Introduction

The EducationUSA Adviser Competencies are designed to provide a common definition of what it means to be an adviser. Developed by REACs and EducationUSA professional development staff, the competencies set forth the key duties of an adviser and encapsulate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform these duties effectively.

Recognizing that the expectations of the adviser position often vary over time and by location, and that advisers build professional expertise and take on additional duties as they gain experience, each competency is divided into Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. Broadly:

- Level 1 competencies focus on working with students and building knowledge of U.S. higher education, the State Department, and EducationUSA policies and procedures.
- Level 2 competencies focus on advising center management duties, strategic planning, and advocating for and representing EducationUSA.
- Level 3 competencies focus on serving as a resource for peers, developing specific areas of expertise, delivering training and contributing to the knowledge base of the network.

Using the Competencies

The competencies are intended to serve as a foundation for adviser professional development. REACs use the competencies to help advisers establish professional goals, assess their progress and development, determine training needs, and identify appropriate training activities to meet those needs. EducationUSA professional development staff and REACs use them to design training that focuses on specific competencies and advising levels, and addresses areas of particular need within the network.

It is not expected that all advisers will engage in all of the activities outlined, or that all advisers should attain the highest level on each competency. Resources vary by location, and advisers often balance their advising work with other professional and personal responsibilities. Advisers should work with their REACs to determine locally appropriate activities within each competency, and set realistic and manageable goals for their professional development.

Competency 1: Help Students Have a Successful Study Experience in the U.S.

Level 1:

- Establish effective advising relationships with students through:
  - Individual advising sessions
  - Group advising sessions
  - Use of all available communication tools (e.g. email, phone, social media, etc.)
• Use key information resources to help students conduct a college search, including:
  – Field-specific search engines
  – The EducationUSA website
  – The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) website and other resources to determine an institution’s accreditation status
  – Other EducationUSA and State Department resources (e.g. the weekly update, Connections, etc.)

• Help students complete the application process by providing guidance on:
  – Application procedures for different institutions, including materials required and the use of the common application
  – Standardized tests, including acronyms and required scores
  – Elements of effective application essays and recommendation letters
  – How a U.S. admissions office works, how decisions are made, etc.

• Assist students in financing their education in the U.S. by providing guidance on:
  – Differences in costs for different types of institutions and programs
  – The basics of the U.S. financial aid system, including differences between undergraduate and graduate financial aid, and resources available to international students.
  – Major scholarships available for international students

• Help students successfully navigate the visa process by providing guidance on:
  – Types of visas required for different populations (i.e. student, intern, trainee, etc.) and regulations
  – Application requirements and procedures
  – The SEVIS system and how it is used

• Plan and deliver a Pre-Departure Orientation.

• Counsel matriculated students on cultural, social, and academic adjustment issues as requested.

• Abide by all EducationUSA Principles of Ethical Practice as they pertain to working with students.

**Level 2:**

• Develop innovative advising activities, and practice “continuous improvement” in carrying out existing activities.

• Be able to lead and advise a Competitive College Club or other focused group advising, and advise students on other programs such as USAP, Opportunity, etc.

• Provide additional information to assist students in the college search process, including:
  – Which U.S. institutions have strong programs in particular disciplines
  – Which U.S. institutions have a strong track record of admitting local students
  – Which institutions in their home countries have a record of sending students to the U.S., and which institutions are underrepresented
  – How to distinguish “diploma mills” from legitimate institutions.
  – How to determine which institutions are feasible financially based on financial aid policies, scholarships, etc.
  – How career counseling works in the U.S. and how it intersects with institution/academic program selection.

• Further facilitate the student application process by:
  – Reviewing and critiquing application essays, and helping students tailor their essays to specific institutions and programs.
  – Understanding how U.S. institutions use social media in the admissions process, and facilitating engagement of students with institutions through social media.
  – Understanding credential evaluation, and providing information about home country credentials to U.S. institutions.
- Building relationships with admissions officers at individual U.S. institutions in order to facilitate student application and matriculation.
- Instructing students on strategies for taking standardized tests, e.g. how to guess effectively.

- Provide additional guidance to students on financing their education, including information on:
  - Lower-tuition options (e.g. 2+2 programs versus four-year degree)
  - Specialized scholarships (e.g. for sports, music, etc.)
  - A broader range of scholarships available to international students, who qualifies, etc.
  - How to interpret the EducationUSA Financial Aid List.
  - Cost comparisons between higher education in the U.S. and in other countries (e.g. the UK, Australia, etc.)
  - Calculating (realistic) family contribution for financial aid applications

- Understand and advise students on the nuances of the visa application process, including typical pitfalls and how to avoid them, and trouble-shoot visa problems as they arise.

- Have experience on a U.S. campus and be able to provide students with first-hand accounts of campus life.

**Level 3:**

- Possess deep knowledge of an increasing number of individual U.S. institutions, including academic strengths, campus culture, etc. in order to guide students in the college search process.

- Continue to build and maintain relationships with U.S. admissions officers, and leverage relationships to facilitate successful student placements. Share contacts with less experienced advisers to help them build their own contact networks. Share detailed information about enrollment trends, financial aid policies, etc. for specific institutions with colleagues.

- Be aware of broad trends in tuition and financial aid, and understand related U.S. legislation and its potential impacts (direct and indirect) on international students.

- Establish and maintain relationships with contacts (e.g. in the Embassy) who can facilitate the visa process and help troubleshoot visa problems.

- Understand and be able to explain how trends in student mobility and other developments in U.S. higher education impact advising and international exchange more broadly.

- Train less experienced advisers on advising techniques, and help them trouble-shoot problems throughout the application and admission process.

- Contribute new advising-related resources to the EducationUSA network for use by other advisers (e.g. training materials, best practices, etc.).

---

**Competency 2: Advocate for U.S. Higher Education**

**Level 1:**

- Understand and be able to explain the basic structure and characteristics of the U.S. higher education system to students and other audiences, including:
  - Types of institutions (e.g. public, private, research university, liberal arts college, community college, technical school, etc.) and their defining characteristics.
  - Degree structures and curriculum models.
  - The accreditation system.
  - The student grading system.
- Unique characteristics and strengths of the U.S. higher education model.
- Campus culture and student life (e.g. housing, student services, etc.).
- How the U.S. system differs from their home country higher education system.

- Be able to “tell the story” of the American college experience.
- Provide contacts for visiting representatives from U.S. institutions seeking to arrange visits to local institutions.

**Level 2:**

- Understand and be able to explain additional aspects of the U.S. higher education system to students and other audiences, including:
  - The Carnegie classification system and characteristics of each type of institution.
  - The credit system.
  - Rankings, including different systems (e.g. U.S. News and World Report), and the pros and cons of rankings.
  - Standards for academic integrity, including the definition of plagiarism.

- Develop a nuanced understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of U.S. higher education and particular institution types, and be able to engage others in constructive dialogue in these areas.

- Help identify appropriate potential local institution partners for U.S. institutions interested in collaborations, and be able to facilitate communication and meetings.

**Level 3:**

- Stay abreast of U.S. higher education news and understand how trends in student mobility, U.S. state and national legislation, and other developments in U.S. higher education impact international students.

- Identify potentially mutually beneficial collaborations between U.S. and local institutions, initiate communication between potential partners, and accompany visiting U.S. institutional representatives to meetings in-country.

### Competency 3: Manage an Advising Center

**Level 1:**

- Understand and be able to explain the structure of the EducationUSA network, including internal and external stakeholders (e.g. students, supervisors, REAC’s, Program Officers, Embassies staff, etc.), their roles, and their expectations of advisers to students and other clients.

- Communicate effectively with all center stakeholders, using the appropriate chain of communication and communication methods within the network (e.g. with REAC’s, through listservs, etc.)

- Collect and compile basic center statistics accurately and on schedule, and use the Center Reporting System and Activity Tracker as required by the State Department.

- Organize a physical advising center that effectively serves the needs of students and other stakeholders.

- Understand how to use basic social media tools in marketing and outreach efforts, including region-specific social media and tools. Comply with and promote host institution strategies for the use of social media.

- Demonstrate strong organization and time management skills.

- Abide by all EducationUSA Principles of Ethical Practice as they pertain to advising center management.
Level 2:

- Understand and be able to explain the structure of the U.S. State Department, including how the Bureau of Educational Affairs fits in, the role of regional bureaus, etc., and how EducationUSA fits into local Embassy Mission Strategic Resource Plans.

- Manage and meet expectations of internal and external stakeholders, and cultivate effective working relationships with all stakeholders.

- Build a broad network of contacts (e.g. U.S. and local higher education officials, alumni, other U.S. government-sponsored exchange program contacts, etc.) and know whom to contact for help in a given situation.

- Analyze center statistics, write reports, and make recommendations based on data.

- Contribute to center marketing plans, including setting and meeting outreach targets.

- Manage a center budget.

- Participate in strategic planning (for center, for country, etc.).

- Develop a year-round advising calendar and other center timelines and schedules that are in line with the U.S. admissions calendar.

- Involve and manage volunteers and interns in center work and outreach activities.

- Manage social media networks and cohorts (e.g. build a contact database, engage with “friends,” etc.). Develop strategies to increase social media traffic.

- Develop and engage a center alumni network.

Level 3:

- Stay aware and informed about State Department trends and priorities, and their potential impact on EducationUSA and center operations.

- Hire, train, supervise, and evaluate center staff.

- Motivate staff and provide guidance on their professional development.

- Serve as a role model for center staff and other advisers.

- Oversee development of center budgets.

- Oversee development and implementation of center marketing plans.

- Lead strategic planning initiatives.

- Share contacts and make introductions for other advisers seeking contacts in particular areas.

- Cultivate a sense of community among stakeholders, and feeling of working together towards shared goals.

- Recognize opportunities for innovation in center operations.

- Train less experienced advisers on management skills.
Competency 4: Represent and Advocate for EducationUSA

**Level 1:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to EducationUSA’s mission, including U.S. public diplomacy goals, throughout their work, and articulate the importance of EducationUSA’s work to a variety of audiences including host organizations and Public Affairs Sections.
- Understand and adhere to EducationUSA’s guidelines and policies, including the policy on commercial agents, Principles of Ethical Practice, and the Free Services document.
- Convey a positive attitude towards the U.S., enthusiasm for U.S. higher education and its benefits, and a belief in the value of international exchange.
- Conduct all activities and interactions in a professional manner, and provide excellent customer service.
- Actively seek out collaboration with other organizations and institutions (e.g. Embassies) to support students and fulfill EducationUSA’s goals.

**Level 2:**

- Demonstrate innovation, creativity, and initiative in advancing EducationUSA’s mission.
- Be able to articulate the impact of EducationUSA using quantitative (e.g. center statistics) and qualitative (e.g. personal stories) data.
- Be driven and highly motivated in all aspects of their jobs.
- Exercise patience in dealing with stakeholders and processes, and persevere through challenges.
- Project a welcoming and tolerant attitude towards all stakeholders, even when addressing difficult issues.

**Level 3:**

- Manifest a sense of personal investment in EducationUSA, and a desire to continually improve the program as a whole.
- Represent EducationUSA at conferences and other venues as an advocate for the network and international education.
- Guide less experienced advisers on the application of ethical standards and other policies in particular situations.
- Facilitate open and respectful discussion among all stakeholders, including when addressing conflicts or difficult issues.
- Demonstrate a commitment to advancing the advising profession and contributing to the professional development of less experienced advisers.
- Exhibit a personal commitment to international education as a field, and a strong belief in what it accomplishes.
Competency 5: Build Professional Competence and Contribute to the Knowledge Base of the Network

**Level 1:**
- Understand the adviser professional development track and available training opportunities (e.g. in-country training, EducationUSA Training Institute, webinars, etc.), and be willing to engage in appropriate professional development activities as identified by self and REAC.
- Apply knowledge and skills acquired through training and other professional development activities in their work, and be able to articulate the impact of such opportunities on their effectiveness as advisers.

**Level 2:**
- Actively seek out additional training and professional development opportunities, and apply new knowledge and skills acquired.
- Begin to develop a specific area of expertise and contribute to resources and training activities for other advisers in this area.

**Level 3:**
- Continue to build expertise in a specific area, and develop information resources and training materials (e.g. articles, webinars, etc.) for use throughout the network. Identify new areas of interest, conduct research, and build additional expertise.
- Serve as a consultant to other advisers, providing advice and best-practices on a range of topics.
- Participate in the delivery of Level 1 and Level 2 training adviser training activities, and assist REAC’s with regional conferences as requested.
- Identify specialized training and professional development opportunities for self, including planning individual research projects.