Passport to UNC Charlotte: Guiding International Students and Scholars

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Who is the international community?

- Prospective international students requiring visa sponsorship
- Currently enrolled exchange and degree seeking international students
- Graduated international students employed in the U.S. up to 3 years post graduation (still in F-1 student visa status)
- International visiting scholars & researchers
- Non-U.S. citizen faculty members requiring visa sponsorship

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ISSO by the numbers
Fall 2024

F-1 students	J-1 students	Other visa types	OPT & STEM-OPT	J-1 scholars & researchers	H-1 faculty	Total Served by ISSO
1,805	25	157	1,012	33	68	3,100

ISSO Responsibility Areas

- Receiving, welcoming, educating and advising international students and scholars on visa/employment regulations, university policies/procedures, and cultural adaptation.

- Maintaining institutional compliance with immigration & employment regulations, issuing immigration documents and submitting regular reports to DHS, DOS, DOL.

- Serving as a resource unit to the campus community.

Programs & Services Provided

- ISSO immigration-related advising services
  - Email, phone & in-person advising hours
  - Online and in-person workshops, Canvas modules
- Programming & ways for students to get involved
  - Friendship & Culture Exchange (FACE)
  - Cultural Ambassador Speaker Panels
  - International Coffee Hour (2x per month)
  - International Student Orientation

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Top International Student Concerns
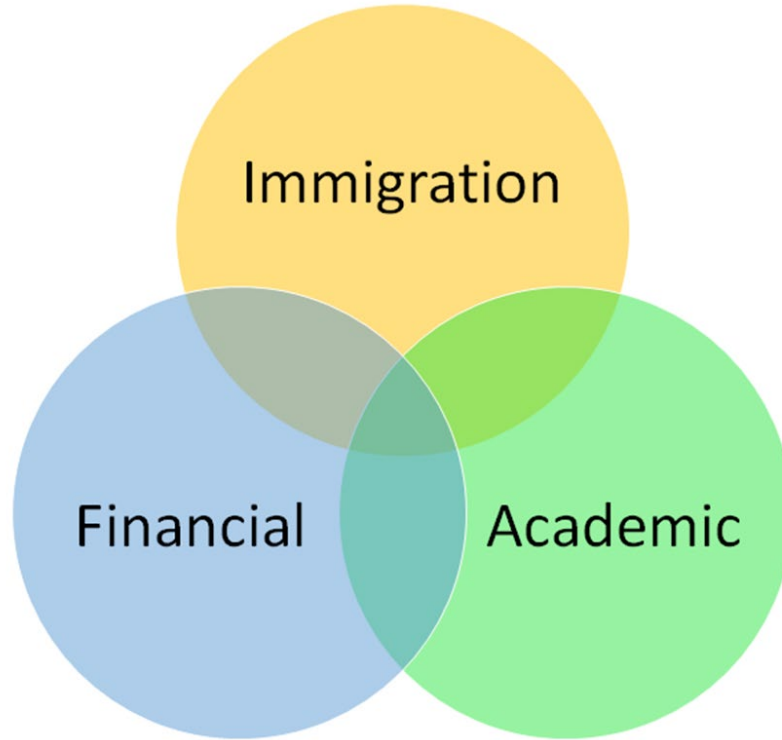
Financial Stressors

- Loans from family & friends in home country (with interest rates up to 15%)
- High cost of living; competition for university funding; pay out-of-state tuition
- Use of food pantry as savings tool
- Heightened anxiety about future employment opportunities in the U.S. & fear of not succeeding

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Areas of Academic Adjustment

- First time <u>not</u> following prescribed curriculum and having to make independent decisions on academics; comfort in 'following advice'
- Importance of attendance grades, frequent assignments, exams/quizzes (Syllabus, Canvas)
- Difference in academic writing styles (direct vs indirect)

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Areas of Academic Adjustment

- Understanding that class participation is being graded
- Professors' expectations that students 'take charge' of their learning by asking for help.
  - Many academic cultures are collectivist, hierarchical, and indirect. Very difficult to ask for help.
- Different definitions of group work vs. academic integrity/plagiarism (fine lines)

Immigration Stressors

- Full time enrollment requirements
  - Every fall and spring semester
  - No more than 1 online class can count towards full time
  - Very few exceptions, which must be authorized by ISSO
- 'Normal progress toward degree'
  - No GPA requirements but academic suspension results in failure to enroll, resulting in end of F-1 immigration status

Cultural Values

U.S.

- Individual
- Solve own problems/independent; own opinions; self-reliance
- Direct communication
- Time moves quickly; must keep up/control

Other cultures

- Collective; member of group
- Dependence on others; community support; strong relationships
- Indirect communication; use of 'intermediary'
- Time moves slowly; no need to control

How Can Faculty & Staff Support International Students?

- It can take years to re-learn how to be a successful student in a new academic environment with different cultural values.
- Being aware, encouraging, patient, and flexible where possible can make all the difference!
- Learn to pronounce their names.
- Treat them like all other advisees regarding academic advising.

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How Can Faculty & Staff Support International Students?

- ISSO relies on partnership with academic advisors & faculty
- Contact the ISSO if YOU have questions:
  - Reduced Course Load (RCL)
  - Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
  - Optional Practical Training (OPT)
  - Program Extensions

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Employment-Based Immigration Sponsorship Guidelines

- UNC Charlotte has developed a [set of guidelines](#) for the hiring of international employees that qualify for employment-based visa sponsorship.
  - Outlines expectations, responsibilities, and provides resources for hiring departments.
  - Created for fair and consistent application of hiring procedures.

Inviting or Hiring International Scholars/Researchers

- J-1 Exchange Visitors: Administered by U.S. Department of State
- Promotes cultural and educational exchange
- Intended for temporary, non-tenure research or teaching purposes
    - Research Scholar (up to 5 years)
    - Professor (up to 5 years)
    - Short-Term Scholar (up to 6 months)
- Proof of funding, English language proficiency, health insurance, export control required
- Plan ahead (4-6 months processing time)
- ISSO issues immigration support document, form DS-2019 based on nature of appointment

Hiring International Faculty

- May be hired on:
  - F-1 OPT (1-3 years employment authorization); or
  - H-1B visa sponsorship (3-6 years employment authorization)
- For H-1B:
  - Position must be a 'specialty occupation'
  - Individual must meet all position requirements
  - Position must be full time, permanent teaching/research positions with minimum 1 year funding
  - Allow 4-6 months processing time (export control, supporting documentation, etc)
  - ISSO files petition with Dept of Labor and USCIS based on ad, wage, and result of search

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Fees

- Required fees* to be paid by hiring dept or college:
  - Form I-129 = $460
  - Anti-Fraud Fee = $500
- Recommended fee for expedited USCIS processing:
  - Premium Processing = $2,805

*NOTE: FEES CAN BE INCREASED AT ANY TIME BY USCIS.

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Pathway to U.S. Permanent Residence

- Tenure-track faculty and permanent EHRA teaching appointments
  - UNC Charlotte *may* sponsor 'employment-based' pathway to permanent residency at discretion of academic department.
  - Two-three year processing time and USCIS filing fees (currently $710).
  - Do NOT make 'green card promises' – tricky landscape with many moving parts out of our control.
  - If position qualifies, individual qualifies, and department wishes to sponsor, ISSO will do its best!
  - Employer does NOT file <u>actual green card application</u> but helps secure faculty member a 'place in line' with USCIS to file own personal green card application.
  - China & India have 5-10 year wait; until that time, ongoing H-1 renewal based on approved I-140 immigrant petition.

How to Submit Visa Sponsorship to ISSO

- ISSO soon to transition to new online data management system that interfaces with Banner.
- Relies on Business Officers/Business Services Coordinators to submit visa sponsorship request within the system.
- Host faculty (for J-1 scholars) and department chairs (for H-1 faculty) invited into workflow process. Must work collaboratively with BO/BSC.

International Resources for Faculty

- Request a 'Cultural Ambassador' international student panel to visit your class.
- Attend an 'Enhancing Cultural Awareness' workshop through the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Learn about 'Globally-Networked Learning' to internationalize your curriculum and increase cultural competency.
- Request an assessment from an Intercultural Development Inventory trainer.
- Attend the Global Learning and Internationalization Institute.
- Request a meeting with ISSO staff to answer any questions about international student concerns in your department.
- Encourage your students to attend ISSO programs such as International Coffee Hour and Friendship & Culture Exchange to make connections.

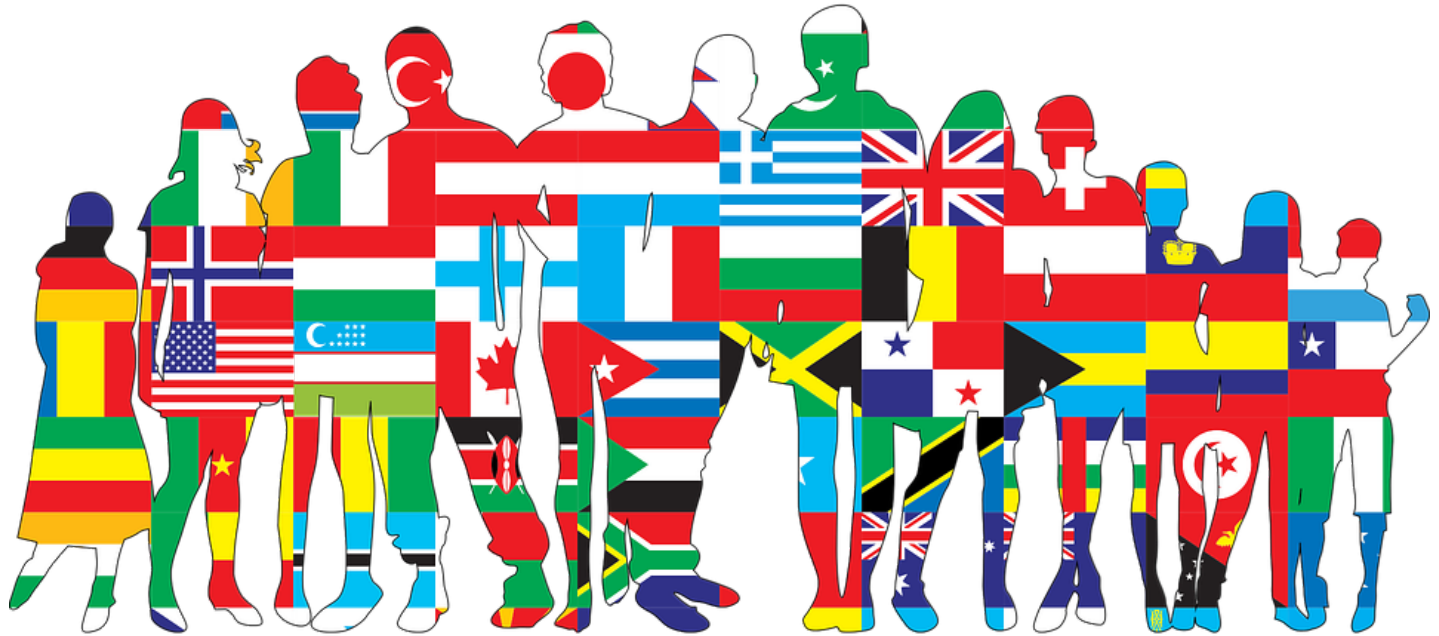UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
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Additional Resources

- [Teaching Guide - Supporting International Student Success The Center for Teaching and Learning | UNC Charlotte](#)

- [The Center for Graduate Life and Learning](#)

- [Writing Resources Center](#)

- [Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)](#)

- [Student Accountability & Conflict Resolution](#)

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Questions?