

Yes and No:

When an Intensive English Program's Policies and ISSS' Policies Conflict

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Tags

Education Policy; International Enrollment Management; International Student and Scholar Services; Management and Operations; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

This International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) department supports over 900 students and faculty each year. The not-for-profit higher education institution consists of undergraduate programs, graduate programs, study abroad sites, and language programs like the Intensive English Program (IEP). The IEP enrolls less than 100 international students per year in the quarterly program. The ISSS office must work with each program to ensure compliance with their policies and immigration regulations. At times, the IEP's admissions and academic policies and procedures are not aligned with ISSS' which results in confusion for the students, staff, and administration. The following two cases will be examined below: 1) the use of conditional scholarship funds as proof of financial support, and 2) the consequences of leaving the program early.

Case 1

International student Esther was recently admitted into the IEP for one session. She informed the IEP and ISSS offices that she has been conditionally awarded a financial grant and would like to use the funds for a tuition

deposit waiver and as evidence of financial support in order to receive her I-20. According to IEP policy, a program deposit must be paid before an I-20 can be issued.

The IEP's policy is to accept proof of scholarships and other sources of funding in lieu of a tuition deposit; however, since the award is conditional, the IEP and ISSS department are unsure how to proceed since technically the student has not yet secured the funds. Unfortunately, the conditional funds will not be dispersed until after Esther needs the I-20 to apply for a student visa. Additionally, she does not have enough personal funds to show proof of financial support.

After multiple discussions between the IEP admissions office and the ISSS office, it was determined that the IEP needed a clear policy about what kind of documentation could and could not be used for a deposit waiver. Since SEVP's policies are not explicit on what to do in a situation like this, ISSS would follow IEP policy on what, if any, conditional documentation can be used for the issuance of an initial I-20.

The IEP determined that since Esther was likely to receive her funding, it would waive the tuition deposit payment for her. She was also issued an I-20 based on her conditional funding letter. However, as soon as Esther met the conditions of the award, she was required to show her International Student Advisor proof that she received the funds to pay for her tuition and living costs.

Discussion questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- With consideration to the conditions outlined in the financial letter, to what extent should the IEP and ISSS use this letter as financial documentation?
- Should the IEP have allowed the student to use the letter as a tuition deposit waiver?
- What happens if a student needs to pay her tuition, but the scholarship funds have not arrived?
- Which office do you think should be responsible for the ultimate policy on what kind of funding can be used for the issuance of an I-20?

Case 2

Aron is a university student on an F-1 student visa studying in the eight-week IEP summer session to improve his English. He is in good academic standing with no absences. Halfway through the program, Aron notifies the program director that he must leave the program two weeks early in order to return home to start his university courses.

According to IEP policy, since Aron did not have any absences, he could skip the last two weeks of class and still maintain an 80% attendance rate which is required for successful competition of the program. The director gave permission to the student to leave the program early and invited him back to study the following summer. Nothing was said to Aron about needing to talk with ISSS, nor did the director communicate with the ISSS office about his plan for early departure.

However, when the DSO learned of Aron's plans, they immediately set up a meeting with him to discuss how his early departure will impact his F-1 status. Despite the fact that Aron was technically in good academic standing

in the IEP's eyes, the ISSS department would have to terminate his record in SEVIS due to Authorized Early Withdraw. Aron's DSO needed to make sure Aron understood the effects of termination, one being that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents may investigate to confirm the departure of the student (SEVIS, 2019).

Moving forward, the IEP instituted a new policy that required all program personnel to notify the ISSS office when a student planned to leave early. The student will also need to meet with their DSO to learn how their F-1 status will be affected.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- In what ways could communication be improved between the students, IEP, and ISSS?
- What might be good practice when the IEP writes new policy and trains new hires?
- Consider these other common issues and discuss how the IEP and ISSS departments should handle them:
 - When a student is not making academic progress in the program (how to define making academic progress? Is it measurable? Does it affect their status?);
 - Concurrent enrollment between a community college and IEP; annual breaks (when are they eligible? How is it being recorded in SEVIS and communicated across offices?);
 - Late arrivals (is the 20% absence rule enforced?);
 - Work authorization in an IEP.

Works Cited

SEVIS (Ed.). (2019, June 28). Terminate a Student. Retrieved March 29, 2020, from <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-help-hub/student-records/completions-and-terminations/terminate-a-student>