

# Effective Practices in Teaching International Students

Many U.S. higher education institutions have seen increases in the number of international students (Ruiz & Radford, 2017). An important challenge to overcome with their increased enrollment is developing a teaching and learning experience that effectively engages and supports these students (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2013). This document outlines several suggestions that foster positive educational outcomes for international students. Areas that are important to focus on are:

- checking and assessing your assumptions about international students
- setting clear expectations
- facilitating effective communication and engagement between you and the student as well as the student and others

## Checking Your Assumptions about International Students

Sometimes, and often not intentionally, we formulate general ideas about our students including those who are international (Trice, 2003). We can make assumptions about level of content knowledge, English proficiency, and instructional and participatory expectations. Perhaps the best approach that we can take is to get to know our international students. Some suggestions are:

### **1** Note cards.

Use note cards to ask students about their experiences with the course topic, expectations of your role and theirs, as well as areas of concern they might have. This will allow you to get to collect unique information that will enable you to tailor your individual support accordingly.

### **2** Scheduled office hours.

Schedule time with each student during office hours. You might ask students to share information that is important to know. This will allow you to reflect on any assumptions that you might have.

### **3** Casual conversations before and after class.

Arrive to your class several minutes before it begins and stay several minutes after class. Use this time to casually talk with one or more international students. Ask them about themselves, how they study the course content, and their experiences with the subject.

## 4 Student Feedback.

At any time, feel free to ask for student feedback on your teaching. You can ask students what is working, what is not, and what they need or might like to see implemented to improve their learning. For optimal impact, make this anonymous. This might better allow those who are reluctant to speak out and share to give you information about their experience and your instruction.

### Setting Clear Expectations

The explicit setting of expectations is important to all students, but it can be particularly vital to those international students for whom the academic cultural differences between their country of origin and the U.S. can be substantial, and who may have limited exposure to the academic norms of the U.S. higher education system. There are several ways to create an environment where the expectations are clear regarding the roles and duties of the instructor and the student.

**Show and Tell.** Share exactly what you want students to do and where appropriate, model or give examples of said expression or task. By giving them information both verbally, textually, and through example, you increase the likelihood of student success. For example, you might want to give students checklists or rubrics to help them make sure that they are providing you with exactly what you want. Additionally, you might want to provide or co-create a set of “rules of engagement” in class to guide interactions between you and your students as well as between students.

**Create Multiple Modes for Dissemination of Expectations.** Provide students with the information that they need to meet your expectations in multiple forms. For example, place information on your syllabus, state it in class, and place it prominently on the course website or on Canvas. Periodically, (especially after an assessment), repeat or call attention to the expectations of the course and the student.

### Facilitating Effective Communication and Engagement

Across cultures, there can be different expectations regarding how individuals communicate and engage with one another. While setting clear expectations is an important part of creating the kind of teaching and learning environment that is desirable for all, it is also useful to develop practices that will allow more students to share and contribute their knowledge and perspectives. Below are a few ways to do so.

**Providing More Portals for Questions.** While you might feel you have created a safe climate for everyone consider creating anonymous practices to solicit questions from students. For example, you might have a box for questions that you have in the classroom every time you meet. Place it somewhere that increases anonymity. Additionally, you might use web-based tools such as [Mentimeter](#), [Linoit](#), and [Padlet](#) to solicit questions anonymously in real time in your class. You can also use these tools to solicit anonymous answers or feedback. Of course, a discussion board is a useful tool as well, as it encourages students to share their knowledge and understanding with those who might have questions. **For assistance on how to integrate these tools into your course design, please contact us at [teaching.utk.edu](http://teaching.utk.edu).**

**Build in Time to Think and Respond.** Often students are nervous about publically responding in class. This can certainly be the case for those who are still developing their proficiency in a second language. If you want students to respond in class, you can contact a student that you wish to call on or to share and let them know that you will be doing so during the next class. This gives them time to manage any nerves and prepare; thus, potentially participating with more confidence. Additional ways to build students confidence in speaking and sharing is to use the practice of [Think, Pair, Share](#) or [Write, Pair, Share](#). These activities create opportunities for individuals to think about a concept on their own as well as with others before they might be asked to share what they know.

## Conclusion

In this document, you will find just a few suggestions that might be helpful to you and your international students. You might notice that many of the practices above are simply good approaches regardless of your students' background. Thus you can consider these ways to create an overall inclusive course that will especially support the needs of your students that may come from other countries, cultures, and experiences.

## Additional Resources

### 1 Working with ESL Writers in Your Classes

To consider issues that students who are still developing their writing in English typically have, [please review the resources](#) that the Center for Writing Studies at the University of Illinois has compiled.

### 2 Pedagogical Issues and Strategies

For more on teaching international students, please review the resources developed by the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning at the University of Michigan at the following link: <http://crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents>.

## References

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (n.d.). Teaching international students Pedagogical issues and strategies. University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents>.

Center for Writing Studies (n.d.). Working with ESL writers: Resources for instructors. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/wac/resources/WorkingwithESLWriters.html>.

Ruiz, N. G. and Radford, J. (2017). New foreign student enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities doubled since Great Recession. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/20/new-us-foreign-student-enrollment-doubled-since-great-recession/>.

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