Faculty Guidebook

Teaching in a Multicultural and Globalized World: Addressing the Academic, Social and Personal Needs of International Students

As higher education becomes more globalized, international students represent a substantial and growing population at U.S. institutions. International students at Plymouth State University come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In 2017-2018, there were 17 countries represented, with the majority being non-native English speakers. Sweden, Saudi Arabia, China, and Nepal represent the dominant groups. The University is working to increase the enrollment of international students on campus, as the presence of these students contributes significantly to PSU’s academic, social, and cultural diversity, as well as the financial health of the institution. Increasing international student numbers, however, can pose a number challenges to faculty and staff, as students sometimes face unforeseen academic and social obstacles.

This guidebook was created for faculty/staff who teach or work with international students at Plymouth State University. The topics generated in the book were derived from questions and issues shared by PSU faculty, staff, and students during a needs analysis conducted in spring 2018. Data were collected from surveys and from series of focus group interviews. The intention of this guidebook is to: (a) raise awareness about the types of challenges that international students face, (b) provide a discussion of the kinds of issues that may affect international students in your classes, and (c) offer suggestions based on current research and best practices (see reference list). While the guidebook may not address all faculty questions or concerns, relevant campus offices and resources are included for additional support.

Lastly, please do not hesitate to use me as a resource to answer questions regarding the needs and assessment of our international students. Any feedback that you would like to share on this guidebook is appreciated.

Thank you,

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I. Profile of International Students

While it is often easy to think of international students as a homogenous group, in reality, international students vary with respect to their English language proficiency and exposure to US academic culture. These two factors can have a profound impact on the teaching and learning of the international students at Plymouth State University. Non-native English-speaking students at PSU tend to fall into two broad categories. The first group are foreign international students who have completed their secondary education in another country and who come to the United States on a temporary visa for undergraduate study. Some of these students may spend time in U.S. before beginning university; others may have never studied in an English-medium school before and have limited or no exposure to norms of interaction expected at American higher education institutions. Great variability may also exist with regard to various aspects of English language skills. Some students may do well on tests but lack communicative proficiency to participate in classroom discussions. Others may be vocal and sound native-like but struggle with academic reading and writing tasks in their disciplinary areas. The second group of students is made up of permanent residents or citizens whose first language is not English. These domestic English as a second language (ESL) students are generally familiar with U.S. academic culture and are generally comfortable with conversational English, but they may be challenged by academic reading and writing tasks.

II. Addressing Academic Needs

International students encounter academic and personal difficulties while pursuing their studies just like domestic students. Unlike their American peers, however, internationals also face additional challenges of navigating a new culture, a second/third language, and an educational system with different rules and expectations (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Tseng & Newton, 2002). Compounding these challenges may be visa issues, anxiety about finances, and pressure to meet family or government expectations. In the section below, specific academic challenges faced by international students are discussed and recommendation/relevant information for addressing these needs are provided. Following the discussion, information regarding PSU support service is provided as a reference should additional support be needed.
A. Understanding Your International Students

1. Language Skills
   International Students who display good conversational skills in English may not have developed adequate cognitive academic language proficiency to handle reading, writing, speaking or listening comprehension tasks needed for university-level content courses (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 1986, 2017). This does not mean that students are not intelligent enough to handle university courses. Students need time initially to bring their English-language skills up-to-speed with their native language abilities.

2. Academic Expectations
   Beside language barriers, international also need to make adjustment to a new academic culture and to expectations of a new education system. It is important not to assume that international students naturally understand your expectations noted in the syllabus. Meet specifically with the international students at the beginning of the semester to discuss the syllabus, and if possible, to provide specific examples of classroom policies including participation policies, expectations for attendance, tardiness, and office hours policies/preferences.

3. Providing Examples
   To the extent possible, provide examples of successful coursework. International students may struggle to understand assignments and their assessment criteria even after repeated clarification. Sharing samples of both successful and less successful assignments/papers provide a concrete understanding of your expectation.

4. Building Personal Relationships
   A short conversation after class can go a long way in helping students feel more comfortable and can build rapport (Pedersen, 1995). As some international students may not be comfortable attending office hours; short meetings after class can offer an initial opportunity to get to know your students and to provide clarification where needed.

5. Assume Good Intentions
   Always assume good intentions. Cultural differences can lead to student behavior that may at times be hard for faculty to understand or even off-putting. In most cases, this is not the students’ intention. Students are probably doing their best to navigate life in the United States, so it is best to operate on the assumption that international students have good intentions.
6. **Student as Representative**
   Ask sincere questions about a students’ home culture; however, it is important not to make students a spokesperson for their country or ethnicity.

7. **Academic Status and Immigration**
   Undergraduate international students are required to maintain at least 12 credit hours while graduate students must maintain at least 6 credit hours per semester. Accordingly, students may sometimes have to make academic decisions to protect their immigration status. In these cases, it’s best to advise students to seek help from the Global Engagement Office.

**B. Classroom Participation**

Challenges:

Some international students come from countries where class participation between classmates and the professor is not typical – asking questions, debating divergent views – as it may be perceived as disrespectful to a professor’s authority. Other students may also not see the benefit of discussion or group work believing that they cannot learn anything substantial from their peers and prefer direct instruction from the professor. Finally, some students may not feel that they have mastered the language skills necessary to effectively participate in discussion or debates.

Suggested Strategies:

1. Encourage participation by explaining that in U.S. classrooms, not only is it acceptable to ask questions, having multiple and divergent viewpoints are expected and valued. This is particularly important for some students who have been taught that only the expert’s opinion is authoritative and acceptable. Encourage students to share their unique perspectives.

2. Look for ways to incorporate more multicultural references and models into the course content, using pertinent examples from various parts of the world. Talking about familiar topics that students can relate personally to can help students get accustomed to speaking in class.

3. Introduce class participation gradually. Start with questions that elicit short answers or facts, then follow-up questions, and lastly with opinion or evaluative questions. Again, continue to assure the students that their contributions are welcomed and appreciated.
4. Provide clear guidelines and expectations for participation and allow time for a participation learning curve. For example, if participation is part of the students’ grade, allow for a trial period before participation points can be accrued.

5. Check-in with students after assigning group work and offer assistance. International students may not be accustomed to cooperative work in class. They may also need advice on how to relate to their American peers (Hedge, T., 2000).

6. Be conscious of discussions/topics that presume a nuanced understanding of American history and politics. Without proper background knowledge, students may not be able to follow the discussion nor effectively participate (Fassinger, 1995).

7. Continually encourage participation while at the same time recognize that some students’ means of participation is different and may take time to change and adapt to U.S. participation norms.

8. Allow longer pause time for your international students, as it might take longer for them to formulate a response.

9. During class or office conferences, avoid asking, “do you understand?” as some international students might not feel comfortable publicly admitting they don’t understand. Other international students may politely respond “yes” whether they understand or not; to do otherwise would challenge your authority and competence as a professor. Instead, ask the students to repeat the main ideas of what you’ve said.

C. Writing Assignments

Challenges:

International students sometimes have difficulty understanding writing assignments. In addition, expectations for writing requirements may vary across different disciplines. Students can benefit from detailed instructions. The following list of ideas and suggestions can be implemented to facilitate international students understand of writing assignments.
Suggested Strategies

1. Make sure writing assignment prompts provide ample directions for writing assignments including the format of the assignment and the type of analysis expected. Detailed writing prompts are also helpful for Writing Center staff, as they can provide additional guidance and feedback to your international students.

2. Provide rubrics for grading that included required elements and specify how many points will be allotted for various parts of the writing assignment.

3. Model examples of a successful paper and a less successful paper and discuss what constitutes a well-done paper. Students often reported difficulty conceptualize grading rubrics, so sample papers provide concrete examples to conceptualize grading rubrics.

4. Allow students to submit an outline or a draft and provide feedback to ensure expectations are being met.

5. Give feedback on the content and organization of the paper. Initially, provide comments on grammar errors only if they interfere with the comprehension of the content. Grammatical errors, although are the most commonly noted concerns, tend to mask more serious content and organization issues in students’ papers.

6. Encourage students to schedule a meeting with a writing consultant at the Writing Center after you provide feedback on the first draft.

D. Academic Integrity

Challenges:

International students come with different expectations about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in terms of academic integrity. The concept that an idea can be owned and needs to be properly cited is a view that is weighted differently across cultures. Further, some international students may view sharing answers and work as less problematic compared to U.S. standards.

Suggested Strategies:

1. Attitudes towards cheating and plagiarism, as well as understanding of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism, can vary from cultures to culture. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to define clearly what are and are not
permissible forms of collaboration in the context of particular academic assignments. For example, students may be allowed to discuss take home essay exam questions, but they may not work collaboratively on the response.

2. Require students to turn in a draft, and their bibliography or references, prior to the paper’s due date.

3. Require students to turn in copies of reference articles with cited text highlighted.

4. Require students to submit annotated bibliographies.

E. Lecture Notes

Challenge:

Understanding and taking lecture notes are especially challenging for international students, as they must process language very quickly to write down key ideas. As one student shared: “I have problems taking notes in class because my professor talks too fast or changes slides too fast.” When students have trouble keeping up with a lecture, it means they will have very little in their notebook. This in turn can put them in disadvantage when it comes to preparing for midterms/final exams.

Suggested Strategies:

1. Begin class with a quick summary of topics/key points that were previously addressed before beginning new material. This will help students make connections between earlier materials and new topics.

2. Provide a brief lecture outlining or writing down the outline on the board, explicitly going over the topics/agenda that will be covered. The outline can be used as an advance organizer for students to follow the lecture.

3. Use transitional phrases to guide students through your class talk/lecture. The signal phrase can be beneficial as it signals a change in topic, a contrasting or supporting viewpoint, or the conclusion of a topic. Outlines and transitional phrases help students to take organized notes and make it easier for them to ask follow-up questions about specific points.

4. Highlight key words/concepts in print and have written explanations of assignments (e.g., handout or online). Students can benefit from seeing key terms in writing, as they might not recognize the pronunciation when they hear it.
5. Provide visuals or an outline for students to follow.

6. Avoid over-using slang, idiomatic expressions, and metaphors (or be prepared to explain them), as these terms can be cryptic for students from other cultures.

7. Explain any cultural/historical references your students may not be familiar with. Not understanding prerequisite background knowledge can impact students’ comprehension of main ideas.

8. Since international students come from a variety of education systems, using a combination of small group and whole class discussions; lecture and discussion; and listening, reading, writing, and speaking activities/assignments will provide opportunities for students with different kinds of learning styles to use their strengths to access instructional content. This will benefit not only international students, but the class as a whole.

F. Help-Seeking Behavior

Challenge:

Interacting with professors during office hours can be an intimidating experience for some international students. Some students may be reluctant or will avoid office hours. In some cultures, there is no expectation for professors and students to interact outside of the classroom. This means that international students need to learn a new cultural norm that she/he has not used in the past.

Suggested Strategies:

1. Invite international students to come to your office hours before they "need help." Some students may feel that going to office hours is a sign of weakness.

2. Inform students that office hours are not reserved for students having trouble with course materials; highly motivated students with good grades often are the ones that make use of professors’ office hours.

3. Tell students that people are different in the way they learn. Some do better in classroom discussion, while others grasp the materials better during a one-one-meetings.
III. English Language and American Culture Courses

Plymouth State offers several credit-bearing courses for non-native speaking students. International undergraduate students who fall just below PSU’s language proficiency requirements are required to take language classes during their first semester. Non-native speaking students who have been admitted to PSU – but may need additional support – are also encouraged to register for language classes. The course list includes:

**EI 1021: U.S. Culture and Communication**
This course introduces international students to multiple aspects of U.S. culture and provides them with the language skills necessary for successful communication in the classroom and on campus. Through course readings and discussions, students will increase their comprehension, critical thinking skills, vocabulary, and knowledge of English grammar. Students will also have opportunities to collect and analyze data from the community on cultural topics discussed in the classroom.

**EI 1022: Academic Reading for English Language Learners**
This course is designed to develop the academic reading skills of English language learners preparing for study at a U.S. university. Emphasis is placed on reading complex college-level texts across disciplines. Topics include identifying main ideas, making inferences, generating and forming questions, summarizing, building vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and annotating text. In addition, students will have the opportunity to integrate writing strategies and to develop their communication skills.

**EI 1023: Academic Writing for English Language Learners**
This course is designed to develop the academic writing skills of English language learners preparing for study at a U.S. university. Emphasis is placed to both the process of writing an essay as well as the final product. Particular attention is given to unity and coherence within and across paragraphs, use of transitions, use of outside sources, and patterns of organization. In addition, students will have the opportunity to integrate critical reading strategies and to develop their communication skills.

**EI 1024: College Skills for International Students**
This course introduces international students to the expectations of US college life and provides them with the strategies needed to pursue a successful academic career. Students develop listening, note-taking, test-taking, and presentation skills while expanding their knowledge of American campus and classroom culture. Students have the opportunity to apply a critical-thinking approach to authentic lectures and peer-reviewed research articles.
VI. Academic/Language Support Services

This section provides a summary of the academic/language resources and services that are available at PSU to support the academic development of international students.

A. English as a Second Language Tutoring Support

Location: Mary Lyons Building  
Contact: pgparker@plymouth.edu  
Hours: Varies each semester  
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/english-language-and-american-culture/

Every semester the Center for English Language and American Culture has ESL tutors available to provide support for non-native English speakers. Tutors can support students in the areas of pronunciation, reading, writing, listening and speaking.

B. Writing Center

Location: Lamson Library (first floor)  
Contact: (603) 535-2831  
Hours: M/T/W 9am – 9pm; TH/F 9am – 5pm; Sunday evenings 6pm – 9pm  
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/writing-center/

The Writing Center offers writing tutorial services to all undergraduate and graduate students. The Center helps all writers at any stage of the writing process, whether brainstorming ideas, creating outlines, sharing a draft or partial draft, responding to professors’ comments, checking mechanics and grammar, or citing sources Students can sign up on the basis of need, up to two weeks in advance, for help with papers, short assignments, ESL issues, and other writing requirements.

C. Plymouth Academic Support Services (PASS)

Location: Speare Administration Building  
Contact: (603) 535-2270  
Hours: M-TH 8am – 9pm; F 8am – 4:30pm  
Website: https://www.plymouth.edu/current-students-success/academic-support/academic-support/tutoring-services/

The primary goal of Plymouth Academic Support Services (PASS) is to collaborate with undergraduate students in becoming efficient, independent learners. PASS provides one-on-one tutoring service on content areas. Study skill tutoring is also offered to help students with time management and examine preparation skills.
D. Math Activities Center

Location: Hyde Building, Room 351
Contact: (603) 535-2960
Hours: M/W 11am – 5pm; T/TH 10am – 5pm; F 11am – 2pm
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/math/activity-center/

The Math Center provides student peer tutors for all undergraduate courses offered by the math department. Peer tutors are generally math majors who are interested in teaching math and practicing their instructional skills.

E. Undergraduate Advising Center

Location: Speare Administration Building
Contact: (603) 535-3065
Hours: M-F 8am – 4:30pm
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/undergraduate-advising/

First year undergraduate students are assigned an academic advisor through the Advising Center. Students are encouraged to meet and discuss their program requirements with their advisor. The Center serves as an additional advising resource, particularly in relation to the graduation review process. The Center also manages the Academic Warning, Probation and Severance system on campus, and provides counsel to students in academic difficulty on the best and fastest ways to return to good academic standing.

F. Librarian Support

Location: Lamson Library (second floor)
Contact: (603) 535-2455
Hours: M-TH 9am – 9pm; F 9am – 5pm; Sat. 1pm – 5pm; Sun. 5pm – 9pm
Website: https://library.plymouth.edu/

The Lamson Library provides print and digital resources, instruction, services, and facilities to support and improve the teaching, learning, scholarship, and research mission of Plymouth State University. Reference librarians are available to assist students throughout the week.
V. Immigration and Visa Matters

Unlike domestic U.S. students, international students may have to make academic decisions to protect their immigration status. There are several visa regulations with which international students on an F-1 or J-1 student visas must comply in order to maintain legal status in the U.S.:

(a) F-1 and J-1 students must register for and complete at least 12 credit hours each fall and spring semester to maintain their immigration status. Dropping below 12 credits without prior authorization by the GEO is considered a violation of your F-1 or J-1 immigration status and will result in a negative SEVIS record termination.

(b) Sponsored or scholarship students, from government agencies (e.g., international students from Saudis Arabia and other Arabian gulf countries) are selected because of their desire to pursue specific academic programs. These students do not have another option for a major. If they are not successful in their major, they often cannot choose another one. Changing major may result in an issue with their government sponsorship and visa status.

(c) Students who are performing poorly or who are on probation are at greater risk of jeopardizing their legal status.

In any of the above situations, please ask your international student to make an appointment with the Global Engagement Office (GEO) to ensure that their actions do not put their student visa status in jeopardy.
VI. Additional Support Services

This section provides a summary of additional resources/services that are available at PSU to support the needs of our international students.

A. Global Engagement Office (GEO)

Location: Speare Administration Building  
Contact: psu-geo@plymouth.edu or phone: 603-535-3370  
Hours: M-F 8am – 4:30pm  
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/global/contact-us/global-community-center/

The Global Engagement Office provides immigration advising, orientation, on-campus/post-graduation employment advising, study abroad programs, and international/global programs to students at PSU. International students have the option of being part of the Friends of the Globe (FOG) student organization, Global Ambassadors Program, and Peer-to-Peer program. For events that are happening at the Global Engagement Office, please stop by the GEO and check out the calendar or visit the Events page.

B. Counseling Center

Location: Michael L. Fischler Counseling Center  
Contact: (603) 535-2461  
Hours: M/T 8am – 7pm; W-F 8am-4:30pm  
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/counseling/

The Counseling Center provides services to students and consultation to faculty, administrators, and parents. The Center’s licensed mental health clinicians come from diverse backgrounds and orientations which are conducive to productively addressing student issues. In addition to providing direct services to students, the Center acts as a resource for the entire PSU Community by providing programs that promote intellectual, emotional, cultural, and social development.

C. Health Services

Location: Mary Taylor House  
Contact: (603) 535-2350  
Hours: M-TH 8am – 4:30pm; F 8am – 3pm  
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/health/

Access to the Student Health Services on campus is included your program fee. Students are advised to call for an appointment. Provider services are not available during the
winter, spring break or summer sessions. Administrative help is available on a part-time basis during winter and summer times.

D. Dining Services

Location: Prospect Hall
Contact: (603) 535-2710
Hours: M-F 7:30am – 8pm; Weekends 10:30am – 8pm
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/dining/contact-us/

Sodexo Dining Services offer a variety of services on campus, including an all-u-can eat format at Prospect Hall, the Union Grille in the Hartman Union Building (HUB), the Daily Paws in the HUB, Commons Café in Lamson Learning Commons, The Woods Café in Langdon Woods residence hall, Concessions in the Ice Arena, Campus Catering and a variety of snack and beverage vending machines.

E. Residential life

Location: Speare Administration Building
Contact: (603)535-2260
Hours: M-F 8:30am – 5pm
Website: https://www.plymouth.edu/current-students/campus-community/residential-halls/

PSU’s Residential Life staff provide a safe and enriching environment where students live, learn, and grow. All first-year students will live in one of the six traditional residence halls as part of the First Year Residential Experience, including Blair, Belknap, Grafton, Pemigewasset, Geneva Smith, and select rooms in Mary Lyon. Continuing students are eligible for housing in Res North, including the University Apartments, Merrill Place, Langdon Woods, and select rooms in Mary Lyon. All students living in a residence hall are required to be on a meal plan. The restricted meal plan is only available to students who have fulfilled the live-on requirement.

F. Plymouth State University Police

Location: University Police Building, 2 High Street
Contact: Business Line (603) 535-2330; PSU Alert Line (603) 535-3535;
Tip Line (603) 535-8477
Hours: M-F 8:30am – 4:30pm
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/police/

The University Police Department provides policing services 24 hours a day, 7-days a week. The University Police are the primary responders to criminal matters and security needs at Plymouth State University and at Holderness campus locations. The University Police Department’s priority is to work with students, faculty and staff to foster a safe environment for those working, visiting, and living within the campus community.
VII. Campus Activities and Recreation

Studies have shown that international students rate their sense of social connection significantly lower than their U.S. peers. As a major part of the college experience happens outside of the classroom, international students are encouraged to become involved with the wide variety of clubs, organizations and extra-curriculum activities that are available at PSU. This final section provides a summary of the campus activities and recreation activities that are available at PSU for our students.

A. Students Activities Office

Location: Hartman Union Building
Phone: 603-535-2639
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/student-activities/

The Student Activities Office (SAO) serves as a resource for Student Clubs and Organizations and provides exciting events for the campus community! With over 80 Clubs and Organizations represented at Plymouth State, there is something for everyone! At the beginning of each semester, the SAO promotes a Student Activities Fair, where you can meet all the organizations and choose the ones you like. Plymouth’s Awesome Weekends (PAW) organize events every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night from 9-11pm. PAW sponsors craft nights, sport competitions, Tie Dying and more.

B. Recreation Programs

Location: Hartman Union Building
Contact: (603) 535-2956
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/fitness/group-exercise/class-descriptions/

Campus Recreation offers group exercise classes (e.g., Boot Camp, PiYo, Spin, Strength/Spin, Yoga Boost, Zumba) free to all PSU students. The Sport Clubs Program providing students with great athletic experiences, while developing leadership and personal skills for officers and participants.

C. Outdoor Center

Location: ALLWell North Building.
Contact: (603) 535-2622
Website: https://campus.plymouth.edu/outdoor-center/

Outdoor Center sponsors trips, clinics, and trainings. Students experience empowerment, goal achievement, and group support by moving beyond their own expectations. Outdoor Center has equipment for rental (kayaks, canoes, stand-up paddle board, backpacking
equipment and snow activities equipment) which will help students access and enjoy the great outdoors. Through our SOAR (Student Outdoor Adventure Recreation) program, Outdoor center offers community building adventure-based training to PSU groups and organizations or groups and organizations from Plymouth community and broader region.

VIII. Useful Resources


Specifically written for administrators, faculty and supervisors in professional education programs of allied health, but provides general principles for helping international students and American ethnic minority students to develop study skills, ways to adjust teaching methods, understanding diverse communication styles, etc.


Lists profiles of students by country and includes cultural information, commonly used teaching methods and learning styles, teacher-student relationships, forms of address, etc., and sample “problems” that may arise with each nationality. Second section lists common greetings and simple phrases in each language.


The authors share case studies of students and examples of innovative initiatives; explore strategies and key recommendations for universities to re-conceptualize their programs to better support international students. The book emphasizes the relational aspect of academic and campus life and provides a framework that supports students from initial contact through graduation.


This text is designed for college faculty and TAs who are unfamiliar with the experiences of international students coming from non-English-speaking countries. This book highlights international students' needs using quotes, anecdotes, and reflection questions, as well as specific strategies, resources, and activities that serve as tools for responding to common instructional challenges.
References


