Empowering the International Student Voice in University Courses: Practical Tips and Strategies from ELS Instructors
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International Students’ Barriers to Success (click to watch)

- First year university students Required to withdraw (RTW)
  - Domestic students: 9.2%
  - Bridging Program (BP): 10.92%
  - Direct entry students: 16.14%
  - Direct entry, ESL students: 20% [1]

- Low academic performance

- Minimal participation and classroom engagement

- Fear of
  - being misunderstood
  - mispronunciation
  - being judged by their accent
  - speaking to native speakers
  - inadequate language and academic skills
  - unknown culture [2]

- International students

- Domestic students

  - native English speakers
  - non-native English speakers

- Non-native English speakers

- Direct Entry
  (without any language prep)

- Bridging Program (BP)
  (14 weeks of intensive English for Academic Purposes Course)

Awareness and Inclusion (click to watch)

Create an inclusive, respectful and fair play classroom culture by acknowledging international students’ presence. Making small adjustments to your practice can make a difference and lead to improved international students’ performance and better rapport.

- Poll students to find out about their original countries/culture (languages) Share the results and compare in the positive aspects of the diversity in the class. Make international students feel welcome.

- Create a needs assessment find about students’ background and Canadian experience. Include more informal questions about interests, accomplishments, fears in order to get a better understanding of the class.

- Allow opportunities for domestic students and international students to listen to each other in a non-threatening environment.

Embrace students’ identities

- When class size allows, make an effort to pronounce and use students’ given names.

- Acknowledge the importance of students’ original names, and give a choice to use the original name of their English name.

- Encourage all students to add their preferred pronouns to their email signature as well as to use Nicknames or NameCope

Recognize your own biases

- Be aware of your own cultural bias and notice your attitudes towards students from different cultures. Notice what you say and how you say it. Recognize areas international students may have difficulties with:

  - Humour
  - Jargon/dictionary
  - Culture references (pop culture, politics, history, holidays, celebrities)

Create fair play culture

- Make slight modification to your practices, including adding tools that help international students participate to their potential.

- Pay attention to your language, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
- Idiomatic language and cultural references should be explained.
- Ask frequent feedback, reflection and low barrier questions in a non-threatening way
- Invite students to share cultural experiences (even with the person beside them)
- Employ online tools with a QR code so students can use their phone to contribute to the discussion (Panopto, polls, everywhere)
- Use tools in an online platform to engage students

Get to know your students

- Include some language support & scaffolding with pre / during / post lecture materials
- Make slides available before class and put recordings of lectures on eClass
- Add glossary of key terms, underline key terms in your presentation and use visual aids when possible
- Flip it! Lecture offline and use synchronous time to practice, apply theory, answer questions
- Make some (optional) introductory/easy-read materials available
- Use closed captions and make transcriptions available Universal design for learning

- Assign groups for projects rather than allowing students to choose
- Roles and responsibilities for group work should be explicit
- Use eClass peer assessment tools (one question could have students reflect on their group’s process and member’s work)
- Modify tasks to include one question about a unique global perspective

- Ensure classroom and assignment expectations are explicit and accessible
- Repeatedly invite students to ask questions if they do not understand or remind them to email the instructor or TA for any help
- Create a Forum on eClass and guide the forum with FAQs
- Use Google Forms to monitor class progress and understanding (using a QR code for easy access)
- Provide both formative and summative feedback to ensure students are aware of their progress

- Office of the Registrar (2021) GPA Comparison of Domestic, BP and Direct Entry Students


Engagement (click to watch)

Encourage international students to be active participants in the class and assignments. Make the class more accessible to students to allow them to learn effectively and thrive. Create an inclusive environment for all students.

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Integration (click to watch)

Facilitate the integration of ESL students with their peers and wider university community by explaining expected behaviours that may be known to local students but ignored by some of our international students. Offer available supports when you notice a student is not collaborating well with peers.

Integration in the classroom

- Set up group work for success of ALL students:
  - make groups encourage diversity of views clear step-by-step instructions checklists

Integration outside the classroom

- Introduce relevant class to social activities
- Set up study groups
- Direct students to the relevant library or reference resources for your class and assignments (library workshops)

Checklists emphasizing inclusion & engagement

- Include University services on the course outline and explicitly refer to them in future

Takeaway

Acknowledging your international students and facilitating their engagement and participation will help them integrate with their peer groups and the wider university community, setting them up for success.

- Online learning tools and strategies for ESL students
- Peer assessment tools for ESL students
- Supportive classroom environment for ESL students
- Accessible course materials for ESL students
- Cultural exchange activities for ESL students
- International student support services
- ESL instructor training and professional development

- Centre for Writers
- ESL student support services
- ESL student success workshop
- ESL student success seminar
- ESL student success panel