



Support Your International Students



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Contents

About the Supporting Organizations	3
Introduction	4
Key Barriers	4
Ways Administrators to Support Students	7
Conclusion	9
Helpful Links & References	10

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About the Supporting Organizations



Every Learner Everywhere is a network of twelve partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work aims to advance equity in higher education centers on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institution practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit www.everylearnereverywhere.org.



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Support Your International Students

This resource describes the unique barriers faced by international students in an online learning environment and provides suggestions for breaking down those barriers and promoting equity in the virtual classroom.

Introduction

International students are being left behind in the wake of COVID-19.

International students represent an important and vital part of the U.S. student body and workforce.

More than 1 million international students studied or conducted research at U.S. universities last year¹ and they account for \$2.5B in tuition fees. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, international students contributed \$44.7 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018² and data shows that foreign-born STEM workers have higher patenting rates, faster productivity growth, and higher earnings than U.S. natives.³ But beyond the financial and economic value they bring, international students increase the cultural diversity on U.S. campuses which has proven to be invaluable in broadening and enriching the learning experience for all students.

Students seek a formal education in the United States for a multitude of reasons, and the benefits of doing so are just as numerous for them as they are for citizens and institutions. In U.S. colleges and universities, students can enroll in small classes with exceptionally qualified faculty who provide personalized mentoring, they often become part of residential communities that are interactive and inclusive, and they can more easily secure access to powerful alumni networks and opportunities that might not otherwise be available.⁴ By studying in the U.S., students are afforded the opportunity to assess historical evidence and social justice events from a different perspective, to think critically about economic principles, to speak a foreign language, and to gain a better understanding and appreciation of world religions.⁵ No matter the reason for choosing to study abroad, there is clear and convincing evidence that the decision benefits all parties, making it particularly important to focus attention on how COVID-19 and the switch to remote learning are impacting these students.

Institutions are quickly reacting to how the outbreak might impact domestic students studying abroad, but they've not focused enough attention on international students.

– Ruby Cheng, International Enrollment Director, University of Colorado⁶

Support Your International Students

While the coronavirus pandemic has had a staggering impact on college students at large, foreign-born students have been hit the hardest. Since March, these students have been forced to make an incredibly difficult choice: Do I prioritize my personal safety and go home or do I prioritize my education and stay in America? It is a decision that has been made exponentially harder due to inconsistent and contradictory information from both U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) and postsecondary institutions over recent months. A recent ruling states that international students won't be forced to return home if their classes move online, but that incoming students will not be allowed to enter the U.S. As the Fall term begins and more universities report plans to continue with distance learning, international students must adapt to a learning environment that is not designed for them.

This crisis has emphasized the inequities and gaps that exist in our [education] system. This is a wakeup call about the value of having technology for all.

– Kristina Robertson, English-Learner Program Administrator, Roseville, Minneapolis Schools⁷

International students are being disproportionately impacted by the rapid shift to distance learning. Contrary to popular belief, many international students in the U.S. come from poverty-impacted households. Many are also Black, Brown, LatinX, and Pacific Islander students, and/or are first-generation students. These students automatically find themselves at a disadvantage and face many additional barriers (whether it's financial, cultural, social, professional) in their new and culturally-foreign academic environment.⁸ Now COVID-19 has forced them to adapt to a distance learning reality that has been designed with white, English-speaking learners in mind. International students who had just acclimatized to "life on campus" are now experiencing a digital culture clash as they struggle with social and cultural barriers hampering their ability to learn, participate, and thrive remotely.

Administrators are responsible for ensuring international students have an equitable learning experience in the virtual classroom. It is unclear how the pandemic will unfold over the coming months, and how this will impact universities who are offering in-person, online, or hybrid classes. This makes things increasingly difficult for administrators to know how to support international students, teachers, and staff for the upcoming school year. As we continue to navigate a global pandemic and more institutions embrace digital learning, it is imperative that administrators do what they can in the near term to optimize the remote learning experience to be more inclusive and equitable for international students. At a time when our international students are concerned and distracted by the looming uncertainty of their future, administrators can do their part to ensure they are seen, heard, and valued in the virtual classrooms of today.

This document is meant to **give administrators clarity around the unique barriers** that remote learning causes for international students, and to **identify immediate ways to support them in their learning journey today.**

Key Barriers International Students Face in the Virtual Classroom

We have identified key barriers that get in the way of international students' ability to learn remotely, whether they are attending class remotely on-campus, off-campus, or from their home country. It is imperative that administrators consider all of these scenarios in order to support international students in the upcoming school year wherever they are.

<p>TIME DIFFERENCES</p>	<p>LACK OF LEARNING SPACE</p>
<p>Students in different time zones are penalized and their education hindered for missing live lessons.</p> <p>“Nairobi is seven hours ahead of Indianapolis, which means my afternoon classes are at the same time I do my evening prayers.”</p> <p>– Raisa Kanji, Psychology Student, University of Indianapolis⁹</p>	<p>Students living in small dorms or homes with multiple roommates or family do not have a private place to learn.</p> <p>“There’s a lot of us in one house, my family’s quite big, so it’s not somewhere I can get motivated for work.”</p> <p>– Loretta Charles-Cregan, Undergrad Student, Ilford, UK¹⁰</p>
<p>HARD DEADLINES</p> <p>Students on different learning schedules are rushing to make deadlines with less time to complete an assignment.</p> <p>“An assignment posted online during the day in the U.S. might not be seen by a student in another part of the world until they log in the next day.”</p> <p>– Paula Smith, English Professor, Grinnell College¹¹</p>	<p>LACK OF SCHEDULED SUPPORT</p> <p>Students rely on the daily in-person class structure and peer/teacher support network to keep them motivated.</p> <p>“I’m so used to my professor being there and being in class asking questions and having discussions about the chapter.”</p> <p>– Carosa Jackson, Education Student, Indiana State University¹²</p>
<p>LIMITED CONNECTIVITY & ACCESS</p> <p>Students with financial or cultural constraints don’t have easy access to high-speed internet, a laptop/PC, or online resources.</p> <p>“Internet can be spotty in parts of the world and we need to be mindful of course material that could trip the Internet firewall in places like China.”</p> <p>– Paula Smith, English Professor, Grinnell College¹³</p>	<p>LACK OF ESL SUPPORT</p> <p>Students who are not native English speakers struggle with remote learning tools with less access to live ESL support.</p> <p>“All distance learning will probably be in English or Spanish unless another language group has a big concentration.”</p> <p>– Judie Haynes, Author and English Learner Educator and Consultant¹⁴</p>

Support Your International Students

<p>REMOTE CLASS CULTURE</p>	<p>SOCIAL ISOLATION</p>
<p>Students with little remote or online learning experience, or students with varying cultural backgrounds, are often unsure of the digital etiquette for socialization and participation.</p> <p>“Politeness is really important here. In Taiwan [...] we don’t usually use polite language like: Could you please? Would it be possible?”</p> <p>– Taiwanese Student¹⁵</p>	<p>Students feel cut off from the university community that helped them socialize and stay active outside the classroom.</p> <p>“The people here [in] the West they... like their independence more. They don’t like people intruding into their independence. But in Pakistan people socialise.”</p> <p>– Nawaz, Pakistani Student¹⁶</p>
<p>INVISIBLE SUPPORT</p>	<p>RACIAL DISCRIMINATION</p>
<p>Students are disconnected from the on-campus support system of resources, services, and mentors that help them stay on track.</p> <p>“International students need support and they learn best through face-to-face interactions and networking. They need access to healthcare, libraries, labs and support facilities.”</p> <p>– Mark Shay, Author, Inside Higher Ed¹⁷</p>	<p>Students experience harmful micro-aggressions, and sometimes overt racism, on a daily basis that is exacerbated in the remote classroom setting.</p> <p>“Higher education institutions are a reflection of the community, and if there is a tendency towards discrimination towards people from non-dominant cultural groups, then international students will feel it.”</p> <p>– Thevi Pather, Director of International Programs and Global Advancement, Royal Roads University¹⁸</p>

10 Ways Administrators Can Support International Students Today

1. Adopt Asynchronous Learning

Work with teachers and faculty to adjust the design and deployment of courses to enable learning at different intervals of the day and across various time zones without penalty or loss of instruction. E.g. Teachers might pre-record lectures and assign readings for students to complete in a window of time, teams might use collaborative docs to complete a group assignment, or a TA might pose a question on the class discussion board for students to weigh in on by the end of the week.

Support Your International Students

2. Allow Flexible Timelines

Communicate to teachers, faculty, and students the importance of flexible deadlines to enable all students to be able to complete assignments and weigh in on class discussions equally. Teachers must respect the need for some students to take longer to complete assignments. Students struggling to consistently contribute to online discussions should be offered alternative assignments, such as a summary post of the week's discussion or an analysis of its content with special attention given to key concepts.

3. Provide Connectivity Support

Personally check-in with international students with a phone call or text to ensure they have access to sufficient internet, hardware and software to support their learning journey for the upcoming school year. Provide students with internet access and appropriate devices if needed. Work with teachers and faculty to assess whether their upcoming course content could trigger censorship issues in some of their students' countries.

4. Offer Safe Learning Spaces

Provide private, quiet, clean, socially distant learning spaces on-campus for students to learn from and do homework if they are unable to at home. Clearly communicate to all students who should use these spaces, and who shouldn't in order to preserve their use for those who truly need them. Provide proper instructions, sanitization, and management to ensure they are appropriately cleaned and taken care of.

5. Replicate the Class Structure

Work with teachers and course designers to explore ways to provide structure, set expectations and track progress in the remote learning environment to help students feel connected to the class and to stay on track. Suggestions include daily goals, weekly to-do's, automatic email and/or text reminders for assignments, team updates and discussion feeds, and upcoming class milestones.

6. Ramp Up Remote ESL Support

Do a language audit of the distance learning tools you deploy and the languages spoken in your teacher's classes. Make note of classes where there is a noticeable language deficiency and figure out how to offer immediate support through interpretation and translation services, advising students, and cultural navigation support to bridge the gap between international students and their families. Provide closed captioning of pre-recorded lectures and transcripts in multiple languages and provide a resource where textbooks can be purchased in other languages. Consider setting up a multilingual Facebook page to connect international students across classes and programs. Encourage faculty to amplify international student support services in their syllabus. Also consider setting up a buddy program and assigning international students with a buddy to support them in their studies.

7. Set Digital Expectations Early

Interview teachers and students from last semester to get their feedback on what worked and what didn't work in the virtual classroom. Work with teachers, faculty, and students to align on a code of conduct for distance learning to set expectations for teachers, students, and families on what social norms and etiquette are expected in the remote classroom compared to the physical classroom (e.g. ways to ask the teacher a question). Translate into other languages based on class audit.

8. Build Cultural Bridges

Work with teachers and faculty to plan fun virtual social events that are respectful of different time zones (e.g. a remote AM/PM dance party, the "round the world" networking event). Encourage teachers to create cultural cohesion in their classrooms by encouraging teams to meet at flexible hours and use collaborative tools to get work done.

9. Orient to Remote Support

Centralize remote services that are relevant and useful to an international student and make them easily accessible online (e.g. healthcare, libraries, labs and support facilities). Find creative ways to let students safely get some on-campus support (e.g. access to signing up for and using a lab on-campus in a socially distant way).

10. Practice Micro Inclusions

Encourage teachers, staff and students to use subtle, inclusive ways to show international students they are welcome and valued (providing helpful hints/tips, recognizing contributions, creating an inclusive syllabus, celebrating different perspectives in a discussion). Establish a safe "virtual" space for faculty and students of color to talk openly about acts of discrimination that have occurred and develop a code of conduct around calling out unacceptable behavior with everyone in the classroom.

Conclusion

International students bring a wealth of global knowledge, innovative ideas, and diverse perspectives to share with others, and their careers and contributions must be nurtured in higher education. Coming here for the opportunity to study means learning about historical events and social justice causes from different perspectives, gaining access to high-worth networks of alumni and, oftentimes, learning to speak another language in new interactive communities. The shift to digital learning during COVID-19 has disproportionately affected these students, with time differences, connectivity issues, and discrimination being just a few of the many obstacles they can experience in a remote learning environment. Though not a comprehensive list of ways to be inclusive, this resource should allow administrators the opportunity to support international students where they are in their educational journey, and to preserve the cultural and societal benefits these learners bring with them.

Helpful Links & References

- [More resources](#)

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Support Your International Students

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