams:* Many international students are talented athletes looking for a chance to participate.
8. *Honors Programs:* For gifted international students, participation in an honors program can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of their college career.
9. *Cultural Programs and Festivals:* More and more colleges sponsor international events or cultural festivals. They are a wonderful opportunity for international students to share their country, language, and culture with fellow students.
10. *Family Friendship Program:* These programs offer the international students a chance to become friends with an American family. The family will invite a student to their home during the holidays or attend local events/attractions to experience U.S. culture first hand.
11. *Comprehensive website:* This could aid current students with maintaining their status, utilizing benefits of their status as well as accessing the resources of the campus and community through a central location.
12. *Alumni Programs:* Developing formal alumni programs and outreach can provide a valuable resource for international recruitment efforts and other aspects of campus internationalization. The needs and interests of international alumni are often different than those of domestic alumni. For example, reduced tickets to a campus sporting event are much less meaningful to alumni in Mumbai than perhaps a local networking event. For cultures in which word-of-mouth is paramount in families' decisions to send students abroad, the assistance of international alumni in promoting the campus may be much more powerful than the same practice in the United States.

These are just a few of the services for international students you may want to consider but is not intended to be a comprehensive list for every campus in the State University of New York system.