Growing Pains:
Transitioning from Small Schools to a Large Institution

Presenters:

Casey Giacomini, MA, International Student and Scholar Advisor, Georgia Tech
Nora Hamilton, MA, Senior International Student and Scholar Advisor, Georgia Tech

Our Background…

- Casey Giacomini:
  - DSO at smaller school for 1.5 years. About 150 F-1 and J-1 students.

- Nora Hamilton:
  - Int'l Student Advisor at ESL school for 3 years. Range of 200-400 F-1 students. One of 2 DSOs
  - Int'l Student Advisor at small private university for 3 years. About 1,000 F-1 students (enrolled and on OPT). About 5 J scholars and students. Approx. 5 DSOs.

Our Current Roles…

- Nora joined Georgia Tech in November 2017. Casey joined in 2018.

- Big changes:

- GT total student population is ~ 29,000 (Fall 2017)

- Current GT ISSS team: 6 ISSS Advisors, 2 ISSS Coordinators, 1 Director

- GT international student and scholars population (2017-2018):

F /J students	OPT/AT	J scholars	J interns	Total
4,818	1,498	834	211	7,361

Why we're here…

Considering a transition?

- How to leverage your current skills

- How to deal with higher volume

- Understanding institutional differences

Hiring from a small school?

- Best practices for training a new hire

- Supporting a new hire beyond the training process

We're sharing our personal experiences and insights. Your experience may vary!

Tell us about yourself!

- What is the population of your school?

- How many international students and scholars do you serve?

- Have you experienced a major transition in population size?

Compliance

Compliance Changes

Advising Differences:
– Much more cautious and deliberate approach to advising.
– Students always advised on risks of their actions (Ex: Travel with pending OPT and I-94 complications; exceeding OPT unemployment)
– Culture change re: advisor knowledge and engagement

Exposure to New Concepts:
– Greater overall complexity of cases
– ESL schools don't do CPT, OPT and STEM extensions!
– Small universities have fewer OPT and STEM extension requests
– Dealing with H1B visa questions and Cap-Gap Extension!

Compliance Changes, cont.

Communications Management:

– More stakeholders are involved in compliance and interaction with government entities, beyond those in our office.

– Messages may be carefully reviewed by multiple entities before being released.

– Greater awareness of political/institutional repercussions.

– Differences of private vs. public institution?

Preparing for compliance changes

- Familiarize yourself with F1 and J1 regulations, not just your institution's policies

- NAFSA Advisor's Manual is a lifesaver!

- Identify peers you can reach out to at other schools if you have questions

- Read other schools' websites to learn how they interpret the regs to gain perspective

- Get on the NAFSA message boards! Read threads and post your own questions.
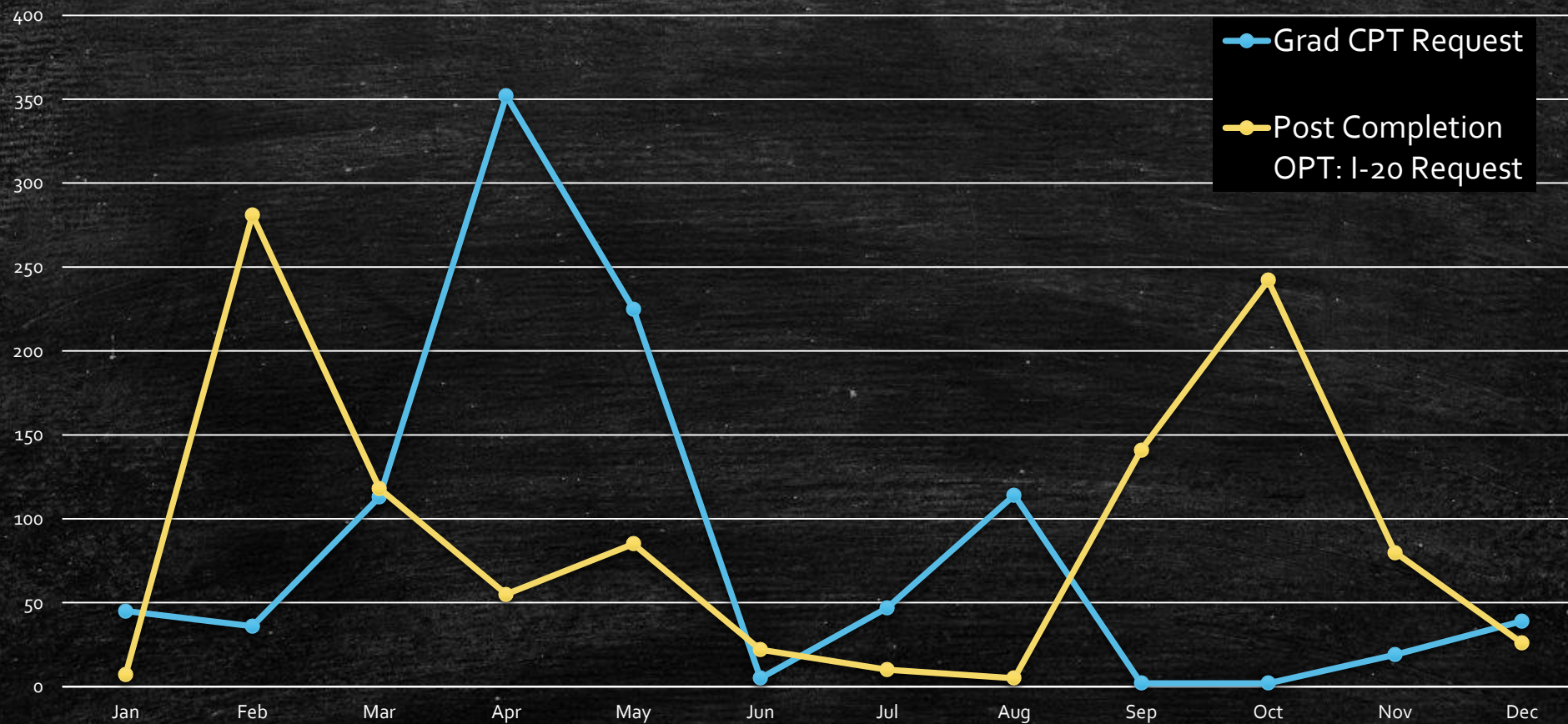
Workload

Workload Changes

Type and Volume Changes:

- Expect changes in the types of requests processed – each ISSS office has different responsibilities

- Volume of requests will also change, so may not have capacity for hand-holding

- Expectations change on processing times – set boundaries and stay within them

- Method of communicating requests will change

Preparing for a change in workload

- Know your cycles – Use data to predict processing cycles to prepare, schedule, and fill training gaps
  - Use this data to flex work assignments

Georgia Tech OPT / CPT Cycles

Preparing for a change in workload

Technology

- Learn Excel – this is a great tool if you don't have an ISS Management software. Also a great tool in analyzing data.
  - Lynda.com
  - Youtube
- Calendars – Block off time and stick to it. Set up routines.

Block Processing

- Reduction in variability (i.e. switching between many different tasks) helps to establish a rhythm and routine.
- Training in relation to cycles – ease new advisors into processing different requests

Institutional Scale

Institutional Scale Changes

- How does each institution differ in their business practices?

- Differences in:
  - Academic programs
  - Organizations structure
  - Terminology

Preparing for a Change in Institutional Scale

Centralized vs Decentralized:
- Move from One-Stop Shop mentality – can support international students in immigration matters, but refer to others with expertise in other areas as well

Get to know your campus partners:
- Schedule in-person meetings or phone calls when you can
- Invite campus-partners to present to your staff
- Ask questions: Learn how to speak each area's different language, such as IT Language vs ISSS Language

Find common ground:
- What past experience do you have that can relate to other departments' work

Training

Reflections on Training

- New advisors were trained by experienced advisors

- New advisors shadow experienced advisors during advising sessions

- Slow rollout of advising duties as training progressed

- Know your new advisors learning style

Recommendations for Training

- Allow advisors to develop their own style. Promote individuality!

- As a manager, know where you (and your office) falls with the regs. More conservative or liberal? Talk to your new hire about their prior workplace culture and explain your philosophy.

- Encourage team members to learn from each others' prior experiences. Allow time to discuss past practices.

- What does your new hire bring to the table? Detailed tax advising skills?

Recommendations for Training, cont.

- "Cheat sheet" of office/campus lingo

- What are your office norms and expectations? Are they documented and shared with staff?

- Maintain clear documentation of processes and share information with new hires (ex. refunds, calling out sick, conference attendance, phone lists, evaluations)

- Consider designating an in-office buddy for the new hire

- Building institutional knowledge takes time!

Conclusion

Questions?

Contact us!

- Casey Giacomini: casey.giacomini@oie.gatech.edu

- Nora Hamilton: nora.hamilton@oie.gatech.edu