

CISS Meeting – October 25, 2024 | 11:00 AM

Chair: Kate Kirk, Georgia Tech

Vice Chair: Christine Shaw, Columbus State

Member at Large: Open

Member at Large: Open

Participants (15): Kate Kirk, Christine Shaw, Dustin Anderson, Annette Burris, Robin Catmur, Leticia Fonseca, Lescia Gonzalez Rivera, Charlene Graham, Prathibha Joshi Beck, Alexa Lee, Cody Marschalk, Irina McClellan, Jada Mitchell, LD Newman, Tiffany Takahashi

Call to Order, Introductions, & Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes – Kate Kirk

- A copy of the previous meeting's minutes is located [here](#). The minutes were reviewed.
- Prathibha Joshi made a motion to accept the minutes. Robin Catmur seconded, and the motion was passed.

USG OIE Updates – Kate Kirk

The USG has been working on increasing data collection and has created a webpage to track trends and data, including enrollments. That website is https://www.usg.edu/research/data_dashboards. Eventually new strategic measures are to be implemented.

Catmur of UGA asked if there is a focus on international students. The committee chair responded there is not, but international students can be seen under the out-of-country residency status (which is a new classification for international students). This allows those in the field to get a feel for specific international student numbers.

This new classification information was presented at the last meeting and originated with the Board of Regents. Tammy Rosner asked that nothing else be added/changed to international student classifications and it is hoped that no further changes will be made. Rosner also asked that no other financial barriers be created for international students.

It was noted that there is quite a decrease from fall 2023 to fall 2024 (25437 down to 17264). The decline could be that some international students are still listed under the out-of-state instead of the new out-of-country classification. The chair indicated that she has not had a chance to review this information but will take questions back to the executive committee.

McClellan of Valdosta State asked whether an international student is moved to the in-state category if they receive an in-state tuition waiver. After discussion, it was felt that those students would still be classified as out-of-country. Conversations are ongoing about how to implement the new classification.

Board of Regents Meetings – it is believed these meetings are broadcast and that the minutes are available on the website. It was stated that the broadcasts are emailed in advance but can also be requested. This committee chair will check into this further.

J-1/DS-2019 issuance by the USG – The central office will be sunsetting their J-1 program, since there are not enough universities in the system using this service to make it sustainable. They are working with UGA and GA Tech on this and the outcome will be reported in December.

Catmur reported that she talked with Tina Rousselot de Saint Céran, Director, International Student and Scholar Services, Georgia Institute of Technology, who will be glad to sponsor J-1s for any USG school. She also contacted USG Legal Services, who reached out to the UGA Legal Services office to ask if this was legal. Catmur let them know that this was no problem, that schools are even encouraged to do so by the BridgeUSA Program. They will formalize a process to issue DS-2019s for other USG schools as soon as possible. However, UGA has no budget for that, so any school using them for this process would have to pay the cost of processing and issuing a DS-2019.

The chair of this committee stated that they are working on a fee structure at GA Tech as well and she will confirm the amount.

Call for Nominations for Member at Large Positions & Candidate Introductions

- Open Nominations:
 - Member at Large Position 1
 - Prathibha Joshi, Ph.D. (Gordon State College)
 - No other nominations were forthcoming.
 - Member at Large Position 2
 - Dustin Anderson (Georgia Southern) volunteered.
- Kirk gave information regarding these positions - At-large members support the biannual meetings, including leading the meeting or taking minutes in the absence of the chair and vice chair, respectively. They are also involved in planning additional activities to support and engage International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) staff in the USG. Past activities have included best practice workshops and collegial conversations. We welcome candidates with any level of experience in their positions and from any USG institution. We particularly encourage candidates from institutions not currently represented in CISS leadership. Current CISS leadership hails from Columbus State and Georgia Tech.
- Prathibha Joshi Beck shared why she is interested in this position. She said she wants to participate more and increase her knowledge to build her study broad and international office, as well as to network and get more of a footprint in the process. She would also like her office to engage more.

- Kate asked for self-nominations for the second member-at-large position. Dustin Anderson volunteered.
- A quorum of 10 (one from each institution) was needed. The motion for each member at large was voted on and passed.

Student-Focused Discussion

- Fall 2024 trends
 - **Effects of Hurricane Helene –**
 - Valdosta State was greatly impacted with 800 trees lost, the university was closed for a week and was remote for a week. Most of Valdosta had no power for 7-10 days and students were evacuated from campus to Middle Georgia College and ABAC. All international students were safe, VSU was in constant communication with them, and there were no injuries. Mid-term exams were pushed back 2-3 weeks. The archives in the library are collecting photos to display. Some traffic lights throughout the city are still not working. They used their international student WhatsApp group to check in with students and send out daily announcements. Their students went to other areas during this time.
 - Georgia Southern was affected, but not as badly, with some power outages on campus. Most of the county was without power for about one week, and without water for several days. They were remote for one day, then closed for a couple of days, but were able to keep the cafeteria and other resources open. They had some trouble tracking down international students since cell phone towers were down. They hosted about 100 students from Swainsboro in east Georgia.
 - They also opened their dining services on both campuses and gave away more than 29,000 meals to students and the community. They were closed for one week and had no classes since they had no power or internet. There were no injuries reported, however.
 - The chair of this committee stated that both SEVP and the Department of State asked for reports on this. She asked if there were any other schools with challenges tracking down students.
 - UGA sent out an email to their international students, but did not hear from any of them.
 - Augusta University was affected, and it was a hugely dramatic experience. The landscape looks completely different due to downed trees, and 2 of 5 people had damage to homes/cars. The campus was closed, and students moved off campus. Most of the area went without water and power for 7-10 days. The campus was remote for one week. There are still residual effects, making it difficult to get around town, such as downed trees that are still being removed. Old growth trees and the

golf course were damaged, and internet access affected. Students had no significant issues, however.

- Augusta also reached out to their J scholars. Six to eight responded that they had damage to houses, apartments, and cars. They had to file incident reports with the Department of State.
- Georgia State had minor flooding to their downtown buildings, but no major impacts to campus. Some Atlanta areas were affected, with some F students living in flooded areas. They received 300 responses from F students needing assistance.
- Georgia Tech reported some flooding and damage but nothing major.
- Gordon State College stated that they hosted some students at their school. Dorms and Dining facilities were provided.
- **Lawful Presence Process**
 - Catmur of UGA stated that the lawful presence process is becoming complicated, and the USG has not come forward with a comprehensive guide on this nor have they given any guidance on what is acceptable to show lawful presence. She asked this committee to bring this issue to the executive committee, even though it does not affect all institutions. She wants to be fair, equitable, and humane in this area, but it is difficult to currently do that.
 - The issue is complicated when a student presents a document that needs to be run through the USCIS SAVE system and the response is then ambiguous. They are told it is their responsibility to get the SAVE system updated to the correct status, however, that is not her job or responsibility. This request was previously shared with USG, but given the increasing population, escalation is needed. Catmur is seeing a burgeoning population with a range of statuses (DACA, etc.) where this is becoming a major issue. The current process is awkward and not fair to the students.
 - Newman of Augusta supports this as they are also having these issues. Other institutions having these issues include GA State.
 - Kirk will follow up on this.
- **Temporary P/D SO Support**
 - The PDSO for Augusta will be retiring in a few months and they will be looking to hire a replacement. Any recommendations are appreciated, or anyone interested in this position can contact LD Newman.
 - If the position is not filled immediately, Newman asked if anyone could temporarily assist. Catmur stated that a PDSO is required for the program to continue. (Newman could fill in but stated that she has little experience.) Catmur suggested a company called Gateway, which provides PDSO services for a charge. She will check if a PDSO can hold that role at 2 institutions. Gonzalez Rivera shared her experience with

this and stated that she transferred to another university but was still designated as PDSO at her previous school.

- Christine Shaw from Columbus State University reported that she assisted Clayton State University with a similar issue on a contract basis over the summer. She was not a P/DSO for Clayton State, but was available for assistance in processing students, for advice, and held regularly scheduled virtual meetings with their staff.
- **Benchmarks for ISSS Staffing at Institutions**
 - McClellan of Valdosta State asked if there are benchmarks/recommendations for an ideal number of P/DSOs an institution should have. Their PDSO position was cut, and she is now the only P/DSO and RO.
 - Catmur of UGA said that Charter Morris did a survey on this a few years ago and the number of P/DSOs depends on the services offered by the institution. If a school has more than 200 international students, having just one P/DSO or RO is not enough. It also depends on how the international office is operated and how much clerical support is offered. UGA currently has one DSO per 800 students, which makes processing times much longer than before, when they had one DSO per 400-500 students.
 - UGA did a survey of peer institutions, which information was then given to their administration, since they rely on the fee structure to pay positions. The survey showed that they are at the lower level of those institutions.
 - Georgia Tech also did such a benchmark and was then able to advocate for their international student team to hire additional staff.
- **Validity of Funding Documents**
 - Lescia Gonzalez Rivera of Georgia Southern asked if anyone had experience with receiving communication from consulates asking for funding confirmation. They are also having issues with the validity of funding documents. She asked how others confirmed whether a document is valid. Also, some of their Graduate Assistantship award letters are fraudulent.
 - Christine Shaw from Columbus State University said she attended a virtual NAFSA presentation recently, where information was given about an organization who assists with this, as well as with official transcripts. She suggested checking with NAFSA on this. Regarding fraudulent Graduate Assistantship award letters – she only accepts those directly from the department or their HR department.
 - Others stated that there is a 3rd party company that can check the validity of bank documents called VeriOnce.
 - Alexa Lee with Georgia Gwinnett College says there is another company through NAFSA that provides this information. Also, some banks have a portal where you can confirm whether an individual is a valid customer.

- **Determining Dependent Funding (F2s)**
 - Lescia Gonzalez Rivera asked how other institutions determine the amount that must be shown for dependents.
 - Catmur stated that each institution's financial aid office may have a cost-of-living calculator that can be used. UGA previously used the U.S. Government poverty line income amount, plus 20%. Now they require the maximum number of graduate assistantships given at UGA.
 - Dustin Anderson, Georgia Southern, suggested that Gonzalez Rivera contact Jim Conlon of that institution.

Scholar-Focused Discussion

- Open discussion – N/A

Announcements

- NAFSA Region VII Conference – November 11-13, 2024
- Next CISS meeting – January 2025

Meeting ended at 12:22pm