

Teaching Chinese Students Workshop

February 8, 2013

Ideas gathered from small group discussions

1. What issues addressed in this webinar are applicable to DU? How do these issues affect the classroom culture as the number of international students increases?

Chinese Worldview (from webinar)

- Avoidance of conflict
- Acceptance of hierarchy
- Respect for elders and authority
- Relationship to the group
- Formality, indirectness and the importance of “saving face”

Yet, Chinese students are more diverse today and are experiencing major cultural shifts and developing new skills

Issues at DU:

Self-segregation in and out of class. Lack of understanding between domestic and Chinese students - this causes greater isolation. There are proportionally many Chinese students in DCB—they hang out with each other and lose the opportunity to practice English. Extensive international student orientation is given in DCB—but need opportunity to form friendships with American students.

Language issues. Chinese students used to be government sponsored students, excellent students, now they are more diverse and the standards are easier. Is this a language comprehension issue or competence issue? The student you are getting is not necessarily the student who took the admissions test in China. (DU now requires additional language testing upon arrival.) Many students cannot speak or write in English at an acceptable standard. How do we keep the standards up while also reaching out to students who struggle with language skills? Does student’s writing reflect understanding of content?

Indirectness and saving face. Many international students are not used to being asked to participate in class discussions or group activities. They don’t ask for what they want/need from instructors or from group members. Some Chinese students are willing to take the lower grade and save face rather than give a wrong answer or not speak well. It is a struggle to draw out questions and responses, balance of saving face with critical feedback. This is a ‘high context’ culture, non-verbal rules are very important.

Different education culture, students have a different understanding of practices—plagiarism, participation in class, and diving into the depth of academic issues.

Multiculturalism. There is a high value in having international students in classes—a richness of different perspectives, is this being taken advantage of? How can we benefit from this for both the international AND the domestic students?

2. What strategies can be used to help non-native speakers engage in the learning outcomes of a class?

Classroom content/understanding

- talk slowly and clearly, give additional explanations to explain foundational concepts, clarify meanings
- explain slang and cultural references, ask students if they understand jargon/vocabulary. They might not speak up, have to read non-verbals or ask students to write down lingering questions and talk with them after class
- hold individual conferences/meetings with students
- sending follow-up emails after a meeting to provide information in writing
- online discussions- not the same pressure related to saving face in classroom - could include online discussion components to courses
- TA can help and departments can assign TA to classes with high international enrollment, prioritize these classes in TA assignments.
- use principles of [universal design](#)
- here is a resource that addresses the academic environment: [Chinese Student Success](#)

Group projects/participating in discussions

- Promote smaller conversations among students in the classroom. Talk to a peer 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)
- 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
- How to pull in international students? Try to ask them questions they can answer. Talk to them during the break and let them know about upcoming questions so they can prepare (good for all students too)
- Provide examples from international student contributions and remind everyone the value of these contributions.
- Allow students to also participate via text chat. This could be done via Adobe Connect or other text chat programs.

- Create group projects with a fair division of labor. US students feel burdened because writing and research is being done by them. 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.)
- Share clear expectations about what they are responsible for and what they are expected to produce both individually and as a group
- provide groups with basic info about communication and decision making differences
- Need more guidelines for group projects, setting ground rules for communication and decision-making. Here is one resource: [best practice in effective group work](#)

Language/grammar/writing

- We can't lower standards, students getting a DU degree need a proper level of English language proficiency.
- However, certain English language mechanics are very difficult for non-native speakers. Writing center instructors explain that language skills often get worse when concepts are harder.
- Distinguish between global writing issues (more important) and common errors (less important or harder to correct)
- One idea - read as if you are talking with the student, we often ignore small errors in speech, see if you can understand the main concepts and ideas.
- 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
- 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.
- Instructors are providing extra feedback regarding grammar, need for more institutional support. The writing center does not do this level of support currently, more assistance at DU is needed
- tell students that their fellow students each think that their language is inferior to the person next to them and encourage the students to do their best to express themselves and that you are not going to be judging their English when speaking in class.

Academic integrity

- Need to communicate the rules, which are different than in some cultures. International students don't necessarily understand HOW to paraphrase, or the mechanics of how to translate things into their own words.
- Can we have Chinese nationals (professors or other Chinese students) explain in Chinese to our students what constitutes academic misconduct and the rules of plagiarism, etc.? –create a webinar or ongoing resource?

- International students have asked to use an electronic translator during an exam. What is the DU policy? Need to create university wide or college wide policies, most seem to think this is not acceptable.
- Someone questioned if international students should be given more time on exam similar to students with disabilities. Disagreement on whether being international could be cause for accommodations similar to a disability.
- One instructor has students take exam on individual level and then take exam 2nd time as group and grade is a weighted average. Pair international with domestic students to deepen understanding.
- Plagiarism test from Indiana University:
<https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/item1.html>
- More resources on [promoting academic integrity](#)

Websites sent earlier with best practice ideas:

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents>

http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/teaching_in_practice/docs/international.pdf

3. What role should the instructor take in helping to establish a welcoming **classroom environment**? What can the instructor do to help facilitate engagement from all members, cross-cultural interaction and acceptance?

Class climate

- Faculty on first day should emphasize accessibility and encourage participation.
- Try to get to know students personally. Get to know their names. Ask them for the correct pronunciation.
- One professor asks students to “become” the culture of the country they are studying as a way to promote cross-cultural interaction and acceptance.
- Let international students know that they bring value to class and show all students your excitement about the opportunity to learn first-hand about international companies that we may not get from American students. Encourage international students to share and then follow-up with positive feedback.
- Need more interaction between students and faculty on a social level. Professors need to take a role outside of the classroom. We need to foster an environment that mixes the international and domestics. It has to be done proactively and deliberately.
- One faculty member interviews each student separately in office hours - builds a personal relationship. This can be done if the number of students is not too large.
- Professors can always mention the holidays that are from all the different cultures in the classes and celebrate all of them.

- Professors can invite the entire group in for a discussion and to help the group understand each others strengths and cultural differences.
- Faculty need to be explicit about the value of intercultural issues, model it and talk about the benefits - these discussions can occur in any class/discipline
- Faculty members don't always know what to do when “hot moments” occur in class, more support/training around cultural sensitivity

Self segregation

- Purposefully mix up students in class
- If students are in diverse groups, have them sit with their groups during each class, encourages informal dialogue
- DCB has case competition on inclusive excellence business issue. The teams must be diverse (gender, field of study, grad/undergrad, nationality) and scholarships are awarded.
- Making members of class aware of each other and their differences up front. Get in groups and share difficulties. Share info on what has come up in courses before.
- Make a class requirement that each domestic student and each international student must choose 2 or 3 new friends of the other culture. At the last class they must report on what they did together and what they know about each other.
- Provide out of class US cultural experiences/ family dinners, or if possible take the class off-campus once/quarter so they can get to know one another outside class.

4. How could DU involve the current Chinese students in informing us about social and cultural transition issues specific to our campus community?

Ask graduating international students for their opinions and suggestions via focus groups. Or sit down with them and ask them how we can make their experience better. May need to ask for feedback anonymously because many international students would not be comfortable sharing this information because it may seem disrespectful.

DCB involves students with events such as Chinese New Year, taking suggestions from students in informal process. ISSS visit with international student groups.

5. What would you like to see as next steps in improving the campus climate and the classroom experiences for international students?

Better English skills when entering DU programs; more staff at writing center with background working with international students, and more support on helping international student writing

(rather than just basic editing).

Support for academic standards regarding plagiarism, citations, etc. perhaps via ISSS. Need for last minute help. Making available more tech/software programs help for students to identify citation and plagiarism issues.

Include signage at DU that welcomes international students in Chinese and other languages where we have a large international student population.

Home stay options for our international students. Any thought about exploring this option at DU? *Unfortunately, that is a big risk-management issue for the university which is why we are not promoting this option.*

It would help if the Chinese students lived with the US students, mixed in dorms and other settings. Extremely important for US and international students to live together - not to isolate in their living situation which leads to isolating socially and in the classroom.

We must give cultural training to both domestic, international students, and staff/faculty. We seem to train only the international students. We must help the domestic students learn to understand and interact with the international students. Cultural adaptation takes time - these students coming in have a very short time.

Resources

Plagiarism test from Indiana University

<https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/item1.html>

Sent from a participant - Wall Street Journal article related to plagiarism: *In Chinese Buildings, a Copycat Craze*

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323951904578290520134759306.html>

“While Americans view imitation with disdain, the Chinese have traditionally taken a more permissive and nuanced view of it. Copying can be valued as a mark of skill and superiority”