**Case: Enrollment of International Students Post-COVID**

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This case demonstrates the ways bureaucracy can be used to address the needs of a diverse international student base in a post-COVID era. As international students get recruited to attend U.S. higher education institutions, there must be an appropriate amount of support and funding present to effectively support the students and their specific needs. Functional areas such as academic advising and career services must have staff that are trained to address issues that are specific to the international student experience.

**Background and History Regarding International Students in the U.S.**

International students’ presence in the United States dates back centuries in various forms. As the international students’ population grows and diversifies on the basis of their country of origin, major, and level of education, the U.S. government took steps in standardizing the process by introducing the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which formally introduced visa categories for foreigners to study full time in the States.

On the institutional level, services for international students grow into a more structured office like the International Student Center (ISC) at Seattle University. International students nowadays face common challenges in cultural integration, language learning, and confusion around governmental laws and policies. Offices like the ISC serve the purpose of being the support agent for international students as they navigate these challenges to study in America. The overall mission of the department is to support the university’s strategic priority of global engagement.

**Institutional Context**

Seattle University (SU) is a private Jesuit institution in the city of Seattle. As of fall 2023, SU enrolls 7,121 students total, with 4,113 undergraduates and 2,280 graduates. The international student population is 9% of its undergraduates and 19% of its graduate students. Seattle University’s mission is dedicated to educating the whole person, to professional formation, and to empowering leaders for a just and humane world. Its vision is to be one of the most innovative and progressive Jesuit and Catholic universities in the world, educating with excellence at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels. Lastly, its values include care, academic excellence, diversity, faith, justice, and leadership.

[**Strategic**](https://www.seattleu.edu/media/strategic-directions/Seattle-University-Reigniting-Our-Strategic-Directions-2022-2027.pdf) **Plan**

Beginning in 2022, Seattle University began to implement a new strategic plan. Goal Three of Reigniting Our Strategic Directions focuses on enhancing the student experience, more specifically, “offering support and services that create connections and nurture student persistence” (Seattle University, 2021). The plan seeks to “unify the university’s administrative structure for delivering student services and seek greater alignment among student service efforts on campus” (Seattle University, 2021). One other aspect of Goal Three is focused on the recruitment and retention of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color across the institution, which often encompasses international students at SU since they come from over 62 countries, especially in Southeast and East Asia.

**Key Stakeholders**

Aside from the international students present at the institution, there are two main offices that support the international student experience at SU. However, international students’ needs go beyond the work of these two offices.

[*International Student Center*](https://www.seattleu.edu/isc/about-us/professional-staff-isc/)

The International Student Center is the main source of sociocultural support for international students at SU. Additionally, their staff of four ensure that SU students remain in compliance with federal policy and law within the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services. Every professional staff member in ISC is a designated school official (DSO), per the requirement by the Department of Homeland Security. In order to be Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified, a school must have dedicated employees meant to assist and oversee enrolled students on student visas. The ISC is tasked with supporting all 950 international students at SU.

*Admissions*

The Admissions Office is tasked with recruiting prospective students to apply and eventually commit to an education at SU. Seattle University has one [Senior Assistant Director of International Admissions](https://www.seattleu.edu/counselors/international/)who focuses on international undergraduate applicants. Likewise, SU has an [International Graduate Admissions Staff](https://www.seattleu.edu/graduate-admissions/graduate-staff/graduate-admissions-international-staff-profiles/) of four.

*Career Services*

The Career Engagement Office offers programs and services for SU students to engage in professional formation and career discernment. They assist with the exploration of career paths, job search, graduate school applications, and more. Currently, there is no dedicated staff member in the CEO who assists with job search relating to Optional Practical Training (OPT).

The Albers Placement Center is another career services office at SU. Their staff of four specifically serve students in the Albers School of Business with career exploration, job and internship search, and anything else relating to employment.

*Academic Advisors*

Seattle University’s College of Arts and Science and the Albers School of Business have full-time academic advisors. The College of Science and Engineering, College of Nursing, and College of Education, however, have faculty members that serve as academic advisors. Students are usually expected to meet with their advisors at least once throughout their academic career, depending on if they are undergraduate or graduate.

**Relevant Policies and Procedures**

*Admission, Visa, and Access to the U.S.*

In order to apply to SU, a prospective international student must complete a general application and submit transcripts, a Declaration of Finances, and proof of English proficiency. International students ought to obtain a visa from their local American embassy or consulate, proving their intention of entering and staying purely to study. Per their visa requirements, international students must be enrolled full-time throughout the entirety of their education in the U.S.

*Employment*

Additionally, because international students are studying on a student visa, the Department of Homeland Security limits their opportunities for employment, on and off campus. International students are limited to on-campus employment or, with Curricular and Optional Practical Training (CPT and OPT), certain off-campus opportunities.

“OPT is temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student’s major area of study…Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization before completing their academic studies (pre-completion) and/or after completing their academic studies (post-completion)...However, all periods of pre-completion OPT will be deducted from the available period of post-completion OPT” (Department of Homeland Security, 2023).

**Considerations**

*On-Campus Employment Opportunities*

 Because of visa requirements, when international students seek employment, their first stop is to look at open job opportunities on their home campus. As the primary goal of international students is to study, international students can only work under 20 hours during the school year. However, the limited number of on-campus employment opportunities can sometimes hinder international students in their ability to support themselves financially as they use up their savings that they first arrived in the US with for their studies.

*Off-Campus Employment Opportunities*

 International students can find opportunities that are integral in their field of study for practical training purposes. Students can pursue internship opportunities during their program as CPT, or Curricular Practical Training. After they graduate, they can pursue OPT, or Optional Practical Training. OPT offers them employment for a year, with a possible extension to three years for STEM majors, designated by the Department of Homeland Security. However, finding an employer who is willing to sponsor OPT and CPT can be extremely difficult as it costs them thousands of dollars for paperwork and legal fees. With the temporary nature of the visa, many do not want to commit so much resource into one employee.

*International Student Programming*

 Much of the work of ISC is focused on advising international students on their visas and connecting them with relevant resources across campus as it pertains to social, cultural, emotional, and spiritual support. There is only one active student organization, the Indian Student Association, that is focused on the Indian international student experience. Because of the current workload and budget of ISC, there exists few opportunities for international students to engage in global, cross cultural programming.

*Dedicated Staff Support For International Students*

Due to the complicated and sometimes ever changing nature of immigration policy in the U.S., ISC staff are tasked with supporting 950 international students at SU; this caseload averages to a little under 240 students per staff member. Law students and exchange scholars on a separate class of visa are additional layers of workload for the ISC with different laws and policies attached to them. It is imperative for international students that they remain in compliance with the Department of Homeland Security for their visas, which involves adhering to strict requirements.

**Memorandum: Increasing Supporting for Our International Students**

To the Faculty and Staff of College of Science and Engineering,

We are the representatives of Rios & Zhao Higher Ed Consulting Co., LLC. We write to you on behalf of the Office of the President, in consultation with the senior leadership team of all divisions of Seattle University. We want to update you on the progress we have made in Reigniting Our Strategic Directions, specifically our growth in global engagement in growing international students’ recruitment and retention.

International students are being heavily recruited at both the undergraduate and graduate level at Seattle University. With **12%** of our student population coming from abroad in the Seattle University community, and **35%** of those are in the College of Science and Engineering (CSE), it is imperative that our institution and the college is equipped to adequately serve our international students. The work of the International Student Center (ISC) has been above and beyond as the number of international students has steadily increased, even since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the support for international students cannot rely on ISC alone. Today, we share with you some proposed measures across the university that will impact the CSE and its international students, given the high percentage of international students within the college.

Seattle University seeks to be one of the most innovative and progressive Jesuit and Catholic universities in the world by educating with excellence at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels. This vision can be accomplished greatly with the assistance of our faculty, who often create the pathways for students to excel in the classroom. However, “faculty efficacy working with international students is often dependent on their own intercultural and pedagogical skills” (Glass et al., 2021, p. 26). We wholeheartedly believe that our faculty has the capability to support our international students just as well as they support domestic students. We plan to equip our faculty with the necessary agency to do so.

Our response to this growing need is as follows:

* The College of Science & Engineering will have an additional **senior academic advisor** specializing in the international student experience. The advisor will have extensive knowledge around immigration policies and the job seeking process for international students. This advisor will assist each international student in the CSE with academic concerns, but still be equipped with the necessary knowledge and context of the requirements for international student visas.
* Similarly, **the Career Engagement Office will have a** **dedicated staff member who will work closely with the college**, focusing on relationship building with employers and supporting students in CSE. The staff will have a deep understanding on navigating the job market for international and domestic students in the field of their major.
* Finally, there will be an **institution-wide professional development training** offered for all staff and faculty to learn about visa requirements and employment pathways for international students offered.

These changes will give our school an edge in recruiting more international students. With our continuous partnership between CSE and universities in India and around the globe, we stand a better chance for international students to choose, to stay at, and to work after graduating from Seattle University.

We believe that these short and long term improvements will make sure our current and future international students can have the agency to achieve their sense of success during their time at Seattle University. We fully trust that, as our international students feel the sense of belonging in our community, they will be a great asset and an integral part of achieving the vision we set in the Strategic Direction. We will further attract international talents to Seattle, truly making Seattle University Seattle’s university.

We recognize the questions and concerns you might have regarding these changes. We first want to reaffirm our commitment to the holistic development of all of our faculty, staff, and students. We also want to stress that this does not mean a cut in position or funding towards your respective department or office. This is a deliberate effort in strategic investment into the future, with careful examination of the current budgets and unmet needs. Each of our responses targets a specific unmet need. The following outlines some questions and concerns you might have, as well as our responses to them.

**Professional Development Opportunity**

The institutional-wide professional development series will be a **voluntary**, **highly encouraged** opportunity open to all faculty and staff. This series will take place twice a quarter for the academic year of 2023 - 2024. The Office of President, with the rest of senior leadership, especially encourages those whose daily duties involve **direct student facing interactions** to participate.

A collaborative effort between the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Division of Student Development, and the International Student Center, this series will share the most current best practices faculty and staff can use in support of international students. Participants will also have the opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions on the challenges their respective offices face.

**Career Engagement Office and its relationship with CSE**

Supporting our international student body is not a task limited to one sole office. Thus, we envision a dedicated career coach under the Career Engagement Office, with the purpose to support all students in CSE. This staff will have a close relationship with the advising staff in CSE and those in the ISC. They will have a deep understanding of the curriculum and course structures of the majors, and participate in CSE events and meetings relevant to their work. This staff will work hand in hand with the newly created position of senior academic advisor of international students in CSE.

**New Senior Academic Advisor Position**

In collaboration with ISC, the university leadership has been hosting extensive discussions with graduate and undergraduate international student communities in Seattle University. With the feedback received from various stakeholders, we are recommending all colleges to hire or create a position of an academic advisor. In the College of Science and Engineering, we believe this position fits into the advising center.

**Conclusion**

As our institution moves forward, we aim to become a globally engaged university for the city of Seattle. A vital part of this goal is to ensure the recruitment, success, and retention of current and future international students. We are committed to the continuous development and learning of our faculty and staff for that future. Our investment into additional staffing into colleges and the Division of Student Development is a necessary step into this future as well.

We look forward to hearing your ideas and thoughts on these changes. If you have any questions regarding the content in this announcement, please contact Elizabeth Pilati, the Executive Coordinator for the Dean.

Warm Regards,

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Higher Ed Consultants

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