Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Community

Sponsored by the Student Policy Issues Committee of the Commission on Multicultural Understanding

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
You and Your International Instructor

Indiana University strives for a diverse educational community by recruiting faculty and students from all over the United States and the world. At the graduate level, IU seeks to attract the best and brightest international students and faculty to its departments. In addition to their expertise in their fields, these scholars provide you, their student, with the opportunity to enhance your cross-cultural awareness and prepare yourself for the global workplace.

International Associate Instructors (AIs) receive teacher training and must demonstrate competency in English; however, the accent and language proficiency of international students varies. Cultural differences in teaching and learning expectations may also be different. Recognize that cultural differences can cause misunderstanding. For example, within certain cultures eye contact is avoided as a sign of respect, yet within the United States, lack of eye contact is often interpreted as disinterest, apathy, or dislike.

You and your instructor have the job of making sure that the knowledge the instructor has is getting transferred to you. It's the same challenge that every student and teacher faces. It works best when the student and teacher are on the same team, working toward a common goal.

Here's a game plan for a successful classroom experience with your instructor:

- Take advantage of the office hours before and after class to talk to your instructor.
- Come to class with required reading and assignments completed. No instructor can compensate for a lack of active learning on your part.
- Recognize that it may take a few classes for you and your instructor to get used to each other’s accents.
- Don’t sell your instructor short! Ask questions whenever you don’t understand.
- Don’t sell yourself short, either! Reword your question or comment if the instructor does not understand you the first time.

If you continue to have trouble understanding, talk to your AI or instructor individually.

If all else fails, talk to the AI coordinator of the department.

"Ahmad knew so much about our subject! I'm glad I didn't let my first worries push me out of the class."

~Laura, Calculus 402
You and Your American Students

Many of your students are meeting Americans of different races, ethnicities, and religions for the first time at Indiana University. And they’re meeting people from other countries for the first time, too. One of those people is you. You have an opportunity to help your students gain the experience of working with a person of a different language and culture—an essential skill for being successful in our changing world.

While you should feel assured that this cross-cultural experience is beneficial to the student, the students themselves may feel some anxiety when studying with international instructors. They may worry that they may have difficulty understanding you, and that might result in a poor grade. The best way to deal with this concern is to assure your students from the first day of class of your willingness to work as a team to overcome any communication problems that may interfere with their success in the course.

"You haven't taught until someone has learned."

~Wilbert McKeachie

Become part of a winning educational team! Here's how to address and solve communication problems:

- Recognize that it may take a few classes for you and your students to get used to each other's accents.
- On the first day of class, establish rapport and credibility by telling the students something about yourself and your background in your field of study.
- Mention your English on the first day. Tell students that you are aware of your accent and that it's essential for them to ask questions if they have difficulty understanding you.
- Get to know your students. Learn their names. Be available before and after class to chat.
- Be available to help students and to answer questions about course work before and after class, and during office hours.
- Use effective teaching strategies
  - Write an outline of the lesson on the board or screen and follow it.
  - Learn to use the blackboard or screen effectively.
  - Write all key information on the board or screen.
  - Speak slowly and clearly, and project your voice.
  - Establish eye contact from time to time with your students. Watch for non-verbal signs of confusion.
  - Make sure that you have understood and answered all student questions.
Resources For Information And Support

**Student Academic Center**
316 North Jordan Ave, 855-7313
http://www.indiana.edu/~sac/
The Student Academic Center offers a variety of workshops and classes on academic skills.

**Office of Diversity Education**
Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center A 231, 855-2139
http://www.iub.edu/~diversit/index.html
The Office of Diversity Education works with individuals and student groups to develop programs to address diversity issues.

**Center for English Language Training**
Memorial Hall 313, 855-6457
http://www.indiana.edu/~celtiep/
The Center for English Language Training provides English language training for International students and administers the Test for English Proficiency for International AI candidates.

**International Services**
Franklin Hall 306, 855-9086
http://www.indiana.edu/~intlserv/
International Services provides orientation and assistance for international students and scholars.

Get Involved!

**Commission on Multicultural Understanding**
http://www.indiana.edu/~comu/
The Commission on Multicultural Understanding gathers information and encourages programs that will increase awareness and understanding of the factors that lead to discrimination in our society and on our campus. Students can get involved by joining any of the COMU committees.

**Conversation Partners Program**
http://www.indiana.edu/~intlserv/
This is a language exchange program that allows international and American students to improve their knowledge of each other's languages while learning about their cultures. This program is offered by the Leo R. Dowling International Center.

**Practical English Training Program**
http://www.indiana.edu/~intlserv/
Students learn how to express in English at a store or restaurant. Students can get involved as an English speaking partner. This program is offered by the Leo R. Dowling International Center.

**G530 Teaching in the U.S. Classroom**
G530 is a class that helps prepare international AIs for teaching. Undergraduates can get involved by observing micro-teaching and giving feedback. They can also join the AI conversation partner program in which international AIs meet once a week for six weeks to talk about student life in different cultures.

**Global Speakers**
http://www.indiana.edu/~intlprog/
The Global Speakers Service provides international and study-abroad students, scholars, and faculty as speakers to organizations interested in learning more about international areas and issues.

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