

Welfare of Foreign Students in Tata Institute of Social Sciences

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Tata Institute of Social Sciences has hosted several foreign students from across the world. Our culturally rich and academically stimulating environment makes our campus so distinctive that we have seen a tremendous rise in the interest to study at our institute from international students throughout the world. Studying in a foreign country is an exciting experience but it is not always easy. Indeed Study abroad offers an enormous amount of pleasures along with its fair share of challenges. With a view to meet the challenges we have an office in TISS exclusively dedicated to the needs of international students.

The International Students Office (ISO) was established in TISS in February 2006 as an independent centre to extend all kinds of support and assistance for all international students. The International Students Office addresses the logistical, cultural and academic concerns of all foreign students. Over the period of time we have developed certain practices which are followed on regular basis with each incoming student. Pre -departure Orientation, Orientation upon Arrival, Regular meetings, updating the foreign students about the facilities available on campus are some of the practices consistently pursued by ISO.

Orientation:

i) Pre -departure Orientation:

This involves informing the students about recommended health tests or inoculations to obtain visa, sending orientation manual, asking to bring extra photos, making arrangements for pick up and accommodation, informing about registration procedures at FRRO-Mumbai, advising them to carry sufficient funds while coming and also to carry their health insurance policy etc. Access to internet being one of the highest demands of most incoming students, they are asked to bring their laptops and adaptors which we help them to configure to the Wi-Fi facility available throughout the campus.

ii) Orientation upon Arrival:

The information provided before departure from their home country is later reinforced through orientation programs upon arrival. An official welcome to students by faculty, administrators and staff with whom they are going to have regular contact is planned. ISO also provides orientation bags containing Maps, Timetable of Trains and Buses along with charges (to avoid being cheated during local travel). Familiarization process includes giving them campus orientation, taking the students around the city, introduction to local transport system, informing them about the dress code for men and women, discussions of taboos, safety and security measures and providing emergency contact numbers. As part of our familiarization process we also introduce the international students with members of TISS student union so that it becomes easy to find an Indian buddy on the

campus itself. It satisfactorily accomplishes our need to arrange a local contact for the students besides our office.

Medical and Counseling Facility:

Being disconnected from one's native environment 'Culture shock' is the first outcome of the study abroad program. Culture shock defined as a 'Sense of frustration experienced by the person due to sudden loss of familiar' can have dramatic and serious effects on those who experience it- including health problems, inability to focus on studies coupled with a desire to abandon the overseas program. To tackle these problems successfully we have on campus a team of medical doctors and counselors to which all foreign students have free access to. We inform them about the timings and availability of these services during campus orientation. All the foreign students who enroll for our Masters Programmes are also provided health insurance.

Yoga is another major rage among the foreign students. Yoga is taught on campus twice everyday. All the international students have free access to gymnasium and playground for outdoor activities to enhance their physical health.

Campus Dining Hall and Cafeteria:

Food is served at the Dining hall in both the campuses at specified timings. All international students can avail of this facility. The foreign students who come for short term are requested to procure food on purchase of coupons. The fees charged from the short term students are exclusive of the expenses for food. TISS campus has cafeteria run by women at both the campuses. The food served here is different from the Dining Hall food. In addition to this cooking facility is also made available in the flats on campus where students live.

Library Facility:

Orientation to the library is provided upon requests to foreign students. The students who attend our regular programmes are imparted compulsory library orientation. Those who come for short term can also avail of this facility upon request.

Accommodation:

Most of the students enrolled for short term courses usually stay on campus in the air conditioned flats especially designed for foreign students. This includes facility for cooking, internet, telephone etc. Those who wish to stay outside the campus are free to do so as well. ISO helps in finding accommodation to the students with the help and support of the housing agents. We also take care to provide interim accommodation for any international student for few days upon arrival.

Security of international students:

An updated list of international students is given to the nearest police station every month inclusive of all the details of their passport, visa, address of the place where they are staying during the course of study in TISS and the duration.

As per the institute rule student who wish to study in TISS has to obtain student visa. Those who intends to do research has to obtain research visa. Any student coming for a period of more than 180 days has to get registered at Foreign Regional Registration Office, Mumbai. International students office facilitates all the paperwork required for registration.

Those students who are staying on campus have to follow all the rules like all other Indian students. Hence prior permission from the Dean of Students Affairs is a must for late arrival to the campus.

Services and Facility:

We also run Language classes twice a week to facilitate the learning of local language(Hindi). Free English language class for students from non English speaking countries is also organized. 'Facilitating services like completion of admission formalities, mobile connectivity, laundry facility, orientation to the library and opening of bank accounts also features among the list of services regularly provided by our office. TISS has tied up with Central Bank of India to enable foreign students to open account. We have especially developed online admission process to facilitate the foreign students so that they can apply. An online essay test and telephonic interview is conducted for the international students. Their admission is solely based on the scores obtained in the essay test and interview. The key to our success has been our capacity to respond quickly to inquiries through e-mail.

Regular Meetings:

Regular meetings between our office and the students are encouraged to openly discuss and resolve issues concerning them. ISO often attends the issues on priority basis. Regular follow up of any kind of support they might wish from us is addressed to.

Coordination between students and concerned departments:

At times it is noticed that we are unable to anticipate the academic and social challenges that international students might face. This is when ISO steps in to coordinate between the Schools/ Deans/ Faculty to put forth the concerns of these students and try to resolve it.

For students seeking research affiliation or applicants for PhD, coordination with the centre for Research and Development or with concerned faculty is initiated by our office. After receiving the approval from the faculty, ISO facilitates and encourages direct communication between research guides and the scholar via e-mail.

Integrating experiential learning in the study abroad programs is emphasized by organizing seminars and field visits to NGO's to discuss and understand issues of gender, religion, caste, ethnicity etc in Indian context.

Rural campus:

Another unique feature of our program is organizing trips to rural India to provide them a glimpse of life in villages'at our Rural campus, Tuljapur, Osmanabad Dt. Maharashtra along with sightseeing at the world famous Ajanta-Ellora caves. ISO

facilitated the hosting of international students for few days from partner universities in the hometown of TISS students who were part of any exchange program in the partner universities.

Cultural Events and Programmes:

With support from TISS student union 'International Cultural Festival' is organized to promote cultural integration and encourage foreign students to display their talent. ISO provides all kinds of support for any such programmes.

ISO Team:

Taking into account the fact that 'Every student is special' and hence deserve our special care and attention. Utmost care is taken to ensure that all our efforts help to grow and nurture a feeling of security and comfort among the international students to help them become an integral part of our institute and connect easily with new culture and the locals. Thus International students Office has always strived to provide rich and dynamic learning opportunity for all foreign students with good program support and well-timed guidance.

A team of four staff is dedicated to manage the International Students in coordination with the departments dealing with academic, administrative and student's affairs.