

AGENCY STEPS UP INQUIRIES ON FOREIGN STUDENTS;

MIZZOU HAS BEEN ASKED FOR DATA ON 1,300 AT ITS CAMPUS

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Body

Even before President George W. Bush proclaimed Monday a crackdown on U.S. visas for foreign students, some U.S. colleges and universities were already feeling the squeeze.

Jim McCartney, interim director of the International Center at the University of Missouri at Columbia, said the Immigration and Naturalization Service made a special request to his office about 10 days ago for data on each of the campus's 1,300 foreign students.

McCartney said the agency asked for copies of each student's visa documents plus a transcript, the student's current program and number of credit hours being taken. To comply within the agency's two-week deadline, "We've got three people who aren't doing anything but standing at the copy machine," McCartney said.

St. Louis University has received since Sept. 11 "moderately more" calls than usual from the immigration agency, just checking to see whether individual students are enrolled, spokesman Jeff Fowler said.

The agency long has had the legal right to certain types of information about foreign students, and colleges are obliged to keep it and give it to the agency when it asks. Administrators who work with foreign students at colleges in the St. Louis area say the agency has always asked for the information - periodically. They also say they are hearing on their professional grapevine that the immigration agency has been extra active in requesting information in the past seven weeks.

Agency spokeswoman Elaine Komis would say only that, because of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the agency has been seeking information that it had not sought before.

MU's McCartney said he had "no notion" how the agency was choosing schools for scrutiny or why it had selected Mizzou.

Bert Barry, director of international services at Webster University, said the school had been "fortunate - knock on wood - that we haven't had such a request" from the immigration agency.

Student visas have come to public attention since Sept. 11 because two of the terrorists involved in the attacks may have used them to enter the country initially. Barry and his counterparts at other colleges say the immigration agency's current system for tracking foreign students is so full of loopholes that holders of student visas can easily enter and stay without ever registering for a class.

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Toni Liston, international **student** services adviser at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, said the immigration service has never had "the money, the computers, the wherewithal" to monitor **foreign students**. She said its current system suffers from lags of two to four years.

Notes

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