

Interview with a Higher Education Administration

As an international student myself, I have seen the impact of the U.S federal policies and regulations on both my personal and academic life. To keep my nonimmigrant status, I must be enrolled full-time and complete a full course of study. In addition, I was only allowed to work on campus but limited to 20 hours per week. However, these regulations and policies are designed so that international students comply with federal government policies and regulations.

Constantly changing these policies often creates barriers for students. To better understand how the International Support Services Office navigates the relevant legal or policy issues affecting higher education and international students, I interviewed Lynne Vanahill, the director of the International Support Services Office, who has worked in this field for more than 25+ years.

Lynne Vanahill graduated with a bachelor's degree in science and a master's degree in Counselor Education from Emporia State University. In her role, she handles managing immigration compliance, interpreting new policies and regulations, and communicating these policies within departments and students. In addition, she gives immigration advice to F-1 (International students) and J-1 (exchange/scholar) students. In this interview, we discussed the federal and institutional policies that affect international students, how the office handles issues related to freedom of speech, students' privacy, harassment, discrimination, and academic misconduct.

In terms of the policies and regulations for implementing F-1 and J-1 students, Lynne explained that there are different federal agencies that are in charge of enforcing immigration laws for international students. These agencies are the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S Customs and Border Protect (CBP). She also defined the difference between policy and regulations.

According to her, “A regulation is federal government law for F-1 students.” For example, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is a government agency that creates rules and policies for F-1 students. They are also responsible for processing applications, keeping the SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) records, and enforcing institutions to comply with these rules. For instance, recently the DHS proposed a new policy that limits international students time in the U.S. According to this proposal, colleges are required to admit international students for a fixed period but not exceed more than 4 years (The U.S Department of Homeland Security, 2025). However, the Department of State (DOS) sets rules and regulations for J-1 students. For instance, when a student applies for a J-1 visa, the Department of State oversees coordinating with the U.S Embassies/ Consulates to decide if the student is eligible for this type of visa.

Furthermore, Lynne explained that regulations are a formal process that the federal government proposed, while policies are informal about processes and can be changed without any formal procedures. For example, government guidelines include cables, memos, and foreign affairs manuals for F-1 students, while the Department of State has a formal manual to be used for J-1 students. As Lynne said, when the regulations are issued by the federal agencies, it is often unclear, ambiguous, and does not address specific situations. Therefore, the institutions and government often come up with a policy to clarify those gray areas for students. Most of the time, the ISS leadership is consulting with NAFSA (Association of International Educators) to interpret and better understand these regulations.

Another important topic we discussed was the students’ personal information and privacy. According to Lynne, when DHS or any other government agencies ask for students' data, the ISS must report this information. This made me think about the FERPA, so I asked

whether sharing this data violates FERPA because the purpose of FERPA is to keep the privacy of student education records. (Schollenberger & Widelock, 2024). From Lynne's response I learned that when students sign their I-20(s) (A document issued by the ISS after students get admitted to KU), they provide written consent that allows the university to share specific information with DHS or any other government agency. The form specifically says that "I authorize the named school to release any information from my records needed by DHS pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(g) to decide my nonimmigrant status. Parents or guardians, and students must sign if the student is under 18." (The U.S Department of Homeland Security, 2025). However, students consent to the I-20 giving permission to disclose their information to the government, but this does not apply to parent requests. As Lynne emphasized, under FERPA, the office does not share any type of information with students' parents. In addition, students' records are kept confidential in Sunapsis, and only authorized employees have access to students' data.

While discussing the First Amendment of the U.S constitution, which protects individuals' rights to freedom of speech and religion according to Schollenberger & Widelock (2024). I was curious to know if international students have the right to protest or participate in any kind of protest on campus. To answer my question, Lynne said that "all international students have the right to protest or attend protests on campus however if the protest turns into violence or if students violate any campus policies, the students will be subject to higher consequences, such as being removed from the country or terminating their student visa." For instance, in recent months six non- U.S citizens' visas have been revoked due to their comment about Charlie Kirk on social media.

Regarding handling the issues of discrimination and harassment, I learned that the ISS office is not directly responsible for handling these issues, but they are closely working with the

Office of Civil Rights& Title IX to report any cases related to international students. According to Lynne, when a student shares issues related to food security or financial needs, they file CARE reports and make it confidential in Sunapsis. However, the ISS does not oversee students' misconduct issues. They often refer to these cases to the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX and the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Throughout my interview with Lynne, I have learned that federal police and legislation related to international students are complicated. Each student's situation is unique, and the federal policies and legislation are complex. In addition, there are different federal government agencies who are responsible for processing international students' applications depending on their visa type. I also learned that according to the policy issued by the DHS, F-1 and J-1 students are limited to a certain period of time to stay in the U.S after completing their degrees.

Furthermore, I learned that the U.S Constitutions apply to all international students while they are in the U.S, however they are still expected to comply with the federal regulations and policies. While discussing with Lynne, I also realized that policies and regulations for international students are constantly changing, which means that international immigration advisors need to stay informed and proactive to make sure all students are aware of these changes and comply with the new regulations. Additionally, in this interview, I learned that International Student's Services Office and the KU International Affairs leadership are connected to NAFSA (The Association of International Educators) to get latest updates on the policies and regulations related to international students. Overall, this interview helped me learn about the immigration aspect of the international support services office and the federal government agencies that write these regulations for international students.

References

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