

International Flag Display FAQ

1. **Do flags represent individuals or governments?** Flags typically depict governments or organizations, not individuals. Flags' designs and colors carry great significance, reflecting how the country or organization wishes to be depicted in the world. Individuals may identify with a flag, but flags do not typically represent individuals.
2. **Why are the flags hung in this specific order?** When national flags of more than one country are hung together, the display must follow a prescribed order of precedence (e.g. ordering principle, such as alphabetical) such that no one country's flag is prioritized above another. In addition, if flags from different government levels or country types are hung together, there should be distinct groupings of each type, each following a consistent order of precedence. Flag etiquette is fairly consistent across national borders, and this reliability helps to avoid offense.
3. **Why don't students just self-identify their country or region?** Because the University is not a governmental or diplomatic entity, it is not in a position to decide nationhood. For this reason, the University must rely on authoritative external sources, such as the United Nations and the US Government, regarding official nations.
4. **Why are flags rehanged every year?** We hang flags based upon where our current students (outside of the United States of America) obtain their visas to study here and their citizenship. Since this changes every year, and since rehanging the flags is a major and labor-intensive project, we change the flags once per year, after information from the incoming class in the College becomes available and reliable; we also take account for all students in all schools based upon the data available. We then provide a list of all the flags we anticipate hanging for the year on the Wilson Commons Student Activities website for a period time so that students who notice discrepancies (visa or citizenship) can bring these to our attention and petition for the flag to be displayed.
5. **Why did the ordering change this year?** The recommended protocol is to hang nations recognized by the United Nations in alphabetical order by their English translation, and to separate other types of flags into distinct displays. This follows international flag protocol which ensures hierarchies between nations, territories, and states. (We also hang flags of US Territories and Indigenous Peoples within the United States.) This protocol presented a problem for Taiwan and Hong Kong, because they are not recognized by the UN. However, we do accept students on visas from these locations to study here. Hence, we wanted to continue hanging those flags, but in a manner that reflected international flag protocol more closely. This created a fourth area (UN recognized countries, *Other Countries & Regions*, US Territories, and Indigenous Nations within the US). The italicized area is this year's change.

There have been other changes over the years as we have tried to figure out the best way to hang the flags using the most objective criteria we can (e.g., recognition by the United Nations). What initially caused us to review the protocol at all this past year was feedback from our students with dual citizenship who requested that we not only fly flags from countries issuing visas, but also from countries where our students are citizens. This prompted us to take a look at

our protocol more closely as we tried to come up with a plan to incorporate our students' feedback into the flag display.

6. **When are the flags rehung?** Reliable information about visas and citizenship become available and can be made available in early November, which closely aligns with International Education Week. We take advantage of that coincidence and rehang the flags each year in concurrence with International Education Week, which occurs annually in mid-November.