

International Graduate Student and Early Career Scholars Support Best Practices Document

This document was developed by international graduate students and faculty for The Anti-Authoritarian Resource Network (www.taarn.org). It outlines common difficulties faced by international students and scholars and provides a list of best practices for academic support during these challenging times.

Statement of Purpose

This document is intended as a constructive resource to promote understanding, dialogue, and institutional improvement regarding the experiences of international students, scholars, early-career faculty, and staff in U.S. higher education. The recommendations presented are informed by existing research, professional experiences, and the collective perspectives of members of the international academic community. They are not exhaustive, but they are a place to start.

The purpose of this document is to encourage thoughtful discussion, evidence-informed policymaking, and collaborative solutions that foster a more supportive, effective, and friendly environment for international members of the academic community. Recognizing and addressing the unique challenges international students and scholars face contributes to a broader culture of inclusion, mutual respect, and institutional excellence.

The recommendations presented here are intended to serve as a foundation for engagement among institutions, departments, academic associations, faculty, staff, students, and community partners. While we acknowledge that several points in this document are already in practice at some institutions, the overarching goal is to strengthen U.S. higher education by creating campuses where individuals from all backgrounds can learn, work, teach, and contribute successfully.

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Immigration and Legal Considerations

The political and policy environment surrounding immigration in the United States has become increasingly uncertain, with changes in federal immigration, employment, travel, and visa policies creating new forms of precarity for international students and scholars. For those working and studying in the United States, immigration status is not separate from academic life. It determines whether a student can enroll, accept or continue employment, travel internationally, conduct research, attend a conference, receive funding, complete a degree, or remain in the country after graduation. In a rapidly changing policy environment, decisions that may appear routine within an academic department can therefore carry consequences that extend well beyond the immediate academic or administrative context.

This reality places an important responsibility on academic departments and institutions. While departments are not immigration offices, faculty and administrators should not provide legal advice or interpret immigration regulations, they do, however, make or influence decisions about funding, assistantships, employment, enrollment, degree milestones, leaves of absence, research activities, appointments, and professional opportunities. At minimum, every department should keep current contact information for the institution's international student and scholar office and for the university's legal or general counsel office in a standing, visible place — the graduate handbook, the program website, the onboarding email — so that international students and scholars are not left searching for it themselves at the moment they can least afford the delay. Because these decisions can intersect with immigration requirements, departments should recognize when immigration considerations may be implicated and ensure that international students and scholars have timely opportunities to seek appropriate professional guidance before consequential decisions take effect.

Departments should develop a basic understanding of how immigration policies apply within higher education and how universities may differ from other employers. For example, many universities and qualifying nonprofit institutions are exempt from the H-1B annual cap, meaning that highly publicized concerns such as the H-1B lottery do not apply to them in the same way. Rapid policy changes and public reporting can easily create the impression that new restrictions apply uniformly across all employers. Departments should therefore avoid making assumptions based on general immigration news and work with ISSS/ISSO to understand how specific policies apply within their own institutional context.

The principle underlying this section is therefore that academic responsibility cannot be separated entirely from the legal and institutional conditions under which international students and scholars are expected to study, work, and participate in academic life. In an environment characterized by policy volatility and heightened uncertainty, factors such as transparency, timely communication, institutional coordination, and procedural care are especially important.

For international students and scholars, this dependency can create a particularly consequential power asymmetry wherein the same department that evaluates academic performance, controls or influences employment and funding, and determines access to professional opportunities may also make decisions whose timing or implementation has immigration consequences.

Recommended Departmental Practices

1. Recognize immigration as part of academic life and identity.

Immigration uncertainty can affect financial security, mental well-being, academic progress, research continuity, and career planning. Departments should recognize these pressures as part of the environment in which international students and scholars work rather than treating them as entirely private problems. Tulane University, for instance, frames immigration support as part of the university's commitment to equity and diversity, aiming to provide holistic support throughout the immigration process rather than treating it as the

international employer's responsibility. The university treats this as part of its responsibilities to its international workforce.

2. Know when immigration may be affected.

We recommend that faculty advisors, graduate directors, department chairs, and relevant staff should endeavor to have a basic understanding of the immigration issues most likely to intersect with departmental decisions. This may include F-1 and J-1 status, CPT, OPT, employment authorization, and visa sponsorship. This knowledge is not a substitute for immigration advising, but complementary. Its purpose is to help departments recognize when professional guidance is necessary.

3. Coordinate with ISSS/ISSO.

Departments should establish clear lines of communication with International Student and Scholar Services or the appropriate international student and scholar office. When a proposed academic or employment decision could affect a student's immigration status, encourage the student to consult the appropriate office before the change takes effect.

4. Early and Timely Communication.

International students should not learn about potentially consequential changes at the last minute. Departments should prioritize timely information about changes to funding, enrollment, assistantships, appointments, degree timelines, leaves, or employment so students have sufficient time to seek appropriate immigration guidance. To this end, departments should consult the institution's designated immigration office before implementing any substantive change to an international student's or scholar's appointment, funding, employment, enrollment, or academic status that could reasonably affect immigration status or employment authorization.

5. Provide necessary documentation promptly.

Departments should respond promptly to reasonable requests for documentation related to academic standing, institutional affiliation, funding, employment, research, conference participation, travel, visa applications, visa renewals, and employment authorization. Examples include letters confirming enrollment or satisfactory academic progress, assistantship or funding letters, employment verification, appointment documentation, expected graduation dates, conference participation, research or fieldwork activities, and other letters documenting the student's academic or professional relationship with the department. For many international students and scholars, these documents are not routine paperwork. As such, delays can affect whether they can travel, work, conduct research, or maintain their status.

6. Plan for immigration-related delays.

Visa appointments, processing delays, travel restrictions, and changes in immigration policy may prevent students or scholars from arriving, starting an appointment, attending a conference, conducting fieldwork, or returning to the United States as planned. When academic requirements allow flexibility, departments should consider reasonable alternatives rather than treating such delays as evidence of irresponsibility or lack of commitment.

7. Be transparent about employment authorization, sponsorship, and immigration related costs.

Departments that recruit international graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, or faculty should clearly communicate employment authorization requirements, visa sponsorship policies, supported visa categories, and any immigration-related costs that may affect employment. Transparency in immigration policies should be considered an essential component of equitable recruitment. Institutions such as the University of Michigan and Yale have established clear, publicly available sponsorship policies that can serve as useful models.

8. Design job advertisements with immigration sponsorship in mind

Design job advertisements with immigration sponsorship in mind. Departments should clearly state whether visa sponsorship is available, disclose any institutional limitations, and consult with the university legal office before posting positions. Candidates should receive this information as early as possible so they can evaluate a position's immigration feasibility before investing significant time and resources in the application process. Job advertisements should be drafted to be compliant with potential immigration requirements and accurately reflect the position's duties, qualifications, and expectations. Doing so can help prevent unnecessary delays, including the need to re-advertise positions because of overly vague or noncompliant job descriptions, which can significantly disrupt hiring and visa processes for international scholars.

9. Do not make assumptions about immigration status.

Being an international student or scholar does not tell a department what an individual's immigration status permits or requires. Faculty and administrators should avoid making assumptions about employment eligibility, travel, family circumstances, or future career plans. When immigration status is relevant to a decision, direct questions through the appropriate professional channels.

10. Simple Departmental Protocol

If a departmental decision could affect a student's enrollment, funding, employment, travel, research, or degree timeline, the department should identify the potential immigration implications, encourage consultation with ISSS/ISSO or another qualified immigration professional, communicate the academic decision and timeline clearly, and consider reasonable alternatives where possible. The purpose is not to turn departments into immigration offices, but to prevent academic or administrative decisions from unintentionally creating immigration problems for the international students and scholars they serve.

What Academic Organizations Can Do

Academic organizations and other affiliates can also reduce immigration-related barriers to participation within the discipline. They can provide timely information about conference participation and professional development, communicate clearly about immigration-related barriers to attendance, and consider flexible participation options when visa or travel restrictions prevent international scholars from attending professional events in person. Concretely, academic organizations should:

- ❑ **Name a person, not an inbox.** Every association website should list a specific, identifiable staff member or officer to whom international members can direct questions about visas, invitation letters, registration, and remote participation.
- ❑ **Issue invitation letters on request,** promptly and in a standard format, containing what consular officers look for: dates, venue, the member's role at the event, and confirmation of registration.
- ❑ **Publish refund and deferral policies that account for visa denial and delay,** so that a consular decision does not also cost someone a registration fee paid out of a graduate stipend.
- ❑ **Build genuine remote and hybrid participation into the program** rather than offering it as a last-minute accommodation, and list remote presenters in the program and consider them for awards on the same terms as everyone else.
- ❑ **Communicate early and publicly about immigration-related barriers to attendance,** including travel bans and processing delays affecting particular countries, instead of leaving members to assemble the picture from rumors.
- ❑ **Recognize the immigration value of scholarly awards and honors.** Clearly communicate the competitiveness and significance of awards using languages legible to USCIS, and provide support letters upon request. Such documentation can serve as important evidence of professional distinction

for immigration processes that consider national or international recognition, including O-1, EB-2 NIW, EB-1, and related visa.

Teaching and Support for International Graduate Students and Early Career Scholars

International graduate instructors occupy a distinctive position within U.S. higher education: they are simultaneously students subject to departmental authority and instructors responsible for managing classrooms, evaluating students, and establishing instructional authority. Accent, nationality, race, gender, and perceived foreignness may shape how students assess their competence and legitimacy. Supporting international graduate instructors therefore requires attention not only to pedagogical development but also to equitable evaluation, classroom authority, and cultural and linguistic inclusion.

1. Teaching Evaluation and Linguistic Bias

Student evaluations of teaching can provide useful feedback but are not neutral or comprehensive measures of instructional quality. For international graduate instructors, evaluations may reflect assumptions about accent, nationality, race, gender, religion, or perceived linguistic difference rather than teaching effectiveness.

Accent is particularly important in this context. Intelligibility, which can affect classroom communication, should be distinguished from expectations that instructors conform to an American or native-English-speaking accent. Failure to make this distinction can allow linguistic and cultural preferences to influence judgments about competence, professionalism, and teaching ability.

2. Classroom Authority and Departmental Protection

International graduate instructors may experience challenges to their classroom authority that extend beyond ordinary student-instructor disagreements. Students may question an instructor's competence, resist instructions, or challenge their legitimacy based on perceptions of accent, nationality, race, gender, or cultural background.

Because graduate instructors also depend on their departments for assistantships, teaching appointments, and professional opportunities, they may be particularly vulnerable when deciding whether to report discriminatory classroom experiences. This power imbalance makes departmental protection and clear institutional accountability especially important.

3. Equitable Teaching and Pedagogical Development

International graduate instructors may enter U.S. classrooms with different educational, linguistic, and cultural experiences, but these differences should not be understood as pedagogical deficiencies. They may need opportunities to become familiar with U.S. classroom norms while also bringing valuable cross-cultural perspectives and teaching experiences into the classroom.

Equity also extends to the distribution of teaching opportunities. Assumptions about communication ability, accent, or cultural familiarity should not determine which courses international graduate instructors teach or the professional-development opportunities available to them.

4. Cultural and Linguistic Inclusion

The experiences of international graduate instructors are connected to the broader cultural climate of departments and classrooms. Accent bias, nationality-based stereotypes, cultural misunderstandings, and assumptions about who appears or sounds authoritative can shape both classroom interactions and professional evaluations.

Linguistic and cultural diversity should therefore be understood as a legitimate feature of academic life, not a difference international instructors are individually responsible for overcoming.

Recommended Departmental Practices

Departments should:

- ☐ Use multiple measures of teaching effectiveness, including peer observation, course materials, evidence of student learning, and reflective teaching practices, rather than relying primarily on student evaluations.
- ☐ Review and contextualize biased student evaluations and train faculty evaluators to recognize linguistic, racial, gendered, religious, cultural, and nationality-based bias.
- ☐ Distinguish intelligibility from accent conformity when assessing instructors' classroom communication.
- ☐ Establish clear procedures for responding to discriminatory or hostile student behavior and affirm the instructional authority of international graduate instructors.
- ☐ Provide confidential reporting mechanisms that allow graduate instructors to report discrimination without jeopardizing assistantship funding or future teaching opportunities.
- ☐ Ensure equitable teaching assignments and professional-development opportunities for international and domestic graduate instructors.
- ☐ Provide culturally responsive pedagogical mentoring addressing classroom norms, communication, conflict management, and inclusive teaching.
- ☐ Promote cultural and linguistic inclusion across departments, including education on accent bias, cross-cultural communication, and nationality-based discrimination.
- ☐ Monitor evaluation, teaching-assignment, and assistantship patterns for systematic disparities affecting international graduate instructors.

Research Support for International Students and Early Career Scholars

International graduate students and early career scholars often experience a concentration of institutional dependency with no equivalent among their domestic peers. Academic progress, funding, health insurance, immigration compliance, research opportunities, professional recommendations, and future employment frequently rest on a small number of faculty members. An international student whose research advisor stops answering emails for a semester does not simply lose momentum, they may miss the milestone that justifies a program extension, lose the assistantship that documents their funding, and discover that an advising problem has become an immigration problem. Supporting research development, consequently, requires attention to the structural conditions of research work, including advising relationships, funding continuity, and access to opportunity, and not just to individual research skills.

1. Advising Power and Procedural Justice

Because so much depends on so few people, students hesitate to report mistreatment, contest an unfair evaluation, request accommodations, or change advisors. For international students the calculation differs in kind, not degree: a lost assistantship is also lost work authorization; a delayed milestone is also a program-extension request that must be justified to an immigration office; a negative recommendation closes off the sponsored positions that are, for many, the only lawful route to continued employment. A grievance process built on the assumption that complainants can absorb a semester of friction is not designed for people in this position. Procedural fairness requires processes that are accessible, independent, transparent, fast, and genuinely protected from retaliation. The existence of a written policy is not evidence that any of those conditions are met.

Advising quality also depends on what counts as legitimate knowledge. International students frequently arrive with training in intellectual traditions, methods, and archives their advisors have not encountered, and are advised, sometimes explicitly, more often through steady discouragement, to reframe their work in the terms of the Anglo-American canon to be publishable. Departments and academic associations should actively support scholarship grounded in epistemologies beyond the Western tradition, including non-English-language sources, regionally situated theory, and methodologies developed outside the United States, and should treat the capacity to supervise such work as a form of faculty competence rather than a favor extended to individual students.

2. Professional Development and Research Training

Conferences, peer review, and professional associations are where scholarly careers are developed. Treating them as procedural duties rather than as sites of socialization leaves international students to reverse-engineer, alone, a set of conventions their peers absorbed by proximity. Departments should mentor explicitly and concretely topics around how to work a convention and what the hallway conversations are for; how to prepare and rehearse a presentation; how to write a peer review that is constructive and methodologically pluralistic; how to propose and chair sessions reflecting one's own regional and disciplinary specificity. Support should help students build distinct research identities rather than converging on whatever is currently fashionable.

3. Anticipating Disruption to Research

Disruptions to research training such as loss of funding, advisor conflict, restricted employment authorization, delayed milestones, or ineligibility for grants are foreseeable structural risks rather than individual failures. Institutions should identify where these barriers concentrate and respond at the level of policy, rather than assessing and ranking individual students. Periodic reviews of student progress should be occasions to ask whether the department and advisor are meeting their reciprocal responsibilities, with support offered on the basis of need and request rather than assigned through classification. Moreover, immigration difficulties can lead to research disruption. The departments should anticipate that and provide a thorough support that doesn't impede student progress any further.

4. Funding, Employment, and Economic Equity

Most assistantships fund only the 9-month academic year, leaving students without guaranteed summer income, and the gap falls hardest outside STEM, where external grants and sponsored summer positions are scarce. For students on F-1 or J-1 status this is not a shortfall that can be made up since their visa does not allow for employment authorization outside of the assistantship. Employment authorization is limited to institutionally approved positions: students cannot wait tables, drive for a delivery app, or take the seasonal work their domestic peers use to bridge May to August. Doing so is not merely against the rules; it is unauthorized

employment, and it can end their status and their degree. The choice on offer is between breaking the law and going without.

The result is several months without reliable income against fixed costs such as rent, insurance, childcare, transportation, and often remittances home. This should be understood as a determinant of research outcomes rather than a private financial matter: interrupted funding stalls data collection, delays manuscripts, and interrupts skill development. It may also deter students from entering non-STEM disciplines altogether. Departments that recruit international students onto nine-month funding while knowing the summer gap cannot lawfully be bridged should be honest that they are recruiting people into a predictable annual crisis. Twelve-month funding is the solution, and it is not a novel one.

Recommended Departmental Practices

Departments and schools should:

On research advising and procedural fairness:

- ☐ Provide written advising expectations at program entry, covering supervisory responsibilities, degree milestones, assistantship renewal and termination criteria, and authorship and data ownership, and revisit them annually.
- ☐ Accompany any decision materially affecting funding, academic standing, or research access with a timely written explanation and a stated route of appeal.
- ☐ Establish mentoring structures giving students access to more than one faculty mentor, independent of the primary advisor.
- ☐ Publish an accessible advisor-change process specifying confidentiality, protection of research records and authorship, continuity of funding and degree progress, and referral for assessment of immigration consequences.

On funding, employment, and economic equity:

- ☐ Develop paid summer positions that comply with visa regulations and incorporate structured research training rather than service labor alone.
- ☐ Audit the distribution of summer assistantships, internal fellowships, and research funding across units, and correct concentration within externally funded STEM programs.
- ☐ Create bridge and emergency continuity funding accessible with low administrative burden, prioritizing continuity of research activity.
- ☐ Build internal funding streams parallel to external grants that restrict eligibility by citizenship or residency status.
- ☐ Record visa-based employment restrictions as a structural equity issue, and report annually on funding access disaggregated by field and visa status.

Support in Everyday Life and Belonging

International graduate students are adapting simultaneously to a graduate program and, often, to a new cultural, linguistic, social, and institutional environment. Departments that recruit international graduate students therefore share responsibility for creating the conditions in which students can study, teach, conduct research, and participate fully in departmental life. This responsibility cannot be outsourced entirely to International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS/ISSO).

It is worth saying plainly what is too often left implicit: international students and scholars are not a support burden. They bring languages, regional expertise, methodological traditions, professional networks, and firsthand knowledge of systems that U.S.-trained scholars can only study from the outside. That knowledge is crucial to the U.S. academy across disciplines and fields. Departments that treat international members as recipients of care rather than as colleagues with important expertise are not only being unkind. They are wasting the intellectual resource they recruited.

For departments, holistic care means designing systems that anticipate predictable barriers rather than expecting students to resolve them individually. The department does not need to duplicate specialized university services; it needs to know what resources exist, connect students to them proactively, and identify where departmental practices themselves create unnecessary barriers.

Holistic care can be organized around five interconnected dimensions: material, cultural, psychological, communication, and identity care.

1. Material Care

Departments should provide practical, centralized information before arrival and maintain accessible pathways to relevant university and community resources throughout the student's program.

This may include guidance on healthcare, housing and tenant resources, banking, transportation, food, and emergency financial resources. Departments should pay particular attention to predictable transition points, such as arrival, changes in housing, gaps between funding appointments, knowledge about visa requirements and regulations, etc. Foci points may include but not limited to:

Healthcare

- ❑ **Providers and Insurance:** Share a vetted list of in-network doctors, urgent care, ERs, and pharmacies.. Explain plans, deductibles, copays, and covered services in plain language. Flag that dental and vision are usually separate and out-of-pocket.
- ❑ **Medication & vaccinations:** Clarify refill procedures, U.S. equivalents, and required immunizations.
- ❑ **Mental health:** Point students to counseling early, before crises emerge.

Housing and Transportation

- ❑ **Before arrival:** Help secure safe, affordable housing remotely and flag common scams.
- ❑ **Furniture:** Maintain a donation-based furniture exchange - a proven, low-cost way to ease arrival.
- ❑ **Leases & roommates:** Explain tenant rights, deposits, and conflict-resolution norms. Keep active departmental or cross-departmental student housing channels.
- ❑ **Transportation:** Map local transit options and driver's-license steps for those without cars. Arrange specific carpool hours for groceries

Finance

Financial systems and ethics across the world look different. Guide students through opening accounts, transfers, and daily banking and credit needs. Explain how to build credit from zero to qualify for housing and loans.

2. Cultural Care

Cultural adjustment is not completed during orientation. International graduate students continue to encounter unfamiliar practices concerning food, holidays, weather, social interaction, communication, and community participation throughout their programs. Departments should treat cultural inclusion as an ongoing feature of departmental life rather than a specialized service for international students. The objective is not to create a

separate “international student culture,” but to build a department in which cultural difference is a normal and valued part of academic life. Foci points may include but not limited to:

- **Food:** Share a list of international grocers with monthly carpool. Run a stocked food pantry. International students are often its heaviest users, especially before funding arrives. Be attentive to dietary restrictions due to cultural and religious reasons while organizing departmental programs that include meals.
- **Festivities:** Ask students which holidays and observances matter to them and build these into the departmental calendar, not as an “international night,” but as ordinary departmental life. Avoid scheduling defenses, job talks, and mandatory events on major religious and cultural holidays, and treat an absence for Eid, Diwali, or Lunar New Year exactly as a department would treat one for U.S. based holidays.
- **Weather:** Collect and reissue coats and warm gear for students arriving in winter from warm climates. Build awareness of seasonal affective disorder and its academic impact.

3. Psychological Care

International graduate students may experience homesickness, isolation, anxiety, imposter feelings, burnout, and the cumulative demands of navigating unfamiliar academic and social systems. Departments should not treat these solely as individual adjustment problems. They should also address cognitive burden - fragmented information, inconsistent communication, and unspoken academic norms require students to spend additional effort figuring out what to do and whom to ask. Departments should prioritize clear, centralized, timely communication; normalize questions and requests for clarification; and frame these challenges as institutional design issues rather than student failings. Anticipate challenges and build systems that prevent them. Foci points may include, but not limited to:

Emotional Care

Create peer networks and community-building beyond the lab or cohort to address issues of homesickness. Imposter syndrome hits international students hardest; reinforce strengths and clarify expectations. Make culturally responsive mental health awareness normal. Promote sustainable workloads and early intervention to address burnout.

Cognitive Care

- **Decision Fatigue:** Centralize timely, actionable information around coursework, bureaucratic documentation needs instead of fragmenting it and making the individual responsible entirely.
- **Hypervigilance:** Communicate policies consistently so students feel safe asking questions.

4. Communication Care

Departments should treat communication differences as a shared responsibility, rather than requiring international students to assimilate to a single linguistic or cultural norm. An accent is not an indicator of intelligence, competence, professionalism, or teaching ability, and treating it as one is a failure on the part of the listener, not the speaker. Faculty, staff, and students should be encouraged to distinguish communication effectiveness from conformity to a preferred accent or communication style. Normalize asking clarifying questions by talking about consistently intra-departmentally.

5. Identity Care

International graduate students may develop bicultural or hybrid identities, experience a sense of being “between worlds,” or find that their relationship to home changes over the course of graduate education. Successful adaptation should not be equated with complete assimilation. Value the ability to navigate multiple

cultures rather than expecting full assimilation. Acknowledge competing cultural expectations. Create spaces to preserve and express cultural identity. Support integration of home and host cultures as an evolving process.

Examples of Good Practices

- The University of Michigan's [International Center](#) provides a useful example of an integrated model in which immigration advising, orientation, health and well-being support, intercultural programming, career development, and departmental consultation are housed within a broader international-support infrastructure. They periodically offer [immigration-update sessions](#) specifically for departments and units with international students, rather than limiting immigration education to students themselves. This is an especially useful model because it recognizes that faculty and administrators make decisions that can have immigration consequences.
- MIT's International Scholars Office maintains dedicated resources for [spouses, partners, and families](#), including information on English-language resources, work-life resources, childcare and schools, and community connections.
- UC Berkeley's [Undocumented Student Program \(USP\)](#) provides a particularly useful institutional model for identifying how immigration status intersects with eligibility for university services. The program helps students navigate academic, financial, housing, legal, and wellness resources.
- CU Boulder's International Student and Scholar Services explicitly directs international students to [emergency funding resources](#), including a Graduate Student Emergency Aid Fund and Student Affairs emergency funding. They also provide an [International Student Academic Success resource](#) specifically addressing challenges related to cultural adjustment, U.S. classroom culture, and related academic difficulties.
- [Research \(Haan & Gallagher, 2025\)](#) from the University of Dayton describes a faculty-development model combining professional-development sessions, language/content-specialist co-teaching, and experience teaching multilingual international student sections. The study found that the combination of these components encouraged instructors to modify course materials and assessments.
- Duke University's Graduate School guarantees [12-month stipends](#) for Ph.D. students during the five-year guaranteed funding period. The program was specifically designed to provide funding during the summer months for students whose programs historically provided nine-month funding. Summer funding can come from the Graduate School, Provost's Office, departments, schools, and other campus units. In addition, Duke's Graduate School requires international students applying for certain [summer internship fellowships](#) to provide information about how proposed activities align with their visa requirements and directs students to appropriate institutional approval processes.
- The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign offers a 10-week [Career Certificate–International](#) program incorporating workshops, peer mentoring, networking, job-search preparation, and interviewing skills. It is specifically designed to help international students become more competitive for employment and internships. They maintain dedicated programming for international students, including workshops focused on the transition from international student to U.S. professional and an [International Career Navigator](#) peer-leadership opportunity. Their [doctoral Research Support Program](#) offers peer mentoring that matches doctoral students with other doctoral students based on similar fields or research interests. The program also provides research orientation and individualized research consultations for international doctoral students.

Conclusion

This document was developed by international graduate students and early-career scholars working through [The Anti-Authoritarian Resource Network \(TAARN\)](#), a network founded by communication scholars,

teachers, and professionals in response to rising authoritarianism, and committed to academic freedom, critical inquiry, and community solidarity. It was written collectively and from lived experience. Everything described here that someone in this group has lived through. We are not asking for exceptional treatment. Nearly everything recommended here is already being done somewhere, by some department, at no great cost and with no adverse consequence. What we are asking is that it stop depending on luck, on whether a particular advisor happens to know what a SEVIS record is, whether a particular chair happens to sign a letter on time, whether a particular graduate director happens to understand that a leave of absence is not a neutral option for us, or a school staff luckily includes kosher or halal lunch options during departmental TA trainings. We hope departments will use this document concretely, not only as a checklist for handbooks and onboarding or as an agenda for a faculty meeting, but also as a prompt to ask the international members of your own unit what is not working and then to fix it. We hope academic organizations will use it to examine and reflect on their own practices. And we hope it is read in the spirit in which it was written. That is, as an offer or extension to help make our institutions work better than they currently do, for the sake of everyone in them.

Appendix A. Glossary of Terms

The following glossary is intended to give faculty, graduate program directors, department chairs, and staff enough working vocabulary to recognize when a decision may affect a student's or scholar's status and when to refer the matter to qualified professionals. These are plain-language explanations offered for orientation only and are not legal advice. Federal regulations change frequently, and individual circumstances vary considerably. Any actual question about a specific person's situation should be directed to the campus international student and scholar services office or to qualified immigration counsel.

Where these terms appear in the body of the document above, they carry the meanings given here.

Immigration Statuses

F-1 status — The most common immigration status for international students, held by individuals admitted to the United States for the primary purpose of full-time academic study at an approved institution.

J-1 status — An exchange visitor status used for sponsored students, visiting researchers, and short-term scholars, which carries different rules from F-1 and sometimes an obligation to return home before changing to certain other statuses.

H-1B status — A temporary employment status for positions requiring specialized knowledge, commonly used for postdoctoral researchers and faculty, which requires an employer to file a petition on the individual's behalf.

O-1 status — An employment status for individuals who can document extraordinary ability in their field, occasionally used for faculty and researchers when H-1B is unavailable or unsuitable.

TN status — An employment status available to Canadian and Mexican citizens in certain listed professions under the North American trade agreement.

Dependent status (F-2, J-2, H-4) — Statuses held by spouses and children of the primary status holder, each with different and often severely limited rights to work or study, which is why family employment is frequently a recruitment and retention issue.

Duration of status — A notation meaning that a student may remain in the United States as long as they maintain full-time enrollment and comply with the rules, rather than until a fixed calendar date.

Out of status — The condition of having violated the terms of one's immigration status, which can occur through something as ordinary as dropping below full-time enrollment without prior authorization.

Reinstatement — A formal request to the government to restore lawful status after a violation, which is discretionary, slow, and not guaranteed to succeed.

Grace period — A short window after completing a program or ending authorized employment during which a person may remain in the country but generally may not work, commonly sixty days for F-1 and thirty days for J-1.

Documents and Records

Visa — The stamp or sticker placed in a passport by a U.S. consulate abroad, which functions only as permission to request entry at the border and does not govern how long a person may remain.

Status — The set of rules and permissions governing a person's stay once inside the United States, which is distinct from the visa and is what actually matters for enrollment and employment; a person may lawfully remain in the U.S. with an expired visa, but would need a new one to re-enter after travel.

Form I-20 — The document issued by the institution certifying a student's eligibility for F-1 status, listing their program, funding, and program end date, and required for visa applications, entry, and most administrative processes.

Form DS-2019 — The equivalent certificate of eligibility for individuals in J-1 exchange visitor status.

Form I-94 — The electronic arrival record showing the date a person entered the country, the status they were admitted in, and how long they may stay, which is often the document that actually determines a person's legal standing.

SEVIS — The federal database that tracks F and J students and scholars, in which enrollment, funding, address, employment, and program dates must be kept current by the institution.

SEVIS I-901 fee — A separate federal fee paid by the student before the visa interview, distinct from the visa application fee itself.

Travel signature — An endorsement a designated school official must place on the I-20 or DS-2019 before international travel, without which re-entry can be refused, and which expires periodically.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD) — The physical card issued by the federal government that proves permission to work, which many employment types cannot begin without, regardless of institutional intent.

Administrative processing — A discretionary additional review of a visa application after the interview, with no reliable timeline, which is a frequent cause of students and scholars being unable to arrive or return on schedule.

Agencies and Campus Roles

USCIS — The federal agency that adjudicates applications filed from within the United States, including work authorization and change of status requests, and whose processing delays departments cannot influence.

Department of State and consulates — The agencies abroad that conduct visa interviews and issue visas, operating separately from USCIS and with their own appointment backlogs.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) — The agency whose officers decide at the port of entry whether to admit a traveler and in what status, meaning that a valid visa does not guarantee entry.

SEVP — The federal program that certifies institutions to enroll international students and sets the rules institutions must follow to remain eligible.

Designated School Official (DSO) — The trained institutional staff member legally authorized to advise F-1 students, update their records, and grant certain authorizations, and the person to whom immigration questions should be referred.

Responsible Officer (RO) and Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) — The equivalent authorized officials for J-1 exchange visitors.

ISSS or ISSO — The campus office housing these officials, variously named international student and scholar services or the international student services office, which is the appropriate point of contact for all status-related matters.

NAFSA — The professional association for international education, which publishes widely used guidance and is a useful reference point for departments building their own practices.

Enrollment Rules with Immigration Consequences

Full course load — The minimum enrollment required to maintain status, which is federally mandated rather than institutionally optional, and which is why routine advising decisions about credit hours can jeopardize a student's legal standing.

Reduced Course Load (RCL) — Authorization granted in advance by a designated school official permitting enrollment below the required minimum for a small set of approved reasons, which must be secured before the student drops the course rather than afterward.

Online course limitation — A federal restriction on how much online coursework can count toward the full-time requirement, which can be triggered inadvertently when courses move online or when a student is advised into a remote section.

Program end date — The completion date listed on the I-20, which governs how long the student may remain and which must be formally extended in advance if the degree will take longer than projected.

Program extension — The process of requesting a later completion date, which must be requested before the current date passes and which typically requires documented academic justification and proof of continued funding.

Leave of absence — A withdrawal from study that, for international students, generally ends status and requires departure from the country, making it a fundamentally different decision than it is for domestic students.

SEVIS transfer — The process of moving a student's immigration record between institutions, which has its own deadlines and can be disrupted by delays in admission or funding decisions.

Financial documentation — Evidence of funding required before an I-20 can be issued, which is why the timing and clarity of assistantship offers directly affects whether a student can obtain a visa at all.

Work Authorization

On-campus employment — Limited work at the institution that F-1 students may generally undertake, capped at a set number of hours per week while classes are in session.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) — Work authorization for employment that is an integral part of the curriculum, which must be tied to a course or degree requirement and authorized in advance, and which cannot be granted retroactively.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) — A period of work authorization related to the field of study, most often used after graduation, which requires federal approval and cannot begin until the card is issued and the start date reached.

STEM OPT extension — An additional period of work authorization available to graduates of qualifying degree programs working for employers enrolled in the federal E-Verify system, which is unavailable to most students in the humanities and social sciences.

Unemployment limit — A cap on the number of days a person on OPT may go without qualifying employment before falling out of status, which makes gaps between appointments a legal problem and not only a financial one.

Academic Training — The J-1 equivalent of practical training, with its own rules, limits, and approval process.

Cap-gap — A provision that can extend status and work authorization for students with a timely filed H-1B petition, bridging the interval between the end of OPT and the start of H-1B employment.

H-1B cap and cap-exempt employment — The annual numerical limit on H-1B petitions, from which universities and affiliated nonprofit research organizations are generally exempt, which is why academic employers can often sponsor when industry employers cannot.

Unauthorized employment — Any work performed without the correct prior authorization, which can include unpaid or informal arrangements and which carries severe consequences for the individual regardless of how the arrangement was initiated.

Honorarium restrictions — Federal limits on paying visiting speakers who are in the country in certain short-term categories, which departments should confirm before promising payment to an international guest.

Sponsorship — An employer's commitment to file and pay for the petitions required to employ someone in a work-authorized status, which is an institutional decision and not something a candidate can arrange independently.

Taxes, Identification, and Money

Nonresident alien for tax purposes — A tax classification, unrelated to immigration status, under which many international students file different forms, are exempt from certain payroll taxes, and cannot claim deductions available to others.

Form 8843 — A federal form that most F and J students and their dependents must file annually even when they have earned no income at all.

Social Security Number (SSN) — A number issued only to individuals with work authorization, which international students often cannot obtain until a job offer is in hand, delaying payroll setup.

Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) — A tax-processing number for individuals who have taxable income but are not eligible for a Social Security Number, such as some fellowship recipients.

Tax treaty — An agreement between the United States and a specific country that may reduce or eliminate tax on certain income, the benefits of which vary entirely by nationality.

Forms W-2 and 1042-S — Different year-end tax documents, the latter used for treaty-exempt or scholarship income, which frequently arrive on different schedules and complicate filing.

Credit history — The financial record most international students arrive without, which affects their ability to rent housing, obtain a phone plan, or secure a car loan in their first year.

Longer-Term Pathways

Permanent residency (green card) — Authorization to live and work in the United States indefinitely, obtained through processes that typically take years and often require employer sponsorship.

PERM labor certification — A lengthy Department of Labor process required for many employment-based permanent residency cases, which institutions may or may not be willing to undertake for a given position.

EB-1B and EB-2 categories — Employment-based permanent residency classifications relevant to researchers and faculty, including one that in some cases allows a person to petition without an employer.

Adjustment of status — The process of becoming a permanent resident from within the United States, during which international travel is restricted without separate advance permission.

Two-year home residency requirement — An obligation attached to some J-1 exchange visitors requiring them to return to their home country for two years before certain status changes, which can be waived only through a separate and uncertain process.

Change of status — A request to move from one immigration category to another without leaving the country, which is neither automatic nor quick and which can be complicated by departmental timelines.

Related Terms

Undocumented student — A student living in the United States without lawful immigration status, whose circumstances and available resources differ substantially from those of international students, and who is generally ineligible for federal financial aid.

DACA — A program conferring temporary protection from removal and work authorization on certain individuals brought to the United States as children, the availability and terms of which have been subject to ongoing litigation.

E-Verify — A federal employment eligibility verification system, participation in which determines whether an employer can host students on the STEM OPT extension.