

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
**Program Review**  
**International Student Services (ISS)**

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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Three experts in the field of international programs were invited to campus to assess international student services and programs. The review team read the annual reports and documents generated from the self study which include the standards of accreditation from NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NASFA), Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education, and Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA); benchmarking analysis (Jesuit Schools & Best Practices); quantitative investigation (on-line questionnaire, retention data, workshop feedback); qualitative investigation (ISS and A&S focus groups, ISS climate investigation); and financial profile. The review team also received an overview of ISS operations, staff and resources; and in-depth review of ISS Internal Review Findings; USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement; and University Life's Commitment Statement.

Additionally, the review team interviewed various University constituent groups which included ISS full-time staff members, international students and program participants, University Life Leadership Team, Office of Residence Life/Off Campus Living, Graduate and Undergraduate Admissions, Study Abroad, Intensive English Program, International Retention Task Force, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Vice President for University Life, Dean of Students, and Associate Dean for Student Development.

- 1. How did the external review team rate the overall quality of the department: excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the department compare with well-established/recognized programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review team's rating.**

The External Review Report states that, "given the small size of the staff, budget and other resources, ISS provides a good to very good level of service and programs." The strengths of the ISS programs and services identified by the review team include: office climate, efficiency and provision of services, workshops, orientation, leadership, organization structure and management, legal responsibilities, assessment, and mission-driven.

The review team also commented that "ISS has a smaller staff to international student ratio than other Jesuit institutions. The average ratio for benchmarked schools is 1 full-time staff to 123.68 students and the ratio for USF is 1 full-time staff to 186.67 students. The number of student workers is about the same as other Jesuit universities. The review committee is unable to assess whether the ISS offices at other Jesuit universities rely on their student workers to the same high degree as the USF ISS office."

The review team identified the following areas of improvement: budget, office staffing, transparent designation of international student fee, financial assistance, social/community development programs, transportation, housing, and orientation to the academic culture of the University/United States.

- 2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the review process?**

Three key general issues emerged in the review process: office operations, budget, and retention.

## Office Operations

- The review team states that the ISS current staffing pattern cannot be sustained for the long-term without demoralization and staff burnout. ISS has to rely on a student worker to perform some of the SEVIS work of the office. The review team believes SEVIS work should be performed by University staff, not student workers. There is broad recognition at USF that the ISS director has done an excellent job in developing programs to meet student needs as well as University and divisional goals.
- According to the review team, ISS has maximized the use of its available space and made it very attractive and welcoming to students. However, ISS does not have adequate space. The assistant director is located in a room around the corner from the rest of the office. There is a very small work space for the student workers. The unpaid staff intern has been located in a spare room located away from the office. Clearly, the current office space is not fully adequate to accommodate the existing staff team and could not absorb an additional full-time person needed to maintain the necessary functions of the department.

## Budget

- The review team identified the ISS budget as an area of concern for its failure to meet expenses for the office's essential and expanded operations. In the 2004 reorganization of the office and hiring of a director, the mission of ISS was updated to support the University's mission to provide a "global perspective". Therefore, educational outreach and programmatic development were added as two salient goals of the office. However, the budget was not adjusted to accommodate these new initiatives, thereby creating a deficit of \$10,000 for the current year.
- In addition, the review team expressed that international students would like more information and transparency around the international fee and its purpose. Currently, these students can not readily identify any benefits between the fee they pay each semester and the specific services that are rendered primarily for this student population. Students assume that their fee pays for the ISS staff and services when the fee is actually included in the University's general operations budget.

## Retention

- The reviewers concluded that the reasons for enrollment decline of international students and how they may vary by student group (e.g., graduate versus undergraduate, nationality, TOEFL score, etc.) have not been systematically studied. Limited qualitative data regarding retention is now obtained through exit interviews conducted with students by ISS staff.
- From the data resources and interviews, the reviewers identified four possible reasons that may be directly or indirectly related to retention of international students. They are:
  - Economic Hardship: increase in tuition/inability to pay or receive continued support from sponsorship
  - Housing: need assistance in finding short- and/or long-term housing; semester contract consideration; more education and information relative to business transactions
  - Transportation: strong need for shuttle services during orientation to include ground transportation from the airport and/or to shopping centers for essentials
  - Cultural Adjustment: need greater connection to the University and understanding about American culture; needs identified can only be provided if additional resources are allocated

**3. What specific recommendations for improving the department's quality has the external review committee made to the Division's leaders?**

**Staff**

- According to the review team, ISS does not have adequate staff at the right level to do the work required of the office. At a minimum, ISS needs an additional full-time staff member. Additional staff and shifting responsibilities would help eliminate the concern around SEVIS work as outlined below. Furthermore, more time and attention can be given to addressing retention issues, advising, and educational outreach.
- The review team strongly suggests that the data entry and processing SEVIS work, currently done by a student worker and reviewed by the Program Assistant, be reassigned to a staff member immediately.
- In its current state, the review team believes ISS should have three full-time advisors and may well need a fourth within several years if recruitment efforts are expanded and enrollment increases.
- If additional staff cannot be allocated, then the review team strongly suggests ISS consider scaling back its operations to provide only basic immigration services and programs for international students and scholars (e.g., eliminate career workshops, off-campus assistance, theme housing, etc.).

**Budget**

- The review team recommends an increase in the operational budget to support institutional priorities and the department's goals. Additional funding is needed for the creation and/or expansion of new goals related to staff compensation, orientation, transportation, housing location assistance, web development, and advising.
- The review team believes the International Student Fee that generates several thousands dollars each year should be used to assist in funding ISS current programs and services and the recommendations made in this report. ISS recommends the elimination of the International Student Fee; it is a detractor for retention and creates feelings of negativity toward financial giving to USF for alumnae.

**Space**

- According to the reviewers, the current office space is not conducive to maximizing organizational productivity and cannot absorb an additional full-time person as necessary for the functions of ISS.
- The external reviewers recommend that ISS be strongly considered in the space allocation process of the University Center.

**4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the department advancing the University's strategic initiatives and the divisional goals and commitments in the programs and services it offers?**

The review team highlighted three areas in which ISS advances the strategic initiatives and the divisional goals:

**Enroll, support and graduate a diverse student body.**

- ISS immigration services and cultural programming support the graduate and undergraduate international populations who constitute an important segment of the diversity of the student body.
- In absence of the services provided by ISS, international students could not be legally present at the USF campus, nor would they be as successful as they are without the additional support offered them by ISS.
- ISS also enhances and supports diversity awareness and growth within the general student population by providing cultural educational programs.

**Promote collaboration across all areas and departments of the University to offer more integrated learning experiences to students.**

- ISS collaborates with many departments inside and outside of the division. The director has done intercultural training for other offices and constituencies, including the Counseling Center, resident assistants, summer guest housing, culturally focused clubs, and Martin-Baro Scholars Program.
- ISS works closely with academic departments on immigration matters for student and faculty as well as support departmental international-related activities (e.g., course-related Curricular Practical Training development, honorarium policy development, internship support, college-specific orientation programs, etc.).
- The director's participation on the International Retention Task Force and the International Support Services Team has focused the attention of a broad range of University offices on international students and their needs as well as on the work and needs of ISS.

**Draw out the leadership qualities inherent in every individual and provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills.**

- Students are highly utilized and relied upon in the ISS office. While this creates some concern for the reviewers, as noted above in regards to SEVIS work, student leadership is apparent.
- The encouragement of student leaders in the areas of programming, student organization committees, student government representation, etc., is highly commendable.
- The International Advisory Council is exemplary. Comprised of international student leaders who gather to share their concerns and ideas to the Director of International Student Services, IAC is clearly seen by students as a way to have their voices heard by the administration, which in turn encourages the students to provide leadership to the concerns expressed by other international students.

**5. Is the office in compliance with professionally accepted standards? What best practices has ISS adopted and/or implemented?**

- The review committee believes that ISS is in compliance with professionally accepted standards except in the area of using a student worker to do SEVIS work. Given the constraints on staff/budget, the assignment of some SEVIS work to a student worker is understandable, but questionable on a professional level: The debate surrounds definition of what a "university employee" is. Can a student worker be considered an employee of USF?
- The creation of comprehensive orientation programs geared to the special needs of international students is duly noted and advances best practices, according to the review team.
- Based on the assessment made by the review team, ISS's implementation of workshops that focus on the particular interests of international students including various types of employment permission, tax assistance for non-immigrants, H-1B visas and green cards certainly support professionally accepted standards.
- International Education Week and Culturescape seem to be the main annual format for cultural education and celebration at USF. The review team agrees that these programs conform to industry standards and encourages their continuation.
- According to the review team, the Global Living Community, linking international and domestic students, is definitely a best practices program. Its continuation and expansion are encouraged, with special emphasis placed on the inclusion of "true" international students (non-immigrant visa holders).

**6. Does the department have adequate space, personnel, and budget to carry out its programs and services?**

- As already mentioned in answers to question 3, the review team believes ISS does not have an adequate number of staff at the right level to do the work required of the office.
- The review team also believes that the ISS budget is insufficient to maintain current needed programs and services.
- ISS has maximized the use of its available space and made it very attractive and welcoming to students. However, the review team believes ISS does not have adequate space and the current office space could not absorb an additional full-time person.

**7. Has the department identified appropriate learning outcomes and implemented assessment strategies to measure the progress in this area?**

- According to the review team, ISS has done an outstanding job in this area. Each of its strategic goals for 2004-2005 is tied to University Life's goals and are extremely well thought out and articulated.
- Furthermore, each ISS goal action item has been specified, a timeline provided and an outcome projected. ISS has described the actual outcome for each goal as well as thoroughly assessed each.
- The review team noted the ISS self-assessment as one of "the most thorough that the team has ever seen."

**8. What is the time table for the external review committee's recommendation for program improvement?**

Immediately	Explore reassignment of student workers only to perform programming duties and general office assistance: Reassignment includes a shift to use only full-time professional staff as Designated School Officials and limiting the amount of immigration information that front-desk student workers are permitted to share.
Fall 2006	Propose a plan to secure funding and develop a program to welcome and transport newly arriving international students from the airport to USF.  Propose a plan to secure permanent funding for ISS programs.
Spring 2007	Propose elimination of the international student fee.  (If not eliminated) propose the publication of a document that explains how the International Student Services Fee is used.  Propose a plan to secure funding for an additional full-time staff member.  Propose a plan to secure additional/new office space for ISS.
Fall 2007	Work with Institutional Research to conduct a study of international students who prematurely leave USF to better understand retention implications.  Explore the types of resources (e.g., space, budget, shared staff) that academic affairs could contribute to ISS in light of ISS' work on behalf of faculty and academic departments (e.g., exchange programs, CPT authorization/processing, orientation, etc.).