

Information and Advising Tips

Working with International Students

For more information:

International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS): <http://www.winona.edu/internationalservices/default.asp>

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Whenever you have any questions or need advice, or have a concern about an international student, contact the ISSS office (is@winona.edu).

Types of International Students at WSU:

- Degree seeking – in residence for anywhere from 1 to 4 years depending on when they enter.
- Visiting or exchange – admitted for one or two semesters; mainly juniors. These students transfer WSU credits to their own institutions.

International Student Status:

Most international students study on an F-1 visa. They **must meet specific requirements** in order to maintain legal status in the U.S., including:

- Must always be enrolled as a full-time student (UG=12 credits/semester; GR=6 credits/sem). Exceptions must be approved by the **Designated School Official – DSO** – in ISSS;
- May take only one or no online courses (may vary – check with ISSS). An online course cannot be taken as the last class toward program completion; - An exception to this requirement is made during COVID-19 pandemic. Contact ISSS for more information.
- There are some restrictions regarding when and how a student can withdraw from a class. Students must get approval from ISSS in advance.
- Cannot change their major or minor, or shorten or extend length of program without official DSO approval;
- Must obtain prior authorization from the DSO before starting an internship or practicum (CPT);
- May study abroad, but must confer with ISSS to adjust immigration documentation;
- Must leave the U.S. if they are suspended from school.

Employment, Internships, and International Students:

- International students do not receive work study funds, but are allowed to work **on campus** a maximum of 20 hours per week during the semester (40 hours during the summer). Many are employed by Chartwells.
- International students are not allowed to work off campus unless they are participating in one of the following authorized Practical Training experiences (more info on eligibility and guidelines can be viewed at <http://www.winona.edu/internationalservices/F-1.asp>):
 - Curricular Practical Training (CPT) allows an F1 student to engage in a work opportunity that is an integral part of an established curriculum. At WSU, this means an internship or practicum that is a required component of their degree, and/or is credit-bearing. Visiting or exchange students are generally not eligible for CPT.
 - Optional Practical Training (OPT) is “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study” for one year following completion of their program of study.

Important Considerations for International Students:

- *Academic background:* International students meet WSU admission and language proficiency requirements. They are usually strong performers at home but may not be familiar with US classroom culture or academic discourse.
- *Knowledge of the U.S. education system:* International students may be unfamiliar with key concepts in the US education system such as electives, core curriculum, declaring a major, and classroom norms. In India, for example, there is a set curriculum; students cannot select the courses they wish to study. Some may not have flexibility to change majors; their declared major may be required by their sponsor or parents.
- *Academic integrity:* Definitions of cheating and plagiarism are culturally dependent. Knowing what is common knowledge in a new culture is challenging. Sharing work or copying an expert's work may not be considered cheating in their native culture. International students may struggle with these issues.
- *Cultural adjustment:* International students are not only adjusting to a new institution, but an entire culture. They're experiencing culture shock related to food, health, weather, loneliness, and conversational norms we take for granted.
- *Financial factors:* International students may run into financial difficulty due to unforeseen circumstances such as changing exchange rates, which may cause them to register late.
- *Registration:* New international students are usually the last group to register, so there are significant course availability challenges, in addition to dealing with a new culture, and educational system.
- *Graduation:* International students have limited options after graduation. These include applying for OPT, applying for a graduate program, transferring to another institution, or leaving the country within 60 days. They do not have the flexibility with incompletes, repeats or in-progress courses that domestic students do, and they need to meet with ISSS immediately if they will not be graduating in the term planned.

Tips for Effectively Advising International Students:

- International students may need more direct advising during their first semester. At this stage they will still be learning about the differences in educational systems, including how to register for courses.
- Visiting/exchange students will not have a DARS. The advisor will need to look at the student's transcript to determine if the student has the prerequisites needed.
- New international students often register last and courses they need may not be available.
- It is important to clearly articulate expectations and to ask clarifying questions.
- Help international students understand the grading system, the importance of submitting assignments on time, and concepts such as academic warning and suspension.
- Be aware of how clearly you speak; limit the use of acronyms, abbreviations, jargon, colloquialisms, and idioms.
- Cultural differences may cause challenges in communication. Long silences, shaking the head for no reason, or repetitions can indicate that the student is not understanding. Assume that cultural differences are at play. **Don't** assume the student is ignorant or incapable.
- A helpful text is [*Fostering International Student Success in Higher Education*](#) (S. Shapiro, R. Farrelly, Z. Tomas; TESOL Publications, 2014). Short and very informative for university faculty and staff.

Helpful Acronyms:

- CPT/OPT – Curricular Practical Training/Optional Practical Training
- DSO – Designated School Official – an employee dedicated to assisting and overseeing students who are studying at a U.S. institution on a student visa. A PDSO is a Principal Designated School Official who is a DSO with added responsibilities.
- F-1 – The type of visa most international students receive to study in the U.S.
- SEVIS – Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, part of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which handles all matters related to international students and visitors.
- SEVP – Student and Exchange Visitor Program. WSU is a SEVP-certified school.

Did you know?

- WSU has been accepting international students for over 100 years, as early as 1913!
- For the 2019-2020 academic year, there were around 215 international students on campus.
- Academically, international students perform as well as their domestic counterparts, based on average GPA.
- International students pay to attend WSU, just like domestic students.
- The financial contribution international students make to the city of Winona is close to \$8 million, and their presence supports 44 jobs. For the State of Minnesota as a whole: over \$473 million, supporting over 4,500 jobs. This is in addition to the academic and cultural contributions these students bring to our communities. (NAFSA Intl Student Economic Value Tool: http://www.nafsa.org/Policy_and_Advocacy/Policy_Resources/Policy_Trends_and_Data/NAFSA_International_Student_Economic_Value_Tool/)