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# STAFF

## INTERIM DIRECTOR

- Jolene Vollmer  
(She/Her)

## IMMIGRATION SPECIALISTS

- Tracy Rakes  
(She/Her)
- Rachael Matingi  
(She/Her)
- Joel Short  
(He/Him)

## PROGRAM COORDINATOR

- Erika Suzuki  
(She/Her)

## GRADUATE ASSISTANT

- Musa Baldeh

## STUDENT EMPLOYEES

- Mariam Abdulsalam
- Sai Pratyush Danthala



### Important!

As an international student, you are required to do **Immigration Check-In** every semester, regardless of whether you traveled outside of the US or not. If you have not completed this yet, please do so today!

Walk-In Hours: Monday-Thursday 2:00-4:00pm



University Plaza, UHB 1006



217-206-6678



ISS@uis.edu

If you need to speak directly with an immigration specialist (DSO), you can come during walk-in hours, or email ISS@uis.edu to book an appointment.

Welcome to the start of a brand-new semester!

I hope you are enjoying your new classes and staying warm. It was a lively start to the year as we welcomed 159 new international students to UIS!

As some of you may know, our director, Rick Lane, retired at the end of 2024. I'm honored to step into the role of Interim Director and PDSO for ISS, and I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself.

I've had the pleasure of working at UIS for over 15 years, and as a proud Springfield native and UIS alum, this campus has always been close to my heart.

I've also been fortunate to live abroad in Austria and Germany, so I understand the excitement—and challenges—that come with living in a new country. Traveling is a passion of mine, and I've explored 23 countries so far. I'm genuinely excited to learn about your home country and culture too!

One of the most rewarding parts of my job is meeting incredible students like you, helping you transition to life in the United States, and ensuring UIS feels like your home away from home. It takes courage, determination, and a strong vision to pursue your dream of studying in a different country, and I deeply admire your journey.

With the recent change in presidential administration, the immigration field is facing a time of uncertainty, making it hard to predict what lies ahead. Even simple questions like, "Can I plan international travel next summer?" don't have clear answers. This uncertainty can be challenging as you navigate how immigration policies might affect you. Rest assured, our office is committed to keeping you informed about any relevant changes. Additionally, UIS has developed a dedicated [UIS Immigration](#) website to provide you with valuable resources and support during this time.

Wishing everyone a productive and successful semester ahead!

Sincerely,

*Jolene*

*Jolene Vollmer, M.A.*



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Namaste!

My name is Sree Lekha Kolla, and I hail from Guntur, a small town in Andhra Pradesh, South India, famous for its fiery chilies. I grew up in an agricultural family where we grow corn, rice, chickpeas, red chilies, and jute. My younger brother and I grew up watching our dad cultivate the best of the yield we have ever known, which instilled in us a deep respect for our roots and the land we call home. Being the first woman in our family to earn a Bachelor's degree, made my family proud and they motivated me to pursue higher studies abroad.

In South India, agriculture is more than a livelihood—it is a way of life. Here we treat land as our mother and the five fundamental elements i.e., earth (Prithvi), water (Jala), fire (Agni), air (Vayu), and space (Akasha) as holy beings which bring us prosperity and good yield. One of the most valuable lessons I've learned from Indian culture is the power of resilience and harmony. Whether it's the ancient wisdom in yoga or the unity displayed in our diverse festivals, I've carried these values with me wherever I go.

I was always fascinated by the fact that major organizations use data in their day-to-day operations as their keyway to attracting their stakeholders. With this goal in mind, I always wanted to pursue a master's in Data Analytics, so, When I was exploring options, I was also worried about how I could manage the living expenses abroad. UIS piqued my interest when I came through the GPSI opportunity. That is the reason I chose UIS. The coursework closely aligns with the industry standards and requirements, learning core subjects like Deep Learning from Dr. Elham Buxton enhanced my knowledge and built fundamentals. With strong motivation and grit, I secured a GPSI position at Innovate Springfield. During my tenure at Innovate Springfield, under the able guidance of Benjamin Hage, I got an opportunity to explore new endeavors using real-time data and understand closely how data influences decision-making inside the organization.

It's been more than a year since I moved to the United States. Although I am not an avid traveler, I have been to the bustling streets of Chicago and covered some parts of scenic California, I loved being there and enjoyed exploring the city, but Springfield has been my comeback spot due to its compactness, less traffic, and seeing how easy it is to get day-to-day things done.

During my third semester, I volunteered for the International Student Festival, that was a great experience to remember where I got to learn about various cultures, food, and dance forms. Being an introvert, I made a few - but lifetime friendships here in UIS. UIS shall always take a special place in my heart for the rest of my life. Eventually, I aspire to establish a good career as a Data Scientist with good people around me and have the best time of my life.

A word to my fellow students: Don't neglect your core values running in this rat race. Keep your body and mind healthy. Be kind and do good. Follow your Ikigai and the rest all will fall in place.

Jai Hind.



## UIS WELCOMES NEW INTAKE



The University of Illinois Springfield held an orientation ceremony for newly admitted students at the Union Ballroom. Speaking at the ceremony, the Chancellor Prof. Janet Gooch and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Dr. Jarmaco Clark delivered welcoming speeches.

Almost 150 international students, drawn from around the world, were also among the attendees at the ceremony.

The International Student Services delivered a presentation that covered important details including regulations for international students in the United States.

## ISS BIDS FAREWELL TO RICK LANE



Staff of the Office of International Student Services hosted a farewell lunch in honor of their long-serving Director Rick Lane following his retirement in December.

Rick has spent 45 years working with international students in various capacities and institutions in the United States. A significant part of which was spent at the UIS.

As he embarks on a new chapter of his life, Rick wants to “catch up on some much-needed sleep, returning to some beloved hobbies, working on some home projects, and spending some time with family.”

## Athlete of the Month

My name is Sacha Lamraski. I am from Brussels, Belgium. I play golf for the team here.

I started 10 years ago because my dad started playing too it was a good way for us two to have moments to spend together and enjoy nature while playing this sport that is amazing.

Then I loved it because I was spending the whole summer with a group of friends playing golf the whole day and having fun together but what I love especially now is the competitive side of it and that is what makes me train hard.

The team is improving the general ranking and we are getting better so it is great to be part of it. Yeah I would like to give a shot at professional golf because it is my dream and I will try a lot and train a lot to achieve it.



# WORLD CELEBRATIONS

January 1st

New Year's Day



January 4th

World Braille Day



January 20th

Martin Luther King Jr. Day



January 24th

International Education Day



January 27th

International Holocaust remembrance day





## Sprintax Webinar Series 2024/2025 Season (EAP)

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### Sprintax Nonresident Tax Webinars (EAP)

In these webinars, international students, scholars and professionals will be run through everything they need to know about nonresident tax for the 2024 tax season. Topics will include who must file, tax residency, FICA, State returns, implications of misfiling as well as how to use Sprintax to prepare a compliant tax return.

- › **Tuesday, November 26th @ 12pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Wednesday, December 11th @ 1pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Thursday, January 23rd @ 12pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Thursday, February 6th @ 11am EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Wednesday, February 26th @ 12pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Tuesday, March 11th @ 2pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Thursday, March 27th @ 1pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Thursday, April 3rd @ 1pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Thursday, April 10th @ 2pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Monday, April 14th @ 11am EST** – [Register here](#)

### OPT Webinars – Sprintax Nonresident Tax Overview for OPT/CPT (E)

Topics covered will include residency for tax purposes, tax liabilities when on OPT/CPT and pre-employment tax forms when on OPT/CPT. The Sprintax team will also provide an overview of Sprintax Forms which can be used to prepare your pre-OPT/CPT employment tax documents.

- › **Tuesday, November 19th @ 12pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Wednesday, December 11th @ 1pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Tuesday, January 21st @ 1pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Wednesday, February 26th @ 2pm EST** – [Register here](#)
- › **Thursday, March 27th @ 12pm EST** – [Register here](#)



# SPRING ORIENTATION HIGHLIGHTS





# International Student Welcome Party

Friday, January 17, 5 pm @ Union Ballroom

Sponsors: Office of International Student Services



恭喜  
发财

Happy Lunar New Year

January 24th 2025