

## Teaching International Students: Tips for Creating a Welcoming Learning Environment

*From the Office of International Engagement*

Students from over 50 countries have chosen to study here. We are very fortunate to have global and multicultural students at UNI.

Below are guidelines for faculty to support international students in ways that will help all students succeed at our university. Many of the suggestions incorporate [Universal Design for Learning](#), which has been shown to support international students and can also help domestic students.

### 1. Intentional Interactions.

- **Pair domestic and international students.** Take the lead and assign domestic and international students together during collaborative activities in pairs and groups. Concerted efforts, if only once in a while, to join domestic and international students will increase chances of sharing and global learning.
- **Office Hours.** Invite international students to visit during office hours. Even better - reach out to students so you can learn more about them! Some students may come from cultures where it is uncommon to interact directly with a professor.
- **Communicating Expectations.** Don't assume all students understand academic norms. Make expectations clear - verbally and in writing. Time, assignments, and interactions are interpreted differently among cultures. Tell students your expectations for their prompt arrival to class, timely submission of assignments, class participation, acceptable use of AI, etc. More details about academic honesty are explained below.
- **Highlight Campus Resources.** Connect students to campus resources. [The Learning Center](#), [OIE Academic Coaching](#), and [Student Health & Well-Being](#) are some of the great resources available to support students. However, sharing a link with students isn't enough: invite a representative from these offices to visit your class or create a scavenger hunt activity where students must visit the offices.

### 2. Language.

- **Avoid Euphemisms.** Many (but not all!) of our international students are non-native English users with varying degrees of familiarity with the language. It can help to simplify your language by avoiding euphemisms or cultural references.
- **Consider Accommodations.** It is the faculty's prerogative to allow more time for assessments if the student is a non-native English speaker. This is not a disability, so an official accommodation is not required.
- **Provide Information in Multiple Modalities.** For all students, international and domestic, providing information in writing (such as the syllabus, slideshows, or email) and repeating it orally can help students receive important information. When showing a video, turn on subtitles.

- **Use Nonverbal Cues.** Utilize nonverbal cues and indirect communication. Emphasize important messages by writing on the board and using hand gestures. Instead of asking for direct questions, provide opportunities for indirect student feedback through polls and exit tickets.
3. Intercultural Awareness.
- **Academic Honesty.** All cultures value academic honesty, yet it is expressed in different ways. Be aware that American practices of academic honesty are not universal and that you may need to be explicit with expectations. Encourage students to see academic support at [The Learning Center](#) and [OIE Academic Coaching](#). Plagiarism is often unintentional and accidental.
  - **Non-Verbal Communication.** Things like eye contact and personal space are highly culturally relative. It can help to learn the cultural background of your international students and basic information about their culture. Just beware of generalizations! We're all unique.
  - **Giving Grace.** Be willing to forgive miscommunications and misunderstandings as students adapt to a new college culture. It is most important that our students learn and succeed at UNI.
  - **Holidays.** Keep aware of holy days around the world, such as Ramadan, Eid, Easter, and Diwali. Some holy days involve fasting, which may impact students' energy levels. Please note that according to [UNI Policy 3.06 Class Attendance and Make-up Work](#), students must be excused for an absence of religious observance.
  - **Names.** Students whose names come from different languages may be difficult for a native English speaker to pronounce. Instead of saying, "Do you have an English name?" try "What should I call you?" or "How do I pronounce your name?" In addition, inform students of how you as the instructor may be called. Tell them if you prefer Professor, Doctor, or even Miss or Mister. In my languages, the default address is simply "Teacher," so it may help to provide students with this cultural information.
  - **Cultural Misunderstanding.** If you are unclear about a certain incident or issue, don't hesitate to either ask for clarity from the student or contact the professionals at the Office of International Engagement for support.

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### **References & Further Reading**

CAST (2024). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines* version 3.0.

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

Global Cornell. *Teaching International Students*.

<https://global.cornell.edu/resources/faculty/teaching-international-students-tips-instruction>