

Minutes PIER Meeting

Wednesday, November 2, 2005

1:30pm @ University of San Diego

A. Welcome: Chair Kim Jackson welcomed everyone to the PIER meeting, with a special welcome to the overseas advisors.

B. Introduction of Mr. Steve Fultz, Director of Admissions at USD.

Mr. Fultz welcomed PIER and the overseas advisors to the USD campus and briefly spoke about the new things going on at campus. New residence halls have opened up on campus, and the university is focusing on a program in peace studies. USD will be the home of one of three peace studies programs in the USA. It is important to focus on peace studies, economics, and to reflect on their mission as a Catholic University. It will help bring to students what it means to be globally competent and to provide them with the tools they will need to survive in a very conflicting world. He went on to say that he was very excited to see the international advisors and the PIER group on campus and he thanked everyone for spending time on campus today.

C. Introduction of PIER Members: In keeping with tradition, all members in attendance introduced themselves by name and institution.

D. PIER Board Presentation: Kim acknowledged the outgoing PIER Chair Maria S. Malloy, with a certificate of appreciation and outstanding achievement. Kim thanked Maria for her service of PIER and especially for the mentorship to her. She groomed her well and made big shoes for her to step into. A personal thank you, for her exceptional leadership to her and to PIER.

E. PIER Business

1. Membership: Kasey McCarthy

a. Kasey informed everyone that as of 11/02/05 there were 111 members. Two lists would be passed around the room with everyone's information. She asked that everyone please confirm their contact information.

b. The next meeting will be held at GIA and per security reasons if you are not a PIER member, or if you are not a DHS or USCIS guest you will not be allowed in.

2. Treasurer: Eric Abutin

a. Eric informed the membership that we had \$2035.63 in checking and \$35.93 in savings.

3. Chair Elect: Olga Piro

a. Olga mentioned that everyone who had requested a mentor had been assigned one, and if you hadn't yet been assigned a mentor or wanted to sign up for a mentor to please contact her now or throughout the year.

4. Chair: Kim Jackson

a. Kim informed everyone that a PIER list serve was created to help support the work that we do, and in case a mentor wasn't available, someone's questions could still be answered. She mentioned that it is completely voluntary. Only three people have signed up so far. You can sign up and don't ever have to use it if you don't want to but it is there in case you ever do need it.

Announcement from the Audience:

- ✓ Yvette Fontain mentioned that the position submitted by Stephanie Pasenajen would start reviewing resumes on the 14th of November.

b. Kim shared some information from the sessions attended at NAFSA Region XII conference.

1. LAX contact: John Huizar, Chief Inspector SEVIS Coordinator, CBP
310.568.7501, john.a.huizar@dhs.gov

2. The new I-515A must be sent directly to Washington (SEVP/I-515A Processing Team, 800 K St., N.W., Suite 100, Washington, DC 20536). Even if person gets the old I-515, send to this address, not address on form.

2b. Sometimes students are given an I-515A by mistake saying they have to pay SEVIS fee. DSO should write a letter to Wash address, they will correct in 2-3 weeks and return documents back. DSO should go ahead and register these people in SEVIS and NOT WAIT until the documents come back to do so.

3. Post-completion OPT students who travel - Should they be prepared to show they have a job and are re-entering the U.S. to resume employment. No, not at LAX at this time. But, student's I-20 signature must be no more than 6 mos. old.

4. On question regarding SEVIS access at LAX:

Everyone has same level of access to SEVIS information; Primary inspections has access but does not use due to time constraints-they have 11-15 seconds per person; Soft secondary uses the SEVIS info which is Name, DOB, academic status of visitor; start and end dates of program. Does not see Notes section! Officer never sees if the student record is terminated.

5. Can student with EAD application pending travel? Yes, as long as they have receipt notice (I-797) and I-20 indicates OPT dates.

6. SEVP contact information

- For I-901 fee payment help – visit www.ice.gov/sevis/i901; call Customer Service Hotline at 785.330.1048; or, email at fmjfee.SEVIS@dhs.gov.
- For comments, concerns, suggestions – email SEVIS.Source@dhs.gov; call 202.305.2346, fax 202.353.3723; or, write ICE/SEVIS, 800 K Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20536.
- For school certification questions (check status of I-17, confirm receipt of payment or receive information on a site visit) – email the SEVP School Certification Branch at schoolcert.SEVIS.dhs.gov; call 202.305.2346 or fax 202-353.3723. The School Certification Branch is organized on a state-by-state basis. If a school administrator contacts the School Certification Branch, the staff will direct the call or message to the Case Analyst working with schools in that state.

- ✓ **Question to audience** from Mia S: How many have received I515a since they came into effect? Only a couple of people. Mia has 2 out of 3 cases were the student submitted the documentation directly to DC without notifying the DSO and even if incorrect information was provided they are getting approved. She found out because she received the information back from DC.

Response from audience: Olga Piro mentioned that the problem she is facing is that they are not being returned for months, and several audience members agreed. Jane K. suggested that we call the CBP office for clarification. Kim will distribute email and phone number for CBP.

7. TCN Session: Sandra Raynes was present at that session:

- ✓ The appointment system at all American consulates in Mexico is now live.
- ✓ The ones in Canada will go live as of 12/09/05. They will be new also but we won't see any changes until March 2006.
- ✓ If you have students who are making appointments in Mexico you may contact Sandra if you have any problems.
- ✓ Tijuana will take F1 renewals
- ✓ B2 to F1 only with visa annotation.
- ✓ Someone who is on a visa waiver but wants to change to F,J, or M – then email Sandra first.
- ✓ No Visitor visa applicants or any applicants from the 26 special interest list
- ✓ Sandra is really good about getting back to us however we must be selective on what we contact her for. You may fax Sandra for general information, anything else you can email her at: raynes@state.gov. This is to be used conservatively and DO NOT give to students.

Questions/ Comments from the Audience:

- ✓ **Doug B:** with the new systems are they supposed to increase TCN appointments?
Answer: (Kim) Yes, especially for J and M's in Canada.
- ✓ **Danielle:** Has anyone gone through the new Interim EAD process
Answer: (Yvette R) Yes, but they had not heard back from the student so they are assuming that it went well. She gave them the website and instructed them to do it on their own.
- ✓ **Audience:** J1 auipar student who wants to change to F1 was sent to Chula Vista
Answer: (Doug B) – Would talk to advisor after the meeting.
- ✓ **Mike Dietz:** J to F change of status takes a long time.
- ✓ **Audience:** Is it ok to allow them to take classes while pending?
Answer: (Kim) Don't know but perhaps people can ask?
- ✓ **Vince:** Question about NSEERS students. They are now getting a lot of Saudi students and are still advising them to not travel to Mexico. Does that still apply?
Audience: Yes it still applies
- ✓ **Olga** – informed a Saudi student what to do and he came back to Olga and informed her that yes he had spoken to the officers and he decided not to travel after all.
- ✓ **Audience:** Had NSEERS student that went to TJ and came back with no problems.
- ✓ **Kasey:** Please remind your students that they need a tourist visa to enter Mexico; otherwise if something happens to them while in Mexico the Mexican authorities can deport them from Mexico.

F. CSC Tour information provided by Eric Abutin.

Tour of the California Service Center by National Association of Foreign Student Advisors
October 12, 2005, Wednesday 1:30 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.(60 participants)

CSC is located in the Chet Holifield Federal Building in Laguna Niguel, CA. Wide seven floor building.

In addition to the CSC the Federal Building also contains:

- ✓ Social Security Administration
- ✓ National Archives and Records Administration

- , Pacific Region is housed here and is the busiest genealogical research organization out of NARA's nine regional facilities in the United States.
- Originally built for the aerospace firm Rockwell Autonetics.
- The building is in the style of a ziggurat, an ancient Babylonian stepped pyramid

Training Room

Jennifer Louis: Assistant Center Director of Division II

Jay Rangaswamy: SCAO, Division II

Judy Mitchell, NAFSA Regional Coordinator, Region XII (Cal Poly Pomona) CIPP-RR (Committee on Immigration Policy and Practice Regional Representative)

Begin Tour: Approximately 60 attendants including:

- Government Representatives: **Denise Mackie-Smith**, Branch Chief for Information Technology, SEVP, Washington D.C. **Lekisha Clayton**, Analyst, Resource Management Branch, SEVP, Washington D.C. **Henry Scott**, Program Officer, Office of International Education, State Departments Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs
- Group was broken into 4 groups

SCOT Mail/Fileroom

- 550 employee contracted by SCOT for data processing to include the mailroom, data entry, and processing in 2 shifts
- Total of 700 CSC employees
- Approximately 25-30K incoming mail a month
- Viewed where mail comes in. All mail is X-rayed and then goes to presort.
- 16 Pre sorters who sort the applications: Sorting fees
- Approximate generated monthly revenue from application fees: \$25 million
- From the presort area the applications are sorted into a filing area until applications go to data entry
- Applications to Data Entry: Bar code: WAC added

Brief walkthrough of Div V, III, XII

- Division V: I-90s, I-212, I-612, I-824
- Division III: I-130s, I-751s
- Division XII

Department that handles bulk e-mail & phone inquiries for the USCIS National Customer Service Center

Met Congressional Liaison team: Handles congressional inquiries in a timely manner

Walkthrough of DIV II/Premium Processing Room/General Adjudication Process

- September 2005: Approx. 2000 I-765 applications approved and 86 denied
- Currently I-765 60-90 days processing time
- Division II adjudication: **I-129** Petition for a non-immigrant worker, **I-539** Application to extend/change nonimmigrant status, **I-102** Application for Replacement/Initial Non-immigrant Arrival-Departure, **I-765** Application for employment authorization (F academic student OPT, CPT, Econ. Hardship, M, and J)
- Premium Processing: Small Office and designated adjudicators

Brief walkthrough of DIV I

- I-131, I-140, I-360, I-485, I-526, I-824, I-829

Return to training rooms for Q & A Session

- Questions submitted to CSC prior to the NAFSA conference that were answered at the Oct. 11th CSC session and Oct. 12th CSC tour have been posted on NAFSA Region XII website at www.region12.nafsa.org, choose Immigration > CSC - NAFSA Liaison Meeting Reports > CSC Tour-Q&A-October 12, 2005

USCIS Fee Adjustments: Effective October 26, 2005 due to inflation

- I-539: \$200 (previously \$195) Revision date: 10/26/2005, OMB 1615-0003 Exp. 11/30/2007 Website states 07/30/04 still accepted
- I-765: \$180 (previously \$175) Revision date: 10/26/2005, OMB 1615-0040 Exp. 08/31/2008, Website states 01/31/05 still accepted
- I-129: \$190 (previously \$185) Revision date: 10/26/2005, Exp. 05/31/2008, Website 03/17/05 still accepted

On September 28, 2005 USCIS made effective a revised fee to Form I-290B (Notice of Appeal to the Administrative Appeals Unit)

- I-290B: \$385 (previously \$110)
- Same as Motion to Reopen or Reconsider USCIS decision

G. Overseas Advisor introductions by Mia Scavonie:

Mia introduced our guests, and spoke about a DOS training program for overseas advising offices. This is supported by National Commissions and DOS to support American education abroad. They are our counterparts and support what we do all around the world. Over 450 advisors involved in the network. There are four people from fullbright and 1 regional advisor, who represents over 28 countries over central Europe.

1. Alexandra Enzi * Austria – American Educational Commission (Fulbright Commission)

Alexandra spoke about how the Fulbright program in Austria was established in June 6, 1950, when the two governments signed the Fulbright Agreement, and the first exchanges under its auspices took place during the 1951-52 academic year.

She mentioned how they have two jobs. One as the program officer which promotes study abroad and the other as the education USA advisor. Their biggest job is informing them about US education. The different schools and locations, and to inform them on how to research for schools but not particularly advise them on a specific school. The big concern is the 3 year degrees from Austria. Students are very insecure about graduating and then not being able to come to the US to study graduate degrees.

She mentioned that the Austria office is special as it is in the US Embassy building. They are very restricted on who can be admitted into the building, etc; therefore they hold a lot of lectures, and do a lot of outreach to then follow up. They have a great program were they invite prospective students to a retreat style fair and have faculty and students there for Q&A, etc. for 4 days. They also have an online forum that really helps.

2. Gaurav Ka * Nepal Fulbright Commission

Gaurav spoke about how they assist Nepalese students wanting to study in the USA or USA students wanting to study in Nepal.

- ✓ Only US education center in Nepal and they complete full assessment of the student that wants to study in the US and then meet with the student individually to go over their questions, etc.
- ✓ The student can take the TOEFL, GMAT, and GRE, all at their center.
- ✓ Once the student has been granted their visa they have a pre-departure orientation to go over culture shock, the US educational system, etc.
- ✓ In 2004 their office had 47,000 visitors of which 15,000 students came to the US.
- ✓ There are 4,300 Nepalese students studying in US. 70% undergraduate and 30% graduate. A 17.3 increase the biggest in the whole region.

He congratulated the PIER group as it is great what we are doing and sharing knowledge.

3. Tatiana Rudnitskaya * Education Advisor, American Education Information Center, Russia

Tatiana spoke about Russia's population of more than 1 million people. It is made up of about 100 high schools and about 80 universities of higher education. The center opened in 1994. They have been working for 11 years now. The center organizes annual information fairs, in which about 500 people – schools / students that attend the fairs. Standard practice includes lectures about different aspects of education, organizing meetings with representatives from US schools, and individual consultations. About 70% are TOEFL and GRE questions.

Their center is located in center of city which is close to many universities. It is in a public library therefore they get many visitors. Programs of interest have been business, economics and medicine; however computer/natural sciences and engineering are the programs of newer interest. The educational situation not as good as they want it to be in Russia especially because of corruption within the higher education industry; however the government is trying to intervene. The Russian educational system is currently under reform and the universities began transitioning to a system of similar to that of Britain and the USA.

4. Fanny Del Rio * Program Officer and Educational Advisor in Uruguay

Fanny spoke about how they currently do not have a lot of students here in the USA; however they hope to have more students soon. She mentioned that we share a common goal which is for more international students to come to the USA. That is their objective, to guide students for successful USA education.

Most of their students will apply for tuition waivers, scholarships, etc, as US education is much more expensive than the education in their home country especially since public education is free. They focus on the prestige of studying in the US. The culture, ethical values of US the educational system. We are all working in the same field and trying to reach the same objectives. They can be reached through the educational USA website. It is a great tool for everyone. She encouraged us to let them know about our programs at our universities, so that they can let their students know about our schools.

5. Wes Teter * REAC for Northern and Central Europe

Wes spoke about working for Fulbright and the DOS.

Some services they provide include:

- ✓ Informing student of funding
- ✓ practical steps on testing
- ✓ goal is to match students with proper schools
- ✓ preparing them for culture shock
- ✓ visa policies

We can send them information on our programs and they can then disseminate them to their 450 offices. They work for the department of state to keep the advisors up to date; therefore he requested that we please send them any updates we have.

Northern and central Europe is made up of about 45 countries. He encouraged us to please use the tools to our advantage. (4 tools)

a. **European Credit Transfer System** – ECTS makes study programs easy to read and compare for all students, local and foreign. ECTS facilitates mobility and academic recognition. ECTS helps universities to organize and revise their study programs. ECTS can be used across a variety of programs and modes of delivery.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html

b. **Diploma Supplement** – A free document available to every student graduating from 2005 in the EHEA which can be attached to a higher education diploma aiming at improving international transparency and facilitate credential evaluation. It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content, status of the studies that were successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/rec_qual/recognition/diploma.en.html

c. **Eramus Mundus** – A 230 million dollar scholarship program for master level students to study in Europe. It is configured into a multilateral framework of institutions to attract the worlds best and brightest students. Each European consortium can establish institutional ties with third countries such as the US to exchange these prestigious students. Contact the coordinator of each program for details of these partnerships.

d. **Quality Assurance Agencies in Europe** – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) will oversee the establishment and functioning of national quality assurance agencies. ENQA promotes transparency and quality assurance and in 2005 is taking steps to outline the practical dimensions of introducing a peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis.

Please connect with education USA we are all partners.

Questions from the Audience:

✓ **Danielle M.:** Curious about your library resources, what is helpful for you to have onsite, i.e. CD's, Catalogs and what is your process for keeping up with the schools?

Answer: Nepal center: Receives CD's and Catalogs. Will be getting a bigger building soon; therefore please only send catalogs. The REAC's keep them updated.

• Russian center: Center has a lot of room to house any type of materials provided by the schools and they keep everything. They do not throw anything away therefore giving the visitors more options. Again the REAC keeps them updated.

✓ **Audience:** Do you advise students on degrees that will help them for the jobs in their home country? We advise programs depending on jobs they can get here in the US.

Answer: Austrian center: In Austria a bachelor's degree from a US institution is not accepted as academic program. They need a master's degree to be able to get a job. They advise on what their goal is, either to work in the US or back home and then find an appropriate program.

✓ **Audience:** Why are there more undergrad instead of grad

Answer: Nepal – schools in Nepal are preparing them better than before therefore students are better prepared to leave earlier. The quality of education in Nepal is not as good as US.

✓ **Kim:** Can you please explain what liberal education is and courses, etc. Students are surprised when they get here and inquire as to why they have to take all of this other stuff outside their majors. Do they understand?

Answer: Uruguay center: Part of the adjustment experience is the educational system. They have orientation but not all of them read or understand the materials. US school orientation is very useful.

- ✓ **Kim:** You provide resources and information on how to get here. We are the receiving end. Is there anything you would like us to know about your students, etc? Who do you hope we are at the other end that you are sending your student to?

Answer: Uruguay center: It is hard to have a one on one communication, but will be useful when student contacts us to guide them to their educational center in their country so that they can prepare them on what to expect, and to guide them on how to apply, etc. They advise to contact their international student advisor once in the US.

- Nepal center: When they do their group advising, they advise on different educational structures, requirements, etc. such as essay requirements, reference letters, etc.

- ✓ **Olga** In the countries you represent do you see special interest in them doing short term professional certificate programs? Example 9 month programs, etc.

Answer: Nepal center: It is more likely that they will not get a visa for short term program. Maybe J, or M visa but not F1 visa.

- Russian center: I specialize in exchange programs but interested in this information.

- ✓ **Drew:** Most community college students come from language schools, students with lower English skills what do you advise?

Answer: The Full Bright commission scholarship requires a TOEFL score of 550. They do have an occasional student who does not have TOEFL and they will take intensive English courses here in the US.

- Nepal center: In South Asia they are seeing more of a trend to attend English Language Programs. They advise the students to have a certain level of English.
- Russian center: It is cheaper for the students to take English courses in country.

H. Answer to Questions Sent In Before the September Meeting that were not answered * CIS/CSC: Addressed by Chuck Kotkin.

Question: If an alien applies for AOS at the Texas Service Center, then moves to San Diego and files the AR-11, is his application automatically transferred to CSC, or will it be transferred only upon request? Does the transfer slow down processing time? Since the processing times are now shorter, is it OK, if this person was to now live in San Diego and leave his application in Texas for processing (fingerprints already done).

Answer: This question was sent to CSC for clarification. If an alien applies for AOS at one Service Center and then moves to the jurisdiction of another Service Center, his AOS application can be processed at either Service Center. The transferring of the A file will generally slow down the processing of AOS. Therefore, if everything is good to go - then the AOS can be adjudicated at its current location. Sometimes, the processing times are faster at one Service Center than another. In such cases, it is up to the adjudicator to decide.

Question: If CIS CSC receives an I-765 application before the student's I-20 end date, and the dates requested are within the grace period but it takes 90 days before the EAD is issued, is the student legally in the U.S.? Also, will the adjudicating officer issue the EAD with dates in the past or a date from the day of adjudication? What if adjudication is past the grace period?

Answer: Yes, as long as the application is timely filed (should be before the completion end date). We do not back date. We use date of adjudication or future recommended date.

Question: Recently several RFE's have been sent requesting that the SEVIS Fee be paid when a student has an extension of visa status on an I-20 that was issued prior to September 1, 2004. Why is this being requested? How can this be resolved? It is my understanding from the regulations that the SEVIS payment does not need to be paid by continuing students who have maintained their status.

Answer: Continuing students do not need to pay the fee. Do you have a particular WAC number so we can instruct or educate the officer(s) asking for this type of RFE?

Question: With the new "crackdown" on community colleges not being able to issue I-20s for students who want to pursue a certificate program, students will need to indicate their intent to pursue the associate degree or transfer to a four-year university. The question is, if students complete requirements for a certificate, can they still apply for OPT?

Answer: Students are eligible for OPT if they are taking a course of study leading to a degree.

Question from Ana: the above question relates to comments from a DSO concerning that DSO's are being told that certificate programs were no longer going to be allowed. I have not heard anything new about certificate programs, have you?

Answer: No. I have to ask and will get back to you...

Conclusion of meeting:

- ✓ Kim thanked Maria for hosting the meeting, the advisors for joining us and Mia for hosting the advisors.
- ✓ Maria thanked Kim for the certificate and the rest of PIER as it was definitely a team effort. She encouraged everyone to be part of PIER board as it is a rewarding experience.
- ✓ **Next meeting is January 11, 2006 at the Gemological Institute of America.**

I. Meeting Adjourned: Kim adjourned the meeting at 3:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Diaz

PIER Secretary 2005-2006

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