

UMKC international student enrollment drops under new visa regulations

[Fadhel Kaboub](#)

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New visa regulations have slowed the flow of international students to both UMKC and other U.S. universities. Delays in processing new visas due to inadequate training and database problems have made it more difficult for U.S. universities to attract new international students.

One UMKC official who has noticed the new difficulties is Monica Mingucci, director of UMKC's Applied Language Institute (ALI).



Dr. Monica Mingucci, ALI

"While the US is not welcoming international students, and is precluding students from coming to study here, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK are having an open door policy," Mingucci said.

She said that the current crisis in international politics and the growing anti-American sentiment have had a negative impact on international students enrollment.

The ALI offers english courses for international students as well as their dependents (holders of F-2 Visa). New regulations now make it illegal for F-2 visa holders to enroll in any ALI courses. This creates financial problems for the ALI because it generates 100% of its income from tuition payments and does not receive any external funding. Total enrollment at the ALI went from 234 in Fall 2001 to 163 in Winter 2003. ALI officials expect enrollment to drop even further in the 2003-2004 academic year.

"So far we have been able to stay afloat, but if things don't change very soon we will have serious financial problems," said Mingucci.

Mingucci said that normally at this time of year the US would have issued an average of 300,000 student visas, but thus far only 81,000 have been issued.



Dr. Keith Grafing, ISAO

Keith Grafing, interim director of the UMKC's International Students Affairs Office (ISAO), affirmed that the ALI has been hurt by the new visa regulations more than anything else. He said that the number of international applicants to UMKC has been decreasing in the last two years.

According to Grafing, the number of newly enrolled international students at UMKC dropped by about 15% from January 2002 to January 2003. Grafing attributed this decline partly to UMKC's higher tuition as well as delays in processing new visas by U.S. authorities. The newly implemented Student and Exchange Visitor Information Database (SEVIS), an Internet-based system used to provide information on international students and their dependents, is also part of the problem Grafing said.

"It was instituted too quickly and has many technical flaws," said Grafing. At the SEVIS Service Center, only 28 agents are handling a daily volume of about 800 calls from designated school officials like Grafing with questions about new visa regulations or with problems with the SEVIS database.

90% of the requests are not handled on the phone and take at least one month to be processed. The SEVIS Service Center agents admit, however, that they have not received the appropriate training to deal with the new regulations.

Problems with increasing international student enrollment nationwide have been noted by the Institute of International Education (IIE). According to a recent study by IIE, "Further deteriorating enrollments from countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia cannot be ruled out, prompted by various factors including visa approval delays, financial problems, political concerns, and attractive opportunities to study elsewhere."

Adding more troubles to UMKC's attempt to attract new international students for 2003-04, the recent state budget cuts will likely result in the elimination of some teaching assistantships. Hence, it is expected that many international students currently supported by teaching assistantships will be applying for the economic hardship program to support their studies.

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