

ANNUAL REPORT

International Students and Scholars Office
Office of the Provost

2025-2026

HELLO, WORLD!



LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PROVOST AND ISSO DIRECTORS

Dear Colleagues,

We are delighted to present the Columbia University International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) Annual Report for 2025-2026. Within these pages, we celebrate the achievements of our international community, while highlighting the programs and collaborative efforts that ensure our vibrant global community continues to flourish. We are also using this moment to celebrate transitions: ISSO has recently said goodbye to longtime leaders, Kathy McVeigh, Samantha Lu, and Soulaymane Kachani, while welcoming new colleagues into leadership roles, Gwyneth Smith, Ushma Neill, and Miguel Urquiola. Many of us are pictured here at the May 2026 retirement party for Kathy McVeigh.



ISSO remains committed to fostering a welcoming environment for Columbia's international community. Our dedicated team provides timely guidance on immigration and documentation, ensuring our support services are accessible and responsive. We are proud to support a diverse community of faculty, students, researchers and their families from 159 nations. Whether joining us for academic programs, research, or short-term visits, our international members enrich all of Columbia's campuses.

This report illustrates the breadth of ISSO's collaborative efforts and services. It also showcases our recent initiatives, highlighting new courses, programs, and webinars that keep our community informed and empowered. ISSO also continues to invest in enhancing the user experience for the communities we serve, while providing ongoing guidance on the latest visa and immigration news.

As we look into the future, we renew our promise to foster a welcoming campus for all. This team is dedicated to providing guidance and support to the Columbia international community, ensuring they feel truly at home at every stage of their time here.

Sincerely,

Ushma Neill, Vice Provost, Campus Integration

Miguel Urquiola, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives

Jane Acton, Director, ISSO Faculty and Scholar Services & Interim Director Student Services

Maria Reynoso, Director, ISSO Compliance

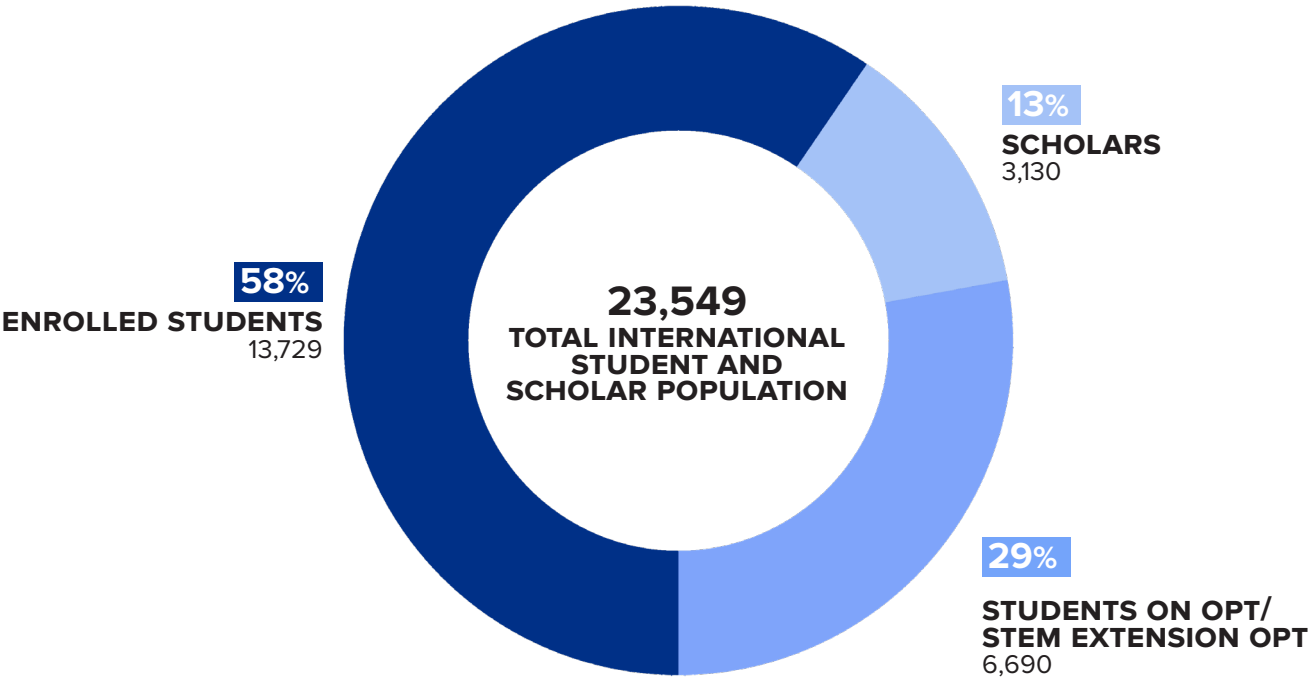
Gwyneth A. Smith, Interim Director, ISSO-CUIMC

Soulaymane Kachani, Outgoing Senior Vice Provost

Kathleen McVeigh, Outgoing Director, ISSO-CUIMC

2025-2026 BY THE NUMBERS

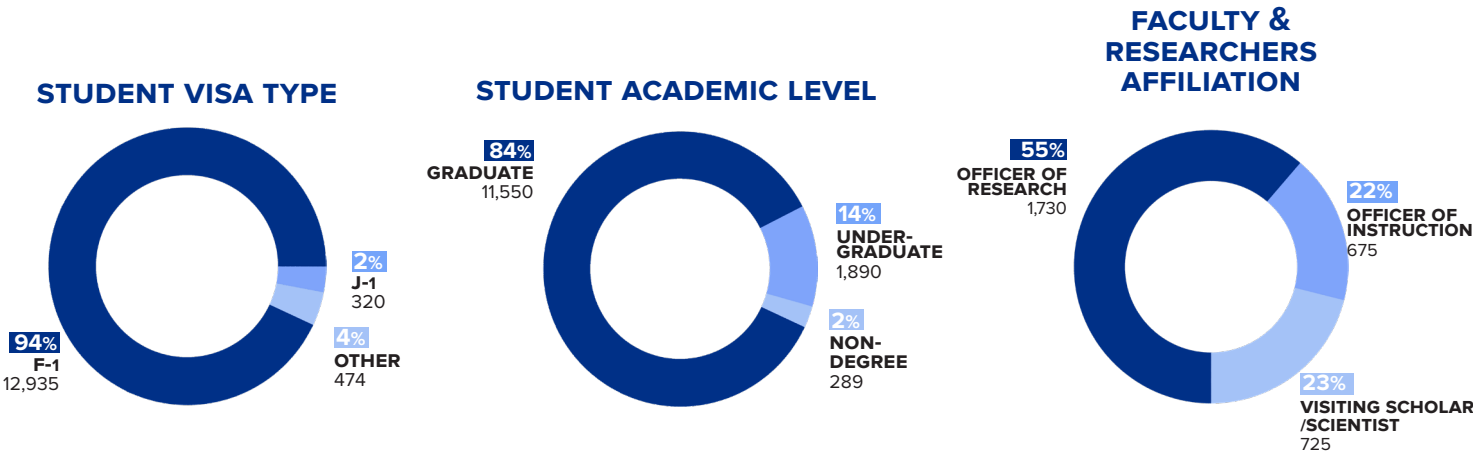
ISSO reports annually to the Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Survey, which captures information on international students and scholars.



APPROXIMATELY

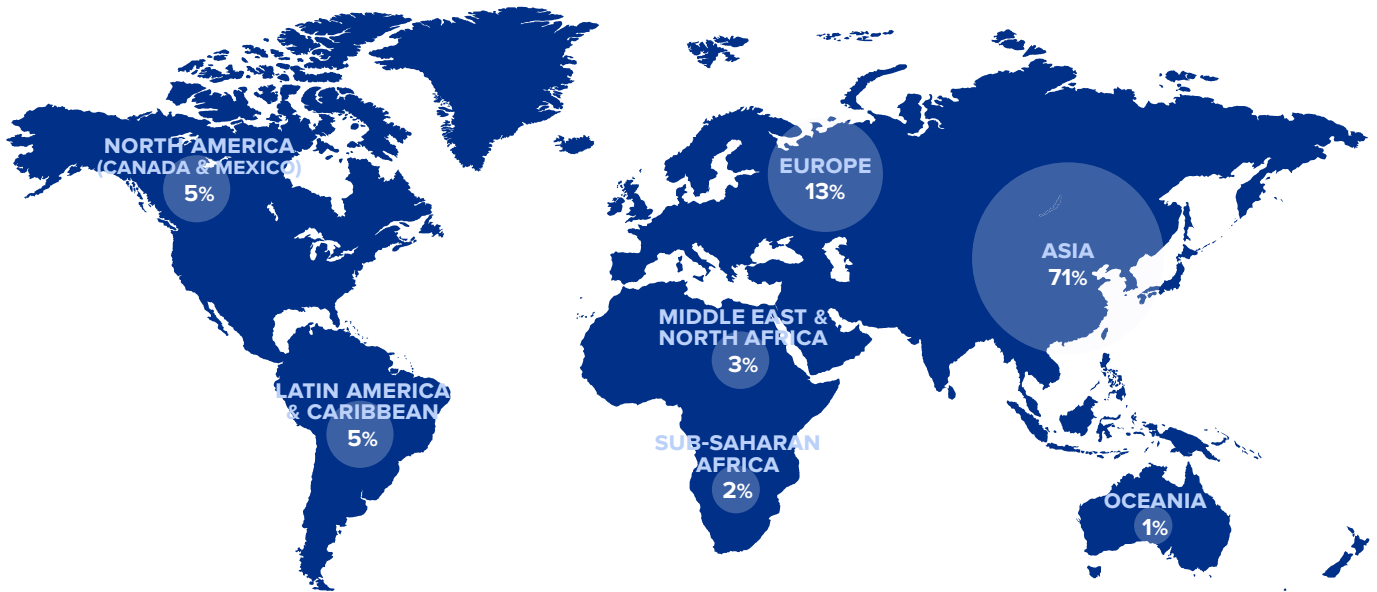
159 COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

53,000 STUDENT EMAILS, PHONE CALLS, APPOINTMENTS, AND DROP-INS

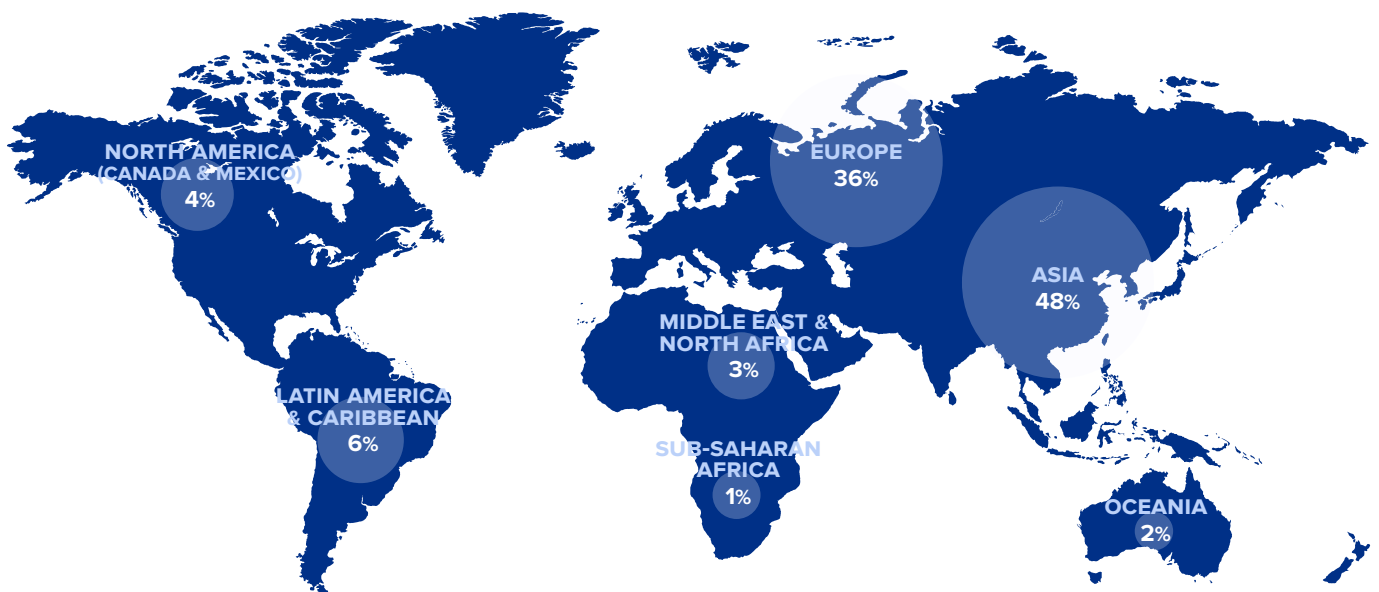


Population by Region

ENROLLED INTERNATIONAL STUDENT POPULATION BY REGION



INTERNATIONAL FACULTY & RESEARCHER POPULATION BY REGION





Highlights

Student Support

ISSO continues its commitment of delivering exceptional advising and support to international students — whether by phone, virtually, or in-person. With daily advising appointments offered each week and expanded telephone hours, available seven days a week, the office ensures students have consistent, reliable access to guidance when they need it most. Same-day appointments are always available to address critical concerns, reinforcing ISSO's student-first approach.



Educational Offerings

This year, ISSO developed new Canvas courses, launched a new podcast, and hosted regular webinars on immigration and visa-related topics to keep students informed and empowered. ISSO continues to collaborate with schools to support newly admitted international students through information sessions on the I-20/DS-2019 and visa issuance process.



Streamlined Student Requests

ISSO continues to strategically invest in Compass, our case management system to elevate the student experience and to manage international student records and requests. Through streamlined e-form questions, newly developed communication templates, and expanded e-form features, student submissions are easier for the user, enabling significantly faster adviser processing times. These enhancements not only improve efficiency but also increase clarity for students navigating complex immigration processes.



Improved Webpage Experience

Over the past year, ISSO elevated the international student experience by redesigning the Optional Practical Training (OPT) and STEM OPT Extension reporting webpages. The updates improved navigation and usability and included additional content to provide students with timely guidance and access to critical information.



Launched Virtual Pre-Arrival J-1 Scholar Orientation

In collaboration with Columbia+, ISSO enhanced its outreach to incoming J-1 Exchange Visitors through a new pre-arrival virtual orientation for faculty, researchers, and Visiting Student Interns. This orientation provides an overview of important regulatory compliance and shares resources to assist exchange visitors and their accompanying family with the transition to Columbia and life in the U.S.



Enhanced Reports for Columbia Administrators

ISSO launched automated, admissions-focused reports in Power BI, a Microsoft business intelligence program, providing enhanced reporting capabilities and interactive data visuals to support administrators as they prepare for new incoming international students.



Coordinated Student Group Celebrations and Collaborations

Working closely with registered international student groups, ISSO coordinated the inaugural Cultural Fair outside Butler Library, which showcased games, trivia, art, and activities from all over the world to the campus community. In collaboration with the 50 Haven Global Community, a campus residence and social hub, ISSO hosted a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, to share a recognizable U.S. tradition and celebration. ISSO continued to provide co-sponsorship grants to registered international student groups to support their campus programming that promotes, celebrates, and shares the international cultures of CU international students.



SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

ISSO serves international students and their dependents. Advisers have in-depth knowledge, training, and expertise to advise on immigration-related matters to ensure federal immigration compliance.

Programs, Sessions, Events, and Initiatives

ISSO engages our international community through initiatives that promote adjustment and well-being, foster community, support academic success, and provide timely guidance on immigration, employment, and compliance.

Incoming International Student Program Highlights

Even before arriving on campus, ISSO facilitates online community building opportunities, in addition to a robust series of webinars at the start of each semester. More than 2,000 new students joined ISSO's New International Student Welcome Gathering in the fall and over 800 participants attended pre-arrival programs on topics such as housing, immigration guidance, and academic success.

Programming Highlights

ISSO hosts a wide arrangement of educational and community-building programs both on and off campus.

New York City Life

ISSO facilitated experiences that showcased the energy and diversity of the “city that never sleeps.” Students attended Broadway performances, explored iconic destinations such as Central Park, Governors Island, and Bryant Park, enjoyed festivals, parades, and outdoor movies, and cheered on local teams including the New York Yankees and Brooklyn Nets. Students also took in breathtaking skyline views from SUMMIT One Vanderbilt and Top of the Rock, creating memorable experiences and deeper connections to city life.

Immigration Guidance and Support

In addition to regular programming regarding practical training options, maintaining student status requirements, and filing U.S. taxes, ISSO increased immigration guidance programming by hosting frequent webinars with immigration attorney, Dan Berger.

School Break Gatherings and Excursions

Recognizing that school breaks can be an isolating time for students, ISSO ensured students who remained in NYC over scheduled breaks had opportunities to connect with ISSO and other international students.



These opportunities included social ISSO drop-ins with games, puzzles, and space to relax. It also included community dinners, excursions, tours, as well as a plethora of experiences from the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes to our growing ISSO Summer in the City portfolio.

Celebrating Graduates

To honor and celebrate the achievements of our international graduates, ISSO again hosted two special celebrations: a Hudson River cruise and a community afternoon in Riverside Park. These annual events bring together graduating students, their families, and ISSO staff to celebrate this important milestone and foster a sense of pride, connection, and shared accomplishment.

Continuing Professional Development

ISSO Global Leadership Advancing Student Success (GLASS) continues to grow its leadership and professional development offerings, aiming to cultivate the next generation of globally minded leaders through a series of workshops, excursions, and experiences around three focus areas:

- Professional learning and development: Enhancing skills and knowledge for career readiness and leadership.
- Interpersonal and intercultural communication: Navigating communication dynamics across cultural contexts.
- Global mindfulness and inclusion: Developing cultural competencies and awareness.

With over 20 ISSO GLASS offerings each semester, international students develop their cultural intelligence and grow their professional networks by engaging with peers across degree levels, departments, and schools.

ISSO GLASS program offerings included:

- Looking for Work Around the Globe
- Thriving Under Pressure: Overcoming Imposter Syndrome
- Networking and Job Searching in the U.S. as an International Student
- Leveraging Your Leadership Styles Through Cultural Intelligence
- The Power of Your Story: Acing Interview Questions



“My experience with ISSO was absolutely great. They are really the best organization structure at Columbia for everything regarding status / struggles as an international student. I most enjoyed how they really knew me as a person, always answered very fast, and did not get annoyed whenever I asked questions repeatedly.”



— **ANNA VICTORIA ELISA RENTROP**,
F-1 STUDENT, PUBLIC HEALTH,
GERMANY

Outreach and Partnership Highlights

The programs and events that serve our community are successful because of the collaboration and partnership of many departments, schools, and registered student groups.

Ongoing Collaboration with International Student Groups

ISSO worked with student groups to promote and elevate student events. Co-sponsorship grants were awarded to:

- Diwali, the festival of lights, hosted by the Indian Students Association at Columbia
- Peru Summit at Columbia University, organized by the Peruvian Students at Columbia
- Annual Belly Dance Showcase, hosted by CU Raqs Sharqi, a group of students dedicated to exploring the ancient art of Middle Eastern dance
- Mid-Autumn Festival: Mooncake Making, sponsored by CUIMC-CSSA
- Indonesia Unplugged Vol. 1, a Cultural Night Festival hosted by the Columbia Indonesia Society
- Dia de Los Muertos in collaboration with the Global Community at 50 Haven (CUIMC)
- 2026 Chinese New Year Gala, hosted by the Columbia University Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CUCSSA)

During the annual International Education Week (IEW) in November, ISSO worked closely with Multicultural Affairs, the Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) Writing Studio to coordinate and cross-promote a series of programming focused on international and global learning and experiences.

In close partnership with University Life, ISSO co-hosted the spring 2026 “New Year, New Beginnings: A Spring Semester Welcome”, a night of networking, crafting, and dancing to welcome new students to campus and welcome back our returning students.



#ISSOstories Spotlight

Sandrine Amahoro Rutayisire, Alumna

Sadrine masterfully bridges computer science, film, and visual arts to explore storytelling in the digital age. Beyond her creative and academic work, she built a strong cross-cultural community at Columbia and demonstrated a commitment to environmental service through volunteer leadership with ASEZ (Save the Earth from A to Z), combining intellectual curiosity, artistic expression, and civic engagement throughout her Columbia experience.

Quick Facts:

- **Program/Department:** Computer Science
- **Academic Interest:** Data Visualization
- **Home Country:** Rwanda

Which Columbia program/department were you in?

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Computer Science.

Tell us about your research or projects at Columbia.

I did an interdisciplinary track so I did computer science, film, and visual arts. These things normally don't go together, so it was an interesting experience to bridge them and see the possibilities. Ultimately, I consider myself a storyteller so I like to see how we can tell stories in the time that we're in now. One project that I was so happy about was called *Originality in Literature*. With the emergence of AI, how can we write things that are original?

I have had the pleasure of hosting other projects including *Home for Pigeons and for Human* alongside my coursework. Advised by a great number of faculty, the primary aim of this short film is to explore themes of adaptation, marginality, and fractured subjectivity in contemporary urban life; specifically by viewing the city through a pigeon's perspective.

What is something you are proud of during your time at Columbia?

Something that I would spotlight is the relationship or the network that I built at Columbia. I'm very proud about the friendships that I've built at Columbia. Being able to meet people from different cultures, with different perspectives and beliefs.

Being far from home, I knew I needed to build a support network here. I joined ASEZ (Save the Earth from A to Z), a student volunteer group dedicated to environmental service. Through ASEZ, I spent weekends cleaning up parks, planting trees, and raising awareness about sustainability. ASEZ became my home on campus because I found my people: people who challenged me, supported me, and shared life with me whether we were coding into the night or planting flowers on a rainy day. I'm thankful to have been part of a club that was so welcoming, that taught me Mother's heart, and that allowed me to serve in that way.



SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL FACULTY AND RESEARCHERS

ISSO is responsible for federal regulation compliance related to J-1, H-1B, E-3, O-1, and TN visa statuses. ISSO also assists with sponsoring employment based Permanent Residence (PR) applications.

ISSO's commitment to supporting Columbia's international community also extends to the international faculty, researchers, postdocs, Visiting Student Interns, and Visiting Scholars who enrich the academic life on campus.

International scholars from across campuses are invited to engage with the ISSO community throughout their time at Columbia. They are welcome to grow their networks outside of their hosting departments through monthly coffee hours and social excursions, to museums, sporting events, theater, and other events in and around NYC.

Programs, Workshops, and Events

Monthly Coffee Hour Series

At the beginning of each month, researchers, faculty, postdocs and international scholars from across departments, labs, schools, institutes, and campuses come together for a morning coffee with ISSO staff. These coffee hours are informal and casual opportunities to foster connection and welcome in new scholars who join at various times throughout the year.

Social Events and Excursions

Each semester begins with an invitation to all international scholars to join a social program to connect and reconnect with others in the community. Gathered at the Baylander in September and traveled to the Liberty Science Center After Hours in January. Throughout the semester, ISSO organized a number of Faculty and Researcher Night Out events, including a trivia night, lantern making on campus, a social night at Dave & Busters, curated tours of an indigenous art museum and the Poster Museum as well as an excursion to a local holiday market.

Summer Programming

ISSO recognizes the importance of continuing to connect and support our community throughout the entire academic year. In addition to the monthly coffee hour series, the international scholar community was invited to a number of social outings over the summer, including a visit to the Lincoln Center Symphony, the Met Opera, and an excursion to Queens. International scholars were also invited to join ISSO's Summer in the City series of programs and events along with students and international families.

U.S. Tax Filing Info Sessions for International Students and Scholars

Hosted in partnership with Sprintax, these webinars offer international scholars an overview of U.S. tax filing obligations and best practices.

Information and Training Sessions for Academic Departments

Designed to equip academic departments with the knowledge needed to sponsor and support international faculty and scholars, these sessions covered topics such as J-1 and H-1B visa sponsorship, employment-based permanent residency, and support for Visiting Student Interns and scholars.



“One thing I can say for sure: the ISSO team would never let you down. No matter what the issue is, they’re always there with a big smile and a solution. ISSO has made my time at Columbia so much richer than I ever could have imagined.”



– YUNLIN (CICELY) PENG,
VISITING SCHOLAR, WEATHERHEAD
EAST ASIA INSTITUTE, CHINA



#ISSOstories Spotlight

Pedro Juan Aranguéz Díaz, Visiting Scholar

Pedro's exceptional research focuses on corporate responsibility for human rights and environmental protection in international commerce, with particular expertise in how multinational corporations implement these obligations across global supply chains. His important research explores new European Union regulations and their implications for U.S. businesses.

Quick Facts:

- **Program/Department:** Columbia Law
- **Research Interest:** Law
- **Home Country:** Spain

Which Columbia program/department are you in?

I'm a Visiting Scholar at the Law School.

Tell us about your research or projects at Columbia.

I study corporations' responsibilities for human rights and the environment and how they enforce that across international commerce. It implies multinational corporations. There is a new rule from the European Union that's going to impact U.S. business, and that is what I'm focusing on during my time here.

What is something you are proud of during your time at Columbia?

I am proud of my exploration because there are so many different things to do at Columbia. I think sometimes scholars focus on one topic, but at Columbia I wanted to be a bit intellectually curious. I'm learning a lot of new ideas and in the end I am finding that they're all interconnected. For example, I'm doing a bit of antitrust and a bit of climate law and energy and in the end, you see there are a lot of similarities.

What does a typical weekday look like for you right now?

I usually wake up and I try to run as much as I can. I live right next to Central Park, so it's great because I can run at the beautiful Jacqueline Kennedy Reservoir. In Madrid, I live next to Retiro, so it feels like my parallel life.

I spend most of the day at the office or the library. There are some other Visiting Scholars, so we usually are together. At lunch there's a lot of talks and events, so I try to join them. And then, during the evening we try to disconnect. We usually go to Brooklyn or Williamsburg with some friends. There's a lot of opportunities in New York, so I think that it's hard to choose.

While there is good weather, I try to do a lot of outdoor plans. I'm reserving the museums for later. We went to the Hispanic Society recently and it has so many important artists. There are hundreds of outstanding things like that in New York – it is an impressive city.



SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL SPOUSES, PARTNERS, AND FAMILIES

In 2025, over 500 international students and scholars arrived at Columbia accompanied by family members. Recognizing the vital role these loved ones play in the well-being and success of our international community, ISSO intentionally supports our accompanying spouses, partners, and dependents through tailored programs and events.

Focused Support

ISSO offers weekly drop-in English conversation sessions for spouses and partners. These guided conversation sessions facilitated by ISSO staff strengthen confidence in speaking English and build connections across our international community. Over the summer, these conversation sessions took a different approach, including both a movie and discussion club as well as board game get-togethers, allowing for practical use of English around the city. Additionally, ISSO continues to promote the on-going efforts of the International Spouses and Partners Network (ISPN), which hosts weekly meet-ups and peer-to-peer support.



Events and Excursions

ISSO hosted over 12 family-friendly offerings throughout the year. We scheduled additional opportunities for families with children during the NYC Public School fall and spring breaks. Highlights included:

- A fun for all ages excursion to the **Liberty Science Center**
- **Picnic on Governors Island** with other international families and ISSO staff
- A walk on the Coney Island boardwalk followed by a **Brooklyn Cyclones Game** and ending the night with fireworks
- **Family Photo Shoot** with a photographer
- A compilation of board games, networking and photo opportunities at a **Hex & Co. Family Welcome**





“Our family needs were accommodated by ISSO events and information. As a spouse, I can take advantage of my spare time to learn English, meet other spouses, join excursions, and more.

I love the variety of ISSO events especially the family excursions, such as my son and I could enjoy apple picking without thinking much about planning and transportation.”



– **FITRI SARI,**
SPOUSE/PARTNER,
INDONESIA

“ISSO offers events that everyone can enjoy regardless of nationality, gender, age or English level. It was especially comforting to meet friends who are living abroad while supporting their partners’ dreams, just like me. Sharing both the happy and challenging moments with them meant so much. Now, I even hang out with friends I met through ISSO outside of the events. My life in New York would have been completely different without ISSO.”



– **TOMOKA OFUSA,**
SPOUSE/PARTNER,
JAPAN





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