

2023-2024
Unit Annual Report
Division of Academic Affairs
Unit: Office of International Education

I Mission and Goal/Outcomes Statement:

Provide overall Mission/Goal Statement for your unit.

Our mission at the Office of International Education is to provide exceptional services to international students and study abroad participants, while also serving as a valuable resource for Fitchburg State University's faculty, community, and partners. Through fostering an inclusive environment, promoting cross-cultural interactions, and forging strong global partnerships, we aim to cultivate global awareness and enrich the educational journey of our students, preparing them to thrive in an interconnected world.

II Personnel:

List all staff and note all personnel changes that occurred during 23-24

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>
Nelly Wadsworth	Director, OIE
Nicole Salerno	Assistant Director, Study Abroad
Sandy Yu	Staff Assistant/coordinator International Student Programs and Services
Phuong Trieu-Hindle	Contract (12.5 hours per week Admin. Asst.)
Antje Peters	Student worker as Office Assistant (20 hours per week), Sept. 2023-May 2024

III Facilities/Equipment:

List any new facilities/equipment/software etc. acquired during 23-24

None

IV Budget Expenditure Analysis:

Was the budget expended as planned? Were additions/changes made, and if so, explain.

The budget allocated for the fiscal year 2023-2024 was spent as planned. The money that SGOCE provided and other monies obtained from submitting proposals had helped to manage all the activities and cultural programs at OIE. Supplemental budget from Identity fund helped in running the Cultural program in the Spring 2024.

V Programs/Activities:

List major campus activities, events etc. that the office participated in/supported; committees served; community outreach; etc. List events provided to current and prospective students. Also, provide professional development of all staff.

Accomplishments/Activities for the year:

- Welcomed a total of 80 new international students on Fall, 2023 and 50 in Spring 2024.
- The count of participants in the Study Abroad program exhibited a notable growth of 30%, both in the Faculty-led programs and semester-long study abroad experiences.
- The coordination of the Global Village event in February was a resounding success, as it was thoughtfully synchronized with the Spring semester's Study Abroad Fair.
- March's International Night garnered a substantial turnout and featured the active involvement of the Center for Diversity and Inclusiveness, the African Student Union, Indian Student organization, and LASSO.

- The Graduation Reception, is done in two separate sessions due to gaining popularity within the graduating study abroad students and due to time constraints, recognition of the International graduating students was done on Thursday and the Study Abroad graduating students was done on Friday since study abroad students are mostly undergraduate students, this recognition was done the day before the undergraduate commencement ceremony.
- Organized welcoming sessions for new international students in both Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, helping 130 new students join us based on recommendations from other students and alumni.
- Guided accepted students through virtual interviews to prepare for their F-1 visas, and this year the percentage of successful issuance is very small for the academic year 2023-24. Organizations like NAFSA are working hard to lobby to house to make the Department of State approve more student visas to come to the USA. This make USA a choice for international students for their studies.
- Offered support for solving SEVIS issues and provided continuous training for our International Student Coordinator and the part-time Admin Assistant.
- We successfully held workshops for curricular practical training and Optional practical training and processed 69 CPT applications and 264 OPT/STEM OPT applications.

- Our office is involved in assisting exchange students throughout their journey – from admission to arranging housing, course registration, visas, transportation, and settling into dorms. Every year we have about 10-12 exchange students that come to Fitchburg State

- The director's role involved helping international students with SEVIS issues, which provided important insights for the International Student Coordinator.
- Our study abroad staff are actively engaged in meetings with faculty and Study Abroad providers to ensure the smooth progress of study abroad programs.
- In study abroad, we are always ready to handle issue that arises during the implementation of the program. The new program in Croatia in Spring March 2024, we dealt with the issue of a student who lost passport while inside the Istanbul airport. The situation was solved after 3 days. This situation has prompted us to make a policy that all faculty-led programs must have two staff (one faculty leader and a staff) to help out with the faculty-led program.
- Our office actively participated in MaCIE sessions and updates, advocating for international education issues and contributing to our field's progress.
- We attended meetings with Worcester/Boston international educators/advisors and MaCIE sessions to stay updated on developments in the field.
- We organized engaging events like the Global Village where we combine the Study Abroad Fair with international students showcasing their countries. This event's purpose is to have an interaction between the American students who are thinking of studying abroad and our international students can talk about their countries and shared their experiences, fostering connections.
- We celebrated diversity through a successful International Night, offering a journey around the world through diverse cuisines and the program highlight showcasing "Harana" a Philippine cultural heritage.
- Working closely with Student Development Office, and Summer Bridge program to introduced OIE services and programs to students.
- We explored potential collaborations with organizations and overseas institutions for the purpose of recruiting more undergraduate students to study at Fitchburg State.
- We successfully organized four faculty-led programs with about 50 students, 6 faculty members and one staff participated.
- Provided guidance to multiple students regarding faculty-led programs, involving meetings with financial aid, academic advisors, Trio Services, parents/guardians, and providers.
- Supported faculty in developing and executing faculty-led programs,
- Managed updates and maintenance of the OIE website, particularly the study abroad section and the CPT section for international students. Also, worked closely with student workers for website tasks and organizing information.
- Successfully coordinated all aspects of the Summer Global Ambassador Scholarships, streamlining the process and timeline for study abroad scholarships
- Conducted information sessions for all planned faculty-led programs.

- Organized pre-departure orientations for all students participating in Study Abroad, ensuring they were well-prepared for their upcoming study abroad experiences.
- Assisted students in applying for passports, and visa including accompanying them to the post office and consular offices for a smooth process.
- Facilitated cultural activities and gatherings for international students to promote a sense of community and meetings between exchange students and prospective participants, fostering connections for future programs, particularly to our exchange partners.

VI Action Plan for 2023-24

(Insert your 23-24 Action Plan from last year's report)

These were the priorities last year (Academic year 23-24) and what we accomplished and challenges

Overview

The Office of International Education (OIE) has successfully provided high-quality services to both international and study abroad students, despite the challenges of a significant increase in graduate international students and no additional staff. Below is a detailed report on the priorities set for the academic year 2023-24, along with accomplishments, challenges, and recommendations for the next academic year.

Enrollment of New Undergraduate International Students

Accomplishments:

- Maintained the number of matriculated undergraduate international students at 16.
- Successfully enrolled two new freshman students for both Fall and Spring semesters.

Challenges:

- The limited budget and staff hindered efforts to increase international student enrollment.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize recruiting more undergraduate international students using recruiting agents, particularly on-site country agents who understand local customs and have established connections.
- Participate in the 1+2+1 Sino-American partnership to facilitate recruitment of international students. This program, coordinated by AASCU, requires minimal paperwork and ensures students stay on campus for two years, live in dormitories, occupying more spaces in vacant dormitories and pay out-of-state tuition
- Develop more collaborations with local and overseas institutions and companies to increase undergraduate international student numbers and revenue, as international students pay out-of-state tuition fees.

Study Abroad Faculty-Led Programs and partnerships

Accomplishments:

- Successfully executed four faculty-led programs with a total of 50 student participants in 2024.
- The new faculty-led program in Croatia was very successful.
- Introduced an application fee to offset costs for future programs, approved for the 2025 faculty-led programs.
- University of Florence partnership - revisit the proposed partnership with University of Florence and submitted the MOU draft for the partnership between Fitchburg State and University of Warsaw, Poland.

Challenges:

- Six out of ten planned programs were canceled due to not meeting the minimum number of students, despite significant preparatory work.

Recommendations:

- Increase faculty involvement in promoting study abroad programs and recruiting students from their classes.
- Foster more collaboration with faculty members to amplify the visibility of the faculty-led programs and other international opportunities within their classrooms
- Secure additional scholarships for study abroad students.

Campus Internationalization

Accomplishments:

- The International Advisory Committee devised and distributed a survey to department chairs to understand the current internationalization activities and initiatives.
- Will participate in the NAFSA E-Institute on campus internationalization to learn effective strategies for creating an internationalization plan.

Recommendations:

- Encourage faculty to create more partnerships within their network
- Assign a faculty fellow to coordinate internationalization with the Academic departments and other innovative projects such as COIL, etc.

ESL Program Proposal

Challenges:

- The proposed ESL program did not receive attention or progress during the academic year.

Recommendations:

- Increase discussions among stakeholders to prioritize and develop the ESL program, which can serve as a feeder for undergraduate and graduate matriculated students.
- If developing an intensive language program is challenging, start with an existing course—Basic English—modified to meet the needs of international students as a bridge program for those requiring assistance in English writing and speaking.

Navigating Post-COVID Regulatory Changes

Accomplishments:

- Successfully adapted to post-COVID regulatory changes, ensuring the availability of in-person classes for graduate students.

New International Student Orientation

Accomplishments:

- The blended approach of virtual and in-person orientation programs has been effective in helping new international students navigate the Fitchburg State campus and its resources and services.

Attendance at Departmental Meetings

Challenges:

- OIE staff were unable to attend departmental meetings regularly due to time constraints and a lack of additional full-time staff.

Expanded Cultural Programs

Accomplishments:

- Successfully organized cultural programs such as the Diwali Celebration, Global Village, and International Night.
- Established the Fitchburg Indian Student Association (FISA), creating a community for Indian students and assisting with the Diwali celebration.

Challenges:

- Limited undergraduate international students to run the Student International Club.

Recommendations:

- Encourage the formation of new student clubs, particularly for graduate students, and ensure approved clubs receive budgets for their events.

Conclusion

The OIE has made significant strides in achieving its priorities despite various challenges. Moving forward, strategic recommendations will help enhance internationalization efforts, increase international student enrollment, and provide robust support for international and study abroad students.

For efficiencies:

- A targeted approach to expedite the admission process for undergraduate international students is proposed. This includes the streamlining of procedures, such as waiving evaluations for straightforward high school diplomas obtained from foreign institutions. In light of receding pandemic concerns, the heightened enthusiasm among students for international travel is an opportunity that necessitates seizing.
- Capitalizing on the momentum of students' eagerness to travel, it is prudent to recalibrate the processes involved in the student admission journey, while concurrently expanding the array of student services extended.
- To further augment our recruitment efforts, an organized approach involving our alumni and current students as brand ambassadors is recommended. The referral mechanism offers a budget-conscious strategy for expanding our outreach.
- With regard to Study Abroad programs, fostering collaboration with faculty members to amplify the visibility of these programs and other international opportunities within their classrooms is paramount.
- Engage in alternative methods of delivering orientation, conducting virtual interactions to address students' queries, and focusing on students applying for visas are key strategies in this context.
- The utilization of agents as recruitment partners in the endeavor to attract international students is a viable avenue to explore.
- Furthermore, diversifying our academic offerings by incorporating additional STEM-designated graduate programs is advised, as this is anticipated to enhance the appeal of our institution to prospective international students.

VII Assessment Report for 2023-24

Were the Action Plan objectives met? Provide in list or table format that parallels item VI above.

Goals were achieved. The highlight of OIE's accomplishments has to be the impressive boost in **new international** students, hitting a high of **220 new** students for both Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. Not to forget, Study Abroad program also shone brightly with a fantastic 30% increase in participation. See above in VI for accomplishments and challenges

VIII Other Accomplishments:

List accomplishments not already captured above.

See above in V, the programs we have done include accomplishments also.

IX Action Plan 2024-2025:

<p>Planned Initiatives for 2023-24 Add more rows as needed</p>	<p>Associated Strategic Plan Goal & Strategy Goal # followed by Strategy # ex: 3.2</p>	<p>Indicate if a DEI initiative</p>
<p>Office of International Education Goals for Academic Year 2024-2025</p> <p>I hope these goals will help us make significant strides in international education and global engagement, fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment at Fitchburg State University.</p> <p>These goals are in addition to the current services we offer to International Students and Study abroad students.</p> <p>1. Increase Undergraduate International Enrollment:</p> <p>Work with Enrollment management office to develop innovative strategies to attract 25 new undergraduate international students to study at Fitchburg State University (15 Fall semester and 10 Spring semester). Work with Marketing office to leverage digital marketing, social media campaigns, and alumni networks and current students. Hopefully approve the use of agents in countries that has a high rate of visa approval.</p> <p>2. Expand Study Abroad Participation:</p> <p>Enhance the visibility and appeal of study abroad programs among students and faculty. Implement</p>		

targeted marketing campaigns, offer more diverse program options, and collaborate with faculty to integrate study abroad opportunities into the curriculum. Meet with the Development Office and see if there might be more money that we can use as scholarship for study abroad faculty-led programs. Create a new faculty-led program for First Year experience and use this as recruitment incentive. We will need scholarships for this.

3. Work with International Advisory Committee to start the Internationalization Processes through NAFSA e-Institute Knowledge:

Together with the IAC, we will apply insights and strategies gained from the NAFSA Executive Leadership e-Institute to strengthen and streamline the university's internationalization efforts. Ensure these processes are effectively communicated and integrated across campus departments.

4. Strengthen International Partnerships:

Finalize the partnership with the University of Warsaw. Develop collaborative academic programs including COIL, research initiatives, and student exchange opportunities to enhance the global footprint of Fitchburg State University.

5. Engage in AASCU 1+2+1 Sino-American Articulation Partnerships:

<p>Advocate for and secure approval from university leadership to participate in the AASCU 1+2+1 program. Emphasize the benefits of gaining more undergraduate students who will pay the 'out of state' tuition fees for two years. We have the capacity to provide necessary services to the Chinese accepted students in this program.</p> <p>6. Explore the Creation of an ESL Program or Investigate the feasibility</p> <p>of offering an English course for international students if we participate in the Sino-American AASCU program (if establishing an English as a Second Language (ESL) program will be a bit difficult). Assess demand and resource requirements to support international students' language proficiency and academic success.</p> <p>7. Initiate Collaboration for COIL Program:</p> <p>Begin working with faculty to develop Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programs. Encourage faculty to create joint projects with international partners, integrating virtual exchanges and global perspectives into the classroom.</p> <p>8. Introduce Additional Graduate Programs in STEM and Specialized Fields:</p> <p>Explore the option of introducing additional graduate programs in STEM fields or specialized programs tailored to meet the workforce demands of the region, the nation, and international</p>		
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<p>students' home countries. This aligns with the institution's goal of increasing international student enrollment.</p> <p>Looking at the NEBHE's policy brief, to quote: "The mental health provider field—both nationally and in New England—lacks diversity. The majority of providers (75% nationally and 79% in New England) identify as White women. Higher education and government leaders can work in concert to address the mental health crisis through an equity lens by taking a three-pronged approach that includes recruitment and retention of new, diverse talent into the mental health field." With this policy brief in mind, I recommend that Fitchburg State offer an on-campus section of the MS in Mental Health Counseling. Marketing this program to international students, particularly those who already speak two languages, can attract a diverse cohort well-suited to meet the needs of the mental health provider field.</p>		

Updates to the Action Plan may be submitted via a revised Annual Report.

X Reflection:

Take this section to reflect on--

1) *Initiatives that you may be considering for 24-25 academic year that you did not already capture above.*

1. This #1 is the same recommendation I had last year's report. Since I have not seen that these have been done, I am putting this as my recommendation again this year's annual report.

I recommend that Fitchburg State University work on intensifying its marketing efforts in the regions of Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America to further enhance the institution's global presence and attract a diverse pool of **undergraduate international** students. These regions hold immense potential in terms of both academic talent and cultural diversity. By strategically focusing our marketing initiatives in these areas, we can effectively highlight the distinctive academic programs, enriching campus environment, and robust student support services that define Fitchburg State University. I believe that by forging stronger collaborations with educational partners, embassies, influential networks and utilizing recruitment agents across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, we can not only increase the enrollment of international students but also foster meaningful international exchanges that enrich the fabric of our university community. This targeted approach aligns with our commitment to cultivating a globally engaged learning environment and can contribute significantly to the **economic growth** and reputation of Fitchburg State University on the global stage.

2. To align with the institution's goal of increasing international student enrollment, I recommend to explore the option of introducing additional graduate programs in STEM fields or specialized programs tailored to meet the workforce demands of the region, the nation, and international students' home countries.

Looking at the NEBHE's policy brief, to quote: "The mental health provider field—both nationally and in New England—lacks diversity. The majority of providers (75% nationally and 79% in New England) identify as White women. Higher education and government leaders can work in concert to address the mental health crisis through an equity lens by taking a three-pronged approach that includes recruitment and retention of new, diverse talent into the mental health field." With this policy brief in mind, I recommend that Fitchburg State **offer an on-campus section of the MS in Mental Health Counseling. Marketing this program to international students**, particularly those who already speak two languages, can attract a diverse cohort well-suited to meet the needs of the mental health provider field.

3. The Master of Science in Computer Science program is highly sought after by graduate international students. However, expanding its student capacity has proven to be a challenge due to the difficulty in recruiting faculty members to teach in person courses for this specific program. It may be beneficial to offer enticing incentives to attract more faculty members with expertise in the field of Computer Science. This can help address the demand for MS Computer Science and enhance the institution's capacity to accommodate more international students.