

University Senate International Affairs Committee (IAC)
Report and Recommendations on University Communication with International Students
15 November 2017

The following document provides a report and recommendations in response to Standing Charge 2: *Report on and give recommendations on how International Students are made aware of various policies, such as Conceal and Carry*. It was prepared by IAC Chair Celka Straughn with assistance from committee members Paola Alor, Melissa Birch, Seth Brooks, Manuela Gonzalez-Bueno, Farah Salsabila, Kapila Silva, and Charlie Bankart (ex officio).

Members of the International Affairs Committee met to develop questions and determine campus units to contact in order to identify methods of communication with international students, particularly in regard to policies such as concealed carry. Emails were sent to 17 specific units across campus, including the Office of the Vice-Provost for Faculty Development, whose office further disseminated the email inquiry through governance to the list of deans, chairs and directors. A total of 29 responses were received from a diverse range of academic departments and schools (14 total), and campus units, including the Office of Institutional Opportunity and Access, Watkins Health Services, Graduate Studies, Student Account Services, Office of Public Affairs, International Student Services, Center for Research Methods & Data Analysis, Parking and Transit, Office of Research, Center for Teaching Excellence, KU Libraries, Experiential Learning, Academic Accelerator Program, College Office of Graduate Affairs, and Financial Aid and Scholarships.

General Trends:

While the responses received represent an initial and limited source of information, these were very helpful and indicate a few general trends about the forms of communication used and perceived effectiveness. In general, units provide information to students about campus policies and a range of other issues, but their communications do not tend to intentionally consider various members of the community or to contextualize to constituencies. Rather, units seek to serve as broad an audience as possible and their methods for reaching international students take a passive approach.

Campus units employ a variety of methods including email, social media, websites, and print (these rank among the most prevalent methods), as well as Blackboard, school video boards, tabling, and international priority mail. Some units also offer in-person trainings upon request and some hold in-person meetings on a regular basis (e.g. once a semester). At least one campus unit has a specific international student listserv for disseminating information specific only to international students, though most communication sent is the same as that for domestic students. Some units stated directly that their office does not employ specific strategies for outreach and communication to international students, while this was more implicit in statements by other units. A few units simply noted that they do not directly interact with international students.

Although one department noted: “We assume they are able to function adequately in English,” there are students whose advanced levels of proficiency may work for their degree program, but do not necessarily fully suffice for comprehending all aspects of a policy, particularly more culturally specific policies like concealed carry. Moreover, students enrolled in full-time,

intensive English courses likely have not attained the level of proficiency for the variety of University communications. Some units do offer translation of materials in a few languages and others will make materials available for translation; some also use a translation system for communication with an interpreter (e.g. Watkins Health Services).

Additionally, some units provide specific orientation for incoming international students (e.g. Watkins Health Services). Other offices, such as International Student Services (ISS), also set up special meetings for specific issues like concealed carry and incorporate these policies into orientations, which they hold each semester and at which several campus units present (e.g. Parking and Transit). The Department of Spanish and Portuguese discusses policies and sensitive issues during their orientation as well as at departmental workshops that occur throughout the academic year, and they further include notices in their weekly newsletter. The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) offers GTAs online tutorials that include questions relating to KU policies, a method rated as effective in assessments, and CTE offers specific sessions that relate to international students, which will begin to include information on concealed carry. Nevertheless, some offices report that international graduate instructors could benefit from further cultural competency training for U.S. classrooms as well as more concealed-carry training. A few other units also create materials specific to international students, and the College Office of Graduate Affairs (COGA) develops specific correspondence for international students. Academic advisors in COGA work directly with international students for navigating KU steps and processes; they also arrange for graduate workshops that included concealed carry, active-shooter, and de-escalation training.

While some units also work with other entities such as the Chancellor's Office and Public Safety to convey policies, many departments and units seem to rely on the cooperation of academic departments and student-oriented units and organizations to relay communications. Specifically for communication with international students, many units seem to reach out to and rely on International Student Services and other parts of the Office of International Programs. The responses received also seem to indicate a reliance on cohorts of international students to disseminate information.

Most departments and units do not have measures for assessing the effectiveness of communication, though some acknowledge the importance of assessment. Some units noted they do not see any indication that communication is not effective, while others base effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, on complaints received, which are addressed on an individual basis, or if something is raised during a departmental meeting. Some can see if emails have been opened, and at least one unit finds social media the most effective. A few units assess by noting the results of international students making use of their services (e.g. health services, transit services, financial aid and scholarships). For one unit, communication with international students is included as part of general communication assessment efforts. The Academic Accelerator Program (AAP), which works with international students, conducts a series of three surveys at different points in the program to assess student satisfaction, sense of belonging, and academic preparedness. It could be helpful for the broader campus community to learn from these assessments, and one office specifically expressed interest in learning about international students' pre-arrival perceptions of KU, and to the extent that these could be identified, what were the sources of those perceptions.

Challenges and Requests:

A few units noted challenges for communication with domestic and international students, particularly getting students to pay attention to campus emails and social media messages. This challenge indicates the importance of multiple platforms for communicating important policies and other issues, including orientations and in-person meetings.

A couple of departments expressed that they do not know who undergraduate majors are and where they come from, and requested for better information on students interested in departmental majors so that the department can communicate with them. There was also interest to learn more about the concerns of international graduate students.

While many units indicated awareness of, and perhaps also worked with staff and sections within the Office of International Programs (OIP), some requested further communication guidance from ISS or related offices. Another unit expressed difficulty identifying the appropriate people within OIP offices (ISS, AAP, AEC) to talk to regarding outreach for international students. There was also interest to gain better information about opportunities to communicate with and promote services to international students in addition to working with International Programs.

Specific to Concealed Carry:

Many of the responding units seemed to provide more general information for concealed carry, generally through syllabi statements, and nothing specific to international students or making use of any specific strategies. Only one department responded that they communicate specifically to international students that they are not legally allowed to carry guns themselves, so it is not a "level playing field." This department further noted that "the communications from CLAS and the University so far have simply left the students crying, literally crying, with no options and no solutions." For one department, all departmental course syllabi include statements on concealed carry along with plagiarism/academic misconduct, and grading (among other issues). For others departments, syllabi statements were up to the discretion of individual instructors (faculty and GTAs). One school noted that in addition to including specific language on syllabi, they also offered Concealed Carry Training for faculty, staff, and students by KU Public Safety (though only one training was noted). These comments indicate a range of levels for communicating concealed carry, which could leave some students without adequate information.

Areas for Further Inquiry and Analysis:

While emails were sent to some international student organizations, the IAC did not receive any responses to be able to include in this report. Members of the committee will work to convene an international student focus group as well as an international faculty and staff focus group to inquire further about effective strategies based on their perspectives, in addition to other issues relating to FY18 standing charges. The responses received prompted questions of whether the student leadership groups feel they can effectively communicate policy issues like concealed carry, and if they have thoughts about other ways to communicate. Since student organization leadership changes annually, it might also be useful to work with faculty mentors. Additionally, how might the Student Leadership and Involvement Center incorporate policy communication into its training and awareness activities?

After reviewing the responses, members of the IAC wondered if any unit is working with their unit's DEI staff to craft more inclusive communication as part of efforts with international students and all students. Such work could offer models for effective communication strategies; some units responded that they would appreciate learning about the committee's findings to improve overall communication strategies and develop more effective and inclusive communication with a diverse range of KU students.

Possible Recommendations:

Based on a preliminary analysis of the responses received, the IAC suggests the following recommendations:

- employ multiple forms of communication;
- include information and discussion sessions of policy issues as part of undergraduate and graduate orientations, and when applicable, departmental orientations;
- develop model inclusive communication strategies that make messages broadly accessible, perhaps working with unit DEI offices and/or with the KU Office of Diversity and Equity;
- for major issues and policies like concealed carry:
 - develop shared and inclusive communication strategies that can be employed across units;
 - provide preparation for units in advance with appropriate strategies for communication regarding the policy and its impact on diverse constituents, including international students;
 - work with student organizations to further disseminate information;
 - work with the Applied English Center (AEC) to develop communication strategies for students not actively pursuing degree programs due to language proficiency.

The International Affairs Committee will provide further recommendations and updates as it continues to learn more.