International Student Advising
Week One: What you Need to Know
August 25, 2014
Welcome and Introductions

- Name
- Department
- Previous international experience
Opening Exercise

• Why are you interested in having international student advisees?

• What are you most concerned about as you face this task?
Agenda:

• Introduction of incoming group of int’l students
• Schedule for week zero and week one for int’l students
• What faculty need to know about immigration regulations
• WRIT 107/Religion 121
• FOL requirement
• Common academic adjustment issues
• Common cultural adjustment issues
• International student support team member on campus (names and roles)
• Q&A and Discussion
What is an International Student?

• At St. Olaf, **international students** are defined as students who do not have a U.S. passport nor a “green card”/permanent resident status.
• All of our international students at St. Olaf are on an F-1 student visa.
• There are **degree-seeking international students** who will be here for all four years and **non-degree students (“exchange students”)** here for a semester or year, applying through an exchange program or independently.
Where are St. Olaf students coming from this year?
Our International Students

• The St. Olaf student body represents 82 different countries (includes US citizens living overseas). At the last count, international students alone represent 75 different countries of citizenship. There will be over 225 international students on campus this year.

• The 77 students coming for International Orientation this week represent:
  • 60 degree seeking students
  • 3 transfer students
  • 10 non-degree/exchange students
  • 4 US citizens from overseas
  • They are from 42 different countries, speak 30 different home languages, and for 52/77, English is not their first nor home language.
Countries Represented

- Most represented countries in this incoming class:
  - 8 = China
  - 6 = Germany
  - 5 = India, Vietnam
  - 4 = Nigeria, Norway, South Korea
- New countries in this year’s group: Burundi, Colombia, Hungary, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Russia, Serbia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Yemen
Where They’ve Studied

• Our international students come from a variety of different types of high schools around the world:
  • United World Colleges (“UWC”): 2 year IB international schools (12 around the world). We have 76 students on campus who attended a UWC, 25 in the first year class
  • International Baccalaureate curriculum
  • A-Levels/Cambridge A-Levels
  • American/International Schools with a US curriculum (usually AP or IB)
  • National schools with an “overseas” or “international” track for those intended to study abroad
  • National schools with the national curriculum
• One good resource for high school structure and curriculum around the world is Education USA: http://www.educationusa.info/
Why do International Students Come to St. Olaf?

- Liberal Arts curriculum: Ability to choose, combine, and be undecided
- Meaningful contact with professors---- (thank you!)
- Residential experience
- Extracurricular activities
- Word of mouth, social networks---- positive experience of friends and classmates!
- Safe, small town environment with access to a metropolitan area and international airport
- Financial Aid
Schedules

• Week Zero
  • **International Student Orientation: August 26-29**
    • **Tuesday:** Arrival Day! Check-in and Pause pizza dinner!
    • **Wednesday:** Campus tours, **President's Welcome Lunch***, opening a Bank Account, and trip to Target.
    • **Thursday:** Immigration information, Taxes, Health Insurance, Cultural activities, Dinner in Northfield, and Bonfire with Friendship Families.
    • **Friday:** Preparing for Registration, Academic requirements, tours and dinner in Minneapolis and St. Paul.
    • **Saturday:** Writing placement, domestic students arrive, and the start of Week 1!
  • *You are all welcome to attend the President’s Welcome Lunch for our new international students. Wednesday at noon, in the Ballrooms. Please join us! RSVP to Kham Vang.

• Week One
  • **Wednesday September 10th-Social Security Office**
Immigration Regulations

• **St. Olaf Policy** and **Immigration Policy** do not always match. International students are constantly having to evaluate situations from two points of view.

• As an academic advisor, you counsel and advise students about St. Olaf policy, coursework and academic opportunities. I’m not expecting you to counsel students about immigration issues.

• **Student visa rules and regulations are complex and violations of status result in serious consequences for our students.** Please don’t be afraid to say, “I’m not sure how this relates to your immigration status” or even question, “Is this opportunity available to international students?”

• If your students are unable to answer your immigration questions, or you are unsure of their answers, please don’t hesitate to contact the Visa Coordinator. I am more than happy to explain regulations and discuss the options that are available to our students.
Full-Time Student Status

• International students must be registered for a minimum of 3 credits each semester.

• St. Olaf students will not graduate in four years if they take only 3 credits each semester. Students are told this during orientation, but it never hurts to repeat this message, especially mid Junior year, when they might not have enough credits to graduate in 4 years. Studying at St. Olaf for more than 4 years opens a new can of immigration worms, which we would like to avoid.

• It's also important to keep the 3 credit minimum in mind, if your advisee wants to switch courses or get into a closed course. They can not fall below 3 credits after the first day of class.

• If an international student drops below 3 credits without DSO’s authorization, it's considered a violation in status and is grounds for termination.
Exceptions to 3 Credit Rule

• If they are in their final semester and do not need 3 credits to graduate
• Illness or Medical Condition
• Initial Difficulty with English Language
• Initial Difficulty with Reading Requirements
• Unfamiliarity with American Teaching Methods
• Improper Course Level Placement

• Academic and Language based RCLs are only approved in the students first year.
• After receiving one RCL for academic difficulty, a student is not eligible for another.
• Although "imminent danger of failing a class" is not a permissible reason for authorizing a reduced course load in and of itself, it may be that once sufficient facts are gathered, it becomes clear that the student is on the verge of failure because he or she was placed at an improper course level or is struggling with the English language.
Non-Government Approved Reasons to Drop Below 3 Credits

- Finishing incompletes from semester/s before
- Financial Difficulties
- Playing sports or a musical instrument
- Study for GRE, GMAT, LSAT ...

Students must have DSO approval before dropping below 3 credits, this is also the case if a student wants to take a J-term off.
On-Campus Employment

• F-1 students can work on campus without additional employment authorization
• On-campus work is “on-campus” and paid only by St. Olaf College
• Limited to no more than 20 hours/week during the semester, providing employment doesn’t interfere with their ability to make progress towards their degree
• Full time during official school breaks
• Students who do not graduate in spring and will return in the fall may be eligible for on-campus summer employment
Off-Campus Employment

- Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- Students must be in status one academic year before they are eligible for off-campus employment
- Employment must be related to their field of study
- Always requires authorization prior to start date
Consequences of Unauthorized Employment

- **Unauthorized employment** is the number one reason international students are deported from U.S.
- By law, employment opportunities for international students in the U.S. are restricted.
- Students are not allowed to work as a private tutor, baby-sit, play an instrument, lead Sunday school, mow a neighbor’s lawn, etc.
- Even volunteer positions can jeopardize their student status.
- Encourage students to talk with the Visa Coordinator about any paid or unpaid opportunities.
- Off-campus employers may not know the immigration rules *but students and the College are required to understand and follow them*.
- (Not allowed to participate in public welfare programs)
Updating Government Records

- Change of major or additional major/concentration
- Change of address or dorm assignment
- Transfer to another school
- Extend studies beyond four years or shorten period of study
- Termination of study/withdrawal from the College
WRIT 107/Religion 121

- Most of the new students are registered for either Amer Con 101, Great Con 113, Religion 121, or Writing 111
- Exceptions to this are international students that will take writing placement on Saturday, August 30.
  - Once writing placement is determined, we will register as many of the international students into a first-year course as space permits.
  - Some students may have to take both Religion 121 and Writing 111 in spring semester.
- For international students with little to no background in biblical traditions, taking Religion 121 in fall semester is an academic struggle.
- Religion Department is addressing this issue by offering topics that explore diverse spiritual traditions and not so inclusive of just biblical traditions.
FOL Requirement

Students, particularly International students with a native language other than English *may* be able to fulfill the FOL requirement with their native language.

**How?**

- Evidence of proficiency in their native language. Students must prove completion through eighth grade in their native language.
- or provide a high school transcript that shows completion of high school requirements in their native language (not a UWC school).
- or pass a proficiency exam through St. Olaf or administered by an outside evaluator such as BYU or individual with expertise.
- Examination must prove proficiency/passing at the intermediate level if tested through BYU or an outside examiner.
Students have the option to fulfill FOL requirement in several ways:

First is with a language offered at St. Olaf. Successful completion of the final level in the series that carries FOL completes the requirement.

Possibly fulfilling the FOL requirement with the student’s native language. This option requires documentation from the schools attended showing instruction all of subjects in the native language. The Registrar’s Office will determine a student qualifies by reviewing documentation.

Finally, if documents aren’t available then we can look into the option of testing by an outside source such as Brigham Young University’s online testing system, or possibly finding someone in high education with the qualifications for language testing. Consult the Registrar’s Office.
Link to the FOL requirement in the catalog

- [http://www.stolaf.edu/catalog/1415/academiclife/ba-gen-ed-requirements.html](http://www.stolaf.edu/catalog/1415/academiclife/ba-gen-ed-requirements.html)

- For assistance contact:
  - Paula Stowe
  - Office of the Registrar & Academic Advising
  - Tomson Hall 149
  - stowe@stolaf.edu
Cultural Adjustment

- **International students bring their values, religious beliefs, customs, and assumptions, with them to St. Olaf.** Social norms, academic practices, and communication styles are a few of the many differences they encounter.
- International students often experience **culture shock** upon arriving in the US; some students experience the phases of Culture Shock more intensely and longer than others.
- **Their cultural adjustment is further complicated by having to learn to navigate their host institution’s culture and expectations,** including enrolling in classes, learning about campus policies and procedures, and overcoming any language barriers that might exist.
- Many students will be asked by Faculty and their classmates about their culture and customs. However, students will have rarely thought about their cultural practices, why they do certain things, or how to explain their culture to an outsider.
- Every language barrier and cultural challenge is an opportunity to learn, a chance to look at the world from a completely different viewpoint.
Common Academic Adjustment Issues

• Advising =
  • So many options! Selecting from a number of possible courses rather than following a prescribed curriculum
  • Specializing later, rather than earlier, in the undergraduate program
  • Having to take courses outside one’s area of interest and fulfill general education requirements
  • Being assigned an academic ‘advisor’ rather than simply being told what to take

• In the classroom =
  • The importance of participation and class attendance
  • Hesitation to challenge, question, or disagree with an instructor’s authority or perspective
  • Being expected to raise questions and participate in class discussions rather than sitting quietly
Common Academic Adjustment Issues Cont.

• Assignments, exams, and research =
  • Having a great deal of importance attached to grades
  • Having frequent assignments, exams, or quizzes
  • Taking ‘objective’ tests (true-false or multiple choice) rather than subjective essay or oral exams
  • Having to analyze and synthesize the material, rather than simply memorize it
  • Having to do what they might consider menial tasks or ‘busy work’ versus independent study
  • Confusion about plagiarism and not knowing what is considered cheating in the American system
  • Being expected to use the library extensively

Adapted from THE HANDBOOK OF FOREIGN STUDENT ADVISING, by Gary Althen, The University of Iowa, Intercultural Press, Inc. 1995
Potential Challenges

• They don’t come to see you
• They are emailing you constantly about many non-academic things
• They can’t quickly make decisions about their courses, their major, dropping a class, etc.
• They want you to simply tell them what classes to take
• They don’t seem to be taking their studies at St. Olaf seriously
• They constantly challenge you and ‘No’ doesn’t mean No!

• Communication styles, Social values and pressures, Family relations and expectations, Financial pressure, Educational values, Learning styles, Language barriers, etc.
Advice

• Try to remember that each international student is different and will be going through cultural, academic, personal, and language adjustment throughout their 4 years
  • Listen and observe
  • Take a step back and ask questions
  • Try not to misjudge but instead to empathize
  • Go beyond “Int’l Student” and get to know your students
  • Be an advocate, an ambassador for your department
  • Help connect students to resources on-campus

• St. Olaf is lucky to have such a diverse group of international students, we can learn so much from their unique perspectives and ideas, and this opportunity should never be taken for granted.
International Student Support Team

- Megan Carmès (Visa Coordinator)
- Jenny Howenstine (Associate Dean of Admissions and Director of International Recruitment)
- Kham Vang (International Student Coordinator and Assistant Dean of Admissions)
- Tim Schroer (Associate Dean of Students -- Int’l Students and First Year Students)
- Pamela McDowell (Associate Dean of Students, Director of Residence Life)
Q&A

- Questions?
- All information will be made available to faculty advisers as soon as possible