

The International Student Fee – History and Usage

International Student and Scholar Services

The University of Iowa

Updated February 1, 2019

International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) recognizes that many international students may not be aware of the history of the International Student Fee or how it is used, particularly after we notified students that the Board of Regents approved increasing the fee in Summer 2018. This document helps clarify what the fee is, the history of the fee, and how the money is used.

What is the International Student Fee, how long has it existed, and who has to pay it?

The International Student Fee was created in 2000-01, and is used exclusively by International Student and Scholar Services to cover the cost of staffing, fees, and license requirements to provide immigration services and support for those on an international student visa. It is also used to provide ISSS programs and workshops to promote intercultural learning, adjustment, and internationalization across campus for students, staff, and faculty.

The fee is assessed of everyone on a University of Iowa-issued I-20 (F-1 status) or DS-2019 (J-1 status), with the exception of students participating in formal exchange agreements.

ISSS does not receive funding from the university's General Expense fund. However, support staff services for International Programs (ISSS is a unit housed within International Programs), including reception, accounting, and HR staff/salaries are shared among all International Programs units and covered by General Expense funds; no ISSS funds cover these salaries.

When was the fee last increased?

The fee was \$40 each fall and spring semester (\$20 if enrolled in the summer) when it was implemented in 2000-01. It increased to \$60 per semester in 2007, and to \$70 in 2010. The Board of Regents approved the fee be increased in June 2018 to \$125 each fall and spring (\$62.50 for summer enrollment), and became effective in Fall 2018.

When adjusting the fee, International Programs utilized future budget and enrollment projections over a 5 year period in order to avoid having to make future fee adjustments within this time frame, based on current/emerging enrollment trends.

How does this fee compare to other comparable institutions, such as other Big10 universities or Iowa State University?

The International Student Fee at the University of Iowa remains among the lowest, with very few exceptions. For example, as of 2018 a couple schools in the Big10 have international student fees around \$100, while others have fees of \$145, \$450, or even nearly \$1500/semester. Other schools have adopted a “third tier” of tuition, where international students pay more than residents or U.S. nonresidents from other states. The tuition differential can range from \$700-\$1000/semester.

The University of Iowa does not assess a separate rate of tuition for international students; an international student pays the same “nonresident” rate of tuition, such as a U.S. student from California, unless they otherwise qualify for the in-state rate (such as graduate teaching or research assistants, or the child/spouse of an international parent/spouse working in Iowa).

Many schools that have the “third tier” of tuition, or larger fees, divide that income among various offices on campus – it does not necessarily all go to the campus international student office. That can sometimes make transparency and accountability difficult.

What about J-1 visiting scholars – they are not students and do not pay this fee.

In addition to F-1 and J-1 students, International Student and Scholar Services provides support and assistance for a small population who come as J-1 scholars (visiting professors, researchers, specialists, or short term scholars). These are individuals who are staff, not students. A separate visiting scholar fee exists for this group, currently \$100. Expenditures on programming for scholars are kept separate from spending on students, or made at a proportionate rate where a program is for both students and scholars (ex. bus trips, Thanksgiving dinner), or contribute to the salaries of staff who have significant duties with J-1 scholars.

How large is the ISSS budget? How exactly is this money spent?

The budget varies from year to year based on the enrollment of students on a University of Iowa form I-20 or DS-2019. It is currently about \$750,000. This includes funding from the International Student Fee, the Scholar Fee, and one-time Orientation Fees. Sometimes ISSS is able to carry forward a balance from the previous year. A breakdown of spending areas includes (these are estimates and can vary from year to year):

- **Salaries of 9 FTE staff and 3-4 students – 87%**
- **International Student Pre-Arrival Programming and Orientations– 4%**
- **Intercultural programming for students, staff, faculty, and occasional community – 2%**
(Includes Life in Iowa, Global Buddies, Friends Without Borders, Engaging Across Cultures, Bridging Domestic and Global Diversity, Building Our Global Community, support for some international student organization events, and support for Friends of International Students and the International Women’s Club.)

- **Staff professional development and training** – 2% (Includes membership in NAFSA: Association of International Educators, annual subscriptions to NAFSA Advisors Manual, attendance/presenting/leadership at regional, state, or annual conference, training workshops.)
- **Licensing and Fees** – 3% (Includes software/licensing fee for Sunapsis/iHawk, Windstar nonresident tax program, server fees, SEVIS recertification/redesignation fees for F-1 and J-1 program approval/continuance.)
- **Miscellaneous/Director's Discretionary** – 2% (Emergencies and unexpected expenses.)

In what ways does ISSS attempt to control spending?

- ISSS did not replace one full-time staff member who departed in November 2017.
- In leaner years, professional development is typically the first area to be cut. For example, ISSS staff did not participate in professional development or conferences during 2017-18 and limited professional development in 2016-17. We also attempt to secure outside funding whenever possible, such as through professional development funding through the UI Staff Association.
- By doing more with the staff we have. For example, in 2017 ISSS took over processing and issuance of immigration documents for newly admitted undergraduate and graduate students. This work had previously been done by the Office of Admissions. ISSS was able to add this work without adding new staff to handle it. ISSS also worked at the request of UISG and the Office of the President in 2017 to allocate an existing staff member's duties to provide support part-time for the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership (now Multicultural and International Student Support and Engagement). This too was done without adding new staff.
- ISSS stopped sending staff to China for summer pre-departure sessions in Beijing and Shanghai. Instead we implemented the pre-arrival webinar series, now in its second full year. This has saved several thousand dollars, while making the content available to students regardless of where they are located, and provides information appropriate for graduate/professional students as well as undergrads.
- Efforts are always made to spend less than is available so a surplus cushion can forward to the next fiscal year. This works well during years of higher enrollment and is less possible during years of lower enrollment.

I rarely come see an ISSS advisor, why should I have to pay this fee?

There's a lot that goes on "behind the scenes" that most students are not aware of when it comes to being here on a student visa. That includes processing initial immigration documents for new students, tracking, reporting, and updating the immigration records for enrollment and progress each semester, employment authorizations, etc. In fact the vast majority of work done by ISSS relates to immigration processing, reporting, and authorizations.

ISSS sees 8,500-11,000 individual walk-ins during a typical fiscal year from July 1-June 30. This number has not significantly changed even with the decrease in enrollment of the last couple of years, while the duration of walk-in sessions has increased. In addition to in-person advising, ISSS staff review and process several thousand e-forms that do not require in-person contact, respond to hundreds of emails each day, as well as phone calls. Individual staff also have specific duties such as processing part-time enrollment requests or updating the I-20/DS-2019 for changes of major, processing documents for newly admitted students, checking in new scholars, or working closely with students experiencing academic and/or mental health difficulties. In addition to the immigration work, most ISSS staff also have roles facilitating various workshops and training programs, sit on committees, and work closely with other campus offices/programs that support international students.

How can we as international students have a voice in what ISSS does?

Get involved with student organizations that provide feedback to ISSS. These include:

- International Student Advisory Board (ISAB)
- University of Iowa Student Government (UISG, for undergrads)
- Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG, for grad/professional students)
- Graduate Student Senate

Want to learn more about ISSS?

- Main Website: <https://international.uiowa.edu/iss>
- Information on Fees and Expenses:
<https://international.uiowa.edu/iss/current/financial/expenses>
- ISSS Staff and Duties: <https://international.uiowa.edu/iss/contact>
- Research, Reports, and Data on UI International Students:
<https://international.uiowa.edu/iss/research-data>

Additional questions? Please contact Lee Seedorff, Senior Associate Director, lee-seedorff@uiowa.edu .