BCCIE
BC COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

# BC Symposium: Advancing International Student Support
# Roundtable Discussion Notes

In January 2025, BCCIE ran its 2nd annual BC Symposium: Advancing International Student Support. We have provided the following notes summarizing key points and best practices shared during the roundtable discussions:

## IMMIGRATION ADVISING

### Managing Stress & Workload for Staff

- **Peer Support:** WhatsApp group with other RISIAs for discussion and clarification.
- **Transparency:** Honest communication with students about navigating policy changes together.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Deleting apps such as email and Microsoft Teams at home to disconnect from work.
- **Perspective:** Reminding oneself of the positive impact on students despite ongoing changes.

### Staying Updated on Immigration Policy Changes

- **Trusted Sources:** PDI, CIC News, Canada Gazette, LinkedIn (RCIC posts),Borderlines podcast.
- **Expert Consultations:** Network of trusted RCICs and lawyers who offer free 30-minute calls for student inquiries.

### Communicating Policy Changes to Students

- **Simplified Language:** Ensure clarity, especially for non-native English speakers.
- **Internal Information Sharing:** Keep different departments informed to ensure consistent messaging.

### Supporting Students' Stress & Anxiety Around Immigration Uncertainty

- **Dedicated Wellness Support:** Provide wellness advisors, ideally with a psychology background.
- **Counselling Partnerships:** Online/in-person support with extra sessions available if needed.
- **Peer Support Groups:**
  - » Group counselling tailored for international students.
  - » Grief & loss groups framing policy changes as a form of loss, helping students process and plan their next steps.

## Tools & Resources for Students

- **Cross-Departmental Workshops:** Collaborate with career services, enrollment services, and wellness advisors to provide holistic support.
- **Proactive Workshops:** Identify common student concerns and create sessions with access to resources like PowerPoint slides afterward.
- **Online Content:** Video tutorials, templates, and drop-in sessions for accessibility.

## Collaboration & Best Practices

- **External Collaboration:**
  - » Microsoft Teams for connecting with ISAs at other institutions.
  - » Regional institutions meet multiple times a year to share best practices.
  - » CBIE student advising community for nationwide discussions.
- **Internal Collaboration:**
  - » Joint meetings with faculty, staff, and advisors to ensure alignment on policy updates.
  - » Restorative relationships coordinator joins immigration meetings to reduce student burden in re-telling information.
  - » Cross-departmental emails to ensure immigration advisors stay informed.
  - » Social activities (e.g., faculty/staff lunches) to build relationships and trust.
  - » Microsoft Teams chat for real-time updates and information sharing.
  - » Emphasizing that only registered immigration advisors should provide immigration guidance.

# STUDENT ORIENTATION

## Inclusive & Accessible Orientation Strategies

- **Student Involvement:** Student panels help reassure new students.
- **Reducing Information Overload:** Provide slides and key information via email after sessions.
- **Interactive Engagement:**
  - » Icebreakers help students wake up and meet peers from different cultures.
  - » Peer Mentors led campus tours to offer a change of scenery.

- **Hybrid Format:**
  - » Part 1 on Zoom, Part 2 in-person (succinct information, recorded for later viewing).
  - » In-person session includes printed resources, goodie bags, quality food, and prizes.
- **Extended Support:** "Orientation 2.0" session 30 days later to refresh key information.
- **Thematic Approach:** "We Are Family" theme for orientation to foster a sense of belonging, including networking, career programming, and monthly check-ins.
- **Accessibility Measures:** Online platforms, QR codes for info, and posters throughout campus.
- **Mandatory Online Orientation:**
  - » Attendance tracking with account holds for non-compliance.
  - » Engaging activities like icebreakers.
  - » One-on-one advising sessions during the first two weeks.
  - » Family-focused sessions.

## Collaboration & Campus Integration

- **Cross-Department Collaboration:**
  - » Combine domestic and international students for morning sessions, followed by an international-only afternoon session.
  - » Integrating faculty, staff, and various departments into orientation programming.
  - » Create short department videos to explain their roles.
- **Community Partnerships:**
  - » Hosting a "Back to School Fair" with community organizations (banks, phone companies, RCMP, etc.) for onsite services.
  - » Include city tours, Indigenous engagement, and recreational outings (e.g., Whistler, tubing, lake visits, Stanley Park tours).
  - » An institution led a welcome booth at the airport, staffed by student volunteers.
- **Pre-Arrival Support:**
  - » An ESL program offers pre-arrival sessions with program coordinators and international student advisors.
  - » Collaborate closely with overseas agents to provide pre-arrival workshops.

## Balancing Information & Student Engagement

- **Prioritizing Belonging Over Information Overload:** Make orientation about fostering connection rather than overwhelming students.

- **Structured Orientation:**
  - » Positioning orientation as a registered (but free) course or pre-requisite increases participation.
  - » Peer Mentors provide in-person support and send follow-up emails.
- **Student-Led Information Sharing:**
  - » Zoom and WhatsApp chat groups allow students to share information (though unmonitored for accuracy).
  - » Peer Ambassadors increase credibility—students trust information more from fellow students.
  - » Paid Peer Advisors can ensure accurate information is shared in group chats.
- **Parental Engagement:** Separate info packages for parents/guardians vs. students.
- **Logistical Support:**
  - » Agents copied on emails with key student information.
  - » Free city walking tours with donation-based payments.
  - » Waivers and emergency contact forms for student safety.
- **Sustained Engagement:** International Peer Advisor programs provide ongoing personal connections throughout the first year.

## CAREER PREPARATION

### Successful Career Prep Programs & initiatives

- Global Lounge offers drop-in career coaching.
- 14-week employer-paid work placements in non-profits (low uptake due to financial concerns).
- Big Interview software to help students practice behavioral interview questions.
- International student advisor partners with career services for pre-arrival to post-grad support.
- Global department proactively assists students in obtaining co-op permits by visiting classrooms.
- "Graduation, Now What?" event integrates career, immigration, and enrollment services.