



CAL STATE LA MANAGES COMPLIANCE WHILE KEEPING STUDENTS FRONT AND CENTER



Summary

NAME:

California State University,
Los Angeles

LOCATION:

Los Angeles, CA

OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

- 26,000 total students
- 450 enrolled F-1 students
- 301 students on OPT/STEM OPT

SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED:

- ISSS
- SEVIS Coordinator as a Service
- Study Abroad

At California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA), international education is central to fostering cultural connections and expanding student opportunities. In one of the world's most diverse cities, the university supports 450 enrolled F-1 international students and 301 students on OPT or STEM OPT each year. Cal State LA also promotes global learning through study abroad programs and international partnerships.

In recent years, rising demand and reduced staffing have created new challenges—but also opened the door for innovative solutions. By rethinking how they deliver services, Cal State LA's International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) office found new strategies to stay compliant, operate more efficiently, and remain focused on what matters most: helping students thrive.

With Terra Dotta's ISSS platform and SEVIS Coordinator as a Service, the team has streamlined operations while continuing to deliver the personalized support that defines their work.

775+

new I-20 invitations in a
single semester

400+

SIS changes cleared
in under 3 weeks

Significantly

reduced lag time from
admission to I-20 issuance



Resource shifts strained capacity, but not the mission

A 7.9% cut to the university's operational budget—equal to \$397 million for the 2025–26 academic year—hit international programs hard. Staff departures and a hiring freeze left ISSS operating with just one Designated School Official (DSO) supporting hundreds of F-1 students and graduates on OPT.

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“It's not just the volume—it's the complexity,” says James Fukaye, International Student Advisor at Cal State LA. “With fewer hands on deck, I've had to take on everything from document processing to tech troubleshooting to student support.”

The hiring freeze and broader uncertainty across campus made it harder to maintain even routine support. Processing times doubled—from 7 to 14 days—and advising became more transactional as the team worked to keep up.



“Like many across the CSU system, our office has had to adapt to changing resources while responding to increasing demand,” says Matthew Walters, Director of the International Programs Office at Cal State LA. “It's been a challenge, but our top priority remains ensuring that students have the time, attention, and support they need to succeed.”

ISSS also became a frequent first stop for questions beyond its core responsibilities. “When questions from international students cross into other areas of the university, our office often becomes the first point of contact,” says Walters. “We're glad to help, but we also connect students with the right campus experts for their specific needs.”

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Reclaiming time, reducing strain, restoring focus

Cal State LA first adopted Terra Dotta's ISSS platform in 2020 to modernize student services and provide international students with mobile-friendly, self-service tools. By 2024, however, rising compliance requirements and limited staffing increased the pressure on the office. The team turned to SEVIS Coordinator as a Service to ease the administrative workload and accelerate document processing.

"Without Terra Dotta, meeting compliance requirements while also maintaining the level of student engagement we value would be much more challenging," says Walters. "When the opportunity came to implement SEVIS Coordinator as a Service, we saw it as an important additional support for both our staff and our students. The benefits were clear right away."

Two clicks, zero errors, and more I-20s processed

When SEVIS Coordinator as a Service launched, more than 400 SIS changes were sitting in the queue. Within three weeks, the backlog was cleared. At the same time, 160 students received I-20 invitations and their records were created in SEVIS with 100% accuracy—a milestone for the team.

"It was the first time I'd ever seen that list empty," says Fukaye. "I didn't think it was possible. It's a big win for the team and for morale, helping us think beyond compliance and toward what else we can accomplish."



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Daily operations improved across the board. Batch processing, once time-consuming, now takes just a few clicks. Onboarding invitations, previously sent twice a week, are now triggered by daily checks—allowing students to receive their I-20 invitations just days after admission. In one semester, the office sent more than 775 invitations, significantly reducing the gap between acceptance and engagement.

“Terra Dotta enables us to send daily invitations that allow us to issue more I-20s in less time,” says Fukaye. “Automated batch reporting helps us complete what used to take hours in just minutes.”

The system has also improved collaboration. With integrated workflows and built-in communication, ISSS can coordinate more effectively with campus departments and external stakeholders.

Most significantly, the service helps fill the gap left by a SEVIS coordinator role that the office can no longer staff during the hiring freeze.

“This has been a valuable step forward in how we manage our workload,” says Walters. “With SEVIS Coordinator as a Service handling many of the administrative compliance tasks a coordinator would normally take on, we can focus our limited staffing resources on student-facing advising. While budget challenges remain, this support is crucial in helping us maintain compliance and prioritize student engagement.”