



Working with International and/or ESL Students

Definition/description: An international student is a student who left his/her home country and moved to another country for academic study. International students do not have US citizenship, and are not legal permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, or refugees.

SDSU has three types of International Students:

- **International Degree Seeking Students** – Traditional students who will complete a degree in the US. May eventually decide to immigrate to the US.
- **Intensive English Language Students** - An IEL student speaks another language as his/her primary language and is initially here to acquire academic English Language skills. May eventually pursue a Bachelor’s or graduate degree.
- **International Exchange students** – Attends SDSU for 1-2 semesters and returns to his/her home institution to complete degree.

Facts:

International students face unique challenges – culture shock, “learning shock” (transition to a new academic environment) (1), language barriers, loneliness, homesickness, financial pressures, and changes in living conditions, food, and climate.

International students have great variation with English proficiency, background, financial means, and goals (2).

Low English proficiency is a leading factor of dropping out of school (4).

Educational approaches vary across the world. Are students expected to sit quietly and listen to lectures, or be involved in an interactive classroom? There may be variations in peer interactions, as well as with professors.

International students contribute to the diversity of the campus community and offer different perspectives (3).

International students often place a high value on education and are eager to learn. They are hard-working, independent, and resilient.

Strategies for Faculty/Staff:

Be curious! A brief conversation, or asking about the student’s home country, can help students feel more comfortable. Make an effort to learn and pronounce students’ names correctly.

Ask open-ended questions. After explaining, ask the student to restate it in his/her own words.

Avoid using acronyms or idioms. If an acronym is commonly used, take the time to explain the meaning.

Be explicit about your expectations. Norms such as class attendance, homework, and punctuality vary. Explain what office hours are; encourage students to utilize them.

Keep in mind that gestures vary across cultures. Students from some parts of the world may indicate agreement by shaking their heads side to side, which in the US would indicate that they don’t understand or don’t agree.

Use the principles of Universal Design to present information in multiple formats. For example, if asking your class, a question, include the question on a PowerPoint slide so students can hear and read the question.

Be comfortable with silence. Linguistically diverse students may need more time to formulate ideas.

Follow-up meetings with a brief email summarizing action items.

Encourage clubs or events that will connect students to campus and the community. International students with more connections to people from the US report greater satisfaction and less homesickness (5).

On-campus contact / for additional info:

Office of International Affairs/English Language and Culture Institute
Hilton M. Briggs Library 119
650-688-4122
sdsu.intlstud@sdsu.edu

Sources:

- 1 - Xu, L. (2015). Transitional Challenges Faced by Post-Secondary International Students and Approaches for Their Successful Inclusion in Classrooms. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 1(3), 1-28. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1070720.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-274,848>
- 2 - Farnsworth, B. (2018). Enhancing the quality of the international student experience. *Higher Education Today*. American Council on Education.
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- 3 - Leask, B (2009). Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 205-221.
- 4 - Sheng, Zhaohui, Sheng, Yanyan, & Anderson, Christine J. (2011). Dropping out of School among ELL Students: Implications to Schools and Teacher Education. *The Clearing House*, 84(3), 98-103.
- 5 - Hendrickson, Blake, Rosen, Devan, & Aune, R. Kelly. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281-295.