Salt Lake Community College

Program Review: International Student Services

INTRODUCTION

On April 23 and 24, 2012, a site team reviewed the International Student Services Department (ISS) at Salt Lake Community College in Salt Lake City, Utah.   The site team members were:

Mr. Ken Bus, Director International Education Program
Glendale Community College, Glendale, AZ

Mr. Bill Barnhart, Past Director of International Center, University of Utah
Past President of NAFSA: Association of International Educators

Mr. Eric Weber, Assistant Vice President of Student Enrollment Services
Salt Lake Community College

METHODOLOGY

Before the site team met at SLCC   Redwood Campus, they prepared for the visit by reading the self study analysis prepared by the ISS staff. Then they began a series of meetings with departments and individuals at both the Redwood Campus and the South City Campus who interact most directly and frequently with the ISS Department. Some of these meetings took place with all three site team members, and others with a pair or with just one site team member.   All results and notes of these interviews and meetings were shared and were used to compile this report.   The specifics of these meetings are presented on the following page in the order in which they were conducted over the day and a half of the site visit.

SITE VISIT MEETINGS

TOPIC	SLCC PERSONNEL	SITE TEAM MEMBER(S)
College Internationalization	Chris Picard, Ryan Carsten	Bill Barnhart, Eric Weber
Information Technology	Larry Larsen, Patrick Chaffos	Ken Bus
ISS Staff Functions	Elizete Bond, September Bickmore, Nour Ahmed	Ken Bus, Bill Barnhart, Eric Weber
ESL Level IV	Dean Huber, Kathy McIntyre	Bill Barnhart, Eric Weber
Testing Services	Diana Harvey	Ken Bus
School of Advanced Technology (SAT) Operations	Chad Miller, Franz Feierbach	Ken Bus, Bill Barnhart
SAT Advising	Philip Anoosike, Linda Gray	Eric Weber
Data Center	Joyce Hendricks	Bill Barnhart
College Budget Process	Kimberly Henrie	Ken Bus
Student Life & Leadership	Curt Larsen	Eric Weber
Student Employment & Cooperative Education	Wendy Potter	Bill Barnhart
Health and Wellness and Insurance	Lorri Castro-Aguilera Michele Neeshan	Ken Bus
SAT ESL Program	Cheryl Shurtleff	Ken Bus
Institutional Marketing & Communication	Alison McFarland Sharlee Smith	Bill Barnhart

Student Panel Discussions (2)	Random SLCC students	Eric Weber
International Club and International Diplomacy Program	International Students, Club Members and International Diplomats	Ken Bus, Bill Barnhart

FINDINGS

College Internationalization Efforts:

SLCC is just at the beginning phase of developing a comprehensive vision and mission for internationalizing the college.   The connection between this effort and the ISS Department is not well developed.   If there is to be a strong link between internationalizing the curriculum and the presence of international students at SLCC, a more deliberate approach will be needed. ISS currently does not have a role in developing academic curriculum or in setting goals for internationalizing the college. The relationship between the Provost's office and the ISS is informal.   There is talk of setting up a "center for global studies," but if SLCC is to move to the next level of having a comprehensive international program with coordination between academic programs and student services, a more intentional approach with adequate resources will have to be implemented.

Information Technology:

Most of the programming issues resulting from phasing in "FSA Atlas" software in the ISS have been resolved.   The primary justification for using this software is to interface with SEVIS, the U.S. Government's F-1 student visa tracking program.   There are also database and recruiting applications associated with FSA Atlas.   In order for SLCC to take full advantage of these applications and the reports that they can generate, more training of all ISS staff is needed. The IT Department is very supportive of ISS and the international students at SLCC and will do what they can to provide appropriate assistance.

International Student Services Staff:

Turnover of staff, lack of training, and proper placement of staff are issues that came to the surface in these discussions.   With an international population of over 300 F-1 visa students, SLCC needs a well-equipped, well-trained, stable staffing arrangement to serve these students. The loss of a temporary position to handle the admission of international students is especially troubling.   International student admission is very different from domestic student admission--more labor intensive, requiring more training and skills.   ISS needs to produce

training manuals or modules for each of the key positions.   Current ISS staff seem unsure of how shifting priorities and budget constraints will affect them and their job performance. Nevertheless, they enjoy the work they do and like meeting and helping international students. The SLCC health insurance policy and coverage for international students is causing some inefficiencies in the use of staff time, but this discussion will be covered in the section on "Health and Wellness" (see below).

ESL Level IV at SLCC Redwood Campus:

Having the first three levels of the English as a second language (ESL) program at one campus and the last level (IV) at another campus seems like a strange arrangement.   Nevertheless, staff provided satisfactory explanations for how this configuration evolved.   The issue of accreditation for the ESL program was discussed but it may be more important for levels I, II, and III to be accredited by an outside ESL accrediting agency, since they are more like a stand-alone program, whereas level IV is part of the academic course offerings at the Redwood campus and therefore derives accreditation from the academic program.   There is some uncertainty over the purpose and goal of accreditation for the ESL program and whose responsibility it is to secure accreditation.

Testing Services:

Testing services for international students at the Redwood campus seem to be well organized with a clear purpose of placing students in mathematics, reading, and English classes. Students are allowed a surprising number of re-tests, as long as they pay for them. It has been many years since the cut off scores for the LOPE part of ACCUPLACER have been normed.   It may be time for Institutional Research to conduct a study to validate the cutoff scores used for placement of ESL students.   The use of different tests (i.e., CELSA and CASAS) to place ESL students at the SAT campus seems confusing and arbitrary, though some of the logistical problems involving test times seem to have been resolved.

School of Advanced Technology (SAT) Operations, Advising, and ESL:

The SAT has a history, vision, and mission substantially different from those of the academic programs and this fact may not always work to the full advantage of ESL students on the F-1 visa program.   There is no DSO (Designated School Official for SEVIS compliance) at the SAT, but there has been some discussion of bringing an adviser to the campus on a regular basis to serve these students.   Space is a problem and if an adviser came to SAT once or twice per week, there would be no place to set up an office. The three ESL levels taught at SAT do not lead to academic-level proficiency, so level IV was designed and implemented at the SLCC Redwood campus to bridge this gap.   SAT has also developed a level III-C that helps prepare

students for transition to an academic program.   The connection between level III-C and level IV is not clear.   International students on the F-1 visa program almost never enter one of the SAT technical or vocational programs and there doesn't seem to be any interest in recruiting international students for these programs.   It is not clear if the new Media and Graphics programs would attract international students once they go on stream at the new SAT facilities currently under construction. The advisers reported that they have good relationships and communication with the ISS.

Data Center:

The ISS staff needs to take advantage of training opportunities offered by the Data Center. The international admissions coordinator should be a permanent and full-time position due to the complexity of international admissions, the rare but real danger of document fraud, and the need for the college to be compliant with SEVIS policies and regulations.   Having the same person responsible for recruiting and for the admission of international students is a conflict of interest and should not be part of the same job description. The move to an online application process for international students is supported and   should be developed more.

College Budget Process:

Due to Utah state government policies and regulations, all the money generated by international student tuition and fees goes into a common fund and cannot be earmarked for any particular program.   Therefore, it is impossible to set aside special funding for international programs at the college.   The ISS is treated like every other department in the budget process.   SLCC is funded by state allocation.   The only way for ISS to have a revenue stream for its own priorities is to charge special fees, known as "soft"" funding. An example is the special application fee of $75 for international student applications. SLCC tuition level for out of state and international students must cover the "full cost" of education for those students.   That is why SLCC's international student tuition is near the top of community colleges in the USA.

Student Life and Leadership:

There are not enough efforts to arrange collaboration and cooperation between Student Life and Leadership and the ISS. There was an ice cream social that was intended to introduce student body officers to international students. More could be done in the way of intentional tie-ins.   The new Diversity program may provide a conduit for possible collaboration. Student Life is ready to provide support when asked to, as they did when the topic of international student health insurance came up.

Student Employment & Cooperative Education:

The working relationship between this department and ISS is good.   The impact on international students is twofold: curricular practical training (CPT) and on-campus employment. There are two or three CPT workshops offered for international students every semester.   There is also follow up with faculty and employers to ensure full compliance with regulations. On average there are 8 - 12 students doing CPT every semester.   The on-campus employment program for F-1 students begins with an online application process. There are workshops to help students with the application and with resume writing and interviewing skills. Generally speaking, international students are underutilizing the services of the Student Employment Office and the director would like to work more closely with ISS to address this issue.

Health and Wellness and Insurance:

SLCC is fortunate to have a clinic on campus that can serve many of the physical and mental health care needs of students, including international students.   Making health insurance mandatory for international students was a prudent and logical step to take.   But the charge for mandatory insurance should be added automatically to students' college invoices. The waiver policy is too wide open and encourages students to try make their own insurance arrangements.   This could be eliminated with a "hard waiver" policy, such as that used by other colleges and universities.   The current system of allowing the insurance vendor to review and evaluate students' private insurance leads to a conflict of interest that is both risky and extremely time-consuming.   The policy on asking students about MMR and TB inoculations is in line with ACHA guidelines.   The form that students fill out with this information could be separated into two parts so that MMR and TB data are collected individually.

SAT ESL Program:

The findings from this discussion were included with the general comments about SAT Operations, Advising, and ESL (above).

Institutional Marketing & Communication:

The staff of Marketing & Communication are very supportive of ISS and are eager to help on several fronts.   First, they offered to help design and develop a more effective webpage for ISS.   The current webpage shows lack of maintenance and may need to be remodeled and updated. Second, they want to help ISS develop a strategic mission statement and plan.   Third, they want to feature more international students--both faces and stories--in college

publications.   International students add a distinct and unique element of diversity and high achievement that should be documented and celebrated. And last, they are eager to work on a marketing and branding effort for ISS to bring the program in line with college initiatives, while also giving it a chance to shine and stand out on its own.

Student Panel Discussions:

There were two sessions with current international students. These discussions revealed that they are by and large very pleased with their decision to attend SLCC.   They felt that the admission process was clear and relatively easy. They had good experiences with ESL instructors.   After that, their opinions of instructors of academic classes depended on the instructor--some good, some not so good. They would like to see more support for events on campus with international themes.   They would like more on campus employment opportunities and more scholarships for international students.   They expressed a need for help in communicating with their instructors and for greater acceptance in student life and leadership programs.   The students felt that non-native American employees at the college were more sympathetic to them and therefore more helpful than American employees.   They expressed appreciation at the chance to air some of their feelings and opinions and want to do this on a more frequent basis.   And lastly, they mentioned that even after they finish the ESL program, they like going back to the ESL club events and the ESL laboratory because they bonded with their fellow students there.

International Club and International Diplomacy Program:

The International Diplomacy Club volunteers to help with several projects and programs. Though not all of them are international students, they help out at the international student orientation and they also contact new international students prior to their arrival via e-mail and even Skype.   They get involved with international club events.   There is apparently no budget for the International Diplomacy Club so they do their own fund raising.   They have gone on brief outings and trips together--most recently to Nine Mile Canyon.   They all expressed a great deal of enthusiasm and appreciation for these programs and the contacts and opportunities they have gained through them.   They see value in this program and would like to see it continue.   The international students in the group are satisfied with the services provided by ISS, especially programs like workshops on maintaining status and getting work permission.

CONCLUSIONS

The International Student Services program at SLCC and the college as a whole are at a critical juncture in the development of an international and global profile for the college.   They are at

a fork in the road, where one path takes them in more or less the same direction they have followed for many years and the other goes off in a new direction with new opportunities and new challenges.   Although the scope of this study was limited to the ISS, several issues emerged from the visit that really point toward a much larger dimension and bigger questions: What is the international and global mission of SLCC? What role does ISS play regarding Study Abroad, Faculty and Student Exchanges, International and Intercultural Programming, Internationalizing the Curriculum, ESL and an ESL Institute?   Does the college have a mission statement that encompasses all of these issues?   Are all of these desirable options for SLCC, and if so, how can they be funded?

RECOMMENDATIONS

SLCC needs to have a strategic conversation with all interested parties present to discuss the future goals and direction of international education.   The ISS is critical to that conversation but it should not be thought of as the only piece of internationalization at SLCC.   The idea of a Center for Global Studies or an International Education Program should be given serious consideration.   Such a program would be an umbrella for the following:

International Student Services

Study Abroad

Faculty Exchanges and Initiatives

Grants and Scholarships

Internationalizing the Curriculum

ESL Institute

This should not be considered a complete or exhaustive list.   Priorities would be set by a strategic planning team.   An English as a second language program set up as an entrepreneurial profit-making institute model could serve as an engine to generate funding for all the other international components.   SLCC should investigate other ESL institutes for examples of successful programs.   An ESL institute should be housed on the campus where it makes the best strategic sense.

However, in the short term, there are some critical issues and problems that the site visit team believes need immediate attention.   These are:

SLCC needs a full-time, permanent position for an international admissions specialist.   The

position could be part of the Enrollment Services team or could be housed in the ISS, but should not have the added role of international student recruitment.

The international student insurance charge should be added directly to the students' invoice or bill every semester.   A "hard waiver policy" should be put into effect making it very difficult for students to qualify for a waiver.

Enrolling F-1 students in the SAT ESL program seems to   be causing some concern with the start dates on their I-20s and the placement testing.   Clearly there are some administrative knots that need to be unraveled and re-examined in that program in the short term.

Switch from using one form to process both MMR and TB compliance to using two different forms.   Ask Health and Wellness to play a greater role in educating F-1 students about these requirements and about how to use their health insurance policy.