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## Advocacy Corner - v8

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## Advocacy Corner by Daryl Bish

On May 11, 2023 the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) terminated its COVID-19 guidance that allowed F and M visa students to enroll in a program of study that contains online components in excess of the regulatory limits. While most schools returned to in-person operations months or even years ago, SEVP's discontinuation of the COVID guidance, in a way, marks the end of an unprecedented three year period that significantly impacted English Language Programs (ELPs) and international education.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ELP field cannot be overstated. It is responsible for the largest ever decrease in U.S. international student enrollment, with ELPs being hit hardest and being the slowest to recover. Historically low F-1 student enrollments forced many ELPs to close their doors for good during the pandemic and it required many to expand beyond the traditional intensive English program by creating courses to serve students who do not need the F-1 visa, such as community ESL or online classes for students outside the U.S. The pandemic altered classroom instruction and student advising as both moved online. Despite returning to in-person instruction, many ELPs continue to use web-based learning management systems and online textbooks; immigration and academic advisors continue to meet students via Zoom and serve them online. And thanks to a pandemic-related decision by SEVP, F-1 students can now receive their I-20 electronically, adding efficiencies to the admissions process never before seen. Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic altered the ELP and international education landscape in both large and small ways that will stay with the field for years to come.

The much talked about post-pandemic "new normal" for U.S. international education is here and ELPs are meeting the moment with resilience, adaptability, grit, and, perhaps more than ever, collaboration as the field continues to rebound from the effects of the pandemic. However, the "new normal" for ELPs and U.S. international education arrives with a more competitive global market. The global competition for international students is becoming more intense. Many of our competitor countries are seeing increases in international student enrollment that can be attributed to their strategic commitment to international education and successful efforts to attract students. For example, the Australian government has relaxed student visa work restrictions and will increase the number of years international student graduates can stay in the country ([Study International Staff, 2023](#)). Such changes make Australia a more attractive destination and have helped to increase enrollments. In 2021 the United Kingdom established an international education strategy with the explicit goal of hosting 600,000 international students by 2030. They achieved this goal ten years earlier than expected ([Erudera News, 2022](#)). The UK is not alone, many countries have set national targets for international student enrollment. While the United States remains the top destination for international students, its competitors are demonstrating that a national, strategic approach to international education can produce results.

International education organizations, including EnglishUSA, are calling for a coordinated, strategic approach to U.S. international education and leaders believe that the field is at a turning point. The time to act is now and international education leaders and organizations will continue to urge the government to build on their [July 2021 Joint State of Principles](#) renewing U.S. commitment to international education by developing a national strategy that increases international student enrollment across the country.



EnglishUSA, as the only organization in the United States that includes all types of ELPs, has taken steps to increase the visibility of ELPs at the national level while promoting the value of ELPs to international education stakeholders. Such efforts are important as momentum for a national international education strategy grows. It is imperative that ELPs and language training be part of any national strategy to attract more international students. To that end, EnglishUSA will build on past advocacy actions while developing new strategies to promote and support the ELP sector.

In October 2022 the association released policy recommendations that, if enacted, would support English study and international education in the United States. The recommendations address long term issues that impact ELP student enrollment, such as consular officials denying the visa because of questions of academic choice and qualifications and admission criteria. Denial of a visa should not be based on English-language competency. Additionally, EnglishUSA has encouraged member programs to advocate for the inclusion of language training student enrollment data in the annual SEVIS by the Numbers report released by SEVP. The omission of ELP student data from the report means that ELPs and their students are not identified and included in the national discussion of international student enrollments. Unfortunately, SEVP did not include ELP student data in the most recent report released in April 2022, so EnglishUSA

will continue to advocate for this. Most importantly, EnglishUSA was awarded a U.S. Department of Commerce, Market Development Cooperator Program (MDCP) grant to promote the U.S as a language study destination. It includes initiatives that will provide enhanced data collection on ELP student enrollment as well as promoting U.S. ELPs in South and Central America through trade missions and supporting educational agents, consultants, and advisors. In March 2023 EnglishUSA and Bonard, the globally recognized market research and strategy development firm, released the first ever sector-created survey collecting detailed information on U.S. ELP enrollments. The initiatives EnglishUSA creates through the MDCP award help support industry-wide marketing, recruiting, and, importantly, it helps EnglishUSA promote the ELP sector nationally.

Increasing the visibility of ELPs and English language study in the U.S. is a theme that EnglishUSA's Advocacy and External Relations Committee (AERC) will continue in the 2023/2024 academic year. EnglishUSA will promote the field's public image and the member interests of EnglishUSA stakeholders while monitoring public policy and relations with stakeholders. It will continue with the above mentioned advocacy efforts and more, but with a key difference: increased collaboration with associations and agencies.

Fanta Aw, NAFSA's new executive director and CEO highlights the importance of increased collaboration and intentionally and strategically building alliances across the international education sector. She states that "given the major challenges that we're seeing in the sector and what the future outlook seems to indicate, we're going to have to figure out how to work much more in comprehensive partnerships and alliances" (Manning, 2023). To that end, EnglishUSA is proud to announce the re-formation of a group of association & accreditation leaders. The group, now referred

to as the English Language Program Advisory Consortium (ELPAC) is made up of leadership from EnglishUSA, UCIEP, TESOL International Association, NAFSA, and IIE. This group, formerly known as Alphabet Soup and/or CIEPA - Council of Intensive English Program Associations, has met in many configurations over the past 25+ years. ELPAC meets quarterly to provide updates and address topics relevant to the English language program industry and the Executive Directors of ACCET and CEA participate as observers. EnglishUSA will engage with ELPAC to discuss and potentially address shared goals and to collectively support and promote the role that English language programs play in international education. Collaboration is necessary for success and it's a vital part in ensuring that ELP issues and concerns do not get lost in the large, complicated ecosystem of international education in the U.S.

We at EnglishUSA appreciate your support and encourage you to continue to advocate for your students and programs while promoting the the value of ELPs to your stakeholders. Please share your thoughts and questions about any of the above topics on EnglishUSA's Engage Forum.

*Daryl Bish is the Assistant Director and PDSO at the University of Florida English Language Institute. He has extensive experience as an instructor, program recruiter, and administrator, having worked for university and community college programs. His master's degree is in Curriculum and Instruction, with TESL Certification. He has served as the NAFSA IEP Network Leader, a CEA site reviewer, and is currently Chair of the Advocacy and External Relations Committee on the EnglishUSA Executive Board.*

