

YDS Guidelines for Teaching International Students

International students are an important, albeit small presence (ca. 10% at any given time) within the overall student body at YDS. The international students enrich our common life with their particular experiences of what it means to live, think theologically, and minister in cultural contexts different from the ones with which most North American students and faculty are familiar.

International students thus have much to contribute at YDS, inside and outside of the classroom. At the same time, having left their own cultural context and living with English as a second language, international students face particular challenges and complexities as far as their academic work is concerned. To ease these difficulties, the Curriculum Committee offers the following guidelines for all those with teaching responsibilities at YDS.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Intentionally identify and acknowledge international students in classes from the very beginning.

Learn how to pronounce names correctly early on [sometimes this will require prompting international students not to “Americanize” their names too quickly] and encourage other students to do the same.

If you open your class with prayer, sacred text, or song, consider asking an international student to open with a prayer, text, or song in their native tongue.

Offer accommodations in expectations, not altering expectations and thus creating a second class category, but suggesting supportive mechanisms and avenues of assistance from other students, receptors, etc. **Do not wait for international students to come to you and request help.** Some of them will not think of this as permissible, some of them come from cultural traditions that place a high value on achieving against all odds, some of them are simply too embarrassed to ask. The instructor needs to take the initiative here (for concrete suggestions, see “Academic Requirements” below).

Be intentional about familiarizing international students with the resources among peers and faculty that most U.S. students know by virtue of having been in North American higher education for years. Such intentionality is not condescending in any way, it simply seeks to highlight what is there for U.S. students that might remain hidden to international students (e.g., the services of the writing consultant, or ESL classes). Instructors also need to bridge as much as possible where international students are in their academic development and U.S. academic operating assumptions and expectations.

Finally, be aware of where the international students in class come from and what might be happening in their world. An earthquake in Japan may be far away from New Haven, but for the Japanese student with family in the center of the quake, this will be the all-absorbing worry of the day—made worse by the fact that hardly anyone will share this worry.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Many international students, although eager to contribute to class discussions, are hampered by having to express themselves in another language than their mother tongue. International students might be 'left alone' initially in class discussions to find their bearings, but after a reasonable time the instructor might also venture to call on them quite specifically in order to lead them into the class discussion, to acknowledge their presence, and their particular contributions to the class.

Consider making use of Canvas posting in a discussion forum, especially early in the semester. Allowing international students who still struggle with English to post class reflections online can work rather well, and after a couple of sessions, international students usually have the attention of the class when they venture to speak without a written text.

Depending on the subject-matter of a course or a session, consider asking the international student/s to do a presentation on their own cultural context and its theological struggles, resources, problems, visions, &c. Often this proves to be a very important moment both for the international students and for the rest of the class.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

Remember that international students carry additional burdens in fulfilling course requirements (English as a second language, unfamiliarity with North American academic education, inability to second-guess possible exam questions, and so on). Consider offering international students:

- lecture notes or outlines in advance to ease note-taking (this can assist with listening comprehension);
- pairing with a U.S. student who is willing to share note-taking;
- extra time for taking exams;
- consultation on papers, work with the writing consultant, extra time for rewriting;
- pairing with a supportive U.S. student within discussion groups or sections;
- help in finding a study group.

FOLLOW-UP

Throughout the semester, ask international students specifically and individually whether they are following the lectures, handling the readings all right, and so on.

Be aware of holidays and breaks as potential times of particular loneliness and isolation for international students.