

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

**Adrienne Nussbaum**

Director/Asst. Dean, OISS, Boston College  
Asst. Professor, Global Studies,  
Bentley University

**Shontay Delaloe, Ph.D.**

Assistant Provost for Global Engagement  
Director, Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship  
Brown University

**Boston Intercultural Skills Conference**  
**February 24, 2017**



# 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”...

# Tip #5: Indirect Communication: Written



- ▶ 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 use to show respect
  - Often misunderstood in US as avoidance, lying, 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.



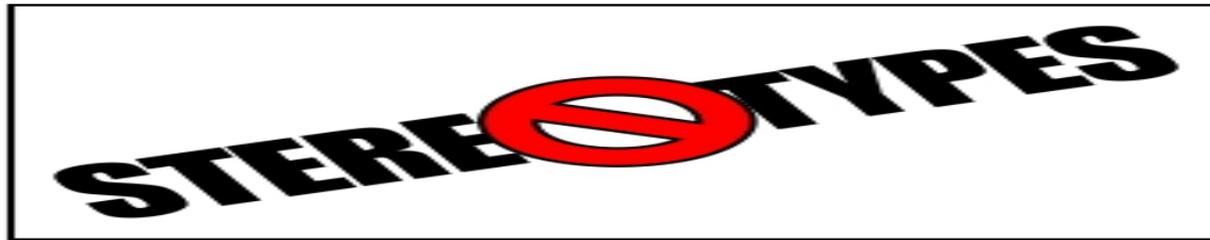
# Tip #9: The Importance of Time

- ▶ 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!
- 