In the week of March 18, the School of Graduate Studies had to advise a visiting research student to return to his home country after completing only a few weeks of a planned five-month visit. The student had been invited outside of appropriate channels, and had been unable to secure appropriate travel documents for the planned arrangements. This represents a major setback for the student. We are therefore reminding all faculty and staff involved in organizing research visits that all visiting graduate research students must register through the International Visiting Graduate Student (IVGS) program.

**Institutional Context**

In December of 2015, Governing Council endorsed three priorities, one of which was to “strengthen and deepen key international partnerships.” A key aspect of building international partnerships is the mobility of researchers between collaborating institutions. In support of this aim, the School of Graduate Studies manages the International Visiting Graduate Student (IVGS) program. All graduate students from international universities who wish to conduct research at the University of Toronto for more than one month must register through this program.

Visiting students do not pay tuition, but do pay the sessional incidental fees for the sessions during which they are on campus. The program is designed to ensure that visiting students, and the University as their host, remain in compliance with immigration law and with our commitment to UHIP.

**Importance of Compliance**

Formalizing the relationship between visiting students and the University is essential for both students and the University. Without registration as a student, the status of visiting researchers on campus, and in Canada is less clear. The presence of an incorrectly documented foreign national on campus can result in severe penalties imposed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada on the entire university.

Penalties for employment violations are assessed on a points system. Major infractions (type C) are penalized more harshly than minor infractions (type A or B), and large institutions, such as the University of Toronto are penalized more harshly than individuals or small businesses. As an example, if one visiting student admitted purely for the purposes of research is offered work invigilating exams, that could be
considered a type C violation. The first violation incurs two demerit points. If a second student is made the same offer, the second instance incurs three demerit points, plus a penalty of up to three points for the University’s failing to make reasonable efforts to prevent a recurrence of the violation. The IRCC may also award up to six points for a negative effect on the Canadian economy, for a maximum possible penalty of fourteen points for just these two violations. **Penalties for fourteen points range up to $90,000 in fines or a moratorium on hiring any non-Canadians for ten years.**

Immigration law surrounding visiting researchers, whether faculty or students, is complex and changes frequently; the IVGS program exists, in part, to keep faculty members from accidentally violating immigration law. As registered full-time students, visitors under the IVGS program are eligible to apply for study permits, and most are successful.

The Recruitment and Admissions Office (RAO) at the School of Graduate Studies, with support from the University’s Registered Canadian Immigration Consultants (RCICs), is able to provide advice and support to faculty members and graduate units planning to host a visiting student. The staff of the RAO are committed to helping U of T faculty members bring visiting students smoothly – and legally. In cases where immigration officials do not acknowledge the IVGS program as a program of study, and insist that visitors apply for a work permit, the RAO can in many cases provide the required documentation.

In order to provide this support, the RAO needs the help and cooperation of all faculty members and graduate units to ensure the correct processes are followed. It is not possible for visiting students to apply for study permits or work permits once they have entered Canada. In a few worst-case scenarios, students invited through improper channels have had to return home.

**Admission Requirements**

Admission requirements for the program are simple: students need to be enrolled in a graduate degree program at a recognized university, and must have the support of both a U of T graduate faculty member and their home supervisor. The program is not open to undergraduate students, recent graduates, or students enrolled in diploma or certificate programs. (For information on other categories of visitor, please see [http://immigration.utoronto.ca](http://immigration.utoronto.ca).) While there is no formal English proficiency requirement, host supervisors are strongly encouraged to assure themselves that prospective IVGS students have sufficient levels of English language skill to handle not only their research project, but also immigration, administrative issues at the University, and the city in general.

**Admission Procedure**

Graduate faculty who wish to supervise a visiting student need to prepare an invitation letter laying out the terms of the visit. Important issues to determine are the length of the visit and the scope of research to be undertaken, frequency of supervisory meetings, any intellectual property issues, and what financial support, if any, will be available for the student. SGS can provide samples of past letters as templates. Both the invitation letter and the [IVGS application form](http://immigration.utoronto.ca) need to be signed by the U of T supervisor and the Chair or Director of their graduate unit, the student’s home supervisor and chair, and the student. Final SGS approval is given by the Recruitment and Admissions Office, in consultation with
the Director, Student Academic Services, and, if necessary, the Vice-Dean of Students. The School of Graduate Studies then issues a formal offer of admission.

Services for Students
IVGS students, in paying incidental fees, gain access to campus-wide student services – including health and wellness, housing, and access to library and computer resources. Crucially, it also gives them access to the student services offered by the Centre for International Experience, including immigration advice.

SGS Support for Faculty and Staff
Services provided by the RAO to support graduate unit administrative staff and graduate faculty include:

- The IVGS website, with full information about fees, and useful links to information on immigration
- Sample letters of invitation for supervisors inviting visiting students for the first time
- Regular training sessions for staff members on IVGS procedures and issues (the next is on Tuesday, April 2 – contact sgs.international@utoronto.ca to RSVP; faculty members are welcome as well)
- The recently launched listserv SGS-MOBILITY-L@LISTERV.UTORONTO.CA, which allows
  - SGS to disseminate news of interest to faculty and staff working with visiting students (fee updates, changes to immigration law)
  - Faculty and staff to share information and best practices

We look forward to working with faculty and staff in all units to ensure that the University of Toronto provides a warm welcome – and a smooth arrival – for all visiting graduate students.

Sincerely,

Professor Charmaine Williams
Acting Vice-Dean, Students
School of Graduate Studies
University of Toronto