

Essential Competencies for Regulated International Student Immigration Advisors (RISIAs) Practice

This document outlines the essential competencies for RISIAs as of July 1, 2026, and will apply to College exams held on or after October 1, 2026.

If you are writing a College exam scheduled before October 1, 2026, please refer to the previous essential competencies available [here](#).

College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants

Version: 2026-002

Unit 1: Foundational Knowledge

RISIAs apply knowledge of the Canadian legal framework and immigration legislation and regulations to provide competent student services within the RISIAs' scope of practice.

Competency	Performance Indicators
1.1 Demonstrates knowledge of the Canadian legal system.	1.1.1 Summarizes the Canadian justice system and the authority and scope of each division. 1.1.2 Explains the development of international student programs in Canadian immigration. (Updated) 1.1.3 Differentiates the functions and powers of the various federal departments and agencies which have a role in immigration matters. 1.1.3 Differentiates the functions and powers of the various federal departments and agencies which have a role in immigration matters. 1.1.4 Articulates how the legislation and regulations are created and amended by parliament and provincial legislations. 1.1.5 Explains the concepts of standard and burden of proof as outlined in Canadian immigration law. (Updated)
1.2 Demonstrates a knowledge of the principles of administrative law for international student programs in Canada. (Updated)	1.2.1 Summarizes the body of law that regulates the activities and operations of governments and governmental agencies in Canada. 1.2.2 Explains the meaning of discretion in administrative law and how it must be exercised in various contexts.

Competency	Performance Indicators
	1.2.3 Explains the role of judicial review in ensuring that the executive branch of government follows the principles of administrative law. 1.2.4 Explain the relevant rules of procedural fairness to different immigration law contexts. (Updated)
1.3 Interprets Canadian immigration and refugee legislation, regulations, and policies.	1.3.1 Interprets the relevant sections of the <i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i> (IRPA) and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR). 1.3.2 Applies knowledge of the refugee determination system in Canada as it relates to the impact of the student's status in Canada. 1.3.3 Identifies issues and concerns warranting special relief for humanitarian and compassionate applications and considerations. 1.3.4 Accurately applies immigration legislation, regulation, policies to various cases. 1.3.5 Locates the different provinces' and territories' immigration programs guides and instructions and provide students with the general preliminary information regarding the requirements.
1.4 Differentiates the principal categories and classes of temporary and permanent immigration, with greater focus on international student program. (Updated)	1.4.1 Identifies the temporary and permanent residence categories and classes. 1.4.2 Shows familiarity with the requirements and limitations for each category of temporary residents. (Updated) 1.4.3 Articulates the procedures for each class of temporary residence as it relates to international students. (Updated) 1.4.4 Demonstrates an understanding of the international student program's relationship to other classes of temporary and permanent immigration. (New)
1.5 Locates and considers case law in various immigration cases. (Updated)	1.5.1 Identifies the leading cases that impact Canadian student immigration. 1.5.2 Demonstrates an understanding of the impact of case law as it relates to international students. (Updated)

Competency	Performance Indicators
1.6 Analyzes the various grounds of inadmissibility and how the grounds are applied in a variety of contexts.	1.6.1 Demonstrates awareness of the IRPA, IRPR, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and other relevant sources of law pertaining to inadmissibility, removal and detention. 1.6.2 Summarizes the categories of inadmissibility related to: criminality; organized criminality; security; human or international rights violations; health; financial reasons; misrepresentation; non-compliance; and inadmissible family members. 1.6.3 Recognizes and analyzes the impact of inadmissibility on the student and their situation. 1.6.4 Advises the student on the consequences and the exemptions that apply to each category of inadmissibility. (Updated) 1.6.5 Demonstrates awareness that remedies exist that are associated with overcoming inadmissibility, and when inadmissibility cannot be overcome. 1.6.6 Summarizes the actions the government may take when a student is deemed inadmissible, including arrest, detention and removal.
1.7 Demonstrates knowledge of immigration enforcement legislation and related activities to student situations and issues.	1.7.1 Identifies the sections of the IRPA, IRPR, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and other relevant sources of law pertaining to removal and detention. 1.7.2 Lists the different government agencies and tribunals that are involved in enforcement and analyzes the relationships between them. 1.7.3 Explains the requirements for entering and remaining in Canada as related to enforcement. 1.7.4 Communicates to the student the impact of not complying with legislation and regulations. 1.7.5 Demonstrates an understanding of the recourses available for students facing removal. 1.7.6 Demonstrates an understanding of the circumstances in which it is not appropriate or ethical for a non-lawyer to act on behalf of students.
1.8 Identifies global issues that have an influence on Canadian immigration policies and directives.	1.8.1 Evaluates how global events or issues impact the specific circumstances of the student. (Updated) 1.8.2 Assesses the effects of international relations, treaties, and agreements on the student's specific situation and legal challenges. (Updated)



Unit 2: Student Advising and Coaching

RISIAs provide accurate and current advice and coaching to students on student immigration application operational instructions and guidelines to reduce the risk of denial and delay in processes.

Competency	Performance Indicators
2.1 Conducts a preliminary assessment of the student's profile and needs to determine the appropriate approach to the case.	2.1.1 Verifies the person's identity and reason for the inquiry. 2.1.2 Gathers enough information from the person to determine whether to initiate or decline services or to refer to another professional or service. 2.1.3 Assesses own competence to provide the services required by the student and their dependents and refers to another professional when needed. (Updated)
2.2 Engages in a process to ensure that the student is fully informed and able to make a decision whether to proceed with the RISIA's professional services.	2.2.1 Determines the student's capacity to reasonably understand the information presented or seeks appropriate supports if the student requires assistance. (Updated) 2.2.2 Discusses with the student the different options, potential and actual barriers and risks, and alternative course(s) of action. 2.2.3 Discusses with the student the anticipated timelines and milestones to ensure the student has realistic expectations of the process. 2.2.4 Advises the student of the RISIA's scope of practice, personal competence and practice limitations, including the need to refer the student to an RCIC or another authorized representative under Section 91 of IRPA to fill out any immigration forms. 2.2.5 Explains the student's responsibilities, particularly truth-telling and complying with the study permit conditions. (Updated) 2.2.6 Explains the potential consequences of breaching study permit requirements. (New)
2.3 Coaches the student on how to obtain and maintain status as a visitor, student and worker.	2.3.1 Conducts an interview with the student to obtain information pertaining to the immigration process and that could impact the student's application or their current immigration status. 2.3.2 Provides the student with accurate and current immigration processing information. (Updated)

Competency	Performance Indicators
	2.3.3 Guide the student to current and relevant immigration resources and relevant academic policies that may impact the student's immigration status. (Updated) 2.3.4 Ensures the student's understanding of the information provided and provide clarification when needed. 2.3.5 Identifies challenging or problematic issues that may arise due to the student situation, lack of documentation or current immigration environment. 2.3.6 Advises the student of their options to address challenging, problematic issues and how to proceed. 2.3.7 Identifies situations where a referral to an RCIC or another authorized representative under Section 91 of IRPAs required. 2.3.8 Supports the student in identifying and recalling the renewal dates and processes.
2.4 Uses effective coaching skills when interacting with the student.	2.4.1 Prepares the meeting environment to create a private and comfortable atmosphere for discussion. 2.4.2 Uses active listening techniques to encourage the student to talk freely. 2.4.3 Assists the students in articulating their problems, defining their goals, ordering their objectives, and generating, assessing, and implementing alternative solutions. 2.4.4 Dynamically assesses and sorts through the information for importance and relevancy to the issues. 2.4.5 Seeks clarification and elaboration of the essential information, when needed. 2.4.6 Focuses efficiently on relevant matters in a manner respectful of the student's time. 2.4.7 Asks both open-ended and closed questions as needed to solicit all necessary information. 2.4.8 Demonstrates empathy without sharing personal information and experiences, nor transferring personal feelings onto the student. 2.4.9 Summarizes the results of the meeting and clarifies the next steps. 2.4.10 Provides the student with accurate and current resources to support student's access to additional services or information.

Competency	Performance Indicators
	2.4.11 Refers the student to the appropriate professional when the student's emotional needs are beyond the RISIA's competence and scope of practice.

Unit 3: Legal Research and Informatics

RISIAs conduct research using information technology sources to support the formation of the legal strategy.

Competency	Performance Indicators
3.1 Identifies and prioritizes the legal issues to provide accurate and relevant advice and information to students and others.	3.1.1 Considers the facts of the situation to identify the current and potential issues that may arise. 3.1.2 Determines which provisions of statutes, regulations or policy instruments apply. 3.1.3 Asks follow-up questions to determine potential issues not initially presented. (Updated) 3.1.4 Prioritizes preliminary issues based on the facts of the situation, the student's request, and applicable legislation. 3.1.5 Determines the need for further information based on the objective of the research.
3.2 Determines and locates current and reliable information and applicable law or policies that address the student needs.	3.2.1 Identifies reliable research tools to obtain primary and secondary sources of law and other information that is relevant to the issue and the student case. 3.2.2 Locates reliable and current sources of information from a variety of resources. 3.2.3 Locates and follows government operational instructions and guidelines that are applicable to the student case. 3.2.4 Correctly reads legal citations in order to locate the text of the statute or regulation.
3.3 Proficiently uses government's immigration and citizenship portals, government databases and other creditable information technology sources.	3.3.1 Conducts online searches using key search words to find reliable and current sources of information. 3.3.2 Navigates credible legal online databases and immigration websites to access relevant and current legislation, regulation, case law, policies, and operational instructions and guidelines. 3.3.3 Navigates the government immigration and citizenship portals to access immigration applications, instructions and other documents.

Unit 4: Leadership and Advocacy

RISIAs demonstrate leadership and advocacy skills to support international students.

Competency	Performance Indicators
4.1 Demonstrates leadership skills in Canadian student immigration.	4.1.1 Applies mentoring skills to support others in practice. 4.1.2 Acts as an expert in Canadian student immigration law by providing advice and information to students and other professionals. 4.1.3 Recognizes limitations of others and provides support when needed.
4.2 Advocates for access and awareness of student immigration services within the organization.	4.2.1 Educates the employer and the public on the role of, and scope of practice of RISIAs. 4.2.2 Actively contributes in developing and updating organizational policies and student services pertaining to student immigration. (Updated) 4.2.3 Engages in active discussions with others to establish a method to best meet and serve the needs of international students.
4.3 Creates and maintains current immigration resources to advise and direct students and others to immigration policies and processes.	4.3.1 Locates current Canadian immigration legislation, regulations, policies and government operational instructions and guidelines. 4.3.2 Locates and advocates for resources appropriate for students with different language and literacy levels. (Updated) 4.3.3 Creates education materials to support students' and faculty members understanding of the relevant sections of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR). 4.3.4 Regularly reviews the government resources to ensure that resources are current and accurate.

Unit 5: Professionalism

RISIAs adhere to the Code of Professional Conduct for the profession to provide competent and ethical services.

Competency	Performance Indicators
5.1 Demonstrates and maintains competence in practice.	5.1.1 Seeks feedback from students and peers to develop and enhance expertise. (Updated) 5.1.2 Stays current and complies with legislation, regulation, professional standards, policies and guidelines. 5.1.3 Recognizes and exercises professional judgment within the limits of individual qualifications. 5.1.4 Collaborates with others, seeks counsel or makes referrals as appropriate. 5.1.5 Keeps current with evolving technology and emerging trends in immigration services. 5.1.6 Identifies need and takes the appropriate steps to maintain and enhance competence. 5.1.7 Engages in continuing professional development activities and experiences as required by the regulatory organizations. (Updated)
5.2 Demonstrates accountability and integrity in professional behaviors and in practice.	5.2.1 Takes responsibility for own actions by notifying affected parties and taking appropriate steps to remedy any errors or omissions. (Updated) 5.2.2 Identifies personal limitations in handling immigration cases and refers to an RCIC or other authorized representatives when necessary. (Updated) 5.2.3 Demonstrates an understanding of the circumstances in which it is not appropriate or ethical for RISIAs to provide services. 5.2.4 Manages student affairs efficiently. (Updated) 5.2.5 Refuses to engage in conduct that is dishonest, fraudulent or illegal. 5.2.6 Demonstrates transparent communications with students and other professionals. 5.2.7 Adheres to ethical standards in all aspects of work. (Updated) 5.2.8 Maintains licence to practise and appropriately uses professional designation. 5.2.9 Accurately communicates their professional title and designation.

Competency	Performance Indicators
	5.2.10 Respects intellectual property rights, including citation and recognition of the ideas and work of others, regardless of the medium (e.g. written, oral, electronic). 5.2.11 Provides accurate and truthful information in all communications.
5.3 Ethically manages conflicts of interest to ensure the integrity of the professional relationship.	5.3.1 Recognizes a perceived, potential, or real conflicts of interest. 5.3.2 Adequately discloses the conflict of interest to all relevant parties. 5.3.3 Determines the appropriateness to proceed with the provision of services in collaboration with the student and other relevant parties. 5.3.4 Withdraws from advising the student or situation when a perceived or real conflict of interest exists, and the conflict cannot be adequately mitigated.
5.4 Maintains security and confidentiality when collecting, sharing, transmitting, storing, and destroying confidential information in accordance with legislation, regulations, and the standards of the profession. (Updated)	5.4.1 Complies with privacy and confidentiality policies according to legislation requirements. 5.4.2 Takes action to minimize foreseeable risks to privacy and confidentiality of the student's information. 5.4.3 Takes required action in response to unauthorized access, use, and disclosure of information. 5.4.4 Ensures the safe and secure destruction of personal information according to institutional policy and provincial regulations. (Updated) 5.4.5 Ensures the physical security of on-site records by the use of controls such as locked filing cabinets, restricted office access, logging off computers when out of the office, etc. 5.4.6 Ensures computer systems meet security, privacy, and confidentiality legislative requirements and professional standards. 5.4.7 Applies security features when sharing or transmitting student's personal information by electronic communication (e.g. encrypted, password protected, secure network, authenticated sources and destinations). 5.4.8 Follows legislative procedures when directed by law to disclose student's personal information.

Competency	Performance Indicators
	5.4.9 Makes reasonable efforts to notify the individual(s) involved if their information has been lost or stolen or accessed without their authorization.
5.5 Recognizes and maintains professional boundaries in practice.	5.5.1 Recognizes warning signs of a potential and/or actual boundary crossing or violation. 5.5.2 Remains alert to the changing nature of interactions with the student. 5.5.3 Avoids inappropriate disclosure of personal information that is non-relevant to the student's situation or case. 5.5.4 Recognizes behaviours associated with transference and counter-transference. 5.5.5 Takes action to manage transferences and counter-transferences to support an ethical, effective and appropriate relationship with the student.
5.6 Collaborates with other professionals to meet the needs of the student.	5.6.1 Consults with or refers to others when issue(s) or student needs are beyond personal competence or professional scope of practice. 5.6.2 Demonstrates knowledge of other professions' scopes of practice. 5.6.3 Respects other professionals' opinions and professional knowledge. 5.6.4 Builds rapport and trust within professional relationships.

Unit 6: Cultural Competence

RISIAs apply principles of cultural awareness to effectively interact with different individuals and to positively impact relationships with the students.

Competency	Performance Indicators
6.1 Acknowledges differences in cultural values and priorities among students.	6.1.1 Builds self-awareness of personal beliefs, values, and cultural biases. 6.1.2 Identifies and explains variations in Canadian culture to student. 6.1.3 Reflects upon student's culturally informed motivations. 6.1.4 Identifies and takes action to address potential for cultural bias issues in the student's applications. 6.1.5 Collects information, without prejudice, about the student's current and past gender orientation required for application process.
6.2 Adapts services to different cultural contexts.	6.2.1 Researches cultural characteristics of specific student communities. 6.2.2 Cultivates a network of cultural informants. 6.2.3 Structures interactions to respect cultural norms. 6.2.4 Incorporates student's priorities into immigration strategy. 6.2.5 Identifies and adapts to cultural variations. 6.2.6 Advocates for international students with respect to cultural norms and exceptions.
6.3 Demonstrates awareness of students' cultural needs and takes action to facilitate student engagement.	6.3.1 Examines culturally based expectations of service and communications. 6.3.2 Addresses culturally determined negotiation strategies. 6.3.3 Identifies needs for language and cultural resources (translator, interpreter, educational materials). 6.3.4 Ensures culturally appropriate support (language, gender, religion) is provided.

Unit 7: Communication and Education

RISIAs use effective communication skills to enhance relationships in the provision of services and increase knowledge of student immigration needs and services.

Competency	Performance Indicators
7.1 Demonstrates proficiency in oral and written communications.	7.1.1 Uses concise, clear, and understandable language. (Updated) 7.1.2 Accurately references statutes, regulations and policies. 7.1.3 Consistently applies accurate legal terminology and appropriate abbreviations in all communications. (Updated) 7.1.4 Employs correct grammar, spelling and sentence construction. 7.1.5 Minimizes the use of complex legal terminology to enhance students' understanding and comprehension of the information provided. (Updated) 7.1.6 Adapts communication style to accommodate the diverse needs of the individual or group.
7.2 Adapts communication methods and education materials to meet the needs of various audiences.	7.2.1 Assesses the communication needs of the individual or group. 7.2.2 Identifies barriers to effective communication. 7.2.3 Tailors messages and education materials to meet the needs of the target audience with IRCC's most up to date policy information. (Updated) 7.2.4 Evaluates the effectiveness of the communications and education methods and materials used to ensure understanding of the information presented.
7.3 Uses communication and interpersonal skills to manage emotional situations.	7.3.1 Considers trauma-informed approaches when communicating with students. (Updated) 7.3.2 Encourages a period of reflection so that decisions made are thoughtful and in the best interest of the student. 7.3.3 Demonstrates neutrality in one's opinion. 7.3.4 De-escalates conflict through clarity, empathy, respectful communication, body language and active listening. 7.3.5 Allows for adequate time and reflection for student decision-making if emotions are high.

Competency	Performance Indicators
7.4 Manages student expectations through effective communications.	7.4.1 Clearly communicates factors influencing likelihood of success. 7.4.2 Confirms the student's goals and anticipated outcome of the services. 7.4.3 Ensures student is aware that it is beyond the scope of practice of RISIAs to complete and submit immigration forms and related documents. 7.4.4 Identifies negative factors impacting the outcome and advises on how to best deal with them. 7.4.5 Delivers services as promised and takes responsibility when cannot. 7.4.6 Reflects on and addresses student dissatisfaction in a timely manner to correct misunderstandings and de-escalate conflicts.

Unit 8: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Evidence-Based Practice

RISIAs integrate critical thinking and problem solving to inform decisions and actions.

Competency	Performance Indicators
8.1 Demonstrates professional judgement and critical reasoning in decision making.	8.1.1 Analyses and synthesizes information to inform decisions. 8.1.2 Uses critical thinking to consider a fresh perspective and to conceive a new or original perspective or solution. 8.1.3 Consciously engages in a process of rationalizing, analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting information to make informed judgments and/or decisions. 8.1.4 Integrates complexity of student's issues, needs, goals, and limitations within all aspects of services. 8.1.5 Demonstrates insight into personal expertise and limitations. 8.1.6 Integrates relevant information with previous learning, experience, professional knowledge, and current practice models.
8.2 Reflects on and evaluates options when faced with problems, issues, and challenges.	8.2.1 Identifies potential or real problems, issues, or challenges. 8.2.2 Investigates alternative solutions for problems or issues and provides justification for selected solution(s). 8.2.3 Develops and executes a plan to effectively address identified problems, issues, or challenges. (Updated) 8.2.4 With the student, evaluates the effectiveness of the chosen plan and identifies required future actions. (Updated)
8.3 Adopts evidence-based practices in the provision of services.	8.3.1 Critically reviews literature to inform best (evidence-based) practices. 8.3.2 Consults with others to identify best (evidence-based) practices. 8.3.3 Reflects on past experiences and positive outcomes to inform future actions. 8.3.4 Formulates a strategy that is founded on legal grounds and proven concepts.