

## **International Scholars Office**

The International Scholars Office (ISO) facilitates the visas for international researchers and professors, who come to MIT for a variety of purposes. ISO advises on immigration matters, issues visa documents, and provides guidance, workshops, and literature on a wide range of issues relevant to the international scholar population. Weekly orientation sessions are held for incoming scholars and family members. The office also engages in advocacy efforts to protect international educational exchange, prevent burdensome regulations, and clarify and improve related regulations and procedures.

### **MIT'S International Scholar Population FY2005**

ISO served 1,687 international scholars affiliated with MIT and their accompanying family members. This reflects a 7.7% increase over last year (1,567). According to the most recent Institute of International Education's Open Doors report (2004), MIT ranked eleventh nationally with regard to the numbers of international scholars at US institutions.

During the past year, international scholars came to MIT from 84 countries, with the highest numbers coming from the People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Germany, Italy, Canada, the United Kingdom, Israel, India, and Spain. The ISO worked closely with administrators in 74 departments, laboratories, and centers (DLCs), preparing the appropriate visa documents and petitions for incoming and continuing scholars and their families. The areas hosting the largest number of scholars were the following, in descending order: Chemistry; Sloan School of Management; Biology; Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory; Chemical Engineering; Research Laboratory of Electronics; Materials Science and Engineering; Mechanical Engineering; Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences; and the Picower Institute for Learning and Memory.

The majority of MIT's international scholars (784) were sponsored on MIT's J-1 exchange visitor program, up 4.4% since last year (750). An additional 75 scholars were here through other J sponsors. There were 388 scholars on campus in H-1B status, sponsored by MIT. This reflects a 6% increase over last year (366) and a 109% increase since FY2000 (185). There were 9 international scholars on campus this year whose O-1 visas were sponsored by MIT. The rest of the scholar population had other sponsors or nonimmigrant categories (note that some of the scholars held more than one visa status over the course of the reporting period). According to Human Resources Information Systems' data, 65% of MIT's postdoctoral associates and fellows are foreign, as are 49% of "visiting" appointees. ISO submitted 18 permanent residence petitions to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on behalf of MIT faculty members and upper-level researchers.

Not only have international scholar numbers increased, but the number of "person hours" spent per function and per case have increased dramatically as a result of new government systems, forms, regulations, and practices.

## **MIT Initiatives and the ISO**

The Sloan School's MIT-China Management Education Project is expected to expand to include Korea and Mexico, and ISO will be involved in future arrangements to bring scholars from these countries to participate in it.

## **Primary Activities and Accomplishments**

ISO continues to ensure institutional compliance with federal mandates related to sponsorship of foreign scholars. All requirements pertaining to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) are being met, and new incoming J-1 scholars began paying the \$100 SEVIS fee to the Department of Homeland Security following the September 2004 effective date. ISO staff members have devoted considerable effort to learning, implementing, and communicating SEVIS-related changes. They have absorbed a new layer of staff responsibilities, transformed database capability and management, updated all office procedures, and ensured a smooth transition at the Institute. Government officials and employees who oversee SEVIS continue to work out bugs and provide periodic system updates. ISO staff members request "data fixes" on a regular basis and are severely hampered by slow response times. The ISO database (a purchased software product) is used for maintaining all scholar records and reports, SEVIS communication, and the issuance of visa eligibility documents. This software has limitations that have not yet been addressed by the vendor despite longstanding efforts.

Delayed scholar applications remain a challenge. In response to concerns voiced by MIT and others across the nation, USCIS has launched an ambitious initiative to reduce backlogs and processing times for applications filed by or on behalf of scholars and family members who are already in the US. While thus far results are slow and uneven, there is a basis for hope. Likewise, processing times for visa applications at US consular posts abroad have improved somewhat with regard to security clearances and visa issuance for those seeking entry or re-entry to the US, but considerable problems remain.

For several visa categories, major regulatory changes were published this year by the relevant government agencies. The maximum program duration for research scholars and professors in the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program is scheduled to increase, a \$500 "anti-fraud" fee has been imposed on employers for each new H-1B petition submitted to USCIS, and the labor certification program used for certain permanent residence cases has been overhauled. Required procedures changed frequently, with increased emphasis on electronic processing of key phases of J, H, and permanent residence applications.

## **Other Professional Activities**

ISO staff members participate in Association of International Educators (NAFSA) working groups on scholar issues, providing information and ideas for use in legislative and other government advocacy. ISO works closely on these advocacy issues with Jack Crowley, vice president for federal relations, and Alice Gast, vice president for research and associate provost, who are both instrumental in communicating MIT's concerns. During the period FY05, ISO submitted a number of letters to the US Department of

Labor and USCIS. Topics included comments on two published rules and suggestions on immigration-related practice issues.

Penny Rosser continued serving as a member of NAFSA's national trainer corps, training immigration advisers, and as one of two liaisons with the Department of State on J-1 waiver issues. She also continued to serve as dean of the NAFSA national professional practice workshop on permanent residence in an academic setting. As NAFSA transitioned to a new organizational structure, Penny was invited to serve on the International Student and Scholar Policy and Practice Committee and the SEVIS Policy Taskforce. Penny also presented at an international education conference outside the US, joining Asociación Mexicana por la Educación Internacional members at their annual conference in Mexico as copresenter of "Studying and conducting research in the US: Perspectives of students and scholars from Mexico and Latin America."

Sharon Ralston served as table moderator for an eight-hour, J-1 Professional Practice Workshop at the NAFSA Region XI Conference in November 2004 and was invited to be a panelist in January 2005 for Classes to Careers: Managing the Transition from School to Work, at Bentley College.

Amanda Doran attended the NAFSA regional and national conferences. She continued her role on the Region XI 50th Anniversary Archival History Project and served as a judge of the Region XI essay contest. She also served as ISO's liaison to the MIT Chinese Postdoctoral Network.

Fumiko Futai participated in the intensive J-1 Professional Practice Workshop at the NAFSA Region XI Conference in November 2004 and attended the NAFSA Region XI Spring Immigration Workshop in March 2005.

### **Communication with the Institute**

In addition to advising, preparing immigration documents, advocacy, running a weekly orientation program, and providing extensive written and web-based information, ISO sponsored programming events open to the campus community. Several times this year, ISO staff conducted workshops for new administrators in DLCs that have visa processing as a part of their responsibilities.

ISO publishes and distributes a comprehensive annual report each year.

ISO has received very positive feedback on its comprehensive website, <http://web.mit.edu/scholars/>. Amanda Doran continues to expand and update the site with forms designed for visa processing and with information and resources for international scholars, DLC administrators, and the campus community. Primary DLC liaisons are informed of changes in immigration regulations and ISO practice through a custom listserve.

## **Personnel**

Penny Rosser continued as director and Sharon Ralston continued as assistant director of ISO. Amanda Doran remained as advisor to international scholars. Fumiko Futai was promoted to advisor to international scholars in April 2005 upon the departure of HuQing Piemonte, and Mireille Fortier was hired as administrative assistant in June 2005.

### **Penny Rosser Director**

*More information about the International Scholars Office may be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/scholars/>.*