

Teaching International Students

What

In 2007–08 international students comprised 20% of UK graduates (Lipsett, 2009). There are over 3000 international and EU students at the University of Portsmouth representing around 10% of the student population. As a result, we encounter new types of student expectations of, or reaction to, the learning experience.

Why

Good practice in teaching international students is good practice in teaching any students. We should remember that countries such as China and India are changing quickly so there will be quite a variety of past educational experience, type of institution and urban or rural background among the student cohort. For international students there are additional cultural and linguistic hurdles, as well as the need to cope with new language and content, which may make them more dependent on the teaching provided.

How

International student expectations may be based on different learning styles, linguistic conventions and cultural norms. We need to be aware of the cultural distance travelled when students undertake our degree courses and units. If we ask ourselves what is the role of teaching staff and students we find a range of views even within our own culture. With international students, including European students, this range is even greater. Areas of difference may include the following:

- Independent learning is not a universal norm worldwide.
- International students will often expect more individual guidance from tutors, rather than to use a handbook or webpage.
- They may be used to following a textbook, often authored by a lecturer.
- Libraries may remain unknown quantities and / or very peripheral to student life (Timm, 2007).
- They may feel they need to learn material given in class in order to pass.
- Exams may include only short answers to questions.
- They may anticipate more flexibility in the application of regulations, or an unlimited right to resit exams and assessments.
- Plagiarism is not an offence in all cultures, so academic writing skills may be poor.
- Relationships with academic staff may be distant, with personal tutors being an unknown role.
- Students may not be used to using support system & skills training.
- Students' information literacy and computer literacy may be limited.
- Employment may be dependent on other factors to those accepted in the UK.

Being aware of these factors will help us to create a supportive environment for international students' learning. The following techniques can be employed in learning and teaching:

- Awareness of the cultural underpinnings of our own practice.
- Awareness that students are dealing with new linguistic forms at the same time as new subject content or concepts.
- Curriculum design to cover a wider and more international framework (for the benefit of home as well as international students).
- Use of a wider range of international examples and case studies.
- Guidance on how to use reading lists selectively and online resources (show briefly in classes).
- Assessments – allowing for different ways of achieving the learning objectives, with a range of modes of presentation.
- Assessments should have clear prompts and rubrics.

- Students may feel less threatened by small group discussions that feed into the larger group.
- Groups may be engineered to ensure a cultural mix and enrichment of discussion.
- Face-saving can also be supported by allowing students to leave questions in a “question box” after the lecture.
- Feedback should be given privately, as even praise can cause loss of face in some cultures.
- Encourage contacts between international and home students.

The following approaches can be employed in supporting students:

- Support staff need to be aware of the different expectations of international students arising from their own country context.
- Personal tutors should clarify to students in what ways they can (and cannot) support tutees.
- Support services within the University can offer support designed for the needs of international students.

Selected references and websites

Carroll, J. & Ryan, J. (2005). *Teaching international students: improving learning for all*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Coverdale-Jones, T., & Rastall, P. (2008). *Internationalising the university: the Chinese context*. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lipsett, A. (2009, January 29). Overseas students now 20% of UK graduates. Retrieved 20 May 2010, from: www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jan/29/overseas-students-british-degrees

Timm, A. (2007). *Educational practices at undergraduate level in Greece. Educational practices at undergraduate level in India*. Retrieved 20 May 2010, from: www.sdaw.info/conference/programme.htm

Turner, Y., & Robson, S. (2008). *Internationalizing the university*. London: Continuum.

Student Diversity & Academic Writing Project. International Students, Academic Writing, & Plagiarism. Retrieved 20 May 2010, from: www.sdaw.info/about/about_project.htm

Further advice

There is a wealth of further advice in this area. Links to many articles and guidelines are available on the HEA ‘Teaching International Students’ project webpages. Retrieved 20 May 2010, from: www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/internationalisation/internationalstudents

Further advice and guidance is available from the Academic Development Consultancy service (acdev@port.ac.uk)