

International Student Academic Advisor Supplement

Prepared by the International Student Resource Center, Fall 2017

This document includes some general guidelines and information for academic advisors of international students. While most students settle in quickly and thrive at Oberlin, some may need time to adjust to Oberlin's academic culture. The cultural differences identified in this document represent common adjustment challenges for international students.

The norms and values that shape liberal arts learning in higher education will be new to all incoming students on different levels. This is a challenge for all in-coming students but it can be particularly the case for international students who were socialized academically in very different cultural and educational contexts.

There are a few pedagogy-related items that I would like to bring to your attention that may be useful for all students in your class and most especially international students:

Facilitate a bridge between the student's educational experience and liberal arts learning at Oberlin.

You might consider a classroom exercise that encourages students to share what they admire about the educational philosophy of their high school (domestic or international) and also what they found deficient. This is an opportunity to discuss the values and norms of U.S. higher education liberal arts learning and the ideals of modern Western scholarly activity. It is also an opportunity for all students to reflect on their own academic socialization and how it might be similar and different from what they will experience at Oberlin.

Analyze the notions of "critical" and "creative" thinking.

In high schools – whether domestic or international – “critical” and “creative” thinking may mean a wide variety of things depending upon educational philosophy and culture. Critical and creative thinking may not have been a learning objective in the schools your students previously attended. Depending upon the class, you may wish to introduce students to the culture of Western academe, discussing topics such as the place of individual inspiration, accountability to past academic and artistic production, and the analysis of the norms for critical evaluation.

Support the transition to discussion-based classes.

In the U.S., classroom discussion is often a major pedagogical approach especially in elite schools. For some international and domestic students, your class may be their first exposure to this pedagogical approach. There might also be linguistic challenges for some students for whom English is a second or third language. Clearly outlining in class the expectations and responsibilities of students participating in the class along with one-on-one meetings with international students about their familiarity with discussion-based pedagogies can help assure that all students are fully engaged in class discussion. The appropriate use of faculty office hours may also be something to discuss with the class.

Review standards for academic integrity.

Although all entering students require a review of academic integrity, this may be particularly valuable for some international students from educational cultures with different norms for scholarship and rules guiding a community of learning. Instructors should be aware that for international students the potential effects of disciplinary actions (e.g., for plagiarism) and unsatisfactory academic standing generally may affect their immigration status. Beyond concretely addressing issues of academic integrity with students, you might consider a formal evaluation of their comprehension of it, especially as it relates to plagiarism. See, for example, the following link for a useful online test:
<https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/item1.html>.

First Year, First Semester Considerations

- Review ESOL placement test (placement recommendation and essay) and encourage registration for ESOL/RHET/W-Int. course (if recommended as a result of ESOL test), and taking advantage of the Writing Associates program.
- Inquire whether there are family expectations of certain coursework or field of study to help address cultural assumptions that may emerge regarding certain areas of study.
- International students may come from a culture with a lack, or negative connotation of, support resources. Students may be reluctant to seek help and need encouragement to access support resources.
- International students may come from a culture where certain majors are considered more employable than others. Students may be inclined to think quite pragmatically about their choice of major.

F-1 Visa Regulations to Be Aware Of

- Students must register for a full-time load unless they have obtained an exception approved by the ISRC.
- Students may work on campus without authorization up to 20 hours per week.
- Students may not work off-campus (paid or unpaid) until they have completed 1 year (2 full-time semesters) of academic study, have declared a major, and have successfully applied for employment authorization via the ISRC.
- All off-campus employment (paid and unpaid) must be directly connected to the student's declared major.
- Some STEM majors (3-2 Eng, ACHS, Biochemistry, BIOL, CHEM, CSCI, ENVS, GEOL, MATH, NSCI, PHYS) are eligible for additional employment benefits. ECON and PYSC are not STEM eligible majors for F-1 visa purposes.

International Student Support

Thank you for your work with international students. If, for any reason, you feel an international student is struggling in your class, or you have questions regarding immigration regulations, cultural adjustment, and international student support, please do not hesitate to contact Josh Whitson, assistant dean of students and director of the International Student Resource Center, 440-775-8462, jwhitson@oberlin.edu.