Best Practices in Integrating International Students into Campus Life and the Classroom

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Differences that make a difference in the classroom

Values/cultural differences that impact the classroom:

- Communication Styles and Non-Verbal Behaviors
- Hierarchy vs. Equality
- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Doing/Future Oriented vs. Present/Being Oriented
- Effectiveness vs. Appropriateness
Tip #1: Learn how to pronounce students’ names!

- Students will not feel included if you avoid saying their names or pronounce them wrong.

- At BC have a “Learn to Pronounce Chinese Names” session every year for faculty and staff as part of IEW—International Education Week.

- Taught by BC faculty member from China who teaches Chinese.

- Clarify for students what they should call you. If the student does not want to call you by your first name, don’t push it. May go against his/her cultural norms and make him/her uncomfortable.
Tip #2: Avoid Slang/Idiomatic Expressions and Pop Culture References
Slang/Sports Idiomatic Expressions

- Out in left field
- **Touch base**
- Struck out
- Drop the ball
- Keep the ball rolling
- Throw in the towel
- Take a dive
- Slam dunk
- Saved by the bell
- Low blow
- Lightweight
- Hit below the belt
- Down to the wire
- **Get a head start**
- **Give it your best shot**
- Home stretch
- In the ballpark
- Whole new ball game
- Level the playing field
- Long shot
- **To be off base**
- Par for the course
- Shot in the dark
- Skating on thin ice
- Plenty of other fish in the sea
- Three strikes and your out
- Out of your league
- Learn the ropes
- Jump the gun
- Go to bat for someone
- **Ball is in your court**
- Bat a thousand
- Behind the eight ball
- Get to first base
- Keep your eye on the ball
- Right off the bat
Tip # 3: Get to know your students

- Students from more collectivist cultures need to establish trust and form a relationship before they will feel comfortable talking to you.

- Students from more hierarchical cultures are not accustomed to being able to talk to professors and ask questions.
  - Explain what office hours are and encourage them to come!
  - Get to know them personally so they will feel at ease coming to you with questions.
  - Be aware that they may not feel comfortable with your level of informality in and out of classroom.
Tip #4: Understand **Indirect** Styles of Communication: Oral

- Students from more hierarchical, collectivist cultures will not say no directly or challenge authority. They are non-confrontational. You must learn to read between lines, look for indirect communication techniques, and **be patient**.

- For many international students, appropriateness is more important than effectiveness.
Indirect Communication Techniques

- Understatement
- Stories, proverbs, metaphors
- Changing the subject
- Saying yes (when they mean no)
- Apologies
- Saying nothing—silence
- Telling a story which is off subject
- Asking a question
- Asking what you think
- Qualified answers like “probably”, “I think so”, “I’m almost sure”...
Many international students have never written a paper—come from exam based educational system.

US style of writing is very direct—explicit thesis, driven argument, linear.

May have much more indirect, circular style—US professors feel like this is “unorganized”.

Must teach how to be more direct not just grade down—refer to appropriate resources on campus.

International students may have never written a personal reflection paper—do not assume know they what this means.

International students from collectivists cultures often expect writing of a thesis to be a more collaborative effort.
Tip #6: Have students participate in different ways

Americans are enculturated into the expectation of participating in class from a young age.

International students often come from more memorization/lecture format rather than critical thinking/interactive discussion.

◦ Do exercises in pairs first so less intimidating.
◦ Have a pop quiz to demonstrate they did reading.
◦ Have students provide feedback in writing where they can take more time to formulate their thoughts.
◦ Encourage students to write down comment or question in advance so prepared and to go first.
◦ Make sure international students know some Americans can be nervous about participating too!
Tip #7: Assign group projects differently so all feel included and expectations are clear

- If students decide, US students often won’t pick international students, or international students will click together.

- Find methods for all students to have opportunity to contribute: International students are more collaborative, Americans more competitive—all need to have opportunity to have their voice included.

- Collaboration in another culture may be perceived as cheating in US culture.
Tip# 8: Understand non-verbal behaviors

- Eye contact is very different across cultures.
  - In hierarchical cultures, it is used to show respect.
  - Often misunderstood in the US as avoidance, lying, or something to hide, etc.

- International students will often smile, and nod their head even if they don’t understand to avoid embarrassment—need to check understanding through other methods.

- Silence is a method of communication!

- Odors are interpreted differently across cultures.
Many international students come from educational systems where only have one exam at end of semester or year, not ongoing assignments.

Also meeting deadlines or coming to class on time can be taken less seriously in other cultures.

Need to clarify expectations.
Tip #10: Avoid Stereotypes

- We all have them.
- Be aware of yours.
- Work **consciously** on changing them.

Enjoy having international students in your class. They are a great asset and bring different perspectives to any topic. Utilize them as resources. This will help break down stereotypes.
Final Recommendations

- At BC have started to offer programs to faculty on these topics.
- I do cross-cultural communication workshops regularly for different departments/offices.
- Lynne Anderson, Director of ELL, has offered programs for faculty for past few years as part of International Education Week.
- Use your resources on campus!