

## ***International and Domestic Admissions – Why Understanding the Differences Is Critical***

Why do international educators/international admissions professionals need to know about domestic admissions and why do domestic admissions professionals need to know about international admissions? What does an international enrollment manager need to know, especially with regards to putting systems and resources in place to avoid potential problems and improve strategic enrollment management? How can managers ensure they have properly trained staff and an effective division of labor to provide the best service to students?

In general, many of the processes and approaches to admitting non-U.S. students are the same as those for admitting U.S. students. For instance, students might complete the same application form and submit documentation regarding their educational history. Many students – both domestic and international – learn about the institution through college recruitment fairs, researching web sites, using advising agencies such as EducationUSA or private companies, or by individual institutions visiting schools.

For many schools, application deadlines are the same for international and domestic students; although at some institutions, these deadlines are different. Let us not forget that not all schools in the U.S. have the same application deadline – this can also be an added “confusion” for many international students!

It is these key differences that can create some difficulties if they are not recognized and addressed at the start of the advising, pre-application and application processes.

### ***Credential Evaluation***

A specialized skill set and knowledge base is required in order to evaluate educational credentials for students educated outside the United States. To effectively evaluate non-U.S. credentials, an admissions professional must know where to look for reliable and authoritative information about education systems around the world. It is not enough to know the system itself, a professional must also be able to identify the authentic documents issued by the proper authority within that education system. With increasing allegations of fraud, this skill is critical for any international admission office.

Knowledge of benchmark credentials signaling secondary school completion and entrance to a local university is often information used for admission to U.S. universities. Similarly, recognizing nuances in bachelor degree programs – 3 or 4 year duration – is important for graduate school admissions. Having adequately trained professionals within an office ensures the institution is evaluating students appropriately for the program to which they have applied.

### ***IB/AP/A-Level***

Many international students are concerned that their school systems do not offer honors, AP, IB courses. How will this affect their chances for admission? Other students ask if their IB diploma or A-level courses will give them exemptions.

### ***Language Requirements***

Most institutions require a TOEFL or IELTS exam. Each institution has its own benchmark score for admission. Some institutions allow exemptions for students who have been enrolled in a secondary school or community college for a minimum number of years, or who have received an education in certain English speaking countries. Some institutions have ESL courses on campus to support students

who score below the required minimum. A trained international admission officer knows, or knows where to direct students who do not meet the language requirement of her or his institution.

### *Standardized Exams*

Institutions require standardized exams as part of the application process. Are the score requirements the same for domestic and international students? Is there a waiver for students who take an A-level or IB exam? Is there a TOEFL/IELTS waiver for students who score above a certain threshold on the CR section of the SAT?

### *Student Support Services*

Campuses must provide services specific to the international student population. At the least, these include visa and immigration advising. The relationship between an admission officer and this office/service provider is tantamount to student success from the very beginning. Other services provided on campus that contribute to student success can include ESL support, tutoring, mentorship, club activities specific to the international population at large or specific to a geographic region, the international student office, etc. Knowledge of and communication with these types of offices and departments, as well as faculty throughout campus is an important resource for every international admission professional.

### *Financial Aid/Scholarships*

Knowing what is, or what is not, available to the international student population is critical. Just as important is how to properly answer questions from U.S. passport holders living overseas: Can a student whose parents who are not U.S. citizens qualify for FAFSA? How is that form completed if SSNs are required? Or how to answer questions from non-U.S. passport holders: Can a non-U.S. passport holder qualify for work study? Can we apply for FAFSA? Knowing the ins-and-outs of federal, state and institution specific requirements must be part of any successful training of an international recruitment/admission professional.

### *Visa and Immigration Requirements*

International students and scholars must obtain a visa in order to legally enter and study in the United States. Admissions professionals must have at least a rudimentary knowledge of these requirements – or at the very least where to find the information – in order to complete the admissions process for non-U.S. students. Changes in policy or requirements must be followed and communication with the office responsible for issuing documents for the students is critical. Submission of the wrong document or relaying the wrong information to a student could prevent the issuance of a visa which could lead to the non-enrollment of that student.

### *Verification of Financial Resources*

The financial aspect of international student enrollment must be considered as it relates to admission and/or enrollment requirements. As part of the verification process involving student visas, international admissions or international student services offices at U.S. universities, per Department of Homeland Security requirements, require supporting financial documentation from international applicants. Examples include a bank statement. Usually, financial resources must be shown in an amount sufficient to provide support for one academic year. Financial guarantees are an important part of the paperwork required for visa issuance. Proof of financial support, in order to obtain an I-20 document from a U.S. university to present to the embassy for visa purposes, is a necessary component of the admission/enrollment process. It is normal practice for each college or university to set specific policies regarding review of financial documentation for their institution.

### *Intercultural Communication, Including Language Barriers*

At an even more basic level, non-native English speaking applicants present some additional challenges for admissions professionals. Application instructions may not be clear and even confusing; questions from students may be difficult to understand and therefore answer; requests for additional information may be misinterpreted. Even naming conventions can create confusion in the admissions process. And cultural differences, even without a language barrier, can create confusion and misinterpretations as well. Having a trained professional who can communicate across language, culture, idiom or convention via email or by phone is essential. It is not a requirement for this professional to be multi-lingual – patience and understanding is much more important!

The above are examples campus leaders must consider when discussing international enrollment management. There is a difference between domestic and international admission – and admission is much more than the word itself. International admission must be a holistic endeavor that includes advising, application, admission, visa paperwork issuance, orientation, enrollment and continued guidance throughout the process by trained professionals.

<http://www.nafsa.org/knowledgecommunity/default.aspx?id=20307>

### **Additional Resources**

[http://handouts.aacrao.org/am11/finished/T0500p\\_C\\_Foley.pdf](http://handouts.aacrao.org/am11/finished/T0500p_C_Foley.pdf)

NAFSA webinars <http://www.nafsa.org/events.sec/webinars/>

NAFSA training <http://www.nafsa.org/eventsandtraining/default.aspx>

NAFSA annual and regional conferences <http://www.nafsa.org/annualconference/default.aspx>

NAFSA e-Learning course (coming in 2012) <http://www.nafsa.org/nafsaregions/default.aspx>

*2010 AACRAO International Guide* chapter # “The International Aspects of Enrollment Management” by Chris Foley

[http://www.aacrao.org/publications/publications\\_catalog/publications\\_catalog\\_international\\_education.aspx](http://www.aacrao.org/publications/publications_catalog/publications_catalog_international_education.aspx)

Julie Sinclair’s “International Enrollment Management: Framing the Conversation”

<http://www.nafsa.org/resourcelibrary/default.aspx?id=20375>