

SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS---

IDEAS FOR FACULTY

The following collection of suggested practices is divided into thematic categories for ease of reference. However, it should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive and that many practices transcend a single category. It is also the case that all of the suggestions contained in this area can be beneficial for ALL students, not just the international ones.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

International students don't expect special treatment or privileges, they do anticipate the need to make necessary adjustments in their work habits and academic conduct. The instructor's role is to provide them with access to the tools they may need, and a fair chance for success in the course.

- In the syllabus, provide a list of ways in which students can succeed in the course.
- Provide a list of or online link to contact information for academic support units on campus. (The UNLV list is provided elsewhere in this web site).
- Create a 'buddy system', pairing native and international students for study purposes.
- Provide examples of good quality assignments and discuss their features.
- Allow students to tape-record sessions.
- Provide study guides for complex assignments or major exams.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

It is often the case that international students are quite proficient in written English (reading & writing), and less proficient or self-assured when it comes to speaking. It is true that they have had to "pass" certain English language proficiency tests to be admitted to the University. Yet, these tests are usually focused on everyday English and not on technical or discipline-specific language.

- Speak slower
- Speak clearly.
- Provide instructions in writing.
- Post key items and terminology --- on the board, online, on handouts.
- Pair-up students --- native speakers with non-native speakers.
- Provide guidance for good and efficient note-taking.
- Provide sufficient or extended time for completion of tests or assignments.
- Allow for multiple revisions of assignments.
- Allow use of an electronic translator when appropriate.
- Refer students to the Writing Center.
- Refer students to the ESL program.

CLASSROOM / COURSE PARTICIPATION

One of the most common observations by instructors is that students from certain parts of the world tend to participate in classroom discussions, Q&A, and activities less than their native peers. There may be several reasons for such reluctance to participate: they may assume that questioning the instructor's opinion or information may be construed as defiance of authority; they may feel intimidated by the instant 'jumping' to answer by native students; they may be used to pausing to consider their responses before raising their hands, or they may be timid about their language skills.

- Welcome international students to your course, acknowledge possible differences in educational systems, and welcome their contributions to the diversity of the course and its activities.
- Ensure that session goals are clearly articulated at the start of the session, and that closure is provided at the end of the session --- “this is what we set out to accomplish, this is how we did it, this is what will come next.”
- Use pairs and small groups for in-class work.
- Avoid clustering of students by country in course-related activities.
- Recognize that in many cultures “instant” response to the instructor’s questions is not considered appropriate. When posing a question, use the delay technique. Example: “I will be asking you a question and will give you 30 seconds to consider a response. Please don’t raise your hand. I will let you know when it’s time to raise your hand.”
- Use guided writing assignments (see “Teaching Topics --- Reading Assignments” elsewhere on this web site).
- Assign students to mixed study groups for preparation work outside of class.
- Have students prepare oral summaries of assignments (reading and other) to be shared with another student in-class.
- “Chunk” information dissemination (especially lectures) into short segments followed by Q&A, small group problem-solving, online searching, etc.
- Present new concepts in diverse ways and use many examples.

COMMUNICATION

Cross-cultural communication is a very broad and highly researched area. Instructors can not be expected to master all the nuances of communication related to each of their international students. They can, however, be aware of some general areas of importance: attitudes toward figures of authority, especially teachers; expectations about the responsibilities of students for their own learning; and values related to such areas as success and failure.

- Make appointments with students in the first 10-14 days of the term to discuss their and you expectations, any special needs, etc. It is best to have pairs of students come to appointments as this kind of setting may be intimidating.
- Provide ongoing and frequent feedback.
- Use language appropriate for a semi-formal setting and avoid use of slang or colloquialisms in class and in online communication.
- Make good use of non-verbal communication.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

International students are not less honest than native students. What may appear to be a lack of standards when it comes to academic integrity, most likely reflects a different set of values, practices, and experiences that international students may bring from their native cultures. In some cultures, for instance, peer sharing of information is encouraged and is considered a valuable way to learn. Similarly, copying from the textbook without attribution may be considered proof of study.

- Use guided assignments that include frequent instructor intervention and feedback.
- Provide students (through the syllabus or elsewhere) with a very specific and succinct list of “do’s” and “do not’s”, with clear consequences (positive and negative) included.
- Acknowledge that there are diverse academic integrity standards and practices, and emphasize the local ones as the ones to follow in the course.
- Use some class time early in the term for students to articulate and describe their of ethical behavior of students.
- Define “collaboration” clearly and include examples.
- Arrange with a librarian to conduct a session on the proper citation of sources.

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

While most native students have a casual attitude toward instructors, in many cultures teachers are highly valued and honored. It is, therefore, seen as inappropriate behavior to engage in a discussion (“argumentation”) with an instructor. Making the first contact with an instructor may also be seen as presumptuous.

- Meet students outside of class early in the semester. It is best to have pairs of students come to appointments as this kind of setting may be intimidating.
- Provide meaningful feedback.
- Personalize feedback.
- Avoid putting students “on the spot”.
- Avoid using a student as a “formal representatives” of their country / culture.
- Reassure students that challenging ideas or points-of-view expressed by the instructor are encourage and are not considered a “challenge to authority.”
- Make frequent appointments for one-on-one reviews (after the initial office visit).
- Show respect for differences.

WEB-BASED LEARNING

The online teaching & learning environment, whether supplemental to face-to-face instruction or fully online, provides opportunities for the support of learning by international students.

- Upload photos of yourself and all students
- Use the online environment as a tool for varied teaching / learning approaches.
- Establish a reward system for participation in online activities.
- Include a clear list of action required to accomplish online assignments and tasks.
- Use self-tutorials as often as is appropriate.
- Use short, specific deadlines, and stick to them.
- Validate students work often and provide constructive feedback.
- Use highest quality of writing – proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and avoid use of colloquialisms and slang.