Communicating with Culturally Diverse Students

1. **Learn Names:** Know what to call your student—learn to pronounce his/her name. Find phonetic ways to remember. Ask the student to correct you if you mispronounce it. Tell your students what to call you: Professor/Mr./Ms./Miss, first name, etc.

2. **Listen:** Be patient. Culturally diverse students may have a “script” of what they want to say before they enter your office. Allow them to get through the script so they feel certain that you have heard what they have to say. This can be difficult if the script is long and you can anticipate their questions or issues.

3. **Limit Unclear Language:** Speak slowly. Use short sentences. Pause for an instant after each sentence to give students time to process what you said. Limit the use of slang, figures of speech. Terms like “ASAP” or “on target” are culture-based and may have little meaning to culturally diverse students. Nor will they understand multisyllabic words such as “epistemology” without their everyday synonyms.

4. **Watch for Cultural Difference Indicators:** When a student smiles or nods, it doesn’t necessarily mean he or she understood. A smile can also mean, “I’m confused but too embarrassed to ask questions.” Try asking a question to check comprehension. “Yes” can mean “No.” Some cultures never say no out of respect. Instructors may need to work with their students to get an understanding about how to communicate successfully during face to face meetings.

5. **Consider Body Language Differences:** If a student does not make eye contact, it may be out of respect. Women from any cultures do not want to touch or shake hands with a male. Pointing a finger or placing hands on hips may be a sign of disrespect.

6. **Use Feedback Loops:** Try restating and summarizing. Paraphrase what you think the student said and ask if that’s what he or she means. After you have discussed an issue or topic with a student, be sure and ask them to explain it back to you in their own words. “Do you understand what I told you?” will often be answered with a polite, “Yes, thank you, as the student walks away without the vital information they need.

7. **Use Visuals and Written Words:** Words coming out of a person’s mouth can be difficult to understand. The problem is not knowledge or intelligence, but may be communication. In addition, spoken English used in academia may be different from that used elsewhere. Use visuals to portray concepts. Write important words down. In class, be sure to provide handouts and outlines.

References:

Adapted from *Communicating with International Students More Effectively*. Electronic Powerpoint Presentation by Zhongchun Jiang, Associate Professor SUNY Cobleskill. [http://www.cobleskill.edu/library/Communicating.pdf](http://www.cobleskill.edu/library/Communicating.pdf)

Adapted From *TRAINING TUTORS TO WORK WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*, Carol R. Lyon. *St. Ambrose University*. Retrieved January 29th, 2012 from: [http://bitsy.me/4s8](http://bitsy.me/4s8)


**For more help or information**

For more information or if you have questions about teaching culturally diverse students, contact the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning: [citl@indiana.edu](mailto:citl@indiana.edu).