



**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 <a href="#">Services for International Students and Scholars</a> and to <a href="#">Counseling Services</a> 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 " <a href="#">Activating Your Lecture</a> " 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 <a href="#">Partners in Acquiring Language (PAL) Program</a> on campus for more practice in conversing in English.



<p>May experience cultural, racial, religious, and/or linguistic discrimination</p>	<p>Wu, Garza, &amp; 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 "<a href="#">Microaggressions</a>."</p>
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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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