The Role of SIOs in Navigating the Uncertain Waters of Student Visa and Immigration Regulations

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Discussion Outline & Topics

• Challenging the Status Quo
• Strategic planning and thought leadership
• Understanding and supporting the work of Designated School Officials (DSOs)
  o Navigating complex regulations
  o Taking on institutional risks
  o Balancing institution/governmental/student needs
  o Rethinking International Student Programs and Services
• Budget and resource allocations
Challenging the Status Quo – Continuously evaluate and re-evaluate:

Organizational structure
- PDSO role & position
- Protect DSOs from “mission creep”
- Elevate department visibility

Regulatory compliance
- Ongoing review of existing policies
- Alignment of institutional policies with federal regulations and current guidance

Process review
- Leverage technology/build technological capacity
- Avoid duplication/redundancy
- Communicate changes

Resource allocation
- Appropriate staffing/cross-training
- Professional development
- Fees for services
Strategic planning and thought leadership

• Consider building visa and regulatory aspects into the strategic plan and goals/outcomes
• Assess and strengthen internal processes to provide systematic and timely communications and immigration advising support to international students and scholars.
• Build related Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
• Align and increase collaborations with appropriate units, in some cases formalize collaborations
• Leverage immigration and visa expertise to be a “thought leader” at your institution
• Advocate for international students and scholars
• Communicate strategically with administration, faculty, staff, and students
Navigating Complex Regulations & Institutional Risk

Ensure your P/DSOs have access to the latest developments

- Set up RSS feed for the NAFSA Adviser's Manual Home Page
- Share listserv information from AIEA, Presidents’ Alliance, ACE, NAFSA ISTA

Build in time to discuss how these developments translate into institutional policies

- Example: late arrival on-campus for classes
- Example: Create a plan for student compliance with vaccine requirements:

Form I-17 Updates
- Reporting educational plans for hybrid and in-person instruction
- Facilitating in-person instruction in a remote environment

International Recruitment Considerations
- Reimagining when, where, and how

Academic Program Delivery
- Restructuring programs to facilitate eligibility for benefits such as CPT, OPT
- Example: Two summer sessions = two semesters of study
Balancing Institution/Governmental/Student Needs

• Leveraging new guidance/regulations to build in flexibility and efficiency
  o Digitally signed and electronically delivered

• Flexibility and adaptability in responding to student needs
  o Cancelled flights, quarantines, leaves of absence, etc.
  o Allowing students to take online classes, extended deadlines for class enrollment
  o Offering immunizations and vaccinations
  o Developing policies with the student health center to ensure international populations are able to attend school

• Advocating for reasonable regulations
  o Continued electronic I-20s
Pivoting Advising and Programming Models

Advising Pivots

• Virtual advising and walk-in sessions absolutely work!!

• Virtual advising allows for greater accessibility to students, regardless of their location
  • Effective for pre-orientation and orientation
  • Increased ability to connect with students in their home countries or those working from other locations within the US

• Track details of students in advisement to improve delivery

Programming Pivots

• In-person workshop vs. webinar delivery
  • Synchronous and Asynchronous
  • Recordings and closed captioned sessions

• Creative engagement:
  • Ice-cream socials? Try ice-cream trucks
  • Incorporate shopping trips, sporting events, local attractions
  • Explore holiday celebrations
Budget considerations and resource allocation

- Expanding possibility for remote study from abroad
- Diverting programming budget to support flexible workspace environments
- Rethinking needed technology
  - Laptops with docking stations and added screens
  - Gmass for personalized mass emails from advising teams
  - Slack for improved communication in remote and hybrid environments
- Analyze and appropriately fund staffing for your P/DSO units
Questions & Answers