

FACULTY RESOURCE

Advising International Students

International Students enhance the University of Nebraska–Lincoln by sharing their culture and experiences with the campus community. At the same time, differences in culture can cause challenges. This resource discusses some of the challenges international students face and ways in which faculty can better support our international students. This Faculty Resource was developed in partnership with the International Student Services Office, Graduate Studies, and Institutional Equity and Compliance.

IMMIGRATION POLICES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT LEGAL STATUS

- Among the many different immigration statuses, F-1 is the most common for students. It allows international students to work on campus up to 20 hours a week, except during official school breaks (summer/winter/spring) when they can work full-time. If a student is doing off-campus work that is paid by UNL, or on-campus work paid by an entity other than UNL, they should contact International Student Services Office to ensure compliance with visa restrictions.
- Students with F-1 immigration status can't work until they are in the country, and can't work past the last day of the semester in which they graduate.
- For a student to obtain an F-1 visa, they must first be admitted to a university program, and then they must show they have the financial resources (either through assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, or personal funds) to attend an educational institution in the U.S.
- Obtaining a visa can take a very long time. Be patient when onboarding students. Allow two months or more for them to get their visa. For some it can take a year or longer.
- Students can apply for the F-1 visa up to 365 days before they start classes.
- Students should be advised to take the first available visa appointment at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate (even if it is several months in the future). Once they have an appointment, in most cases, the student can ask the U.S. Embassy/Consulate for an expedited appointment.
- A student having difficulty with their immigration status can contact ISSO for assistance. If ISSO cannot assist directly, they can recommend outside resources, such as attorneys, to the student.
- Students in the F-1 immigration status must be enrolled full-time throughout the academic year (12 credits per semester for undergraduate students, 9 credits per semester for graduate students). Summer enrollment is not always necessary; consult ISSO for more information.
- Graduate students who wish to take fewer than 9 credits (most commonly, doctoral students doing dissertation work) need to apply for full-time certification from Graduate Studies. They must do this for each semester they will be enrolled with less than 9 credits.
- F-1 immigration regulations permit only one online or distance learning class each semester to count toward full-time enrollment status; all other courses must be in-person.
- Keep in mind that not all students understand the words “Fall” and “Spring” in the same way that U.S. students do. Use months and dates instead of seasons for important events and deadlines, such as when they need to report to campus.
- Request that graduate students be on campus at least two weeks before classes start so they can attend the New International Graduate Student Orientation and departmental orientations. Undergraduate students should be on campus one week prior to classes beginning.



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- Remind students that they can enter the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the start date listed on their I-20 Form. This is the document that certifies that a student is eligible to enter the U.S. for educational purposes.
- Both university policy (UNL Nondiscrimination Policy and Procedures go.unl.edu/npp, NU Board of Regents Policies 3.1.1 and 5.1.1 go.unl.edu/bor) and federal law (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act go.unl.edu/USHHS-TitleVI) protect students against threats concerning their immigration status. If you suspect that a student is being threatened or experiencing discrimination, contact Institutional Equity and Compliance go.unl.edu/IECreport.

MULTILINGUAL LEARNING CHALLENGES

- To be admitted to UNL, international students whose native language is not English must demonstrate proficiency in English by submitting a TOEFL, IELTS, or a Duolingo score that meets the minimum requirements for undergraduates go.unl.edu/UndergradProficiency and graduate students go.unl.edu/GradProficiency or by earning a degree from an institution where English is the language of instruction. Individual colleges or departments may have higher TOEFL, IELTS, or Duolingo minimum scores.
- Be patient with different aspects of communication style, instructional style, and adjustment rate. Some international students may need more time to process spoken and written communication.
- Even if a student is proficient in English, they may lack confidence in their ability to communicate in English. This lack of confidence can make presentation assignments more difficult for international students.
- Programs in English as a Second Language provides resources like support labs for help with writing, and students can also use the UNL Writing Center.
- The Center for Transformative Teaching provides faculty with resources and alternative assessment tools for international students go.unl.edu/sisas.
- In some cases, international students may face discrimination due to their difficulty with English. For example, domestic students may avoid working or interacting with international students. Encourage domestic students to engage socially with international students to help break down barriers.
- To help international students improve their confidence in speaking English, encourage them to seek out other students who speak English, or even to speak only English when with students from their own country.
- Be aware that the academic culture in an international student's home country may be different from the U.S. For example, some may not be familiar with active learning environments, as many countries prioritize rote learning. This can be a culture shock for students.

FUNDING AND WORK EXPECTATIONS

- When determining funding or awards, ensure that posted eligibility criteria are accurate and equitable. If both domestic and international students are eligible, apply selection criteria that avoids bias toward one group over another.
- When possible, make it clear who the student's advisor is. Having a clear process for making that designation (including the student's responsibilities, if any) will help set them up for future success.
- It is especially important for international students that faculty create a positive advisor-advisee relationship by holding frequent meetings and discussions about course work, research, thesis and/or dissertation.

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- Relationships with faculty advisors are especially significant for international graduate students since, in addition to much of their funding and dissertation work, their immigration status can depend on these relationships. Be conscious of the power imbalance with research assistantships and international students. International students can sometimes hesitate to voice their concerns for fear of reprisal.
- Make sure that workloads are equally distributed and accurately recorded in terms of hours of actual work. Be mindful that you don't overwork the well-performing students unless you give them more compensation to cover the additional work.

ARRIVAL AND HOUSING

- Often international students arrive at UNL without having visited campus or the U.S. This can be particularly true for graduate students. Graduate Studies recommends incoming graduate students contact their department for assistance with housing.
- To help international students find housing, departments might offer to keep a list of students looking for roommates. They can also refer students to resources like [apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com) and [rentcafe.com](https://www.rentcafe.com), or to Graduate Studies Relocation Resources graduate.unl.edu/admissions/relocate. Housing is also available on campus.
- The International Student Services Office and Graduate Studies offer a series of webinars for incoming international graduate students to help them get acclimated to UNL. Additional resources are available on the Graduate Studies Welcome page graduate.unl.edu/welcome.
- Some graduate students will arrive in Nebraska via the Omaha airport, and many arrive with their families. Suggest that they contact ISSO, which can help arrange an Omalink airport shuttle pick-up for them in Omaha. omalink.com
- Have a plan in place for how international students can communicate with you upon their arrival, as many international students will arrive with a mobile device that does not work on U.S. networks.

WELL-BEING

- Research shows that lower levels of social support significantly predict higher depression levels in international students. Students may feel alienated, discriminated against, and homesick. Encourage socialization with other students — perhaps a lab or area party, departmental social activities for graduate students, or participation in Graduate Student Association and other social activities. Encourage students to participate in professional development opportunities such as conferences and Graduate Studies workshops.
- If you know an international student who is struggling with their well-being, consider referring them to Counseling and Psychological Services, the International Student Services Office, or Student Advocacy and Support, where they can get assistance with working through personal hardships and emergencies. Additionally, if you find that you are no longer able to contact a student, you can make a referral to the Behavioral Intervention Team at go.unl.edu/studentconcern. Finally, where there are concerns of discrimination go.unl.edu/discrimination report those concerns directly to Institutional Equity and Compliance go.unl.edu/IECreport or UNL Report unlreport.unl.edu.

ACCLIMATION RESOURCES

Resources to help students acclimate to UNL.

- International Student Services Office global.unl.edu/isso
- ISSO Important Resources go.unl.edu/ISSOresources

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- Graduate Studies Welcome graduate.unl.edu/welcome
- Graduate Studies Relocation Resources graduate.unl.edu/admissions/relocate

LANGUAGE RESOURCES

Resources to help students improve their communication and teaching skills.

- Programs in English as a Second Language unl.edu/piesl
- Center for Transformative Teaching teaching.unl.edu

WELL-BEING RESOURCES

Resources for faculty to recommend to students struggling with health and well-being.

- Counseling and Psychological Services caps.unl.edu
- Student Advocacy and Support studentadvocacy.unl.edu
- UNL Report unlreport.unl.edu
- Institutional Equity and Compliance unl.edu/equity
- Services for Students with Disabilities unl.edu/ssd

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Resources to help faculty better understand the challenges international students face, plus university resources and policies.

- *Faculty Advisors' Experiences with International Graduate Students* by Huyhn Mia Nguyen for the Journal of International Students (pdf download) go.unl.edu/faeigs
- UNL English Proficiency Requirements for undergraduates go.unl.edu/UndergradProficiency and graduate students go.unl.edu/GradProficiency
- UNL Support for International Students' Academic Success workshops with the Center for Transformative Teaching go.unl.edu/sisas
- UNL Nondiscrimination Policy and Procedures go.unl.edu/npp
- UNL Sexual Misconduct and Title IX Policies and Procedures go.unl.edu/titleix
- NU Board of Regents Policies go.unl.edu/bor

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Resources from the U.S. government concerning work, immigration requirements, and policies.

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: Students and Employment go.unl.edu/USCIS-students
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: F-1 and M-1 Non-Immigrant Students go.unl.edu/USCIS-F1M1
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 go.unl.edu/USHHS-TitleVI