

# The Traveling Pencil: Examining International Student Services

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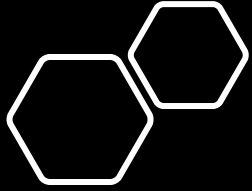
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# Abstract

International students are brave to leave their homeland and come to the United States to pursue a college education. Students travel across oceans and take long flights to reach a city they may have only viewed on the college website but never visited in person. The city is their new home for two to four years or more, depending on the degree they pursue. The college and the higher education environment in a different country are new to them too. As students, we thought how difficult it was to come to a new place and be expected to learn all the new rules, get familiar with the campus, find a place to eat that serves food that you like, overcome a language barrier, and study for classes at the same time. We wanted to examine services international student offices at state colleges offer and learn how currently enrolled students help international students get acclimated to a college campus.

# Introduction

- State colleges in Florida have open door admissions policies. International students who meet admission requirements for career and degree programs have the opportunity to attend one of the 26 state colleges in Florida (FLDOE.org, 2021). Each college has an International Services Office with staff to help students work through the admission process and get enrolled in classes.
- More than one million international students attend college in the United States (Batalova and Israel, 2021). All these students must follow strict government rules to keep visas current to stay in college.
- The questions we ask in our research are what are the services provided by International Services Office on a state college in Florida, and what ways can currently enrolled students help international students get acclimated to the college campus?



# Background

- US News (2020) created a report showing the top ten community colleges in the United States with high enrollment of international students in 2018-2019. The report had two state colleges in Florida on the list, Valencia College and Miami Dade College. Valencia had 1,799 students and Miami Dade had 1,749 students.
- We selected three state colleges Eastern Florida State College, Miami Dade College, and Santa Fe College to use in our study.
  - ❑ Eastern Florida has four campuses in Brevard County and is a feeder school to the University of Central Florida and Florida Institute of Technology. College Factual states Eastern Florida has approximately 125 international students.
  - ❑ Miami Dade has eight campuses in Dade County, and listed as one of the top state colleges in Florida with high international student enrollment of 1,749.
  - ❑ Santa Fe is located in Gainesville, Florida, and is a feeder school to the University of Florida. Santa Fe has approximately 374 international students.
- Our study helps to shed light on what is different and the same international student services at each selected college and how currently enrolled students support international students on their campuses.



# Methods

- We selected colleges in different parts of the state to research and learn about their services available to international students. We examined information for Eastern Florida, Miami Dade, and Santa Fe colleges.
- We searched the Internet to locate credible sources for enrollment numbers and campus activities.
- We looked at student clubs on the Student Life section of the college websites.
- We discussed ways currently enrolled students could help new international students get acclimated to the college campus.



**Question: What services do state public colleges International Student Office offer international students?**

The chart below shows the information we found on each of the college websites.

Help Students	Eastern Florida State College	Miami-Dade College	Santa Fe College
Applications	✓	✓	✓
Instructions in other languages to complete online application	no	no	Yes; Arabic, Korean, Vietnamese, Spanish, French, Portuguese
Dedicated staff	Yes; 4 campuses – three people (2 in Cocoa and 1 in Melbourne)	Yes; 8 campuses – 6 people (1 person covering 3 campuses)	Yes; 7 campuses - 3 people on main campus
Welcome video	no	Yes; highlighting actual international students talking about why they like the college and they give a greeting in their own language	no
Transcript information	Yes	Yes	Yes
Notice of Department of Homeland Security Regulations	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tuition Assistance Information	International Linkage Institutes	<a href="#">Florida Linkage Institutes</a>	International Linkage Institutes
Other website information	links to housing search options, health & accident insurance, employment options, maintaining status, tuition expenses Different – climate & clothing, income taxes, guide to local resources, student travel	links to housing search options, health & accident insurance, employment options, maintaining status Different - college catalog for policies and rules, <a href="#">5 Steps to Attending MDC</a>	links to housing search options, health & accident insurance, employment options, maintaining status, college catalog for policies and rules

Question: What ways can currently enrolled students help international students get acclimated to the college campus? Findings for Miami Dade College are listed below.

- Miami Dade has a SGA club called the International Peer Mentor Program. The club is open to students on the Kendall Campus. *The purpose of the International Peer Mentor Program is to help new international students find their place in Miami Dade College through academic success and cultural integration activities. In addition to this, the International Peer Mentor Program aims to organize events with the objective of raising awareness and provide assistance to various international initiatives to help developing nations and nations undergoing humanitarian crises* (MDC website, 2021).
- Miami Dade offers an International Student Housing Posting Board. They post a disclaimer on the website that states, “Please note that Miami Dade College does not offer housing. This posting board is meant to be a resource for students to connect with each other to find their own accommodations.”
- Miami Dade has a student newspaper called [The Reporter](#). The newspaper is written and designed for students on all campuses.



Question: What ways can currently enrolled students help international students get acclimated to the college campus? Findings for Santa Fe College are listed below.

- Santa Fe has an International Center. *The Center “is where both domestic and international students can interact and get the services they need. From F-1 Visa support, to advising, study abroad opportunities and more, SF opens doors to a whole new world”* (sfcollege.edu, 2021).
- Santa Fe International Center hosts a Developing Global Citizens podcast.
- Santa Fe has an SGA club called International Student Cultural Association.
- The college does not offer any on campus housing options to students.



**Question: What ways can currently enrolled students help international students get acclimated to the college campus?** Findings for Eastern Florida State College are listed below.

- Eastern Florida offers dormitories on campus, and Miami Dade and Santa Fe does not offer campus housing to international students.
- Eastern Florida does not list any active SGA clubs using the word international.
- We propose a new student initiative called iPeer Tours. Currently enrolled students could offer campus tours to new international students. The purpose of the tour is to help international students get acclimated to the campus as follows:
  1. use a campus map,
  2. find the student services building,
  3. find dining options on campus and close to the campus,
  4. get a student identification card,
  5. pick up a Space Coast Area Transit bus schedule and locate bus stops around campus,
  6. encourage to check email often during the week to stay up on student information,
  7. check the Student Life section on website for sporting games, SGA events,
  8. host peer-to-peer workshops like Where's the Food?, and
  9. converse in common language.

International students have a chance to ask questions in a less intimidating atmosphere with their peers.



# Conclusions

- What are the services provided by International Services Office on a state college in Florida? What ways can currently enrolled students help international students get acclimated to the college campus?
- Eastern Florida, Miami Dade, and Santa Fe offer support services through dedicated international student services offices mainly in admissions and advising for academic needs.
- Miami Dade, Santa Fe, and Eastern Florida websites indicate all three colleges offer similar services to international students. The services support prospective students with admission applications, explaining the visa rules, and providing information to external services for housing and transportation.
- Santa Fe College has a dedicated International Student Center with multiple ways for students to get support and information as international students or who want to have an international student experience. These services are hosted in one building on campus similar to a student services building at Eastern Florida with multiple support services in one place.
- Currently enrolled students at all three colleges participate in SGA events and clubs to engage with international students. Miami Dade has the largest enrollment and offers a wide variety of SGA and campus events with diverse food, music, and art for its student population.
- International students can visit any of the three college websites to get a preview of campus events and important information about the campus culture and engagement with other students.



# References

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