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Tips for Teaching International Students

by Kristi Lewis

International students can be found in many college classrooms across the nation. In 2012, over 700,000 international students were studying in the United States ([Open Doors Report, 2012](#)). Currently, there are 455 ([International Student & Scholar Services, 2018](#)) international students studying at JMU, specifically.

According to a study by Wu and colleagues ([2015](#)), there are a number of benefits to having international students in the United States. First, they can increase the prestige of American colleges and universities since most students are well prepared to pursue higher education. Second, they may finance their own education, providing more revenue than non-international students. Third, they tend to enhance diversity and offer varying world perspectives that can benefit American students—and instructors. Fourth, the presence of international students on campus allows others to experience different languages and cultures. This, in turn, allows both instructors and students the opportunity to grow in cultural competency ([Siczek, 2015](#)).

While there is a clear benefit to U.S. institutions of higher education, instructors, and non-international students, many international students find studying in the States to be a struggle. Challenges for international students include language difficulties, financial strains, and cultural differences such as food and living arrangements ([Tas, 2013](#); [Wu et al., 2015](#)).

Since many international students find language to be a barrier, it is recommended that institutions provide English immersion programs ([Freeman, 2003](#)). JMU is fortunate to have the [Study Group](#) program as a resource for international students. Study Group offers an immersion program where international students can take traditional academic courses for credit, while also learning about American culture and honing their English language skills.

It is recommended that faculty, staff and non-international students welcome international students. It is also important to provide services such as tutoring, counseling, and advising ([Wu et al., 2015](#)). International students can receive tutoring through the [English Language Learner Services](#) located at the JMU [Learning Centers](#). Mamiseishvili ([2012](#)) found that international students tended to persist more with their academics when they met with an academic advisor and connected with faculty.

Finally, international students have, of course, many of the same needs as non-international students. Here are some suggestions for how to make international students feel welcome and to help them get the most out of their educational experience ([Srivastava et al. 2017](#), [McFadden, 2014](#)).

1. Learn students' names.

2. Greet students throughout the semester.
3. Use international examples for instructional purposes.
4. Encourage students to share their own examples from their own experiences.
5. Offer multiple assessment options.
6. Require group projects.
7. Avoid using cultural references or norms that require a knowledge of the United States.
8. Identify baseline knowledge on the subject matter and scaffold learning.
9. Define “participation” by being specific and providing examples.
10. Provide explicit details for each assignment, project, etc.

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