

# Strategies for Teaching International Students

## Faculty Learning Community for Teaching International Students

There are some steps that instructors can take to better engage and support international and domestic students

### Classroom Content/Understanding

- American college students have a vocabulary of approximately 20,000 words that took them 18 years to acquire. It can be very challenging for international students to bridge this gap. Trying to understand content while taking notes can be very difficult.
- Talk slowly and clearly, give additional explanations for foundational concepts, clarify meanings of slang and cultural references (some students might not speak up, ask them to write down their questions and talk with them after class).
- Use consistent patterns for presenting information (explain learning outcomes, what do you know about it, how does it fit with rest of material).
- Allow time for brainstorming (some cultures stress reflection before speaking). Give them time to provide a considered opinion.
- Be careful and aware if your content relies on precision, one mistaken definition may disrupt learning an entire concept.
- Consider sending class notes/outlines ahead of time and/or allowing international students to record lectures.
- Hold individual conferences/meetings with students, send follow-up emails to provide information in writing, or encourage them to use office hours.

### Group projects/Participating in discussions

- Promote smaller conversations among students in the classroom, for example, talk to your neighbor for a few minutes, or use writing prompts to give all students time to compose their thoughts.
- Assign diverse groups rather than letting student select groups (but also be careful of isolating international students too much). Keep the groups stable over the quarter to allow relationships to develop.
- Encourage domestic students to help create a space for sharing of multiple voices and to support international students. Appeal to their future careers – they will benefit by having experience working with people from all over the world. Explicitly ask domestic students to list the benefits of having international students and brainstorm what they could do to support and welcome them.
- Provide examples from international student contributions and remind everyone the value of these contributions.
- Create group projects with a fair division of labor. Group projects with a written deliverable often results in unequal division of labor, especially when there are very different language skills. Focus group projects on the concepts and discussion/process, with the deliverable/outcome being something everyone can share (choose a position to defend, recommend a course of action, choose option A/B/C as a group, etc.)
- Provide groups with some basic information about communication and decision making differences. Create guidelines and ground rules for group projects.
- Look into the many resources about effective group practices (for example: [best practice in effective group work](#)).

### Language/Grammar/Writing/Assessment

- Don't lower standards. However, certain English language mechanics are very difficult for non-native speakers. In addition, language skills often get worse when concepts discussed are more difficult.
- In your grading, distinguish between global writing issues (more important) and common errors (less important or harder to correct).
- Also, distinguish between assignments where the thinking/process issues are most important (and grammar is less important), and those assignments that need to be polished/summative/final where grammar issues are important.

- When grading papers, select just one paragraph or page to grade for grammatical issues and ask student to revise rest of paper, don't edit it all for them.
- Visit these resources from The Writing Program: [Working With International Student Writers](#) and [Guidelines for Responding to the Writing of International Students](#)
- Provide specific directions on Assignments: Clarify the Purpose and Goal of Assignment, Outline the Audience and Format, Provide a Rubric of Grading Criteria, and Provide Examples if appropriate
- Scaffold assignments when possible; allows students to build on prior work
- Provide timely feedback on assignments; don't overwhelm them with comments
- If possible, allow for variety of expression to achieve the course outcomes

### Expectations for Learning & Building Community

- Get to know your international students – how to pronounce their name, what brought them here, what are their interests and strengths.
- Be explicit about rules and expectations, especially unwritten rules (who to go to for help, guidelines for plagiarism, expectations for active learning/participation) show examples, model and walk through the rules.
- When using active learning methods, explain why and the expectations for students.
- Provide ongoing feedback on student progress, on how well they are meeting learning goals.
- Ask them to reflect on their learning process – which learning and study strategies are working and which are not? What do they struggle with and how could they adjust their strategies to be successful?
- Promote active learning in class to help build connections and relationships.

### Academic Integrity

- Academic integrity norms are different in some cultures. International students don't necessarily understand how to paraphrase, or the mechanics of how to translate things into their own words.
- Communicate standards about academic integrity and walk through examples with students.
- This [plagiarism test from Indiana University](#) might be helpful to use with students.
- View additional [resources about promoting academic integrity](#).

### Engagement Ideas

- Think-Pair-Share: This can be an effective way to allow students to reflect on a topic, then share in a small group, and report out major takeaways to the larger class.
- Just in Time Teaching: A strategy to use when you want to gauge the understanding in the room and address questions in the moment. You can have students post questions online, use student clickers, or use anonymous forums to test knowledge.
- One Minute Papers/Muddy points: Ask students to write a 1 minute paper reflecting on their biggest takeaways from the class, questions they still have, and topics that they are still interested in learning about.
- During Lectures:
  - Be consistent in a routine (start with an outline, summarize big picture, etc).
  - Allow students to make connections to prior knowledge- have them brainstorm before the lecture.
  - Speak clearly and slowly; re-emphasize important concepts or ideas.
  - Use visuals such as images, charts, video, etc. can help illustrate a concept more clearly.
  - Check for comprehension during the lecture (clickers, visual quizzes, etc).

### Sources:

DU Office of Teaching and Learning. 2017. "Teaching International Students." Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://otl.du.edu/teaching-resources/teaching-international-students/>.

Shapiro, Shawna, Farrelly, Raichle, and Zuzana Tomas. 2014. *Fostering International Student Success in Higher Education*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Press.