

# Foreign Student Adviser: A New Profession?

By JAMES M. DAVIS

**ABSTRACT:** The presence of fifty thousand foreign students in American universities and colleges, combined with the complexity of their problems, has led to the development of a group of specialized service individuals whose responsibility it has become to extend varied services to these students. The designation most commonly given to these officers is foreign student adviser or adviser or counselor to foreign students. The foreign student adviser finds himself in a new social role with all of the dilemmas of a role-in-the-making. He feels a need to justify his role, to establish ethics and traditions, and to define its functions. In terms of the distribution of foreign students in American universities, some idea can be gained of the specialization variously required in providing counseling services to foreign students. In terms of the characteristics of a profession—knowledge, competence, and social responsibility—it can be seen that foreign student advising is a “would-be” vocation of professional stature.

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IN his forthcoming study, Higbee identified 1,073 foreign student advisers in the accredited institutions which reported foreign students.<sup>1</sup> He also identified 1,365 campuses upon which foreign students were enrolled, using this term "campus" to distinguish between the individual campuses of the large multicampus universities, such as California. It is clear that there is a general tendency to designate a foreign student adviser at most of the institutions enrolling foreign students.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS

The extent to which this position becomes a specialization naturally varies according to the number of foreign students on any particular campus. Higbee's analysis of the distribution of the 44,536 foreign students reported in the Institute of International Education's annual census of 1959 as presented in Table 1 is revealing.<sup>2</sup>

The high concentration of foreign students on a few campuses is evident. Nearly two-fifths of them are on the twenty-six campuses which enroll 301

<sup>1</sup> Homer Higbee, *Services to Foreign Students on American Campuses* (East Lansing: Institute of Research on Overseas Programs, Michigan State University, 1961). Quotations and citations from draft typescript were taken prior to publication.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

or more, and another fifth are on those enrolling 101 to 300. Less than two-fifths are found on the 1,279 campuses which enroll 100 or fewer.

Although only 35.5 per cent of the foreign students were reported to be graduate students, the importance of the availability of graduate study opportunities to their distribution is suggested by Table 2.

All except two of the ten institutions listed in Table 2 are among those ten which produce the greatest number of doctorates. Only two of the universities listed are not included among the top twelve universities which Berelson ranked according to the over-all quality of their graduate programs.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that foreign students seek admission to the best American universities and that they are admitted to them in rather large numbers. In twenty-two of the twenty-six campuses enrolling 301 or more foreign students, the graduate foreign students outnumbered the undergraduate foreign students, and at one campus they were in equal number.<sup>4</sup>

These facts offer a basis for distinguishing between the foreign student adviser in a major university which offers extensive opportunities for graduate

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Berelson, *Graduate Education in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 123-28, 280.

<sup>4</sup> Higbee, *op. cit.*

TABLE 1—DISTRIBUTION OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AT U. S. CAMPUSES

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED	NUMBER OF CAMPUSES IN CATEGORY	TOTAL NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE OF CAMPUSES	PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS
301 or more	26	17,260	1.9	38.8
101-300	60	10,053	4.5	22.6
50-100	73	5,153	5.4	11.6
21-49	170	5,404	12.4	12.1
11-20	212	3,121	15.6	7.0
1-10	824	3,545	60.2	7.9
Total	1,365	44,536	100.0	100.0

Source: Institute of International Education, *Open Doors, 1959* (New York: Institute of International Education, 1959).

TABLE 2—COMPARATIVE RANKING OF INSTITUTIONS ACCORDING TO NUMBERS OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AND NUMBERS OF DOCTORATES PRODUCED

RANK BY NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS	INSTITUTION	RANK BY NUMBER OF DOCTORATES PRODUCED
1	Columbia University	1
2	University of Michigan	7
3	New York University	6
4	University of California (Berkeley)	4
5	University of Minnesota	10
6	University of Illinois	3
7	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	—
8	University of Wisconsin	5
9	Cornell University	—
10	Harvard University	2

Sources: Institute of International Education *Open Doors, 1958* (New York: Institute of International Education, May 1959), p. 10. Bernard Berelson, *Graduate Education in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), p. 127. Data are for 1957-1958.

study and enrolls large numbers of foreign students and the foreign student

adviser in a smaller institution offering mainly undergraduate work and enrolling a small number of foreign students. The sheer amount of specialized services required in the larger population leads to specialization of personnel performing these services. In the smaller foreign student populations, the specialized services must also be offered, but they tend not to constitute a full work-load for personnel performing them and, therefore, tend to be added to other duties in order to fill out a full-time position.

A discussion of the professionalization of this position of foreign student adviser is meaningful only in light of these basic distributional data. Before facing the issue of professionalization directly, it is also necessary to discover just what specialized services the foreign student adviser performs.

SERVICES PERFORMED

Higbee<sup>5</sup> found that the 679 of the foreign student advisers who returned

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

TABLE 3—FOREIGN STUDENT ADVISERS' INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICES OFFERED FOREIGN STUDENTS

SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITY				NOT OFFERED
	COMPLETE	SHARED	COMPLETE OR SHARED	NONE	
Admissions	20%	53%	73%	18%	1%
Registration	22%	48%	70%	19%	3%
Immigration	53%	14%	67%	3%	17%
Employment	19%	47%	66%	12%	13%
Academic Advising	26%	49%	75%	13%	3%
Social Activities	34%	33%	67%	8%	18%
Program for Visitors	19%	32%	51%	11%	26%
Housing	17%	40%	57%	22%	11%
Scholarships	21%	40%	61%	16%	14%
Loans	16%	40%	56%	15%	19%
Discipline	19%	46%	65%	14%	10%
Assist American Students	25%	20%	45%	16%	29%
Community Contacts	45%	26%	71%	6%	14%
Personal Counseling	49%	35%	84%	4%	3%
Information and Correspondence	54%	22%	76%	4%	10%
Orientation	23%	27%	50%	8%	32%

Source: Homer Higbee, *Services to Foreign Students on American Campuses* (East Lansing: Institute of Research on Overseas Programs, Michigan State University, 1961).

usable data reported involvement in specific services as indicated in Table 3.

For only one service, Assist American Students, do fewer than half have either complete or shared responsibility. The foreign student adviser normally accepts full or shared responsibility for an extensive range of direct student personnel services for foreign students.

In view of the distribution data outlined above, it is not surprising that Higbee found that more than half of his respondents have no personnel assistance in the performance of these services. More significant is his finding that 195 of his 679 respondent foreign student advisers have one assistant; forty-six have two assistants; thirty-five have three; ten have four; three have five; and sixteen have six assistants. However, these assistants are more likely to be secretarial, clerical, or student help than administrative assistants or assistant foreign student advisers. His study also suggests that the larger the institution, the more foreign students it will have and the more staff it will have specializing in services to them. Conversely, he found that in the larger establishments, the foreign student adviser was supervised by a university officer other than the president; in the smaller institutions the foreign student adviser tended to report directly to the president. Those who report to an officer other than the president tend to rate communications with their superiors as being better than do those who report directly to the president.

#### TANGIBILITY TYPICAL

Another interesting approach to an understanding of the foreign student adviser is offered by his relations with national agencies. From the viewpoint of either a private or a governmental national agency, American institutions of higher education appear as a confusing

collection of prima donnas, each of which has its particular organizational pattern and body of special procedures. In such important areas as the admission of foreign students, their housing arrangements, the administration of their stipends, and even the determination of their course content, it is very difficult for a national agency to discover who does what and with whom it should deal. The gateway for effective relationships is most often the foreign student adviser. He has authority to act on some matters, must refer others to the appropriate institutional officer, but will always respond positively to a request from a national office.

Such tangibility, especially effective in the three hundred institutions in which there is more than one person in the office, enhances the foreign student adviser's special gateway function. In a major institution, on a single morning, he may get letters, telegrams, and long distance calls from different officers in the Department of State, International Cooperation Administration, Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Institute of International Education, Ford Foundation, Asia Foundation, regional Immigration and Naturalization Service office, American Council on Education, and many more agencies. The cultural attaché of a foreign government's Washington embassy may approach him about a special concern. At the same time, he will typically be involved in one of the national committees of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers and will receive correspondence from that body.

His tangibility is also a target for every local service organization, church, international relations study group, and parent-teacher association seeking some contact with foreign students.

Ideally, he is chairman or secretary of the institution's committee which awards

scholarships to foreign students. He advises the committee developing a new junior year abroad program. He is visited by faculty members seeking foreign opportunities or departing to them and by returning colleagues who want to reciprocate hospitality received abroad by entertaining foreign students in their homes. He spends some of his time in channeling the inspired international activities of American students into effective programs involving foreign students.

Against all this background, we may face the real question implicit in the topic under discussion. Is foreign student advising a profession? Does the foreign student adviser occupy a professional position?

#### MEANING OF PROFESSIONALISM

According to Meyer, "Professionalization represents a tendency for occupational groups to acquire the attributes of a community and to seek a favorable position within the larger society. In this process, increase both of authority and of responsibility marks the transformation of an occupation into a 'profession.'"<sup>6</sup> Summarizing the attributes of a profession from the relevant literature in the field of sociology, he states that three characteristics are usually cited to define what is meant by a profession. These include "(1) a body of knowledge, accumulated wisdom, doctrine, or experience; (2) technical competence in the use of this knowledge; and (3) publicly asserted responsibility in the exercise of this competence on behalf of society."<sup>7</sup> Foreign student ad-

vising may be analyzed in terms of these characteristics.

#### BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Foreign student advising certainly includes a rather formidable body of knowledge, accumulated wisdom, doctrine, or experience. Indeed, there is more knowledge available than most of the practitioners have an opportunity to assimilate. The analysis of functions developed above suggests that the complex and dynamic content of immigration laws and regulations, university regulations and bureaucracy, counseling and case work theory, and office management are but a few of the desirable knowledge areas for the practicing foreign student adviser. He should also be sensitive to deep cultural differences and aware of the culture patterns of the countries from which his clients come. The field of comparative religion alone offers a challenge which is beyond the scope of most serious scholars in that field, and yet the foreign student adviser must relate religious taboos and expectations to such operational problems as hygienic practices and residence hall diets.

#### TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

We know very little about the technical practice of foreign student advising. Conferences provide settings for extended discussion of regulations and programs, but, to my knowledge, no research has penetrated the face-to-face relationship between the adviser and the foreign student. The kind of detailed analysis of recorded interviews stimulated by Rogers and carried on by his associates to understand relationships in a psychotherapeutically oriented counseling session has been completely lacking from the literature on foreign student advising.

Therefore, a personal assessment of the technical competence of the foreign

<sup>6</sup> William J. Goode, "Community within a Community; the Professions," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 22 (1957), p. 194, as cited by Henry J. Meyer in "Professionalization and Social Work," *Issues in American Social Work*, ed. Alfred J. Kahn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 321.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322. See also Ernest Greenwood, "Attributes of a Profession," *Social Work*, Vol. 2 (1947), No. 3, pp. 45-55.

student adviser himself must be made. This should be made in terms of certain accepted standards of performance. No such standards have been evolved or proposed. The development of such best-practice goals might well become a major emphasis of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers. The position of foreign student adviser has traditionally included the services suggested above. How well are they performed?

Our attempts to assess the performance levels of foreign student advisers are further complicated by a consideration of just whom we should assess. Should the 1,073 foreign student advisers discovered by Higbee be included; or just the 679 whose responses were sufficiently complete to warrant machine tabulation; or just the 305 of those 679 who reported that they have some professional assistance? Perhaps it would be more fruitful to assess the programs of the 159 institutions which enroll fifty or more students, the total of whom comprise nearly three-fourths of all foreign students in the United States. In the author's opinion, there is considerable variation among those institutions in the technical competence of their foreign student advisers and in adequacy of administrative support for their work. Where the program appears to be inadequate, there generally seems to be insufficient administrative support for competent advisers. This insufficiency characterizes some of the very large private and public universities enrolling large numbers of foreign students.

#### OPERATIONS AND POLICY

If the foreign student adviser is merely the performer of specific services, then he is appropriately evaluated upon his performance of these services. However, it is to be hoped that his expectations and aspirations go beyond the rendering of service per se. If the for-

ign student adviser is seen as a specialist in cross-cultural education broadly concerned with the total institutional impact upon world affairs, then it behooves him to develop a much broader technical competence and seek to play a much more significant role in his institution. Then he will move from being a servant of admissions policies into a position of influencing admissions policies toward the most effective achievement of desirable ends in international relations through a redirection of institutional resources. If he determines that the appropriate function for his institution to emphasize is the support of developing nations, he can seek to gain support for his views and to influence the selection of foreign students and the direction of scholarships, fellowships, grants-in-aid, and loans to them in order to maximize the possibility of achieving this goal.

If he sees his role as community educator in enhancing and giving reality to international sensitivities, he will move from being a manipulator of foreign students in response to the whims of program chairmen to a position of directing both the community organizations and foreign students toward mutually rewarding adventures in international understanding.

If the foreign student adviser takes seriously the recommendations of the Committee on the University and World Affairs that "Curricular offerings must often be redesigned to meet the distinctive needs of foreign students and the nations from which they come,"<sup>8</sup> he may be able to work creatively with the faculty members in various colleges and departments to evolve more appropriate academic programs for foreign students.

He may even take seriously the aforementioned committee's opinion that "ad-

<sup>8</sup> J. L. Morrill and others, *The University and World Affairs* (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1961), p. 30.

ministrative arrangements by and large remain inadequate at most institutions" and develop a strategy for improving them.<sup>9</sup> He may use the experience of the Texas, Michigan, Florida, and Tulane universities in broadening the roles of their foreign student advisers into more effective agencies to help their universities handle various international commitments.<sup>10</sup>

In order to be seen as professionals, foreign student advisers require, in Meyer's terms,<sup>11</sup> (1) a body of knowledge, accumulated wisdom, doctrine or experience, which they have in varying degree; (2) technical competence in the use of this knowledge, which is also evident in limited and spotty distribution; and (3) publicly asserted responsibility in the exercise of this competence on behalf of society. This third criterion bears further mention.

#### PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

It is only in very limited segments of society that the responsibility of the foreign student adviser is publicly asserted. The foreign student adviser notes the absence of even informal community approval of such normal professional powers as control over training centers, granting or withholding accreditation, admission into the profession, and such common privileges as confidentiality and evaluation by others in the profession. The possibilities of a satisfying lifelong career as foreign student adviser are rare indeed.

Public responsibility is recognized in several operational aspects of the foreign student adviser's work. Each spring he is authorized by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service

to grant foreign students permission to work during the summer. He is usually the university officer designated to report to the Service the arrivals and departures of the students. He is expected by the Service to give sound and often quasi-legal counsel to enable the foreign student to achieve his academic objective without violating his legal status as a nonresident student.

Both governmental and nongovernmental sponsoring agencies have extensive dealings with the adviser in the expectation, usually realized, that he will act responsibly in the public interest. Foreign governments also look to him for numerous specific local services varying to the extent that particular governments concern themselves with their students here.

As indicated above, particular agencies in both the local and national communities seek a wide variety of services from foreign student advisers. The range of roles assumed by an adviser runs from that of special counsel to protect the interest of the individual student, through that of university officer operating mainly in the interests of his institution, to that of a quasi-official enforcer of the laws and regulations of government.

If society has not specifically asserted the foreign student adviser's responsibility to it, the adviser himself has recognized that responsibility. As Chalmers so aptly stated at a plenary session of the annual conference of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers: "The profession of the Foreign Student Adviser is an important one, and its members have a sense of responsibility to society."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> A brief statement on this is available from the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, 500 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N. Y.

<sup>11</sup> Meyer, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Paul M. Chalmers, "The Professionalization of the Foreign Student Adviser," in *Professional Service in Educational Exchange*, Report of the 11th Annual Conference of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, 1959, p. 6.

Carr-Saunders identifies four major types of professions in modern society, listing as his fourth type those occupations that aspire to professional status but in which consistency of technical practice and the development of a sufficient body of practice and theory are so rudimentary that little claim can be made to a theoretical base for the profession. He calls these "would-be professions."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A. M. Carr-Saunders, "Metropolitan Conditions and Traditional Professional Relationships," in R. M. Fisher (Ed.), *The Metropolis in Modern Life* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1955), as cited by Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

#### A WOULD-BE PROFESSION

Seen in these rigorous terms, the profession of foreign student adviser is indeed a would-be profession. Nevertheless, we find inspiration and general agreement in the concluding words of Chalmers' conference address: "I believe that the vocation of a college foreign student adviser is of professional stature, and I think that as an organization the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers should dedicate itself to his increasingly effective professionalization."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Chalmers, *op. cit.*