

Berkeley

INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Strategic Plan 2021-2023

January 2021 - June 2021 Progress Report

GOAL 1: Serve as a vital partner to campus and external entities to advance international engagement and advocacy

Highlight the value that the international community brings to the university

- Drafted multiple messages sent out by the Chancellor and campus leadership that included language that reflected the importance and value international students add to the campus experience
- Provided SWOT analysis as requested by the Campus Recharge Committee during the mandatory Annual Recharge Recertification Meeting; emphasized the Strengths and Opportunities that the international community brings to campus, and the vital, essential services that BIO provides to campus

Advocate for the needs and concerns of the international community

- Initiated the idea of the UC President signing a letter together with the UC Chancellors to send to DOS and DHS regarding visa services
- Provided data on international students studying within the U.S. and remotely from outside the U.S. in order to inform campus decisions on availability of remote and in-person classes and advocacy to the State Department with regards to the necessity of the resumption and expansion of visa processing

- Worked with the ASUC to advocate for more remote classes to be offered for the Fall 2021 semester
- Made frequent updates to Advocacy and Support webpage to inform clients and campus community about immigration policy changes and resources for advocating for international students and scholars
- Participated in meetings on critical international students issues and concerns with key campus partners (MFE, Registrar, Student Conduct, Economic Justice Team, New Student Services, Student Advocate, UHS leadership and Social Services, Engineering)
- Facilitated and co-presented NAFSA Postdoc SIG webinars on international visa/immigration, family, career and personal concerns
- Served on the NAFSA Member Interest Groups (MIG) leadership team, NAFSA ISS RP (International Students & Scholars Regulatory Practice) Committee
- Participated in Department of Labor (DOL) video meeting with the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA); co-organized and participated in NAFSA Government Conversation with DOL
- Held joint meetings with key stakeholders including BRS Visa Team, ERSO, and VSPA to share updates and solicit feedback on processes

Collaborate with campus partners to advance international engagement at UC Berkeley

- Continued to attend International Activities Coordination Group (IACG) monthly meetings in order to brief group on visa processing and BIO operations
- Provided updates about international students and scholars to Director of Internal Communications for inclusion in campus-wide Response & Recovery newsletter

Strengthen our identity as a key partner on campus through outreach and support

- Collaborated with Academic Senate Chair Jenna Johnson-Hanks and Undergraduate Education to ensure that all international undergraduate students complied with in-person instruction requirements for the Spring 2021 semester
- Collaborated with Academic Senate Chair Jenna Johnson-Hanks on developing a survey of the international student experience
- Presented to the Berkeley International Group (BIG) updating participants on trends related to the UC Berkeley international community
- Presented at the EVCP campus recovery meeting for campus leadership on the status of visa processing, NIE, DHS guidance and current travel bans

- Started attending campus-wide Student Communication Coordination meetings so BIO is represented and aware of upcoming campus communications to incoming and current students
- Presented workshops for key student populations: Journalism, ASUC, BCSSA, MDes
- Developed and distributed messaging for campus faculty and staff regarding Spring and Fall 2021 enrollment models and planning and travel ban policy updates
- Presented COVID-19 Updates and Q&A sessions for students and COVID-19 Updates and Q&A session for campus faculty and staff
- Presented at Graduate Student Town Halls to support international student concerns
- Provided intercultural communication workshop for Bears That Care
- Worked with departments to ensure the NIF is properly set up for their student population and provide support for their students' needs
- Held joint meetings with key stakeholders including BRS Visa Team, ERSO, and VSPA to share updates and get feedback on processes
- Participated in Postdoc working group to streamline and document the process to bring postdocs to campus

Leverage relationships with external partners to meet the needs of our clients

- Coordinated with current and new sponsors for Spring and Fall 2021
- Collaborated with UCEAP and Transfer Student Center to present pre-arrival webinars for incoming students
- Joined the ISSM Customer Advisory Board in order to advocate for ISSM improvements that will serve the needs of BIO staff and clients
- Submitted annual Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors International Student Census data, including major revisions in methodology and data sources both in response to IIE's COVID-related revisions to census questions and definitions and in order to better account for students with nonimmigrant visa types other than F-1 and J-1
- Worked with campus Merchant Services Credit Card Coordinator to ensure students have the best experience possible using Cybersource to pay for BIO fees
- Worked with campus Student Information System team to implement changes necessary to continue smooth flow of data after SIS Phase 2 project
- Served on the Ellucian working group for ISSM/ISD enhancements
- Co-facilitated with VSPA Office the permanent residency workshop for international scholars and employees
- Partnered with People and Culture - Labor Relations to streamline the employment-based process
- Co-facilitated "Parents in the Pipeline" webinar with NPA members

GOAL 2: Enhance the client experience through our services and programs

Provide a personalized client experience through clear, accurate and holistic advising

- Developed and distributed messaging to new and continuing students regarding Spring and Fall 2021 enrollment models and planning and travel ban policy updates
- Revised Frontline email templates and responses to ensure clear communication of our processing time and delivery methods
- Designed and administered surveys and communications to students to gather their U.S. arrival plans in order to appropriately manage their SEVIS records
- Continued to update COVID-19 FAQ webpage with enrollment, immigration, and return to campus information
- Conducted customized departmental administrator trainings

Cultivate a flexible, hybrid service model to best serve the changing and diverse needs of our clients

- Developed a hybrid advising model for in-person, virtual, and appointment-based services for Fall 2021
- Provided adaptive, updated programming on topics ranging from new student support, visa and travel Q&As, employment, and taxes
- Continued to mail documents physically and electronically
- Updated Mercury forms to improve the student experience with forms
- Created and distributed International Roommate Search tool to incoming students
- Convened an E-Forms Working Group with representation from SEVIS/Data, IT, Student, and Frontline teams in order to make progress on transitioning from PDF student request forms to Mercury e-forms in order to both improve the experience of students and academic advisors and reduce manual processing and data entry required for BIO staff
- Began planning new, hybrid orientation model for new and returning students
- Held online 212(e) workshop for students and scholars via Zoom
- Implemented J scholar travel signature request form and interim travel signature process in anticipation of increased need for travel signatures

Pursue creative improvements of our services to meet new challenges and identify opportunities for growth

- Continued to cultivate our relationship with the Basic Needs Center to address students' basic needs, including emergency financial aid
- Reinstated Summer COVID-19 Relief financial aid process for international students facing financial insecurity due to COVID-19 related issues
- Revised student daily folder intake processing methods to speed up processing
- Continued "Stress Less for midterms and finals" communications campaign for students with revisions to address rise in academic misconduct due to remote instruction
- Continued IOF audit process to ensure payments are processed for all requests
- Created and implemented a PR sponsorship policy for certain staff positions
- Performed many reporting improvements including
 - Re-engineered reports engine to show calculated attributes-based results only
 - Updated FormGroup Statistics Report to allow for breakdown by hour, day, month, or to take an entire given time period as one entity
 - Added Instructions Field to Mercury Reports
 - Created new report to show datapump statuses
 - Created report to show email sending statuses
 - Created lots of new reports in Mercury to address changing needs
- Implemented sweeping VSIS Changes
 - Created new workflow for "No I-20 EPR" VSIS cases
 - Created and fine-tuned new status automation
- Made many big updates to the NIF
 - Introduced term selection to eliminate confusion surrounding program start dates caused by previous deferrals not reflecting in the SIS API
 - Added specialized LLM options to accommodate the 6 different sessions
 - Added electronic delivery option
 - Created notes in ISSM regarding NIF delivery method
 - Created report for NIFs by Plan Codes
 - Implemented document completion date estimation and display for students
 - Added specialized calculation for MDE funding for F vs. J visa types
- Completed phase 1 of J Scholar Portal Enhancement Project

Utilize data to inform and evaluate our services and programs

- Conducted a student experience survey in March to help inform BIO's work; used results to make adjustments to advising services and resources to support the needs of remote and local populations

- Utilized advising sign-in data to update drop-in advising model to reduce student wait times
- Based on student feedback, revised orientation schedule, sessions, timing, and content to be more effective and relevant to students
- Monitored in-person/in-country location and enrollment data for students to support BIO and campus partner needs
- Implemented several Mercury changes to accommodate campus SIS API Changes
- Implemented detailed tracking of request numbers by type

Enrich the international student experience by helping them to connect with the UC Berkeley community in a post-pandemic world

- Developed new Remote Start Cohort Program to engage students beginning their programs in the U.S. mid-degree due to COVID-19 entry delays
- Relaunched Peer Mentorship program to assist incoming first year and transfer international students with successfully transitioning to life at UC Berkeley
- Continued programming that supports student community-building (International Student Meet and Greet and English Conversation Tables)

Strengthen safety and emergency protocols to ensure the health and well-being of our clients

- Co-presented graduate student mental health workshop with CAPS
- Prioritized student and staff safety in Return to Work planning for proposed Fall 2021 hybrid advising model, allowing appointment-based document drop-off/pick-ups, appointment-based advising, and increased physical space for advising

Improve the clarity of client-facing materials and processes

- Updated USCIS application instructions (I-539, I-765) and forms to be more evergreen in the face of changing government policies and forms
- Collaborated with and provided guidance to department units and clients on Department of State National Interest Exemption
- Conducted regular review and revisions of SEVIS Reactivation, NIF forms and processes for new and returning students
- Reviewed and removed underutilized tools and inactive programs from the BIO website
- Enhanced J scholar virtual orientation webinar and resource guide
- Updated client materials, including change of status, extension/transfer, new initial mailout materials

- Established a standard processing time for deferrals for consistency and clear expectation among scholars and campus partners

GOAL 3: Optimize staff, financial, and space resources to strengthen organizational effectiveness

Provide staff with tools, technologies, and training to support their work

- Developed a new Strategic Plan to guide BIO's work for 2021-2023
- Advisors attended training sessions, webinars and workshops on topics related to immigration and regulatory knowledge (USCIS, DOS, SEVP), return to campus planning, equity and inclusion, student belonging, mental health and wellness for students and staff, and supporting LGBTQIA students
- IT team upgraded ISSM twice
- Communicated CalNet requirements changes and helped staff meet them
- Developed procedures and trained student advisors on I-20 e-signatures using Adobe in order to streamline the signing process and save paper
- Built refund recording system in Mercury to allow operations team to update the system so that staff will no longer see the fee as "paid" after it is refunded
- Improved logging of status-changing jobs so that staff can tell why the system changed a response batch status
- Added an "in list" operator to ISSM Report Writer in order to streamline the creation of custom reports and ability to send communications to custom groups of clients
- Created system to allow staff to prevent automated emails from sending in ISSM
- Built new automation tools for daily data jobs using stored procedures
- Developed more automated and streamlined processes for J-1 scholar address reporting and validation
- Developed clear, step by step, written instructions for employees new to chairing a search committee, or new to serving on a search committee
- Trained staff on H-1B prevailing wage

Align staffing levels with best practices and address staff workload based on bandwidth across the organization

- Filled an student advisor vacancy in a very agile way using a past recruitment process, ensuring continuity of services and a fully staffed team
- Reviewed advising workloads and work assignments for peak document production season

- Created transition plan to shift to 5 business day processing time for student requests to support staff workload and increased process transparency for students
- Adjusted student advising schedules to accommodate various personal and department needs
- Hired new AA III to join the Frontline team
- Hired and trained new student assistants; recruited and hired orientation programming support intern

Prioritize a diverse and versatile staff that meets the needs of the international community

- Hired multiple employees who add to the diversity of the BIO staff

Retain staff through career growth, professional development, cross-training, and holistic support of their social and mental health needs

- Initiated multiple appointments of staff to more senior roles through reclassifications
- Conducted one internal hiring of a student advisor
- Identified a return to work model that meets the needs of the office while balancing staff preferences and a need for individual accommodations
- Student advisors gained professional development in their contributions to leading and supporting the BIO Strategic Planning Committee
- Supported team professional growth in transitioning two SSA2 advisors to SSA3 advisors
- Supported Student Advising and Frontline team participation in NAFSA and NOW conferences as well as campus mental health and wellness workshops
- Participated in virtual Northern California Scholar Advisor meeting; USCIS, DOL, AILA and NAFSA webinars
- Presented at ISSS Practices and Technology Conference

Ensure continuity of services through documentation of shared knowledge, and more transparency of staff responsibilities

- Transitioned leadership vacancies and materials and for triage and Frontline supervision as well as lead duties for Summer Session, Taxes, Financial Aid and Employment project areas
- Consistently updated internal wiki during revision of daily folder intake processing methods
- Maintained up-to-date shared Excel documents of all recharge income collections so that any employee of the J Services Team or the Employment Team, as well as the

employees who collect the recharge income can view the status of the income collections

- Documented and trained advisors in the scholar analyst duties to support coverage during anticipated or unanticipated absences

Maintain a strong financial footing to address short and long-term economic challenges

- Took steps to address about \$2 million in lost revenue: Instituted new and increased fees, one layoff, multiple staff reductions in time (ERIT), and vacancies left unfilled — all of which will contribute to a substantial reduction of the deficit
- Submitted to campus a three year deficit recovery plan
- Initiated our first Big Give fundraising campaign, raising a modest \$5,000
- Maintained up-to-date, current fiscal year projections to keep Director informed of BIO's financial situation, as well as its income and expense trends
- Began processing E-3 petition filings in-house
- Implemented Deferral Fee

Adapt the use of space to address emerging needs and campus guidelines for remote work

- Made modifications to BIO's office space to accommodate more meeting room space and to create space for socially distanced advising
- Continued to provide BIO employees with ergonomic evaluations; contacted a campus ergonomist to provide second evaluations when necessary