

MINUTES
International Students and Scholars Committee
22 February 2018

Present: Dr. Warren Johnson (Chair and Secretary), Dr. Rejoice Addae, Mr. Christopher Boothman, Mr. Sumon Roy, Dr. Thillainatarajan Sivakumaran, Ms. Qian Yu

Absent: Mr. Tarun Chincholi, Dr. Gauri Guha, Dr. Lynita Cooksey, Ms. Tracy Finch, Dr. Maurice Gipson, Dr. Mihir, Dr. Evelyn Taylor, Misato Tsuruta, Ms. Shannon Wess, Dr. Karen Wheeler, Ms. Victoria Williams

Dr. Johnson called the meeting to order at 3:35 pm and gave the floor to Dr. Sivakumaran in order for him to update the committee on the efforts of his office, especially in the area of international student recruitment.

Dr. Sivakumaran announced some good news: a pilot scholarship project has been approved, offering 30 incoming first-year students from IB (International Baccalaureate) schools and 30 transfer students \$3,000 a year. The restriction to IB schools was chosen with the hope that these better-prepared students, with a higher average level of English [the language of instruction in many of the IB schools], will be more likely to stay to complete their degrees. If the pilot proves successful, it could continue. Dr. Sivakumaran noted that already 70% of incoming domestic students get institutional scholarships.

Dr. Sivakumaran also said that A-State is seeing more students from different parts of the world in recent years, including from South America and Africa, where new partnerships are being sought. He noted that Indian students are now leaning more toward Australian and New Zealand, where they have better chances of permanent employment. Chinese enrollment has been reduced due to the fact that economic conditions have allowed Chinese students to afford to study in bigger cities and better universities, and because immigration authorities are becoming stricter about English language proficiency before granting visas. (For Indian students, for whom language proficiency is not generally an issue, the barrier to visas is usually financial.)

On the topic of retention, Dr. Sivakumaran mentioned that International Student Services (ISS) is sponsoring various activities to promote a more inclusive environment, including monthly day trips to destinations in Arkansas and Tennessee (such as Ikea and horse racing tracks), a Spring Festival with Japanese cherry tree planting, and other activities in conjunction with nation-specific international student groups, such as Indian Cooking Night, which ISS sometimes helps sponsor. The International Food Festival was a great success last Fall, with more than 700 attendees. International Ambassadors (graduate students from several countries) work with various offices on campus. ISS has a part-time retention specialist and has requested that the position be upgraded to full time. One of this person's duties is to check midterm grades and contact instructors if the grades of international student are C or lower. From Fall 2017 to Spring 2018, the international student retention rate was 88%.

Dr. Johnson asked Dr. Sivakumaran to amplify on the topic of international student recruitment. Dr. Sivakumaran noted that A-State currently deals with 45-50 agents around the world (down from far more a few years ago) and university partners to create 2+2 and 3+1 (+masters) programs that allow students to begin their studies in their home countries and accelerate toward degree completion once they arrive at A-State. Global Initiatives uses social media posts and paid social media ads in certain cities. Generally, however, A-State does not attend fairs, which are expensive and do not allow for easy follow-up with potential new students as do on-site agents who speak the local language. Nevertheless, a full-time recruiter position has been requested. Currently, about 6-7% of on-campus students are international. No international students are enrolled in A-State Online Services courses, since online degrees are frequently not recognized abroad; this is true of China and India.

Mr. Roy suggested targeting Bangladeshi universities, but noted the difficulties many students from that country have demonstrating that they have the necessary financial resources and pointed to practices at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, for instance, which apparently does not enforce such requirements. Dr. Sivakumaran said he would look into the matter, but he and Mr. Boothman noted that these requirements are imposed by federal law. Mr. Roy also noted that if graduate students are offered an assistantship, the salary would apply toward meeting the financial guarantee, but Dr. Addae reminded him that assistantships are not guaranteed for the full length of studies. Dr. Sivakumaran noted that students who are more secure in their finances are more likely to stay and complete their degrees.

Dr. Johnson inquired further into how Global Initiatives interfaces with its agents. Dr. Sivakumaran replied that agents have access to a password-protected resource page that includes pictures and flyers, as well as information on specific programs. Sometimes agents redo these materials in the local language(s). Ms. Yarbrough (ISS) does annual conference calls with agents. New agents must have satisfactory references from three other universities, and unproductive agent relationships are discontinued. Dr. Johnson inquired if any steps are being used to encourage current international students to recommend the university to their peers; Dr. Sivakumaran replied that he is currently looking into an initiative along these lines.

Dr. Johnson thanked Dr. Sivakumaran and the other committee members and adjourned the meeting at 4:30 pm.