

Teaching/Advising International Students

Lawrence enrolls students from around the world and welcomes visiting students for a term or year, including an annual group from Waseda University in Japan. International students bring a unique perspective to our campus and add important insights to class discussions. They may also experience struggles as they adjust to an American style of higher education. Sometimes, these students are hesitant to share their opinions in class. The educational systems they come from may not encourage the expression of divergent opinions, or they may fear that their opinions will be misconstrued to represent their country's perspectives as a whole.

Academic Concerns: During the international student sessions of Welcome Week, we discuss classroom behavior, class participation, and academic expectations. We also discuss the volume of reading and writing that may be required and provide advice about where to turn if difficulties arise. Although students are encouraged to reach out for assistance, new international students may not take the initiative to discuss their struggles with their professors until it is too late. If you notice that a student is not actively participating or seems to be struggling, please talk with the student after class about possible options and consider referring them to the Center for Academic Success; Cecile Despres-Berry, Lecturer in ESL and Director of the Waseda Program; or Leah McSorley, Director of International Student Services (ISS).

Whatever their educational backgrounds, most foreign students in the U.S. find aspects of the American system of higher education to be different and difficult. Some of the more common adjustment issues for international students include:

- Selecting from a number of possible courses rather than following a prescribed curriculum.
- Specializing later in the undergraduate program (having to take courses outside one's area of interest in order to obtain a "liberal arts" education).
- Being assigned an academic 'advisor' rather than simply being told the specific courses and the order in which they must be taken.
- Understanding that it is within their rights to challenge, question, or disagree with an instructor's authority or perspective.
- Having frequent assignments, exams, or quizzes rather than being left to work more independently.
- Taking 'objective' tests (true-false or multiple choice) rather than subjective essay or oral exams.
- Being expected to raise questions and participate in class discussions rather than sitting quietly and accepting the instructor's word.
- Having to analyze and synthesize the material, rather than simply memorize it.
- Having to do what they might consider menial tasks or 'busy work.'
- Being liable to punishment for activities deemed to constitute cheating or plagiarism, and not knowing what is considered cheating in the American system.
- Having a great deal of importance attached to grades.
- Being expected to use the library extensively.

- Receiving final 'answers' from someone other than the professor or director of a department.
- Being referred to and accepting assistance from a psychological counselor when having problems.

Adapted from The Handbook of Foreign Student Advising, by Gary Althen, The University of Iowa, Intercultural Press, Inc., 1995

Immigration Issues: When advising international students, it is important to realize that international students have regulatory issues that govern their stay in the U.S. and limit their academic options:

- U.S. federal immigration regulations require all international students on a student (F1) or exchange visitor (J1) visa to maintain full-time enrollment each term. If a student is in danger of failing a course and needs to drop below 15 units, the student must first schedule an appointment to discuss this decision with the ISS office.
- Student visa holders are not allowed to accept employment off campus without written, prior authorization from the ISS office. If an international student is planning to seek an internship, encourage her/him to talk with the ISS office well in advance. Most internships require immigration authorization; some work permission requires U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) adjudication and can take several months.
- The initial academic stay authorized for degree-seeking international students is four years. If, for any reason, an international student needs to extend their stay beyond four years, the student must seek approval from the ISS office. This must be done before the program completion date on their form I-20 (an immigration document issued by academic institutions to admitted international students to apply for an F visa; this important document contains information about length of study, program of study, off-campus work authorizations, etc., and needs to be updated to reflect changes). If a student began studies at Lawrence in the five-year, dual degree program, the student was initially issued a five-year form I-20. If the student later decides to drop one of the degrees and graduates in four years, the form I-20 must be updated to reflect this change.
- Having an interdisciplinary studies major instead of two separate majors (e.g., Econ-Math vs. Economics and Mathematics) may have a significant effect on future employment options for international students due to a change in immigration law connected with Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is the most common work authorization that students on F1 visas use to find employment in the U.S. immediately following completion of their studies. If your international student advisee is considering an interdisciplinary major and one of the interdisciplinary subjects is a STEM (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics) major, you and your advisee are encouraged to contact the ISS office to find out how this could affect the students' employment options.

If you have questions regarding student immigration regulations and/or advising international students, you are encouraged to contact the ISS office, which is located on the second floor of International House.

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