



Best Practices in International Recruitment:

AIRC Members' Perceptions on Baseline and Best Practices in Campus Services for International Students, Institutional Transparency, and Agency Management

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BACKGROUND

In May 2012 AIRC ratified a set of *Institutional Guidelines and Best Practices*¹ for its institutional and pathway members for working with international student recruitment agencies. The guidelines center on institutions' commitment to engaging in marketing, recruitment and student support practices that are truthful, ethical and transparent and which meet with the highest levels of professionalism. They include 1) Commitment to Proper Student Support Services; 2) Transparency in Student Recruitment Practices; 3) Accuracy in Marketing Information; and 4) Engaged and Strategic Management. They were developed on the basis of established best practices in Australia and UK, and in accordance with NAFSA's *Statement of Ethical Principles*². Subsequently, the institutional guidelines were widely distributed and actively promoted to existing AIRC member institutions and pathway programs, and incorporated in the statement of intent of new institutional members of AIRC.

At its core, AIRC is about collaboration in identifying and promoting standards and best practice. Understanding that agency based recruitment is a newly developing option for U.S. institutions AIRC asked experiences members to begin to address the question “*what would key elements of baseline and best practice in the areas identified in the guidelines look like on a typical AIRC campus?*” The papers incorporated in this document are a result of intense efforts on the part of those members and supported by AIRC staff.

AIRC recognizes that circumstances differ from campus to campus and, as such, there are no overarching principles which can effectively guide the work of all institutional professionals. The baseline and best practices identified in these documents should therefore be considered the opinions of the authors and are presented primarily to assist institutions in assisting their own development and best practice.

It is AIRC's intent that just as recruitment is dynamic, and changing, so will the ideas and principles outlined in this document. All AIRC members are asked to comment and contribute to the professional development ideas embodied here.

¹ AIRC. *Institutional Guidelines and Best Practices*. <http://airc-education.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=103522>

² NAFSA. *Statement of Ethical Principles*.

www.nafsa.org/Learn_About_NAFSA/Governance_Documents/Ethics_And_Principles/Statement_Of_Ethics/NAFSA_s_Statement_of_Ethical_Principles/

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGED AND STRATEGIC AGENCY MANAGEMENT

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Background

When deciding whether to incorporate agents into an international recruitment strategy, it is crucial that institutions recognize and weigh the full impact of agency recruitment. Agency recruitment can be a very effective part of an institution's overall recruitment strategy; however, institutions that engage in agency-based recruitment must be committed to appropriately support and resource partnerships. It is not uncommon for institutions to devote a tremendous amount of time and energy during the vetting and contracting process, and then let relationships languish and fail through lack of engagement. In order to leverage agents effectively, it must be understood that the true success of an agency partnership is measured by the time spent investing in the relationship. In reality, student recruitment work begins after agreements have been finalized. Giving agents the tools to be effective abroad is just as important as building an international service infrastructure at home. In short, agencies require institutional engagement in order to deliver results.

With this issue brief, the authors address several key areas for institutions to consider in order to effectively manage their agency partners. Based on the input and feedback from AIRC members, the document provides both a baseline approach as well as suggested industry best practice. The authors have attempted to cover a number of key areas in the management of agency relationships, but given the evolving, organic nature of partnerships, AIRC acknowledges that some omissions may exist.

Institutional Support

In order to provide the support required to effectively engage with agencies, institutions must make a commitment to appropriately support and resource partnerships.

Recommendation

Institutions need to be prepared for a long-term commitment including ensuring senior leadership support, training dedicated staff and providing financial resources.

Baseline Approach

1. Support from leadership

Recruitment plans that include the use of agents need approval from senior leadership. While often times this support can be generated through internal discussions, in other cases a longer-term approach may be needed to get institutional buy-in. Institutional dynamics vary greatly, so internal approaches need to be tailored appropriately. Some institutions find that benchmarking with other similar institutions is a useful technique when looking for leadership buy-in. In addition, well-articulated budgets, risk assessment information, statistics and overall data will likely provide confidence from leadership. Personalizing a strategy by introducing leadership to potential agency partners is another way to gain buy-in.

In early stages, some institutions adopt a “pilot” strategy in order to build confidence. A pilot strategy may start with partnering with an agent to recruit a specific type of student (i.e. ESL students) as a first step or may take an alternative approach of starting with one agency in a strategic market before expanding with other agencies. This is a useful way to get started as it allows forward progress while also responding to any concerns. Institutions should also be prepared with contingency plans in case of leadership changes or a strategy shift so previous investments into agency recruitment are not lost in a transition.

2. Dedicated and trained staff

Management of agency relationships requires dedicated staff. The formula for number of staff hours needed varies based on a number of institutional factors including size of the institution and how many agencies are being managed, but this discussion and decision are essential components for effectively working with agents. Also essential is “buy-in” from colleagues whose work supports that of the agency recruitment strategy (e.g. the admissions and business offices) and dedicated staff to support international students on campus once the students arrive. Faculty can also be a very important part of a strategy. Keeping faculty informed of efforts to secure interest and increase buy-in can incrementally increase the effectiveness of a strategy. This is especially true in the case of international faculty who may be willing to act as recruitment liaisons to assist efforts overseas.

Faculty and staff across the campus require proper training in order to effectively work with agents. Unlike other recruitment strategies where the institution may have more direct control, the advantage and challenge of agency recruitment is the presence that these partners provide in-country. Institutional investment in training is paramount to ensuring the success of the agency recruitment channel.

3. Financial Resources

As per the formula for the number of staff needed, there is no simple calculation for the budget needed to effectively manage agency relationships. Costs will vary greatly based on a number of factors including travel plans, but institutional acknowledgment and planning is required for successful relationships. The following budget categories need to be considered in planning and preparation for international recruitment in general: SEVIS participation fees, agency commissions or fees, registration and travel to recruitment fairs abroad, publications and shipping, digital marketing, overseas advertisements, IT and CRM infrastructure, training workshops and association member fees, professional development meetings and conferences and hosting of visitors and international student orientations.³

Best Practice

While the benchmark is a well-defined strategic and operational plan, supported and adequately funded by senior leadership, outlining dedicated staff time and dedicated financial resources for agency-based recruitment; best practice is achieved when agency recruitment is a data-driven channel successfully weaved into both a comprehensive internationalization plan and the institutional recruitment culture. At that point, recruitment staff, senior leaders, faculty, and those who administer or support the strategy, will be fluent on the opportunities and challenges, and will ultimately work to develop sustainable, positive relationships.

How to Select an Agency Partner

Statistics from agency-institution matching workshops such as ICEF show that over 10,000 agencies operate throughout the world. So, considering the sheer number of agencies how does an institution even begin to confidently choose an agency partner that will both meet professional standards and be a good match for an institution?

Recommendation

Engage only with agencies that have been thoroughly vetted through a system that instills confidence and build into contracts a means to evaluate the partnership.

Baseline Approach

Always call multiple agency references and check that an agency is in good standing with organizations that screen the quality of agencies. Such organizations include the United

³ : *Although there are too many factors to be able to advise on concrete numbers, please note in the Resources section below that AIRC has a 'Sample Budget Category' spreadsheet to assist campuses with outlining the financial resources needed to effectively operate an agency recruitment strategy.*

States Department of Commerce and ICEF. In addition, institutions should ask how the agency follows best practices established for other regions they recruit for such as the British Council in the U.K., provisions of the ESOS Act, in Australia, or standards developed by regional agency associations. Also check that individual counselors understand and have completed an on-going training on U.S. higher education.

Best Practice

Partner with AIRC-Certified agencies. In order to achieve AIRC Certification, agencies must show no fraudulent activity in the last 7 years (verified by a global, native language background check), must verify compliance with the AIRC Standards, and must undergo an on-site inspection. Finally, the AIRC Certification Board conducts an independent review of agencies. Public comments on agencies are welcome within the AIRC framework and proven violations of standards have consequences for the agency that are made public, such as probation or revocation of Certification.

AIRC also encourages institutions to use the AIRC Standards as a tool to vet prospective agency partners themselves. By following the baseline approach above and using the AIRC Standards, institutions can increase their assurance of agency quality.

What an Agency Looks for in an Institutional Partnership

An institution cannot assume that an agency will automatically want to enter into a partnership. Many agencies will look for institutional partners who will make a strong commitment to the partnership.

Baseline Approach

Institutions should prepare to demonstrate the following to prospective agency partners:

1. agency-based recruitment is an established part of the overall recruitment strategy and there is a sustainable commitment to the partnership
2. commitment to and engagement in the market, and an understanding that an institution-agency relationship is a two-way street
3. a concern for quality control exists, such as adherence to AIRC Standards or similar criteria to choose agency partners
4. the institution has experienced staff that understand regional market differences and can communicate clearly

Best Practice

From an agency's perspective an ideal partner will already know about the agency's market and may already have an existing presence in the market through study abroad programs or research collaborations. Barring that, the institution needs to demonstrate knowledge of the market. An agency will also seek partners that have experience with international students and experience managing agents. The agency may seek references for the prospective institutional partner from students or other agency partners.

Realistic expectations around placement goals and a desire for long-term relationships will also be important for an agency when considering institutional partnerships.

Training and Engaging to Ensure Effective Institution/Agency Relationships

As emphasized in previous sections, training and communication is a fundamental building block in a successful long-term institution-agency relationship and by providing accurate, updated and targeted information to agency partners, institutions enhance the quality of their representation abroad.

Recommendation

Institutions engaging in agency recruitment should ensure that agency leaders and counselors have access to any information and tools they need in order to represent the institution accurately and in a transparent manner to prospective and current applicants. The relationship should reflect a mutual respect for internal processes and deadlines, and ultimately both parties should work together to serve the students.

Baseline Approach

1. Initial and ongoing counselor training

Training the agent, ideally in person, helps ensure that counselors have the necessary tools to advise and assist students properly. A thorough training should be undertaken initially and additional training sessions or tools should be offered regularly; plan for training updates three or four times a year. Creation and maintenance of a training manual, training webinars and/or videos can also be useful resources for counselors, especially if such materials can be translated or subtitled in the local language.

2. Updates to counselors

Whether by formal newsletter or email messages, agency counselors should be provided with regular updates so they are aware of changes to programs or admissions requirements, important deadlines, service improvements, and other potential selling points. Updates should be concise and relevant - keep in mind that agencies may receive dozens of emails on a daily basis from other partners. Translations should be provided whenever possible.

3. Clearly delineated communication protocols

There should be a single institutional point of contact for agencies (as well as a back-up option) and agents should be regularly updated regarding the status of student applications.

4. Clearly outlined admissions process and timeframe

Agents should have an accurate (if approximate) timeframe for application processing including: when they can expect to be notified about the application outcome, I-20 processing times, and what the next steps are at any given time. The applicant will ask such questions, and providing agents with clear processes encourages counselors to continue promoting institutional programs.

5. Availability for real-time interaction with agents

Making representatives available during agent's office hours for questions, online training, and further student engagement provides an opportunity for agents to resolve issues that can be difficult to discuss through email alone. Scheduling a regular communication window, such as a weekly presence on local social media platforms, increases the impact of regular communication.

6. Efficient application and I-20 processing

Lengthy processing times for applications, I-20s and even emails inevitably impact the chances of retaining an applicant. Efficient turn-around times on student applications, as well as responsiveness, are key to ensuring a successful student enrollment.

7. Clear and targeted student publications

Region-specific student publications (and, in many cases, translated into the local language) can assist agents in the recruitment and advising process as well as serve as a reference guide for the counselors. Keep in mind that in several markets parents are key decision makers, and they may not have the language skills to parse English materials.

Best Practice

1. Regular travel to the agent countries

Representatives from the institution should plan to visit target countries, at least twice per year, for marketing events and so students can engage with someone with intimate knowledge of campuses and programs.

2. In-country offices or representatives

Having a representative on the ground to participate in marketing events and provide regular training to counselors can contribute significantly to building a strong partnership with key agents in a market. Where budgets do not allow for this, leveraging international alumni networks can be an effective middle ground.

3. Cooperating with agencies on targeted marketing efforts

Institutions should allocate additional budget for agency partners to launch new in-country marketing campaigns, coordinate targeted events (e.g. workshops, seminars, roadshows and mini-fairs) and recruiting tours principally dedicated to their efforts. Allowing agencies to contribute with market-specific intelligence and propose new initiatives will help institutions in keeping their partners engaged throughout the year.

4. Working with agents to leverage local social media platforms and other channels

Agents have insights into local online platforms or channels that may be useful in marketing the institution to students. These are particularly useful in markets where popular US services are blocked (e.g. China).

5. Providing draft agreements and document templates

Educational institutions, public ones in particular, typically operate with numerous legal requirements and/or restrictions. Providing draft agreements and document templates can help ensure that the initial agreement is finalized sooner rather than later.

Institution-Agency Financial Relationship

Institutions must understand and be prepared for financial aspects of agency-based recruiting, part of which is payment for the agency's services. AIRC recommends creating contracts and supporting documents that clearly state the scope and duration of the agreement, obligations of both parties, marketing guidelines (i.e. use of logo

Unpacking the term "Double-Dipping"

The practice of agents charging fees to students in addition to receiving commissions from contracted partners is often called "double dipping." The term is a misnomer when applied to international student recruiting because double dipping is actually the practice of receiving two incomes from the same source. That said, the unsavory feeling is understood and perhaps a more accurate terminology would be "student-paid fees" and "university-paid fees". While it is important to guard against predatory practices in agency relationships, it should also be understood that in many markets charging fees for services to students is appropriate and even necessary to remain viable. Some of the principal reasons that agents charge student fees are:

Student Fees Maintain Focus on Student Interests: Operating exclusively on commission payments may influence agents to steer students to one of their partners, regardless of whether such partners offer appropriate academic programs or effective international support services. Fees from students keep agents accountable to the students for outcomes and incentivize agents to put student interests first.

The Agent Price Point is their Value: In countries such as China and Korea, where saving for education is a priority, parents tend to equate high-quality services with high service fees. In such cases, reducing or eliminating student fees is an unviable agency model. Similar to the way most Americans would not trust the quality of a new car priced at only \$1,000, these markets do not trust the quality of agents who charge too little.

Institutions need to be aware that agency price points vary throughout the world and include a range of models – for example, no student fees, a flat fee charged to students, or a multi-tiered pricing model. If fees are charged to students for agency services, institutions need to be aware of these fees and ensure they are made known to students early in the counseling process, that they are clearly communicated and equally applied. Institutions should also understand that cultural norms can play a significant role in how agencies operate.

Regional Differences in Service Requirements: Especially in non-Western markets, students (and teachers) have little understanding of the application requirements for US higher education. Services like extracurricular counseling, providing access to internship networks, detailing expectations for letters of recommendation, and working through multiple drafts of personal statements are necessary to achieve the best outcomes for students in these markets. Institutional commissions alone are not sufficient to fund these activities.

By way of example, in China (where university admissions are based entirely on test scores), it often takes three or more drafts of a personal statement to convince students they should excise information like GPA, class rankings, and other academic bona-fides in favor of the personal stories that US institutions expect.

In closing, despite the initial distaste that charging fees in addition to commissions may engender, and in some cases, fees from students may, in fact, guard against many of the worst abuses in the agent industry and often result in better outcomes for students.

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and other branded material), commission terms, method of payment, conditions, and termination options.

Regional differences in whether and how service fees are charged to students will become apparent to institutions as they begin to partner with agencies. The institution may need to alter agency contracts accordingly and depending on these regional differences. For example, it is common in some parts of the world for agencies to charge no fees to students for their services. In these cases, the agency business model relies on the contractual arrangement with the institution. In other parts of the world, it is typical and culturally appropriate for a student to pay an up-front fee for services, including recruitment services. Agencies in these countries operate under a business model that collects fees from students and also from contracted partners. [See issue box on page 10 for more details.]

Baseline Approach

1. Payments

It is vital for institutions to understand how payment terms dictated by the contract will be integrated into their business office's standard processes prior to the first student's arrival. Timely payments are imperative when engaging in commission-based recruitment. The business office and agency relations manager should discuss contract terms and create standard operating procedures that provide details on each step to be taken for a payment to be released without delay.

2. Contract Terms

Contracts should include a specific start and expiration date as well as define a process for contract review and re-negotiation. Institutions should always honor contract terms and effective dates while, at the same time, allow for some flexibility when it comes to notification of student applications. For example, it is very easy for counselors who work in large agencies with dozens of branch offices to make mistakes in the notification process, and so when the finance department sends invoices, it helps if universities are willing to go back and accept after-the-fact confirmation that a particular student was recruited by the agency. This tolerance should be tempered by an expectation on the institution's part that proper notification procedures are being observed in most cases.

Upon contract execution, agencies and institutions become equal partners in a business relationship facing the same financial risks such partnership poses. Therefore, it is recommended that both parties honor each other's efforts by creating a review procedure that clearly states expectations and accountability metrics for reconciliation purposes. This may be quarterly, semi-annually or annually based on the institution's recruiting goals.

Best Practice

1. Tuition and Fee Payments

Payments to institutions should come directly from students, not agencies, unless both parties agree to do otherwise for specific reasons (which should be clearly stated in contract terms). Sending fees directly: a) ensures that agents are adhering to AIRC's transparency policies, and b) reinforces trust with students and parents.

2. Commission

AIRC leaves the handling of specific commission structures up to the partnering institution and the agency; however, the following models are commonly applied. It is important that both parties identify specific terms as they relate to each other's business goals and use the following examples as guidelines, keeping in mind the pros and cons for either party. Some, but not all, of these models can be adapted for regional practice.

- a. **Marketing Fee Structure:** This model offers a flat fee to agencies for their services on an annual basis.

Considerations for this approach: This model is simple and avoids any concerns tied to per capita payment. It may place a de facto ceiling on annual recruitments (i.e. agents will recruit enough students to get the marketing fee into a rough parity per student commissions) which may or may not align with institutional expectations. With this model there is also a potential for inactivity on agency's part (although this would undermine contractual relationship).

- b. **Commission Paid As A Percentage Of The First Year's Tuition Or Flat Fee Per Student:** Percentages will vary depending on institutional resources and goals and tuition amount. Many institutions report a commission payment of 10-15% of first year's tuition. For Intensive English programs and community colleges; i.e. institutions with lower tuition rates, an agency may request a higher commission percentage. The flat fee per student is typically calculated using a percentage on average tuition cost. Both commissions and flat fees are paid per capita.

Considerations for this approach: This approach is simple, offers protection to institutions (since agencies only get paid if a student enrolls), and provides a built-in incentive for agents to put student interests first. The institution must also decide within budget considerations if the commission is paid on the total tuition fee or the net tuition if scholarships are awarded.

The institution must also be aware that there may be an aversion to per capita payment from institutional or professional colleagues, commission cannot easily be scaled for additional financial incentives and since the agency will only receive payment shortly after an enrollment period there is no early contribution to the agency from the Institution towards marketing efforts.

Scholarships and any other financial discounts awarded to a student are an important consideration for institutions and agencies to discuss in payment negotiations. It should be made clear in any agreement whether commission payments will be made on the net or gross tuition paid by the student. (See side bar.)

- c. Retainer + Commission: This is a monthly fee paid to the agency negotiated between both parties, offering a flat fee per capita. Recruitment goals should be mutually agreed upon in order for such agreements to provide a sense of security for the institution.

Considerations for this approach: This model offers income for agencies on a monthly basis. It provides funds to the agency that may allow the agency to help fund dedicated staff for the institutional partner. Also, with this model promotional activities organized by the agency on behalf of the institution would not be limited to in-country visits by school representatives. On the institutional side, staff resources would be required in order to manage the relationship closely. This model presents much higher risk for institutions compared to the other models and is most commonly used with long-standing, trusted agency partners.

Additional considerations will likely come into play with commission payments. Institutions may be approached about bonus or “step” schemes which can be used to further incentivize. Some institutions will opt for non-financial incentives to agents to show support beyond commission. In any additional or alternative arrangement, the details should be well documented and agreed to in advance.

CONCLUSION

The most important point to understand is that engaging with agents is not a quick-fix solution, and institutions should not expect immediate results. Careful planning, budgeting and resource allotment with realistic goals are essential to an institution’s overall recruitment strategy and to a viable agent-recruitment strategy. This paper is an attempt at outlining the areas seen as most critical in building agency relationships. Variations will exist and are an essential part of the success of working with agents. Regardless, what remains consistent are the big ideas and

Financial Discounts and Commission

Institutions that award scholarships and financial aid to students need to make the decision on how these awards will impact the commission payment to the agent. In the case where a scholarship or financial award reduces the total tuition amount paid by the student and the commission arrangement is based on the gross tuition, this will negatively impact the agent. While the institution may not be collecting the full tuition from the student, the question is whether it is fair to the agent that they did not receive the full commission despite providing all the same services to the student. In the case where an institution may award scholarships or financial awards that reduce tuition, it is recommended that the institution consider an agreement whereby commission is paid on the gross tuition. In this scenario, tuition discounts won’t factor in to the commission or to the relationship.

Further to the point above, institutions and agents should also discuss and agree upon an arrangement for the case of a full tuition scholarship. This may be aligned to the net tuition agreement or may be a separate point whereby an alternative arrangement (e.g. flat fee) is put in place.

general approaches outlined above which underscore the notion that institutions and agencies must work together so that the relationship is not simply a “client” relationship, but a “partner” relationship.

Resources provided by AIRC to inform and support institutional support:

- AIRC Institutional Best Practice Guidelines for Institutions and Pathway Members;
<http://www.airc-education.org/institutional-best-practices>
- AIRC Standards
- Sample budget categories for international planning; Mary Marquez Bell, State University of New York, College at Old Westbury (AIRC member-only resource)
- Performance Based Reinvestment Plan, Mitch Leventhal, State University of New York, University at Albany

Resources on Agency Screening

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/education-agents>

<http://www.icef.com/agent-quality/agent-screening.html>

https://www.aei.gov.au/Regulatory-Information/Education-Services-for-Overseas-Students-ESOS-Legislative-Framework/ESOSQuickInformation/Documents/Using_Education_Agents_pdf.pdf

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSPARENCY IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT VIA AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

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DEFINITIONS

What is an Agency?

Within this context, “agency” is defined by the existence of a contractual arrangement between the agency and the institution, based on a commission-per-enrolled-student model, which affirms that the agency serves as a remunerated institutional representative in the counseling and advising of prospective international students. In other words, agencies are remunerated on the basis of the actual, physical presence of an enrolled student recruited by said agency on campus.

Per this definition of “agency”, marketing companies, brand managers, lead generation and like enterprises which assess fees to the institution for advertising, marketing, and broad market reach, are not considered agencies, as remuneration for such services is based on a fee-for-service model, not on a commission-per-enrolled student model. Furthermore, U.S. or international foundations, government units, or academic institutions who counsel prospective international students towards enrollment at particular U.S. institutions on the basis of an acknowledged host-or partner status, and who do not operate on the basis of direct remuneration are also not considered agencies. (Indirect remuneration may, however, exist in such arrangements, such as scholarships or tuition discounts.)

What is Transparency?

Transparency International, a global organization which fights corruption, defines transparency as follows. *Transparency is about shedding light on rules, plans, processes and actions. It is knowing why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members and businessmen act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. And it means that the general public can hold them to account. It is the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend⁴.*

⁴ Transparency International. *FAQs on Corruption*.

http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption/2

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, and in the interest of students being recruited, we recommend that institutions which engage in agency based recruitment commit to transparency in the following ways:

- 1) Be transparent to the public at large in disclosing a verifiable listing of agency partners;
- 2) Be transparent with agencies: convey transparency in contracts and other communications;
- 3) Measure expectations and results and document success.

1. Be transparent to the public at large in disclosing a verifiable listing of agency partners

Institutions' public disclosure of its agency-partners serves as a checks-and-balance to agencies' assertions as to which institutions they represent, and provides prospective students and their parents with the capacity to authenticate the veracity of such a partnership. At the same time, many institutions consider their agency partnerships to be an investment they have made over time and therefore proprietary.

Based on the above we recommend that all institutions commit to the following baseline action, and over time, to the best practice approach. We recognize that in some cases individual units such as ESL centers within an institution autonomously manage agency partners. In these cases the recommendations apply to that autonomous unit.

Baseline Approach

The institution (unit responsible for international recruitment) indicates on its website that it will release names of the agencies with which it has commission based contractual agreements to students and parents and a process by which such requests can be made

Best Practice Approach

The institution (unit responsible for international recruitment) indicates on its website the agency names, including branch locations in each city and country, contact info, and web links of the agencies with which it has commission-based contractual agreements, whereby prospective students may easily find the university's agency representative nearest to their place of residence. (See the University of Cincinnati as an example below.)

2. Be transparent with agencies; convey transparency in contracts and other communications

Institutions must be transparent in their contractual arrangements with agencies, and take charge in terms of expectations, terms, and benchmarks, and develop agency networks in accordance with capacity for training and management support.

Disclosure of financial arrangements between partner agencies and institutions is a legislated practice in the UK and Australia. Pressures for such disclosure in the US exist, and differ widely between public and private institutions and among states, with financial details generally considered proprietary. In the short term, we recommend, as a baseline approach, that institutions publicly acknowledge that its agents are remunerated. (See the University of Mississippi as an example below.)

Baseline approach

The following are approaches to contract management which all institutions should embody:

- A. Be institution –initiated;
- B. Incorporate the institution’s expectations of the agency;
- C. Outline both the agency’s and the institution’s responsibilities in the recruitment/enrollment processes;
- D. Outline qualifications of students to be recruited;
- E. Outline campus readiness to receive international students and in what numbers;
- F. Outline conditions for payment or non-payment of commissions;
- G. Ensure that agencies promote the institution truthfully in its marketing and advertising efforts to prospective students, so students’ expectations may be managed and realized, and the institution’s brand and reputation safeguarded for the long-term;
- H. Within the context of compliance with FERPA, determine which student-specific information it will convey to ensure a transparent and effective, student-focused institution-agency relationship;⁵

⁵ Institutions convey pertinent information with agencies at various stages within the application/admission/enrollment processes to ensure agencies may effectively counsel prospective students according to the terms of contractual agreement. This may include information on application status, admission status, scholarships, I-20 issuance, deposits, housing arrangements, class registrations, arrival, airport pickup, commissions, academic status, academic progression status, etc.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits sharing of such information per its February 2011 Guidance for Eligible Students, Section: Disclosure of Education Records.

- I. Publicly acknowledge the general nature of their financial arrangement with agencies, such as per capita, marketing fee, etc.

Best Practice Approach

Beyond the baseline approach outlined above, institutions should commit to move, over time, to the following best practice approach:

- A. Create a standard contract template and applicable commission rates/fees;
- B. Incorporate the institution's expectations of the agency; outline both the agency's and the institution's responsibilities in the recruitment/enrollment processes;
- C. Outline qualifications of students to be recruited, including minimal level of English required; state tuition, fees and refund and withdrawal conditions;
- D. Clarify conditions for payment or non-payment of commissions; and, within the context of compliance with FERPA, determine which student-specific information it will convey to ensure a transparent and effective, student-focused institution-agency relationship;
- E. Seek the counsel of their University's Attorney Offices prior to engaging in contractual agreements with -and/or disclosing education records to- agencies, given that institution-specific interpretations of 'applicant' and 'student', of 'Directory Information', 'Personally Identifiable Information', and 'Education Records' do exist;
- F. Make the needed resources available to effectively manage institution-agency relationships;
- G. Provide appropriate training to agencies to ensure the agencies' marketing and recruitment efforts conform to AIRC Certification Standards; the university's academic programs are promoted with integrity and accountability; and students are recruited honestly, ethically and responsibly;
- H. Provide training materials to agencies which address topics such as what makes their institutions unique; features and benefits of the city or area where they are located; available support services for international students; institutional policies related to

One of the exceptions to the prior written consent requirement in FERPA allows "school officials," to access to personally identifiable information in education records provided the school has determined that they have "legitimate educational interest" in the information. Although the term "school official" is not defined in the statute or regulations, this Office generally interprets the term to include parties such as: professors; instructors; administrators; health staff; counselors; attorneys; clerical staff; trustees; members of committees and disciplinary boards; and a contractor, volunteer or other party to whom the school has outsourced institutional services or functions.

admission, scholarships, I-20 issuance requirements, tuition payment requirements, enrollment requirements, housing and arrival logistics, transfer policies, etc. and other information relevant to an international student's choice of study destination;

- I. Institutions conduct regular site visits to agencies, or extend campus-visit invitations, for agency training purposes;
- J. Know, comply with, and ensure their agencies' compliance with federal laws which govern the recruitment of international students, and thus the related promotion and marketing practices;
- K. Where feasible based on local regulations, disclose percentages of commissions or fee schedules paid to agencies for per capita arrangements.

3. Measure Expectations And Results And Document Success

Engaging an agency partner assumes that both the institution and student are being well served, but documentation must back up the assumption.

Baseline Approach

The following is a baseline approach to documentation of success which all institutions should embody:

- A. Have a good understanding of the real or relative number of enrolled international students who engaged third parties in the processes of enrolling at their respective universities (be it a contracted agency or other third party agency);
- B. Measure international students' satisfaction with contracted agencies, and use the data to provide constructive feedback to their agencies;
- C. Measure the successes of agency recruited students, including persistence rates (retention), academic success (GPA; graduation rate), and personal success (engagement, leadership) to assess agency-recruited students' success as compared to non-agency-recruited students, the agency's overall effectiveness, and the sustainability of the institution-agency relationship.

Best Practice Approach

Beyond the baseline approach outlined above, institutions should commit to move, over time, to the following best practice approach:

- A. Survey their international students' as it regards the use of third parties in the recruitment/admission process, as well as their as satisfaction as it regards the use of the institution's agencies;
- B. Be transparent with agencies as it regards student satisfaction.
- C. Track the persistence rate and academic success of agency-recruited students for comparative purposes.

CONCLUSION

Institutional transparency in the recruitment of international students by agencies on behalf of institutions is essential to ensuring ethical recruitment practices. This includes the public provision by an institution of verifiable information not only in having engaged agencies, but also in disclosing with which agents it enjoys remunerated partnerships. Furthermore, it includes an express commitment by the institution to manage all aspects of the institution-agency relationship ethically and professionally, so students' expectations are managed well, realized truthfully, and positioned for success; institutional and agency reputations and brands are safeguarded; and valuable and sustainable student-agency-institution relationships are fostered.

Addenda

1. **AIRC Certification Standards**
<http://airc-education.org/Standards>
2. **AIRC Institutional Guidelines and Best Practices**
<http://airc-education.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=103522>
3. **NACAC Statement of Principles and Good Practice**
http://www.nacacnet.org/about/Governance/Policies/Documents/SPGP_9_2013.pdf
4. **NAFSA Statement of Ethical Principles**
http://www.nafsa.org/Learn_About_NAFSA/Governance_Documents/Ethics_And_Principles/Statement_Of_Ethics/NAFSA_s_Statement_of_Ethical_Principles/
5. **Publicly Disclose Listing of Agency-Partners**
 - **Best Practice Approach – University of Cincinnati**
<http://www.uc.edu/webapps/ucosmic/reps/>

<i>Recruits From</i>	<i>Office Location</i>	<i>Representative</i>
Australia	Melbourne (Victoria Australia)	Oceanic Consultants (Headquarters)
Australia	Sydney	Aoji Sydney Office (Branch Office)
Australia	Sydney	Alfa Beta Education and Migration Services (Branch Office)
Australia	Sydney (NSW)	EduGlobal (Branch Office)
Australia	Sydney	iae GLOBAL Ltd (Headquarters)
Bahrain	Manama (Tubli - Kingdom of Bahrain)	Global Vision for Academic Services (Branch Office)
Burma (Myanmar)	Kyauktada Township Yangon	Mentor International (Branch Office)
Canada	Toronto	iae TORONTO in Canada (Branch Office)
China	Shanghai	Aoji Shanghai Office (Branch Office)
China	Beijing	Aoji Enrolment Centre of International Education Ltd. (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	Assistant Country Coordinator for China-Ms.Lina(Alina)Wan- UC Staff Member based in Beijing (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	Beijing New Oriental Vision Overseas Consulting Co., Ltd. (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	Can-Achieve Consultants Ltd. (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	China Country Coordinator-Mr. Xiaolie Qi-UC Staff Member Based in Beijing (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	Country Coordinator for China -Ms. Xiaoying (Jane) Wang - UC Staff Member Based in Beijing (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	EduGlobal China Ltd (Headquarters)
China	Beijing	JL Overseas Education Consulting & Service Co., Ltd. (Headquarters)
China	Changchun (Jilin)	EduGlobal (Branch Office)
China	Changsha	Aoji Changsha Office (Branch Office)
China	Changsha (Hunan)	EduGlobal (Branch Office)

6. **Publicly Acknowledge Agents are remunerated**

- **Baseline Approach - University of Mississippi**
www.international.olemiss.edu

Recruitment and Placement Partners

The Office of International Programs at the University of Mississippi works with partner agencies across the globe. Representatives of these various organizations can help you identify the institution and academic programs which fit your interest, and can support and advise you throughout the application, admission, and enrollment processes.

The staff at the Office of International Programs works closely with these representatives, ensuring that they are able to give you the most up-to-date advice on everything from applications and admission deadlines, requirements, scholarships, etc.

Our partners include, but are not limited to:

- Governments and governmental agencies (incl. EducationUSA)
- Non-governmental agencies and foundations
- Academic partners
- Educational agencies and consultancies
- English language programs
- Marketing agencies

On EducationUSA:

- EducationUSA is a network of hundreds of advising centers in 170 countries where millions of international students each year find accurate, comprehensive, and current information about how to apply to accredited U.S. colleges and universities.
Find an **EducationUSA Advising Center** in your area!

On Educational agencies and consultancies:

- The educational agencies or consultancies listed below have been appointed by the Office of International Programs to advise and support potential undergraduate candidates in their applications to the University.
- Each of our partner agencies have been certified by the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) of which the University of Mississippi was a founding institutional member. Agencies comply with **AIRC certification standards**; the Office of International Programs complies with AIRC guidelines and best practices for institutional members. Look for the AIRC seal on the agency's websites.
- The University of Mississippi pays its representative educational agencies and consultancies a fee for their support to international applicants and to recruit students to the University.
- Some agencies and consultancies charge students a counseling fee. We advise prospective students to clarify all charges and service expectations in advance.
- If you'd like to express any feedback regarding our appointed representatives, please email us.
- Most of our overseas agencies or consultancies have offices in a number of cities and countries. Check the list below to find an official University of Mississippi representative near you.
 - **Access American Education (AAE)**
 - **CANAM Consultants Ltd**
 - **GreatChina International Education**
 - **Intelligent Partners**
 - **PAC ASIA Services Pvt. Ltd**
 - **SIEC Education Pvt. Ltd**

American International Recruitment Council

4710 Rosedale Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814
tel/fax +1 240 547 6400 info@airc-education.org

CAMPUS SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

David Di Maria, Montana State University
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BACKGROUND

A core part of any comprehensive strategy for international enrollment management is a genuine commitment to providing adequate campus services to meet the unique needs of international students. While the responsibility to coordinate such services is often assigned to a specialized staff member or unit (e.g., international student office), such an approach may lead to international students feeling isolated from the rest of the university, overly dependent on the international student advisor and dissatisfied with the institution. This can have a negative impact on retention of current students and recruitment of future students.

This issue brief, focusing on AIRC’s best practice guideline “Commitment to Proper Student Services,” describes alternative approaches for campus readiness that consists of multiple academic and student services units working in collaboration to best serve international students from a systems perspective. As opposed to compartmentalization, the systems approach assumes a holistic view of campus services that focuses on the interrelationships and dependencies among various campus units and stakeholders. Such an approach not only ensures better campus services for international students, but it also reflects an institutional commitment to comprehensive internationalization.

DEFINITIONS

Campus Services for International Students: Any unique service or adaptation to a general service designed to meet the unique needs of international students.⁶

Student Support Services: Supplemental programs offered to students by university personnel in an effort to promote whole student development. Such programs often occur outside of the classroom and commonly focus on enrollment, retention, academic support and social integration.⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Provide support throughout the application process, after arrival to campus and during the entire academic career**

⁶ Di Maria, D. (2012) *Factors affecting views of campus services for international students among student affairs administrators at five public universities in Ohio*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Minnesota.

⁷ Braxton, J. (2003) Student success. In S. Komives & D. Woodard (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 317-335). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Once international students arrive on campus, it is necessary to provide support structures to ease the transition into U.S. higher education and continue to provide support throughout the academic year. The needs of international students are often more diverse than domestic students due to cultural, legal, linguistic and other factors. Therefore, it is generally true that the needs of international students fall into one of three broad categories:

- The same needs as all students (e.g., housing and course registration)
- Needs complicated by cultural differences (e.g., academic ethics and power distance)
- Needs unique to a student's international status (e.g., immigration and taxation)⁸

Baseline Approach

The foundation for success begins with a pre-departure orientation provided by the academic institution or the partner agency. Collaboration with a local EducationUSA office may also serve as a great resource to facilitate a pre-departure orientation.⁹ In the event that inadequate staffing or funding pose barriers to organizing a pre-departure orientation, institutions may utilize free online resources.¹⁰ The U.S. Department of State requires sponsors of exchange visitor programs to provide program participants with specific pre-arrival information.¹¹ While this requirement may not apply to all institutions, it serves as a good baseline for determining the type of pre-arrival information that should be provided.

Once on campus, international students will usually discover an international student orientation in conjunctions with an overall campus orientation. In addition to complying with federal regulations,¹² international student orientations serve as an opportunity to bring together all international students to learn about the campus, the international student services staff, upcoming events, housing and insurance information, and immigration compliance. Information should also be provided regarding employment and social security cards,¹³ as well as government issued identification documents and driver's licenses. Oftentimes, government mandated international student check-in is done at the time of orientation.¹⁴ During check-in, immigration documents are reviewed for accuracy, copied and stored by the institution. Such documents may include, but are not limited to: valid passport, visa stamp, Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, medical insurance documents, and Form I-94.¹⁵ Students may also be asked to complete a math or English placement test, not for a grade but to determine the best entry point into the academic curriculum

⁸ Chalmers, P. (February 1976). The professionalization of the foreign student advisor. *NAFSA Newsletter*, pp. 12-14.

⁹ Find upcoming EducationUSA pre-departure orientations online by visiting

<https://www.educationusa.info/students-orientations.php>

¹⁰ For a complete curriculum designed to assist international students with pre-departure, entry and reentry concerns, please see <http://www.ustudy.us/>

¹¹ The U.S. Department of State requires J-1 program sponsors to offer pre-arrival information to all program participants. See 22 CFR 62.10 (b) for details.

¹² The U.S. Department of State requires J-1 program sponsors to offer an appropriate orientation for all participants. See 22 CFR 62.10 (c)(1-7) for details.

¹³ Social Security Administration: www.ssa.gov/

¹⁴ See SEVP's Fact Sheet on SEVIS Reporting Requirements for Designated School Officials

<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/factsheet/061605dsoreporting.htm>

¹⁵ Please visit <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students/> to learn more about check-in requirements, including materials and time requirements.

or to identify additional resources to assist them. Depending on the needs and goals of the institution, orientation may last from a few hours to several days.¹⁶

Throughout the academic year, staff should strive to stay in touch with international students and create a basic schedule for sending out communications throughout the year. These messages should include important information about maintaining status and dates of campus activities. Staff should also remind international students of campus resources for academic, financial and social support.

Best Practice Approach

In addition to pre-arrival information, international students may be pre-registered for courses prior to arrival. This enables international students to select from a wider variety of courses and sections. While it would be problematic to pre-register all international students, knowing that not all will arrive to the institution, it may be possible to hold courses until a certain date or only pre-register students who have provided confirmation (e.g., tuition deposit, copy of plane ticket or visa stamp) of their plans to attend the institution.

As a complement to international student orientation, advisors should encourage international students to attend first year student orientations and activities.¹⁷ First year orientations create opportunities for students to meet their peers, learn about campus resources and engage with the local community. At some schools, first year students may be required to enroll in a special short-term or semester-long orientation course. International students may enroll in general or separate sections of orientation courses. While the latter allows for a more targeted approach to addressing the needs of international students, the former assists students to integrate with domestic students. In the best case scenario, a hybrid model is employed.

Along with orientations, the international student services office should plan special programs throughout the year designed to assist international students in completing administrative requirements and integrating into their new community. For example, a group trip to the Social Security Administration or the Department of Motor Vehicles is helpful for students who may need a social security card or want to apply for a driver's license. In some instances, officials at local government offices may welcome group trips since it allows for batch processing during peak times. Additionally, such coordination may result in improved services and targeted attention for international students. Group outings and/or tours also introduce international students to the surrounding community and familiarize them with important services and amenities in the area.

Throughout the year, staff should also coordinate special events like International Education Week or celebrate international holidays as a complement to other programming offered to international students. International Education Week provides opportunities for international students to share their culture with domestic students through fairs, film/documentary screenings,

¹⁶ See NAFSA's professional resource on International Student Orientation Models http://www.nafsa.org/Find_Resources/Supporting_International_Students_And_Scholars/Network_Resources/International_Student_and_Scholar_Services/International_Student_Orientation_Models/

¹⁷ For an example of both international and first year orientations and their integration, visit: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/orientation.cfm>

concerts, and/or lectures for example.¹⁸ A schedule of holidays can also be created for the campus with events held during all holidays or quarterly. Depending on the size of the international student population, staff may choose to create committees for each holiday or semester to plan events. This is a great way to achieve buy in from others across campus.

It is also important to continually communicate with international students about immigration issues and events on campus.¹⁹ Regular communications should inform students about immigration workshops, academic and immigration advising schedules, programming and important campus announcements. As a best practice, international student services offices should synchronize the delivery of immigration information with the periods during which specific regulations are of greatest need and interest to students.²⁰ Additionally, offices should use many forms of communication to reach their students and communication strategies should be regularly reviewed for relevance. While some offices utilize software to send automated and personalized messages, others find dedicated intern or student worker positions meets their needs. The use of social media and an international student newsletter are two good ways to send information, such as upcoming events and tips for studying in the U.S, to students.²¹

International students may find they need not only psychological and emotional support during their studies in the U.S., but may also need academic support.²² Inform international students about services on-campus for academic support like English language tutors/centers, writing centers, and academic subject tutors. Take students on a tour of the campus at the beginning of the year to show them where the services are available on campus and online. Also, encourage students to speak with professors or teaching assistants before or after class or during office hours or join study groups even if they feel they are able to keep up with their materials.

Finally, it is very important that the voices of international students be heard when planning campus events and academic policy changes.²³ Strategies include town hall meetings where directors of various service offices are present to respond to questions and concerns from the international student community, establishment of an international student club or council and partnering with student government to ensure there is a permanent international student representative similar to how positions may already exist for other special populations.

2. Ensure the campus is properly staffed to provide services to international students

Host institutions must ensure proper staffing in order to meet the needs of international students and to ensure institutional compliance with immigration regulations. While the U.S. Department

¹⁸ Learn more about International Education Week at <http://eca.state.gov/programs-initiatives/international-education-week>

¹⁹ See an example of international student events and programming at http://oiss.wvu.edu/program_and_events

²⁰ See Adria Baker's chapter "The Life Cycle of F-1 Regulatory Training: Partnering with International Students" in Maureen Andrade and Norman Evans' 2009 book *International Students: Strengthening a Critical Resource*.

²¹ View sample newsletters at: <http://www.pdx.edu/international-students/international-student-newsletter>

²² Daemen College lists all international academic support at: <http://www.daemen.edu/admissions/international/Pages/InternationalAcademicSupport.aspx>

²³ Visit <http://php.scripts.psu.edu/clubs/up/isc/index.php#> for an example of an international student council

of State expects program sponsors to commit to providing adequate staffing,²⁴ something to which the school's head must attest, an exact ratio of students to staff is not identified.

Baseline Approach

The institution has one or more staff members who maintain specialized knowledge and skills in the areas of student advising, intercultural communication, and relevant local, state and federal laws pertaining to international students. These individuals serve as the primary liaisons between international students, the institution and immigration authorities. International students may easily access staff members for assistance with routine matters as well as in times of crisis. The international student advisor does not operate in isolation, but is able to make appropriate and timely referrals to other campus and community resources as needed.

Best Practice Approach

International student advisors offer programs and services that align with strategic goals and objectives. Offerings are routinely assessed for overall effectiveness and student satisfaction. Staff members serve as campus experts on matters pertaining to international student success and are consulted prior to major changes to policy or procedure. International student advisors have substantive international experience, such as participation in a long-term study abroad program. Translators ensure English language learners may access essential information in their native language.

In addition to having an adequate number of highly trained specialists, the institution has a group charged with examining the integration and welfare of international students. Membership extends beyond the international student office to include student affairs, faculty and local community representatives. While the international student officer makes appropriate and timely referrals, the other representatives serve as reflective practitioners and proactively plan actions designed to improve the international student experience.

3. Educate campus stakeholders on the unique needs of international students and develop skills for serving diverse population via formal and informal training

Training is a vehicle by which knowledge, attitudes and skills may be shaped and maintained to align with ideals. Training ranges from instructing a new advisor in the use of SEVIS to providing faculty with tools for making the most of diversity in the classroom. Above all, training is a means by which cultural knowledge of a profession or organization is formally transmitted across group members.

Baseline Approach

International student advisors must have access to basic professional resources to ensure adequate advice is provided to international students regarding complex and changing immigration regulations. A near essential tool is NAFSA's Advisor's Manual, which provides context and

²⁴ See page 42 of the User Manual for Exchange Visitor Program Sponsor Users at http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/Chez_NAFSA/Resource_Library_Assets/Regulatory_Information/ISEVIS_6_11UM_Vol1_DS3036_20121207b.pdf

analysis of immigration regulations.²⁵ Additionally, staff must be trained in the use of administrative systems, the application of university policies and the art of advising. Training materials should be offered to students, faculty, staff and local community members.

Basic information must also be provided to stakeholders outside of the international student services office. This not only better prepares faculty and staff to better serve international students, but it also helps to establish international student services as a distinct professional domain within higher education. Basic needs for staff training and development include:

- An institutionally agreed upon definition of international students.²⁶
- Awareness of services provided by the international student services office.²⁷
- General knowledge of employment restrictions and the impact of distance education courses on full-time enrollment requirements for immigration purposes.²⁸
- Information on educational systems and credentials outside of the United States.^{29 30}
- Basic strategies for recognizing and responding to cultural differences.^{31 32}

Best Practice Approach

International student advisors receive support to attend professional conferences focused on international education and student success. In addition to having access to essential resources and tools, the international student office maintains a library of key publications related to the role of the international student advisors. Staff members discuss critical issues during staff meetings and actively exchange ideas with colleagues across campus and at other institutions.

Workshops are offered to faculty and staff on a wide range of topics including cultural adjustment, academic ethics across cultures and immigration basics for non-immigration advisors. The goals of these workshops are to improve knowledge, skills and attitudes pertaining to working with international students.^{33 34}

²⁵ NAFSA Advisor's Manual http://www.nafsa.org/Advisers_Manual/Welcome_to_the_NAFSA_Adviser_s_Manual/

²⁶ While definitions of international students vary from institution to institution, the Institute of International Education's definition used for Open Doors reporting is available at <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/FAQ#faq4>

²⁷ Montana State University provides faculty and staff with a directory of services provided by the Office of International Programs. It may be accessed at

http://www.montana.edu/international/documents/DirectoryofServices_Jan15.pdf

²⁸ A sample resource is available at <http://www.nafsa.org/findresources/Default.aspx?id=32981>

²⁹ Free resources, including webinars and publications, are available from Educational Credential Evaluators at <https://www.ece.org/SiteMain/23/35>

³⁰ Free resources, including webinars and publications, are available from World Education Services at <http://www.wes.org/educators/index.asp?>

³¹ The Intercultural Communication Institute maintains a free directory of resources pertaining to intercultural education and training at <http://www.intercultural.org/documents/SIICResources.pdf>

³² See also NAFSA's Intercultural Activity Toolkit at <http://www.nafsa.org/findresources/Default.aspx?id=8568>

³³ See Duke University's Intercultural Skills Development Program at <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/ihouse/trainings-and-workshops/intercultural-skills-development-program-isdip>

³⁴ See Kent State University's video on the ACIREMA simulation at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TSK0jdDQ0s>

Additionally, policies and processes are codified and standardized. Advisors utilize checklists and office manuals to ensure consistency and continuity. The university provides faculty and staff with training on how to internationalize administrative systems, policies and procedures.

The university provides international students with access to tools (e.g., software) and training for completing non-resident alien tax returns, processing immigration petitions and completing employment forms.

Specific suggestions for various populations are below:

For students:

- The university offers an orientation program that addresses basic and immediate needs such as course enrollment, immigration registration, tuition payment, food, housing and social belonging.
- The university provides cultural programming designed to facilitate integration between international students and domestic students.

For faculty and staff:

- The university offers campus employers with information on hiring international students.
- The university provides employees with basic information about international students including definitions, demographics and needs.
- The university maintains a resource library for employees to access information pertaining to serving international students from their unique professional domains.

For members of the community:

- The university maintains collaborative relationships with local, state and federal officials.
- The university includes community resources (e.g., Historical Societies and Chambers of Commerce) in the orientation program.
- Employers attending on-campus job fairs are briefed on the basics of hiring an international student.

4. Be intentional about the use of space and facilities for supporting international students

Similar to domestic students, international students will often take advantage of facilities offered on-campus, such as housing and dining options. Housing for international students is an imperative component for successful studies in the U.S. On-campus residence halls are helpful for integrating international students into the entire student body and some colleges and universities require students to spend their first year or first two years living in on-campus housing.³⁵

³⁵ Examples of international student housing: <http://www.life.arizona.edu/home/housing-options/international-students>

Depending on your institution and city, this may not be a realistic requirement if there are no residential halls or if there is an abundance of other housing options nearby.

Baseline Approach

International students should have on-campus housing options like dorms or apartments. If no campus housing is available, information should be available to students for securing their own housing.³⁶ For example, local apartment complexes may be listed on the campus website or housing information sent via email with an institutional acceptance letter.

Along with housing, students need to have access to on-campus dining halls, where ingredients (e.g., pork and beef) should be carefully labeled. Alternatively, students may be provided access to the space, tools and ingredients to cook meals of their choosing.

Finally, institutions should aim to meet the basic spiritual needs of international students by ensuring the availability of quiet space that may be used for prayer or meditation.³⁷

Best Practice Approach

As best practice, many options should be available for international students to find housing on or off campus with resources available to help them make a decision. If a campus requires students to remain on-campus for a number of years, it is important to help students understand all of their housing options available. Student life on-campus can be challenging for international students when they are paired with a roommate who may not be sympathetic to their culture or has a different schedule. Students should understand there are options for mediation or ways to change roommates if conflicts cannot be resolved.

One housing option that many institutions tend to utilize is the “international house.” International houses, or residential halls or houses targeted towards international students, can be effective for internationalizing the campus, but can also become isolating for international students and prevent socializing with domestic students. Successful international houses should include both domestic and international students who are interested in diversity. Events can and should be held often and be open to the entire campus to promote integration.

Beyond housing, other on-campus amenities should be considered along with their cultural implications. For example, informing students about gym space and intramural sporting events may be of interest to some students but they may have certain requirements. Some students may come from cultures restricting interaction with the opposite gender and therefore may be uncomfortable exercising in the same room or participating in sporting events.

Dining halls may also pose a challenge to international students because of dietary requirements and/or restrictions. As a best practice, foods should be labeled “Kosher” or “Halal,” when applicable, and there should be a variety of options available so all students can find enough food options to satisfy their needs.

³⁶ Example of a college without on-campus housing

<http://www.lorainccc.edu/admissions+and+registration/international+students/housing.htm>

³⁷ For an example of multiple religious spaces, see <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/chaplaincy/rooms.aspx>

Finally, international students often have needs beyond those of domestic students and surveying students for specific needs may be useful.³⁸ A few campus amenities that may be requested include:

- Rooms for making Skype calls at any time of the day so that students may communicate with friends and family back home without bothering roommates. A logical place for these rooms is the library, a residence hall or a career services office where the rooms can also be used for interviews with prospective employers in the U.S. or abroad.
- Installed footbaths in restrooms so Muslim students don't have to wash their feet in the sink before prayer.³⁹

5. Ensure opportunities exist beyond the classroom setting

When international students travel to the U.S. for education, they are taking advantage of many opportunities - to learn about a new culture, become immersed in a second language, study at a new institution, etc. Opportunities beyond their academic experience create a rich learning experience for international students.

Baseline Approach

Depending on available staffing and resources, your institution may be unable to provide opportunities for international students outside of orientation. If this is the case, encouraging students to participate in campus activities and community groups will help maximize the opportunities offered to international students.

Staff members in a small international education office should not feel unable to provide any opportunities or programming to international students. Familiarize international students with on-campus services, student organizations and service units like the career services office early-on, to give students the tools necessary to seek out new opportunities.

Best Practice Approach

As a best practice for international student services, opportunities should be offered to international students to expand their knowledge and interests. Although, students are not always aware of these opportunities, efforts should be made to inform students and offer special programs. Job, volunteer, and internship fairs are advantageous to international students and provide them with opportunities to grow their knowledge in their field or provide service to others. Institutions offering these fairs should make careful consideration to inform international students and potential employers about immigration requirements related to work. Similarly, if job and internship programming is not possible, goingglobal.com offers opportunities to work and intern in countries around the world.

³⁸ For a global benchmark survey, see the International Student Barometer at <http://www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer/>

³⁹ For a New York Times article on this topic, visit <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/07/education/07muslim.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

Beyond fairs, workshops offered to international students provide special opportunities for students to learn about a number of topics relevant to international studies. Workshops may include information on Optional Practical Training, Curricular Practical Training, obtaining an H-1 visa, and maintaining status. Similarly, workshops aimed at helping students adjust to living and studying in the U.S. help ease the transition to the U.S. and may include: cultural differences in the workplace, overcoming culture shock, and making the most out of your international education.

Finally, an area often overlooked by international students is studying abroad as an international student. Most institutions offer study abroad programs that are utilized by domestic students, but can also be used to enhance international student experience for many of the reasons that domestic students study abroad: greater cultural exposure, expanded confidence, development of resume, and potential to learn/practice another language, etc. Students may also be interested in a semester participating in the National Student Exchange program.

6. Develop support systems to track performance and provide timely interventions

International student success is a goal shared by both agents and academic partners. There is also a considerable need for a continuum of programs and services designed to address the unique academic, social, cultural, and immigration needs of international students. As an advocate for international students, it is important that you convey the critical staffing and infrastructure that should be in place to facilitate these programs if the students you serve are to be successful. Some academic administrators may have the false impression that signing an agent agreement is the first and last step they need to take to increase international student enrollment, and you have a responsibility to gently inform them otherwise.

Baseline Approach

At minimum, staff should develop ways of tracking the progress of international students. At many institutions, this is done informally when students come to the international student office for advising appointments. In addition to attending to the issue for which the student came into the office, the advisor may check the student's account, registration, grades and other sources of information. Additionally, a polite conversation with the student is an excellent way to find out how the student is adjusting and what problems they are facing. Notes from the advising appointment, including any necessary referrals, should be kept in either a paper file or an online database.

Best Practice Approach

Commonly in place for first-time freshmen, but used in some cases for upperclassmen as well, are 'early alert' systems that notify academic advisors and key stakeholders of a student's poor academic progress. The intent is to recognize this downward trend while there is still time to address it within the term. For many international students, immersion in an English environment during the first semester is a factor contributing to poorer than expected academic progress. Sometimes it is culture shock, or a small matter that can be addressed once the right authorities are made aware of the issue (housing, food, time management, etc.).

Establishing support systems with cross-cultural sensitivity is essential to international student success. Academic workshops and mentor programs are common strategies used by colleges and universities to create networks of support. First-year seminars or one-credit semester-long international cohort courses seek to serve a similar intent. Encouraging international students to engage with these services is essential. It will be greatly appreciated if any trends that you notice or student feedback that you receive is shared with your academic partner to help improve these services for all students.

Some institutions may have sophisticated software systems designed to track a student's progress. These systems often include avenues by which faculty and other stakeholders may report a concern regarding poor academic performance, chronic absence, etc. The system or a system administrator can then route the concern to the appropriate campus resource for review and action.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

While international students require many of the same services as domestic students, their needs are often complicated by factors pertaining to culture, language and immigration status. It is important to assess a campus community's readiness to host and support international students prior to engaging in active recruitment. Moreover, enhancements to existing services should be made in advance, and this often requires educating campus colleagues on matters pertaining to international students. Ignoring these important steps will inevitably set students up for failure and result in a negative impact on the institution's reputation abroad.

⁴⁰ For an overview of issues pertaining to early alert systems and possible vendors from which software may be obtained, please visit NACADA's website at <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Early-alert-systems-and-resource-links.aspx>

AIRC BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

An institution's adherence to AIRC's institutional guidelines signifies its commitment to engaging in marketing, recruitment and student support practices that are truthful, ethical and transparent and which meet with the highest levels of professionalism. Furthermore, it signifies an institution's commitment to operating in accordance with NAFSA's Principles of Good Practice for the Recruitment and Admissions of International Students.⁴¹

Guideline 1: Commitment to Proper Student Support Services

AIRC Institutional and Pathway Members understand the international student experience, recognize the importance of respecting the needs of their students, and commit to the provision of supporting programs and services conducive to the enrollment, persistence and success of international students on their campuses.

Purpose:

Adherence to this guideline by an AIRC Institution or Pathway Member ensures that suitable support for international students is available throughout the application process, once on campus, and during their entire academic career. It is a commitment to ensure proper staffing, training, facilities, opportunities and support systems designed to meet the special needs and requirements of international students so they may be successful as students in the U.S.

Guideline 2: Accuracy in Marketing Information

AIRC Institutional and Pathway Members market their educational and institutional services professionally and accurately, and maintain the integrity and reputation of their particular academic institution as well as of the U.S. education sector.

Purpose:

Adherence to this guideline is an AIRC Institution or Pathway Member's commitment to marketing its respective institution, academic program and student services professionally, accurately, ethically, and truthfully. This commitment is a sign of quality assurance to both partner-agents and prospective students and their parents. The guideline offers a safeguard against unethical, false or misleading marketing practices.

Guideline 3: Transparent Student Recruitment Practices

AIRC Institutional and Pathway Members provide pertinent training and information to their partner-agents for use with the agent's marketing and recruitment efforts so that prospective students may make informed decisions about institutional choice, thereby ensuring better alignment between their expectations and actual experiences.

⁴¹ NAFSA. *About NAFSA: NAFSA's Principles of Good Practice for the Recruitment and Admissions of International Students*. <http://www.nafsa.org/about/default.aspx?id=2477> (Rev. January 2002). Accessed February 6, 2012.

Purpose:

Adherence to this guideline is an AIRC Institution or Pathway Member's commitment to assuring that information provided to prospective students via agent partners is current and accurate at all times and throughout each stage of the recruitment process. This commitment ensures that an agent partner is duly trained by, and remains current on, the university/institution it represents, including topics such as admission and scholarship requirements, academic programs, international student support services, and policies relevant to an international student's institutional choice.

Guideline 4: Engaged and Strategic Agent Management

AIRC Institutional and Pathway Members collaborate closely with their agent-partners and establish clear procedures for a sustainable agent-institutional relationship, including mechanisms for compliance with AIRC guidelines.

Purpose:

Adherence to this guideline by an AIRC Institution or Pathway Member ensures that effective communication procedures are in place and expectations for the relationship are clearly understood. It is also a commitment to understanding and complying with the AIRC guidelines.

ABOUT AIRC

AIRC works to safeguard the interests of international students and enrolling institutions through the promotion of ethical, standards-based international recruitment strategies and best practices in recruitment and implementation of a rigorous, peer reviewed, independent Certification Process for Recruitment Agencies

AIRC's membership consists of representatives from accredited U.S. postsecondary institutions, pathway programs, and student recruitment agencies which have earned Certification through AIRC.

AIRC was founded in 2008 by senior administrators at U.S. post-secondary institutions to establish quality standards for international student placement in the United States⁴². AIRC is a 501c3 non profit organization and is registered as a Standard Development Organization with the US Department of Justice.

⁴² AIRC. *About AIRC*. <http://airc-education.org/>

American International Recruitment Council

Agency Certification Standards

The Agency Certification Standards are monitored by the AIRC Certification Commission and reviewed on a periodic basis as determined by the AIRC Board of Directors.

Standard 1: Organizational Effectiveness

1.1 Mission and Purposes

Statements of mission and purpose are made public and guide the agency's planning and budgeting, including providing a framework for governance, management and communication. These purposes are further reflected in every aspect of the agency and its activities, organization, and human, financial and physical resources.

1.2 Governance and Ownership

The agency describes in a clear and detailed manner its ownership, governance and organization.

1.3 Effective Management

1.3.1 Decision-Making Process

The agency is sufficiently organized to accomplish its purposes through organizational structure, policies and procedures.

1.3.2 Human Resources

Employees or other people working for or on behalf of the agency are competent, well informed, reputable and act at all times in the best interest of the applicant and institutions.

Note: The term, "Agency," refers to the entity which seeks certification. The term, "Agent," is any person or an entity working on behalf of the agency.

1.4 Scope of Operation

1.4.1 The agency describes fully all of its activities related to international student recruitment, including its geographic scope.

1.4.2 If recruitment activities are one part of a larger organization with diverse purposes, the agency must describe how the recruitment operations function as a distinctive but fully operational unit within the larger organizational context

1.4.3 If recruitment activities are carried out by sub-agents, franchisees, or other persons employed or contracted by the agent to transact the whole, or part of the student recruitment process, the agency must describe these relationships.

1.5 Financial Integrity

1.5.1 Financial Sustainability of the Organization

The agency manages its financial resources to maximize the agency's capability to meet its stated purposes for organizational sustainability.

1.5.2 Nature of Setting and Collecting of Student Fees

The agency has a schedule of fees for services rendered student clients which is readily understood and visible to all student clients.

1.5.3 Transparent Refund Policy The agency has a refund policy which is readily understood, publicly posted and visible to all student clients.

1.5.4 Handling of Student Financial Awards

The agency refrains from collecting remuneration from student clients that is conditional upon the receipt of scholarships and financial aid monies awarded by the host or receiving institution, or other scholarship awarding organizations, and is in addition to any remuneration for placement provided by contract with the host institution.

Standard 2: Integrity of Recruitment Process

2.1 Knowledge of the U.S. Education System

Agency staff have a strong working knowledge of the education system in the United States, as well as of the specific institutional clients they serve.

2.2 Advertising/Marketing The agency represents itself honestly, claims competency when demonstrable, and avoids misrepresentation.

2.3 Respect for Intellectual Property The agency uses only authorized material, (including logos) from educational institutions.

2.4 Accountability

The agency takes full responsibility for ensuring compliance with AIRC standards with any sub-agents, franchisees, or other persons employed or contracted by the agent to transact the whole, or part of the student recruitment process.

2.5 Conflicts of Interest

The agency manages its relationships with institutions, organizations and students to ensure impartiality and transparency.

2.6 Transparency and Integrity of Services Rendered

The agency conducts itself in a transparent manner in which only truthful claims are made, and both institutions and students are served in an unbiased manner.

2.7 Appropriateness and Accuracy of Services Rendered

2.7.1 The agency remains updated about and follows the instruction of the U.S. Consulate in regard to immigration procedures.

2.7.2 The agency uses current information about institutions and their admissions criteria (including language proficiency), program offerings and their academic prerequisites; rate of graduation, tuition and fees; personal expenses; scholarships; health insurance; calendar and academic support services as well as support services for international students; housing opportunities; the grounds on which the student's enrollment may be deferred, suspended or discontinued; work opportunities while a student and upon graduation and other matters of importance to the student.

2.7.3 The agency provides accurate information concerning the specific nature of the institution to which a student is being recruited – such as whether study will be at the parent institution; a branch campus in or outside of the United States; by distance education; a joint degree or twinning program outside of the United States, etc.

2.7.4 The agency provides accurate information concerning the nature of the academic qualification/degree being received as per location above and degree level.

2.7.5 The agency provides accurate information related to the transferability of academic credit.

2.7.6 The agency provides accurate and current information concerning the cost of travel to the host institution.

2.7.7 Students who are under the age of 18 in the United States lack many legal rights and need special support. The agency understands the special needs of minor students and provides appropriate services.

Standard 3: Student and Family Engagement Pre- and Post-Enrollment

3.1 Pre-Enrollment

The agency carries out its pre-enrollment services with students and their families characterized by the following:

3.1.1 There is a written legal relationship in the form of a contract or agreement with a readily understood and up-front disclosure of services and related fees.

3.1.2 The agency maintains the confidentiality of records, notes, and client information and discloses confidential information only with written consent from the student on a need-to-know basis.

3.1.3 In the case of students under the age of 18, parents/families are included in the communication process as appropriate and timely.

3.1.4 Promises or guarantees are made by the agency only when backed by facts that they will be achieved.

3.1.5 The agency demonstrates the knowledge that recruitment and admissions in the U.S. educational context are generally prohibited from discrimination based on age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, or other reasons.

3.2 Post-Enrollment

The agency carries out its post-enrollment services with students and their families characterized by the following:

3.2.1 The agency keeps individual student records for at least three (3) years for purposes of internal evaluation and external review.

3.2.2 The agency keeps recent (within 3 years) student/family client satisfaction records on file for purposes of external review.

Standard 4: Institutional Engagement Pre- and Post-Recruitment

4.1 Pre-Recruitment

The agency only contracts with or places students at U.S. educational institutions whose accreditation is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Characteristics of these services shall include the following:

4.1.1 There is a written legal relationship in the form of a contract or agreement which clearly states the nature of the partnership, scope of respective roles and responsibilities, quality assurance measures to be implemented and method of monitoring the contractual obligations (such as an annual report to the institution on the results of recruitment practices or other mutually agreed stipulations).

4.1.2 The agency maintains regular contact with institutions which enables consistent and timely communication.

4.1.3 The agency maintains the confidentiality of the relationship between institution and agency as agreed.

4.1.4 The agency provides legitimate documents to institutions which are properly notarized or attested as to their authenticity.

4.1.5 The agency does not knowingly provide false or misleading records of student academic achievement, preparation, and financial capability. Further, the agency ensures that essays and/or

statement of purpose, are originally created by the student to whom they are attributed.

4.2 Post-Recruitment

4.2.1 The agency keeps recent (within 3 years) institutional client satisfaction records on file for purposes of external review.

Standard 5: Complaints Process

The agency has an internal mechanism for processing complaints and making necessary changes in the nature of recruiting services as needed.