



Strategies for Teaching International Students Series

PART 1: Promoting Academic Success for International Students

More and more international students from across the globe are coming to the US, attracted by the high-quality education offered at many US universities (Turner, 2015). In the 2016-2017 academic year, about 14% of the total enrollment at UC Davis were international students (Budget and Institutional Analysis, 2017), with the university accepting over 60% of its international applicants for 2017-2018 (UC Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2017). International students contribute greatly to the diversity of our campus' population and enrich our classroom environments with their unique perspectives. They contribute to the academic excellence of our institution and bring a wealth of unique and diverse knowledge and experience that are valuable in the classroom (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). By valuing and encouraging their contributions, instructors can play an important role in supporting international students in their classroom communities. This resource series will offer a number of specific strategies and suggestions for supporting international students in the classroom.

Communicative, linguistic, and academic challenges international students may face

International students face a variety of challenges as learners in the US, including difficulties adjusting to a new culture and campus life (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015), social isolation (Gareis, 2012; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015), and stress learning complex topics in another language. Additionally, according to Dawn Takaoglu, director of International and Academic English at UC Davis, international students who first attend a 2-year community college before transferring to a 4-year university experience a variety of challenges that differ uniquely from their peers who followed a more traditional path (personal communication, 2017). Here are a few common challenges international students face, as well as suggestions for how to support these students in the classroom:

Challenges	Explanations	Teaching Suggestions
<i>May be proficient in some modalities of English, but not others.</i>	Multilingual students may differ in their proficiencies with English, or with certain modalities of English (i.e., writing, reading, listening, or speaking). For more on this, please see our series on “Strategies for Teaching Multilingual Learners.”	Employ a variety of modes when lecturing, and when designing activities. For example, Freedman (n.d.) notes that all students, not just multilingual ones, can benefit from the inclusion of visuals (e.g., PowerPoints, Prezis, writing key concepts on the board, etc.) with your lecture. International students may also struggle with completing course readings, so it may be helpful to discuss effective reading strategies in your class.
<i>May experience a high amount of cognitive load.</i>	Multilingual international students may experience a high amount of cognitive load as they attempt to learn complex content in your class in a language they are still in the process of acquiring.	Sweller (2017) suggests being explicit in your instruction and discussion of key concepts in class, instead of expecting students to induce the information themselves from readings. For additional suggestions on teaching to reduce cognitive load, see Crosby (2015) .
<i>May overestimate their level of preparation, both academically and linguistically</i>	International students, particularly those who transfer, may overestimate their level of preparation, both academically and linguistically. Like their domestic peers, they may not be accustomed to the rigor of an institution like UC Davis, and they therefore may	Try to be clear and transparent in your syllabus and course materials about your expectations for students and the academic demands of your class; this can help students prepare in advance for the more rigorous aspects of your course. See Part 3 of this resource for more on what



	<p>not be prepared for the speed of the quarter system. Additionally, they may be slow to seek help because they are accustomed to systems and faculty that reach out to them when they are at risk and direct them to services (Takaoglu, personal communication, 2017).</p>	<p>instructors can do to support international students.</p> <hr/> <p>Assist students with time management by breaking up longer assignments into multiple due dates and reminding students frequently of these and other deadlines. You can also encourage students to form study groups, and have your TA's organize study sessions before major exams.</p>
<p><i>May feel uncomfortable participating in class discussions or activities</i></p>	<p>Glass (2012) found that intergroup dialogue contributed positively to international students' perceptions of campus climate. However, international students, especially multilingual learners who struggle with their speaking and listening skills in English, or those who come from cultures that don't encourage discussion in class, may feel uncomfortable or anxious about speaking during class discussions. Some of the anxiety surrounding speaking in class may be alleviated by first having students discuss in smaller groups. Three effective methods for equitable class discussions can be found to the right.</p>	<p>Employ think, pair, share activities, which will give multilingual students time to think through their response in writing first. If you notice a quieter student beginning to step up their verbal participation, be sure to send them an encouraging message privately by email, Canvas message, or in the hall after class.</p> <hr/> <p>Have students get into groups of 2-6 people and ask them to select one person to report their ideas to the class. This gives everyone a chance to participate without feeling pressured to speak to the whole class.</p> <hr/> <p>Employ a "round-robin" discussion structure, in which students speak in turns going around the circle. This gives each student a designated time to speak, which may relieve some of the anxiety for students who experience difficulty while speaking in groups.</p>
<p><i>May submit writing with consistent grammar or syntax errors, or lack knowledge of US writing conventions.</i></p>	<p>Writing from multilingual international students often displays consistent errors or patterns of error (particularly with articles and/or prepositions) that can distract from the writing's content, and in some cases, its intelligibility. These discrepancies are typical of foreign-language acquisition. International students may also have inconsistent knowledge of US writing conventions, especially regarding citation and plagiarism.</p>	<p>Before grading the paper, consider the impact these errors have on the student's ability to communicate their ideas and content. Freedman (n.d.) suggests allowing students to complete rough drafts for peer review, or to show you in office hours. Also, establish clear guidelines for plagiarism in your syllabus, and discuss this with your students. For more suggestions, see the Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs, as well as our "Addressing Plagiarism Series."</p>

Adapted from: CTE, n.d.; Freedman, n.d., Purdue Libraries, n.d.; Sato, 2015; UMCLRT, n.d.; & UWCTL, n.d.

Additional Resources

- [The International & Academic English Program](#)
- [The Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs](#)
- [Services for International Students and Scholars](#)
- [Writing Assistance Services, SASC](#)



Please also refer to our “[Strategies for Teaching Multilingual Learners Series](#)” for more suggestions and strategies specifically regarding international students from non-English speaking countries.

Citation

Center for Educational Effectiveness [CEE]. (2018). *Strategies for Teaching International Students Series. Just-in-Time Teaching Resources*. Retrieved from <https://cee.ucdavis.edu/JITT>

References

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- Freedman, L. (n.d.). *Teaching multilingual students*. Retrieved from <http://writing.utoronto.ca/teaching-resources/teaching-multilingual-students/>
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Strategies for Teaching International Students Series
PART 2: Supporting International Students' Social and Cultural Adjustment

In addition to the academic challenges international students face, these students also experience a variety of social and cultural challenges as they navigate attending school in a new country. Wu, Garza, & Guzman (2015) note that the transition to attending school in the US can often be overwhelming for international students, who may experience trouble communicating with instructors, staff, and peers. They may also experience culture shock, social isolation, homesickness, and other difficulties adjusting to a new culture. Additionally, Takaoglu notes that international transfer students may over-rely on small transfer communities that joined them in their move from their community college to their university, and therefore find it hard to break into already established cohorts in the new school (personal communication, 2017). Here are a few suggestions on how you can help support international students as they transition into the new social and cultural environment of your classroom:

Challenges	Explanations	Teaching Suggestions
<i>May experience culture shock, or have difficulties with cultural adjustment</i>	Adjusting to a new country, culture, campus, and set of academic expectations can be overwhelming for many international students (Yan & Berliner, 2013; Shi, 2011). This adjustment period can have an impact on their academic performance, especially if they have not been able to form a social support network.	Make your expectations clear in your syllabus, and be as transparent as possible in your assignment prompts and exams. Consider reaching out to a student who appears to be struggling in your class, and emphasize that students are welcome to attend your office hours. You can also refer students to Services for International Students and Scholars and to Counseling Services on campus.
<i>May have difficulties understanding culture-specific references</i>	Many international students experience difficulties understanding American cultural references, idioms, humor, and/or slang. They may be missing background information that instructors assume is already known (e.g., US history, etc.). This can make the already difficult task of learning in another language even more trialsome, and can also contribute to students' sense of social isolation and exclusion from their American peers.	Try to limit or avoid the use of specific cultural references, or explain the references you do use to ensure that all students understand and feel included. Do this in your syllabus, lectures, PowerPoint slides, assignment prompts, and all other class materials. Also consider providing resources that can help international students catch up on key background information that their American peers may already know.
<i>May experience social isolation and/or a lack of meaningful relationships with their peers</i>	Far away from their friends and family, international students are especially prone to experiencing social isolation. However, Gareis (2012) notes that forming relationships with host nationals can help international students with cultural adjustment and decrease their sense of social isolation, as can forming friendships with peers from their home countries.	Consider providing opportunities for intergroup interaction in your classroom, such as small group discussions or projects. See our series on " Activating Your Lecture " for more on active learning. Encourage students to seek out clubs and other groups related to their home countries, as these organizations can often offer social support to struggling students. You can also refer students to the Partners in Acquiring Language (PAL) Program on campus for more practice in conversing in English.



<p>May experience cultural, racial, religious, and/or linguistic discrimination</p>	<p>Wu, Garza, & Guzman (2015) found that many international students report experiencing discrimination and/or stereotyping from instructors, staff, and peers. The researchers also found that while international students are generally interested in helping their American peers understand their diverse backgrounds, they do not always feel that they are given the chance to do so.</p>	<p>Try asking open-ended questions in order to facilitate equitable participation, and make some effort to call evenly on domestic and international students. Encourage students to share their diverse perspectives, but take care to not expect one student to be the sole representative of their culture.</p> <hr/> <p>Model a positive orientation to multiple and multicultural perspectives through what you say in class and through readings and other class materials. If you overhear stereotypes being expressed, open a dialogue between students and supportively challenge those assumptions. For more on how to manage discrimination in your classroom, please see our series on "Microaggressions."</p>
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Additional Resources

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- [The Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs](#)
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Strategies for Teaching International Students Series
PART 3: How Instructors can Contribute to International Students' Success

Instructors can play an important role in supporting international students, both in the classroom and outside. Instructors are often uniquely positioned to spot students who are struggling, and to intervene if possible, or to alert an advisor that the student may need additional support. Here are a few ways that instructors can support all students in their classrooms, including international students:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Take time to figure out who your students are.	Consider having your students complete a survey or poll at the beginning of the year, and include questions about their cultural or national backgrounds, as well as their language/communication experiences and strengths.
Recognize the diverse perspectives, knowledge, experiences, and skills international learners contribute to the classroom.	Wu, Garza, & Guzman (2015) emphasize that international students “enrich the cultural diversity of campuses with their home culture and ethnic experiences” (p. 2). Consider the diverse perspectives and experiences your students have coming into the classroom, and develop ways to leverage and build on those experiences in your lectures and activities without asking students to act as the sole representatives of their entire culture or ethnicity. For example, asking open-ended questions during class discussions can be one way to encourage students to offer their own perspectives.
Provide regular opportunities for students to interact with their peers and with you.	In class, have students work in pairs or groups, and provide peer feedback opportunities on major projects. Use group-building strategies like “numbering off” to ensure that your domestic and international students have opportunities to form relationships and participate in intergroup dialogue (Gareis, 2012; Glass, 2012). Encourage students to come to office hours, and if possible, build time for one-to-one meetings with students (i.e., on major projects, on their progress in the class, etc.).
Provide frequent, timely feedback on writing and other work in class.	Endeavor to provide feedback in a timely manner (within a week if possible), so that students have an opportunity to integrate your comments into their next assignment. For more feedback strategies, see our “Effective Feedback Series.”
Be strategic in your feedback, and focus on what relates most closely to your course objectives.	While multilingual international learners can benefit from feedback on error patterns or consistent mistakes in their writing, grammar should not be the focus of feedback for international students. Instead, like their domestic peers, they can benefit immensely from feedback on their ideas, content, support, and structure. Additionally, some international students may be unfamiliar with the directness of US academic writing, and thus may need help with developing a clear focus in their writing. Consider prioritizing comments in the areas mentioned above when giving feedback, and if you do mark papers for grammar, try to distinguish between errors that obscure meaning in the paper and errors that may be distracting but are ultimately unrelated to your course goals.
Build in opportunities for reflection and assessment	Build in opportunities for students to reflect on their learning, and for you to assess how well the class is understanding your content. For example, you could have students complete a quick “clicker” quiz or a “minute paper” at the end of class.



<p>Provide numerous opportunities for students to ask questions.</p>	<p>Some international students may feel uncomfortable expressing confusion during class. It can be helpful to open several lines of communication, and to encourage your students to ask questions in the way they feel most comfortable. For example, you could create a specific discussion board on Canvas for questions, and encourage students to message or email you if they don't feel comfortable sharing their question with the class.</p>
<p>Intervene when you notice a student is struggling.</p>	<p>When you notice a student may be struggling in your class, reach out to them through email or on Canvas. Sometimes, just showing that you're concerned about them can help a student feel more comfortable asking for support. Additionally, you can point them to (or remind them of) helpful resources like Services for International Students and Scholars.</p>

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