

## Meeting Our Obligations to International Students

by **Jeanne Natali**

from *Inquiry*, Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 2005, 47-48

© Copyright 2005 Virginia Community College System

[Return to Contents Page](#)

---

### **Abstract**

The author argues that the colleges in the VCCS must offer the services that make study in the U.S. successful for its international students.

The presence of international students on our campuses enriches the collegiate experience of all of our students. International students bring with them a wealth of diverse ideas, challenging their classmates to see the world from a variety of perspectives. As a result, students enrolled in courses from art and literature, social sciences, math, or natural science will consider global perspectives on subjects they may in the past have only considered from their own familiar cultural vantage points.

Although VCCS colleges recognize the value of enrolling international students on our campuses, we must also recognize that we have an ethical obligation to provide a range of support services that enhance our international students' chances of success.

First, VCCS colleges that enroll international students present on F1 visas must employ a **professional international student advisor** and provide funds to support the advisor's continuous professional development. The laws governing international students are complex and change with great frequency. A professional international student advisor can provide the critical guidance that international students need to navigate the complex waters of immigration regulations. International students are frequently confused by U.S. immigration regulations and often do not have the English language skills necessary to understand their rights and responsibilities. A professional international student advisor understands this and can interpret the rules for students and help them to apply the regulations to their individual circumstances. At the very least, colleges should provide the funds for international student advisors to join NAFSA: The Association of International Educators. NAFSA provides a wealth of professional development opportunities from F1 101 workshops to professional development training on advanced F1 topics. NAFSA also publishes professional development materials such as the best selling *NAFSA Advisor's Manual of Federal Regulations Affecting International Students and Scholars*.

Second, our colleges must provide a **full range of services** for students whose first language is not English. After colleges assess the English skills of all international applicants, they should place the students in the appropriate sequence of ESL courses. Further, ESL programs must be sufficiently rigorous to build students' academic English skills and enhance their chances for academic success. Colleges that decide that they do not have the resources available to support non-English proficient international students must not admit these students. And VCCS colleges must also set admissions standards, including TOEFL requirements, which ensure the English proficiency of applicants.

Finally, our colleges must provide international students with **opportunities to engage in co-curricular activities** that will introduce them to their new environment and encourage them to establish relationships with their peers. Culture clubs, international dinners, film festivals, and other cultural activities provide the context for students to socialize and share their perspectives. We should also encourage our students to explore and fully participate in the communities where they live and experience the rich diversity of life in the United States. By doing so, international students will return home with a first-hand understanding of what it means to be an American.

We value the contribution of international students on our campuses and would like to attract more students from abroad to study in Virginia's community colleges. However, we must be sure that we have the necessary support

services established before recruiting or enrolling students with unique needs.

---

**Dr. Jeanne B. Natali**, coordinator of international programs at Tidewater Community College, is a member of the National Advisory Panel of the American Council on Education's Global Learning for All project, the Advisory Board at the Meadowbrook School for International Studies, Norfolk Public Schools, and the American Council on Education's Internationalization Collaborative.

[Return to Contents Page](#)