

Fostering International Student-Athletes' Inclusion

Considerations for Athletics Administrators



INCLUSION



Disclaimer: The following considerations apply mostly to international student-athletes with F-1 visa status. However, not all international student-athletes hold this status. Those under a different status are likely to have unique needs that are not mentioned in this document.



F-1 STATUS

- Be aware that in order to get the F-1 visa stamp from the U.S. Department of State, as well as the I-20 form from the campus international services office, international student-athletes with F-1 status must present documentation of their financial resources. Check with your campus international services office to know what its international estimate for tuition, fees and cost of living is every year.
- Ensure international student-athletes have checked in with the campus international services office and provided updates for visa, passport, I-20, address and permanent home address. Verifying that their passport does not expire in the near future is always important.

Note: A travel signature is needed for an international student-athlete to leave the United States and is valid for one calendar year upon issue. Sending reminders to international student-athletes at peak travel times to request a fresh signature every time they leave can save a lot of hassle.

- Advise international student-athletes to plan ahead for travel, and talk to the campus international services office in advance regarding questions about obtaining a passport visa stamp (unless Canadian and visa exempt). Also, remind international student-athletes to check their [electronic entry record](#) when they return to the United States to be sure it is correct, and save a screenshot of it.
- Consult the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) website for more helpful information.



ARRIVING IN THE USA

- Inform international student-athletes about the basic customs and immigration processes at U.S. airports and advise them to account for a sufficient layover time if a connection flight is needed.
- Inform international student-athletes that they must carry all immigration documents onto the plane (NOT PACKED IN A SUITCASE) because those documents will be inspected by an immigration officer for admission into the United States. International student-athletes will need to present to the officer the following documents:
 - Passport with a valid F-1 visa stamp with a Student and Exchange Visitor Information System ID number that matches the SEVIS ID number on the I-20.

Note: International student-athletes from Canada may not be required to have a visa stamp. Connect with your campus international services office for further details.

- I-20 for the school the international student-athlete will attend. The I-20 should have a SEVIS ID number that matches the one listed in the F-1 visa stamp. For details on this document, connect with your campus international services office and designated school official (also known as a DSO, a dedicated employee at your school who is registered with the Department of Homeland Security and is responsible for assisting and overseeing enrolled international students).

- Financial information, upon request. Generally, this will be a copy of the financial information provided to obtain the I-20, or presented to the U.S. consulate for a visa application.
- Check for [U.S. Department of State travel advisories](#) and warnings, as travelers from different countries may be subjected to different rules (e.g., COVID-19 vaccine, etc.).



ACADEMICS AND FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT

- Check to ensure international student-athletes are enrolled as full-time students every semester.
- Verify with academic advisors that international student-athletes are enrolled in predominantly in-person coursework.
 - Check with your campus international services office for its rules on online education; F-1 international student-athletes generally have a limit of three credit hours online (counting toward their full-time enrollment). Additionally, ensure international student-athletes are in compliance with the various initial/final enrollment requirements.
- Be aware that reduced course loads can be an option in only a few exceptional circumstances. International student-athletes should not drop below a full-time course of classes without discussing in advance with the campus international services office.
- Verify enrollment policies for international student-athletes with your designated school official or campus international services office before making any arrangements for a summer arrival.
- Connect international student-athletes with sources for on-campus support at the outset of the semester and ensure they are aware of all existing resources they can use. Remember that assignments requiring written expression, verbal participation or public speaking may pose a challenge for non-native English speakers.
- Take the time to explain to international student-athletes your school's core curriculum, grading scale and general academic requirements early on. These may be quite different from what international students have been exposed to in their home country.



CAREER PREPARATION

- Build a relationship with international student-athletes and get to know their academic/professional goals. Try to gather an understanding of what opportunities they may intend to pursue after graduation, and verify that their major is in alignment with their goals.
- Consider conducting career readiness workshops specifically catered to international student-athletes about resumes/CVs, cover letters, LinkedIn, etc. Encourage international student-athletes to visit the career services department on campus to get help and seek resources regarding international student employment and begin using specific portals where employers who sponsor visas for international students are present.
- Educate international student-athletes about their career and graduate school options in the United States. Provide information on NCAA programming, academic scholarships, internships and professional development opportunities.



EMPLOYMENT

- Verify all potential options with the campus international services office or designated school official. Part-time on-campus employment is generally permitted, though some restrictions may apply.
- Inform international student-athletes on all off-campus employment options:
 - Curricular practical training – work authorization for F-1 students completing internships or other practical training that is required for their degree. International student-athletes **MUST** have work authorization to work off campus. Any CPT must be authorized in advance on the I-20 by the designated school official.
 - Optional practical training – twelve-month work authorization for F-1 students generally reserved for after completion of their degree. International student-athletes majoring in a science, technology, engineering or math field may be eligible for a 24-month extension of this original OPT period (36 months total). Check with your campus international services office for details, including the timeline and process to apply - OPT requires requesting a work card from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.
 - Severe economic hardship – work authorization available to international visitors in cases where there is a severe, unforeseen financial hardship. Check with your campus international services office for help recommending this. These applications may take several months to be approved.
 - Special student relief – additional flexibility on F-1 course and employment rules for international student athletes who are from countries in crisis.



SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

- Get to know the international student-athletes you support. Communicate consistently and ask questions. Be attentive especially during the initial transition to the United States, as well as the period of adjustment.
- Provide initial transition assistance and a comprehensive orientation about the campus/athletics, community and U.S. culture. If available, encourage international student-athletes to attend programming offered to international students on campus. Connect international student-athletes to on-campus or community cultural centers. Meet the individual needs of each international student-athlete by helping them locate places specific to their culture, nationality or faith, such as community centers, worship centers or grocery stores around campus.
- Check in on international student-athletes' mental health and ask how they are doing. Ask about plans for academic breaks and holidays, which can be particularly lonely. Events within the athletics department targeting international student-athletes and collaboration with student affairs and the campus international services office programming can help build a sense of community. Provide information on mental health resources available on campus/within the athletics department.
- Check with your campus international services office to see what programs are offered or student interest groups that apply, such as international student-specific mentoring groups.
- Provide time and space for nation- and culture-specific holiday celebration/commemoration.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Do not assume that basic things are common knowledge. Bureaucracy, finance, nutrition, house maintenance, etc., work very differently in other countries. Added context is always helpful.
- Name, Image and Likeness: International student-athletes may benefit from NIL opportunities in some circumstances. However, consulting with the designated school official on what is permissible and seeking legal guidance related to maintaining immigration status and tax implications is strongly recommended. International student-athletes or school officials who have questions may write to the U.S. Student and Exchange Visitor Program at SEVP@ice.dhs.gov.
- International student-athletes are required to file tax returns each spring, even if they didn't earn any income in the United States in the prior year. The campus international services office should aid international student-athletes regarding filing tax returns and applying for a Social Security number/individual taxpayer identification number.
- Check with your campus international services office before referring an international student-athlete to an attorney for any reason. Often the campus international services office can connect an international student-athlete with an attorney with the appropriate specialization and/or provide the services internally.
- Educate all staff, especially coaches, academic advisors and student-athlete development professionals, on the unique needs and challenges of international student-athletes, as well as on strategies and tools to support this population. This can be part of diversity, equity and inclusion training on an annual basis.



NEED HELP?

- When in doubt, seek answers! The consequences for missteps can cause undue stress for both you and international student-athletes and can jeopardize their immigration status.
- Build a relationship with the campus international services office. If possible, designate an advisor to liaise with the athletics department on all immigration issues related to international student-athletes. Annual or biannual check-ins are encouraged.
- Designate a departmental liaison who connects athletics with admissions, the designate school official and the campus international services office.

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