Supporting International Students in the Classroom: A Guide for Faculty & Instructors

The following recommendations are based on common challenges international students face in adapting to academic culture in the United States. There is considerable diversity among international students and even students from the same country come with varying educational backgrounds and communication competency in English.

- International students tend to be more reluctant to ask questions during class as they don't wish to appear confused or ignorant in front of their professors and peers. Explain the importance of class participation and the function it serves in your course (i.e. how in-class discussion, activities or group work facilitate learning and impact student evaluation). Giving visual/verbal cues for when it would be appropriate for students to respond can help too.
- Students may be unaccustomed to asking for help from instructors due to cultural norms about status differentials, so it is important to reiterate that instructors and TAs are available for one-on-one consultation during office hours or after class.
- Build trust with your students by learning and using their names, allowing students to share and employ their experiences, and asking questions that highlight the unique knowledge and perspective internationals students bring to the classroom.
- Keep in mind that education culture differs significantly from one country to another. [Understanding Educational Diversity Around the World](#)
  - ❖ Assignment and exam formats commonly used in the United States vary considerably from those in other countries, therefore providing students with sample questions, excerpts from successful essay responses, and study guides will allow students to get a better sense of what is expected of them.
  - ❖ Study skills are also culturally specific. Not all international students will be familiar with group work or partner based projects. Providing clear directions about individual versus group expectations can enhance student performance within a group setting.
  - ❖ Be strategic when assigning and implementing group work to optimize inter and intra-cultural communication. Instructors have a lot of agency to shape and influence group dynamics. [Implementing Group Work in the Classroom](#). Turn taking, active listening, inviting multiple perspectives, and even silence are useful tools to employ and model during group discussions.
  - ❖ Students coming from educational systems that prioritize memorization will be less familiar with applied ideas and concepts, creative approaches, open-ended writing prompts, and project-based assignments. Providing examples of completed projects from previous semesters can give students a better sense of what a successful project should look like.
  - ❖ Second language speakers/writers will need different kinds of support with academic writing than students who grew up using English as their primary language. Keep in mind that the structure and organization used in writing is influenced by culture and educational background. [Ten most common ESL mistakes](#). Free writing assistance for Hope College students, is available through the [Klooster Center for Excellence in Writers](#).

- Consider including hands-on pedagogies (e.g., service-learning, research, or community based projects) that provide opportunities for students to do substantive work together.
- GPA calculations and grade inflation can be confusing, as grading systems differ around the world. Getting a "C" in a graduate course may seem reasonable when coming from a system where perfect scores ("Straight As") are nearly unheard of.
- Concepts such as "academic integrity" don't translate well. Formal citation practices vary across disciplines and are not considered common practice in all educational systems. Provide clear instructions on research methods and preferred citations styles, as well as ideas about how students can work together and support one another without compromising academic integrity. Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

QUICK TIPS
- Turn on the English subtitles when showing a film or video.
- Make lecture outlines/slides available prior to lecture, so students can follow along or look up major concepts prior to coming to class.
- Be specific in your instructions, using words like "first", "next", etc. (for example "First watch the video, next write a self-evaluation, and then turn in your completed evaluation in class on Tuesday").
- Break course assignments into smaller steps or projects. Allowing students to turn in drafts or build upon assignments they've obtained feedback on will help improve the final product.
- Limit the use of acronyms, colloquial speech, and culturally specific examples (such as childhood games, iconic TV shows, sports jargon, and other popular culture references) to avoid losing international audience members.
- Both humor and rhetorical questions may be challenging to grasp for non-native speakers, as the intended pun or message is often subtle and culturally specific. Take a moment to explain the pun/ joke/context, thus increasing the cultural fluency of your international students.
- Cue words, such as "what, where, when" can be helpful when emphasizing an important point. Repeat and rephrase main concepts and themes.
- Remember that in addition to the common pressures and adjustments faced by all new college students, international students also confront communication barriers, culture shock and other cross cultural challenges. Weird, or just different?
- Demonstrate interest and respect for cultural traditions and nuances, provide opportunities for students to share cultural knowledge and experiences during class.

RESOURCES:
Readings:
- Case Study of the Hypothetical Discourse System in Action: http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/661/2/cultural-issues-in-the-higher-education-classroom
- Creating a Culturally Inclusive Classroom Environment: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/184853/Creating-a-Culturally-Inclusive-Classroom-Environment-mcb2.pdf

- Implementing group work in the classroom: https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teachingresources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/group-work/implementing-group-work-classroom
- Article: "Internationalization of the Higher Education Classroom: Strategies to Facilitate Intercultural Learning and Academic Success" http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/past2.cfm?v=23&i=3
- Managing Cross-Cultural Conflict Productively: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/184855/Managing-Cross-Cultural-Conflict-Productively.pdf
- Ten most common ESL mistakes: https://www.scribendi.com/advice/the_10_most_common_esl_mistakes.en.html

Film/video:
- Derek Sivers: Weird or just different (TED talk): http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_weird_or_just_different.html
- Understanding Educational Diversity Around the World (speaker series College of Education): Understanding Educational Diversity Around the World
- Writing Across Borders (3-year documentary project funded by Oregon State University): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quI0vq9VF-c

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https://education.illinois.edu/international