

# Campus Services Provided to International Students

## International Student and Scholar Services



Updated October 2015

Programs and services provided for international students and to promote internationalization by ISSS and other offices across campus.

### Quick Facts

Total international student population:	<b>4540 as of Fall 2015</b>
<i>Undergrads:</i>	<i>2651</i>
<i>Grad/Professional:</i>	<i>1469</i>
<i>Post-graduation employment:</i>	<i>420</i>

- International students around 13% of total UI populations.
- About 3-400 J-1 scholars (those here for teaching/research purposes) at any given time.
- Top countries: China, Korea, India, Taiwan, Malaysia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Brazil
- 6 ISSS advising staff (including two Assistant Directors), one Senior Associate Director, one Support and Retention Coordinator, and one International Services Assistant. All advising staff have graduate degrees, are certified by the U.S. government to work with student and scholar immigration issues, trained in mental health triage, and intercultural awareness/communication, with international education backgrounds of their own.
- ISSS advisors received almost 10,300 in-person visits from students, plus over 6500 electronic forms reviewed/processed (no in-person contact involved) between 7/1/2014-6/30/2015.

### Pre-Arrival

- **Pre-Arrival Checklist** – A “one-stop shop” in the iHawk system including steps to obtain the visa, make travel arrangements to Iowa City and from the airport, complete placement exams, apply for housing, arrange health records, and receive individualized orientation schedules.
- **Pre-Departure Info Sessions** – Following a practice started by Chinese Students and Scholars Association, International Programs holds pre-departure sessions in Shanghai and Beijing each summer for incoming students and parents. Created video pre-departure vignettes that can be viewed in other countries and elsewhere in China.
- **ISSS Website** – Additional information on sending belongings to Iowa City, a “Guide to Living in Iowa City” including housing and housing rights, how local transportation systems work, driver’s license information, schools, recreation/entertainment, safety, and weather.

### Orientation

- **Fall Semester** – Graduate students two weeks before classes begin, undergrads week before classes begin
- **Spring/Summer** – Combined orientation during week before classes begin
- **Content** - Welcome session, immigration check-in, English proficiency testing, academic advising. Information sessions on cultural adjustment, health insurance and health services/immunizations, mental health, safety, immigration regulations, non-immigration law, community organizations, academic environment and success panels, U-Bill, social events.

- **Housing** – For last several years, University Housing has made arrangements to open dorms early to accommodate arriving international students, adding early dining services in 2013. Schedules bus shopping trip during first weekend for students to purchase supplies.
- **Transportation** – In fall 2014 ISSS initiated new free bus transportation or shuttle voucher from Eastern Iowa Airport to Iowa City as a result of security concerns from the prior year; plans to evaluate potential expansion during future orientations.
- **“International@Iowa” Online Course** – Begun Fall 2013, 8-week online course required for all new international undergrad students, expanding on topics covered during orientation week (immigration and other laws, cultural adjustment, mental health, academic success, and academic expectations, including expanded subsection on plagiarism and other forms of misconduct). In Fall 2016 this will be rolled into Success at Iowa, the course all new undergrads take, including domestic students.
- **Global@Iowa** – The Global@Iowa optional course brings together international and American students to create a learning environment where all students can be introduced to the issues and experiences of the others. The course will help international students new to the U.S. learn about the transition and adjustment period while becoming familiar with campus and American culture. The course will expose American students to the sometimes very different cultural backgrounds and perspectives of international students. Assignments will include brief reflection papers, significant in-class discussion, and one small group project. We hope to expand section offerings in future and possibly collaborate with University College or CLAS to offer as a selection to first-year students.

## Ongoing Programs and Services

- **ISSS Services** - Immigration, financial, and personal advising (i.e. anything but academic advising). Workshops for students, intercultural programming and training for staff/faculty.
- **Life in Iowa** – Extended orientation sessions throughout the year, focusing on practical, social, and cultural events. Examples include job interview tips or resume writing, American holiday celebrations such as pumpkin carving or gingerbread decorating, study nights, game nights, information sessions on body image or relationships, and trips to Iowa locations such as Effigy Mounds, the Dubuque aquarium, or the Amana Colonies.
- **Global Buddies** – Special program specifically for students coming on formal exchanges (usually one or two semesters); more intensive cultural adjustment support, matches with returning Study Abroad students for frequent social and cultural events.
- **International Buddies at Tippie College of Business** – Special friend matching program specifically for business and pre-business international and domestic students.
- **Scholar Programs** – Provides similar cross-cultural and social programming specifically for scholars and their families; along with Global Buddies recognized by US Department of State as a “best practices” example of cultural programming for exchange visitors.
- **Campus Conversation Partners** – Through ESL programs, matches students and scholars with UI staff/faculty for English conversational practice.
- **Tax Program** – ISSS oversight, staffed by volunteers specially trained by VITA in non-resident tax issues, provide workshops for in-person help and an online program to help process federal non-resident returns each spring.
- **Bridging Domestic and Global Diversity Program** – Intercultural leadership certificate program for international and domestic students, meet weekly during spring semester to discuss cross-cultural issues and focus on a campus event.
- **Building Our Global Community** – Certificate program for UI staff and faculty (10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014), series of workshops and trainings focusing on cross-cultural communication/awareness, self-awareness, specific country/area studies.
- **International Advocate Certificate** – Certificate program for ISSS staff to recognize “above and beyond” work of UI staff/faculty to assist international students, scholars, and internationalization efforts. Separate recognition list for students who lead in these areas.
- **University Counseling Services** – Support groups for international students; staff with extensive experience working with international students from a variety of backgrounds.
- **Suicide Prevention Grant** – Partners in multifaceted, nationally funded campus-wide grant to combat incidents of suicide/attempted suicide on college campuses. ISSS has collaborated with Johnson County Crisis Center to create an online crisis chat in Mandarin, with other languages to be added in future.

- **Student Organizations** – OASIS (Organization for the Support of International Students), numerous nationality/culture groups (Chinese Students and Scholars Association, Indian Student Alliance, Sri Lanka, African Student Association, Muslim Student Association, etc.), special service-oriented groups with international focus such as AiCheng Magazine group, Heart Connection; recent increased involvement of international students in UISG, Grad Student Senate.
- **Community Organizations** – International Women’s Club, Friends of International Students, local religious organizations, Foreign Relations Council, CIVIC.
- **International Student Committee** – Consisting of representatives from numerous UI offices, analyzes trends and projections, makes recommendations for new or existing programs and infrastructure.
- **College-level Programs** – Increased resources for helping international students in speaking and writing labs on campus, specialized staffing and programs developed for students in Business and Engineering colleges.
- **International Student Advisory Board** – New in Fall 2014. Joint effort of UISG and Graduate and Professional Student Government, created to review and make recommendations regarding international student issues on campus. Includes both international and domestic students plus certain staff/faculty as non-voting liaisons.
- **International Student Handbook** – Revived a formerly published handbook that has been inactive for several years, which contains a “Living in Iowa City” guide as well as other topics and “how to” for international students, in conjunction with City of Iowa City and Student Legal Services.
- **Friendship Matching Program “Friends Without Borders”** – Piloted Fall 2014. New program to match international with domestic students one-to-one for friendship/cultural learning. Will collaborate with Center for Diversity and Enrichment, expanding on penpal program. Will sponsor kickoff and closing events at start/end of academic year. Will include incentive program where pairs can win awards for engaging in a certain number and type of activities together during the academic year.
- **Support and Retention Specialist** – Position in ISSS to oversee specialized aspects of student programming, assist with the Global@Iowa course, track at-risk students identified through first-semester survey MAP-Works and provide follow-up and support, conduct student needs assessments.
- **Communication and Outreach Specialist** – Position in International Programs to assist with alumni relations and outreach via social media programs.
- **Graduation Live Streaming** – Spring 2014 became first university to live stream a graduation ceremony (in Mandarin, College of Business graduation) with accompany translation so family and friends in home country could watch. Created after suggestion from an international student. Plans to expand to other ceremonies/languages (possibly Korean, Arabic, Spanish).
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## New Programs and Initiatives

- **Collaboration with Local Organizations** – To create a more welcoming environment for international students, including a letter of welcome from the mayor of Iowa City, providing translations in Mandarin, Arabic, Spanish, and Korean for the Downtown Association banners, and translations of the Iowa City-Coralville Area Convention and Visitor’s Bureau online guide.
- **International Student Case Management** – Developing system for specific ISSS staff to work more closely with other campus programs such as Threat Assessment Team/UI Police, University Counseling Services, and Dean of Students Office to provide specialized case management support for students encountering severe mental health and other issues.
- **Data and Surveys** – Compiling and analyzing data from new and recent surveys (MAP-Works, SERU) to help assess needs and climate.
- **Social Media/Blog** – New social media initiatives to help highlight important announcements/issues but also give a spotlight to student and staff accomplishments.
- **Parent Focus** – Working to increase communication with and recognition of international parents. New International Parent of the Year, expanding information sessions for parents who accompany students to orientation, new blog for parents/family.
- **Community Focus** – Began hosting community information events in Spring 2015 to invite leaders for Iowa City area organizations to learn more about international students (demographics, services provided, major issues faced) to encourage the community to develop ways to be more welcoming and supportive.

- **Focus on domestic students and improving intercultural awareness of all students** – Working with several offices to help increase awareness and intercultural skills of domestic students. Orientation Services may introduce component covering diversity and international students to summer orientation programs. Associated Residence Halls hosts special events to bring together domestic and international students in residence halls. New general education track being planned by CLAS to focus on skills and experiential learning regarding diversity.

## Frequently Asked Questions About International Students

### **I am concerned that my student's level of English language proficiency is not sufficient for this class. What should I do?**

International students for whom English is not the primary language are required to show test results for a certain level of English proficiency to be admitted to the University of Iowa. Students whose scores fall within a certain range are required to take a placement exam on campus to identify specific areas of language need, such as reading, speaking, listening, etc. However, it is possible that students received a sufficiently high score on their original TOEFL exam, and were not required to take the in-house proficiency exam. But in reality the test scores may not accurately represent true proficiency, so they may need more support in certain areas to improve English skills. Or a student may have taken some ESL classes but is not practicing language skills outside the classroom. In rare occasions, a few exam scores submitted to the University of Iowa are found to not accurately reflect the individual student's proficiency for several possible reasons. You may contact ESL Programs at 5-5630 or [esl-program@uiowa.edu](mailto:esl-program@uiowa.edu) with any concerns or questions you may have.

### **I have received an email from International Student and Scholar Services asking for my input regarding an international student. Why?**

International student visas carry a number of federal requirements that must be followed and reported by both the student as well as the university. A student who requests such actions as extending the immigration document to study longer, get authorization to engage in an internship, drop below full-time registration for a semester, or change degree programs all require ISSS to take action in the federal SEVIS online database to grant approval. Each of these things require input from those familiar with a student's academic situation – is the internship related to the area of study? Is the student going to graduate this semester? Does the student still have requirements to fulfill for the degree program? ISSS cannot make an assessment without crucial input from the academic advisor. But we also wish to assure advisors, your input is just that – the legal responsibility for granting or denying any request from an international student rests with the ISSS office only. Any concerns about a request may be addressed to ISSS at 5-0335 or [iss@uiowa.edu](mailto:iss@uiowa.edu).

### **My student really wants to take advantage of this employment opportunity but is being told she cannot. Why?**

Federal law strictly limits the circumstances in which an international student can be employed. Working “on-campus,” meaning working for the University of Iowa, is a bit easier. Anything “off-campus” is tightly regulated, and in all circumstances requires advance authorization from ISSS. Employment for the sake of employment is not permitted. These internships must be related to the student's area of study, and should also have a legitimate educational component and connection. For example, a marketing student who requests permission to sell books door-to-door over the summer will not receive approval, as this is not a true internship situation and the work also does not require a bachelor's degree. It also does not matter whether work is paid or unpaid. Engaging in unauthorized employment can jeopardize a student's legal status, and ISSS should always be consulted first at 5-0335 or [iss@uiowa.edu](mailto:iss@uiowa.edu).

### **I think my student would benefit from a reduced course load this semester, can he drop below full-time?**

Like employment, student enrollment is also tightly regulated. An international is issued a student visa to come to the U.S. expressly to engage in an academic program. While other considerations may be important to the student or even you as the advisor, such as employment opportunities or taking a reduced course load to manage the gpa, the student is legally obligated to follow the federal regulations. There are only very specific circumstances in which students can engage in a reduced course load. There are more options for graduate students once they have completed all coursework and are working on the thesis or dissertation, or who may be teaching or doing research 10 or more hours/week with an assistantship, which is considered full-time equivalent. Undergraduate students are generally eligible for a reduced course load during the first year of study, or in the final semester when they are ready to graduate, with few exceptions. Financial problems, or receiving poor grades, are not permissible reasons for a student to drop below full-time. Advisors should also note that retroactive withdrawals are not permitted for international students.

### **I am certain my student has engaged in plagiarism, but he states that he did not understand he was doing anything wrong. Why don't we educate international students about academic expectations?**

We do, and at several points early in their program of studies. The online course, International@Iowa, contains a very detailed section on plagiarism and other forms of misconduct, with clear examples of situations and quizzes testing student understanding. Since Fall 2013 all new international undergrads are required to take this course in the first 8 weeks of the first semester; plans are underway to create a version for grad students. ESL courses also incorporate these topics into their language learning curricula. Usually around 95% of newly admitted international students will end up taking at least one ESL course. The course College Expectations has also covered this topic. While there may still be some situations that could be vague to a student, such as how to properly format a citation, moving forward it is very difficult for a student to make the case that he or she "didn't know" or "no one told me." As always concerns about academic misconduct should be addressed with the appropriate academic office with your college.

### **My international students have expressed interest in connecting with American students, but don't seem to know what to do. I also observe there is little interaction with the American students in my classroom.**

Are there ways you can structure the classroom to encourage or even require some interaction? For example, if students need to break into groups for discussions or to work on group projects, rather than letting students self-select their group members, would it be appropriate to assign students to groups so you have some control of the group membership? Encouraging students to take part in one of the several hundred student organizations on campus, particularly getting outside of their own student nationality group, can be helpful. You may also refer students to ISSS for more information on the several programs available, or to the global experiences offices in the Tippie College of Business or the College of Engineering for programs specific to those majors.

Annual Statistical Report: <http://international.uiowa.edu/about/annual-reports>  
<http://international.uiowa.edu/about/annual-reports>

ISSS Website: <http://international.uiowa.edu/iss>      ISSS Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/uiowaISSS>

Questions or Feedback: Lee Seedorff, Senior Associate Director – [lee-seedorff@uiowa.edu](mailto:lee-seedorff@uiowa.edu)

**International Student Resources for UI Staff and Faculty**

**<http://international.uiowa.edu/iss/departments>**