Tips for Helping
UCI International Students
Succeed in UCI Courses

The following tips are for UCI faculty who teach international students. The 2016 Academic English Program leadership team (Rica Kaufel, Kathie Levin, Robin Scarcella, Brenna Shepherd, Christie Sosa, Paul Spencer) initially wrote the tips with the input of international students, UCI administrators, and faculty and students. They are updated yearly with campus input.

We hope that you can adapt the suggestions below to meet your instructional needs, recognizing that not all international students and instructional situations are the same. International students have diverse challenges and opportunities, depending, e.g., on their English proficiency level and their length of residence in the United States. Clearly some international students are more familiar with U.S. academic culture than others.

1. Tips for Navigating **Cultural Expectations**

Getting to know your students:

- Get to know international students. Consider finding out where they are from and what a few of their interests are**.** Even a short conversation after class about the student's home country can help the student feel more comfortable and can build rapport.

- Do your best to learn the pronunciation of your students' names, even if it takes you some time. Do not expect or encourage your students to select nicknames or versions of their names that you can pronounce easily. Learning to pronounce your students' names will help to make your students feel welcomed and respected.

- Be proactive in encouraging students to visit you in your office hours. In some countries, students seldom visit professors in their office hours. Students from these countries can feel reluctant to visit faculty in their offices unless they are required to do so.

Understanding students:

- Avoid stereotyping students. Keep in mind that when interacting with students, it is natural for you to make assumptions about students based on personal beliefs. (For instance, you might assume that a student who is very quiet is shy, or a student who avoids eye contact is insincere.) Assumptions can lead to inaccurate characterizations of international students. Be careful not to stereotype learners, e.g., on the basis of their cultures, socio-economic level or international student status. Stereotyping can lead to hurt and misunderstandings and create large divisions between groups.

Clarifying expectations:

- Be clear. International students may have difficulty interpreting innuendos and may lack the language ability to understand you. Statements like "You may want to consider revising this paragraph." can be confusing, and may not yield the expected results. Statements like "You should revise this paragraph." accompanied with a smile, can give students clear direction in a reassuring manner.

- Be aware that international students may have different prior educational experiences and expectations than U.S. students. Don't assume that international students naturally understand your expectations of them. Provide specific and clear expectations concerning class policies, including attendance requirements and homework submission both orally and in writing. If you notice an international student missing a deadline or arriving late to class consistently, use these situations as teachable moments and emphasize the importance of promptness and deadlines in the United States. "Explain your teaching methods and give reasons for your plans for the class (e.g., we value discussion and exploration of ideas, critical thinking, and not necessarily the final idea or the right answer)." (Source: UC Berkeley: http://teaching.berkeley.edu/creating-conditions-international-student-success#anchor2)

- "Provide clear guidelines for participation and allow time for a participation learning curve (for example, a trial period before participation points can be accrued)". Source: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents

What UCI international students say about best practices:

"I like professors who understand a little about me and where I come from."

"I don't expect everything to be like it is in universities in my country, but I do expect professors to be clear about what they expect of me."

“Some instructors are very strict and others are not. Let me know what your guidelines are. State them clearly in your course syllabus and course website.”

“I feel that my contributions to UCI are not valued when professors stereotype me. We are not all rich, we don't all come from Beijing or big cities, and we don't all have English language challenges. Most of us worked extraordinarily hard to get here and received higher grades and admissions scores than our peers who graduated from U.S. high schools. We have not come here to take something from UCI but to be a part of the campus and contribute something to it.”

Faculty voices:

“I ask students to represent companies involved in a catastrophic failure and require them to participate in meetings, explaining key concepts to the entire class. Typically, four students play the roles of attorneys and four students play the roles of technical expert witnesses who interact with the attorneys and write a report to them. A practicing attorney gives a guest lecture during the quarter to help the students understand civil litigation in the US. The attorneys present their evidence orally in an opening statement at the end of the quarter in front of the entire class. Over 100 students in the class develop conceptual knowledge pertinent to engineering and at the same time learn about ethics and the US legal system all while developing their English skills.”

James C. Earthman, Professor
Chemical Engineering and Materials Science

“I give international students an opportunity to participate by asking questions about economic or environmental policy in China, Korea, etc. This puts them at an advantage relative to native speakers but implicitly examines their understanding of the concept.”

Kevin Roth, Assistant Professor – Economics

For additional information:

Video on Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model on Cultural Sensitivity

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vKRFH2Wm6Y

2. Tips for Using **Email** to Communicate with International Students

Some students have difficulty understanding their professors' email messages and do not know the rules for communicating with professors using email. Here are some suggestions.

Consider simplifying sentence structures when expressing important information:

- Consider rereading your email message before you send it to make sure that you have explained important parts using easy-to-understand sentence structures. While many international students can readily understand complex language, some still need practice, so if you want your communication to be as clear as possible, consider avoiding sentences with more than two clauses.

Composing short, pointed email messages:

- Think about dispensing with niceties and flowery language. Consider using bullet points, putting the most important message at the very beginning of the email, and highlighting or bolding key information. As with any busy student, international students are more likely to read and digest a short and focused email.

- Consider offering guidelines on email etiquette. For example, you might encourage students to use UCI email accounts, to state the subject in the subject line (instead of their first name or "hi"), to keep the greeting professional and to end with a "Thank you," or "Sincerely," followed by their full name as it appears on the roster. Formality in email messages must be learned. More often than not, your international students may not know that they are communicating in an informal, possibly offensive way.

- Consider informing the student that specific words or phrases should or should not be used in email with a professor. Suggest alternative word or phrases.

- Think about including an example email for reference in your syllabus or on your class website.

What UCI international students say about best practices:

"Skip the pointless parts of email messages and get right to the point. I hate getting long email messages that contain very little information. Lists are good. I wish academic email messages could be short and clear, at least easy to understand."

"I like it when professors mark important messages as urgent and use stars to highlight important information."

"When I first got here, I had no idea how to write a message to a professor. Good thing one of my instructors taught me the right way to email."

3. Tips for Helping International Students Understand Reading Assignments

One of the best ways of learning language and advancing conceptual understanding is by reading. Students can effectively utilize a variety of apps and translation devices to translate their English texts into their first languages. Below are tips to help your international students understand UCI reading assignments in English.

Prior to asking your students to read:

- Explain the prominent cultural, historical or political references that appear in the assigned reading and that might not be familiar to students.

- Point out or highlight key terms and expressions to draw students' attention to the vocabulary needed to understand and further investigate the subject matter in English.

- Encourage students to use apps, iPads, and tablets to obtain valuable reading practice and support.

- Consider asking students what information the titles, subtitles and organizational features of the texts provide about the main focus or thesis of the text.

- Give students a brief abstract, PowerPoint presentation, or audio recording that provides a roadmap for the text that your students can use to orient themselves as they read.

- Assign a "reading guide" or comprehension questions that focus on key points so students can orient themselves and check their understanding as they read.

- Help students organize weekly peer study groups, in which they share insights and review the main concepts of their readings.

While your students read:

- Encourage students to annotate their reading, ask questions about it, discuss it with others, complete assignments related to the reading, and look up key words.

After your students read:

- Ask students to paraphrase or summarize key parts, apply ideas, and check for comprehension, e.g., by asking them to summarize key parts, define words, explain key points, write questions related to the content, respond to questions using clickers, write a "one-minute paper" explaining the most meaningful parts of the reading, list the most important "takeaways," or take a quiz related to the reading.

What UCI international students say about best practices:

"We have other classes. Assigning too much reading makes us want to go to asylum."

"Please point out the important and unimportant parts of the readings."

"It's useful to have class notes or outlines of assigned readings."

"I like to read with questions in my mind. I always stop periodically to reconstruct what I have read."

"One of my professors told me to practice reading aloud. That helped me develop my speaking ability, get more comfortable using English and become fluent."

"Some of my professors take apart long difficult chapters and explain challenging sections. That helps me."

"Study groups really help me a lot. I learn a lot from the readings by discussing them with others. I'm shy. Please help me join a study group by assigning everyone in the class to one."

4. Tips for Helping International Students Understand Your **Lectures**

International students benefit from lectures that they can understand. It helps them to record your lectures, take notes on them, check their understanding of them, and discuss them with others. Podcasts can help students improve their listening comprehension. In fact, apps and online supports can help them greatly, though they are not always 100% accurate. Below are some useful tips.

While you are preparing your lecture:

- Think about prominent cultural, historical or political references that might not be familiar to students. Do not assume that references to pop culture will be understood. Be aware that some references and jokes may confuse students from some cultures and can make them feel like outsiders.

- Be aware that students may not understand acronyms, abbreviations, jargon, colloquialisms, idioms, and metaphors or explain their meanings. Sports expressions like "run with it," "on target," "home run," "all set," and "throw a curve," which are familiar in the U.S., may have little meaning to international students.

- In addition to using words, consider transmitting information visually, e.g., using symbols, images, drawings, diagrams, props, and demonstrations, when appropriate.

- Consider writing a list of the words you think your students might not know and looking up student friendly definitions of the words in advance of the actual lecture. It is difficult to come up with good definitions in the midst of giving a lecture.

- Structure your presentation to increase clarity, e.g., by listing your questions or topics. You can provide questions that you will attempt to answer or topics you will discuss to orient your students' listening. Questions or topics can be checked off as they are covered.

- Make outlines, PowerPoint presentations, and notes available to students in advance of your lecture and/or afterwards for review.

Before you begin your lecture:

- Encourage students, when appropriate, to audio-record your lectures and to listen to the recordings multiple times soon after your lectures.

- Encourage students to take notes as well as copy or borrow notes, whenever appropriate, and to review them immediately after class.

- Ask "students to write down the names, events, or other references you make that they are not familiar with, to clarify later." http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents

- Tell students they can use their cellphones to take pictures of the notes you write, when appropriate.

- Encourage students who have laptops with touch screen capabilities to utilize them when taking notes e.g., to draw diagrams.

While you are lecturing:

- Give students time to note the key terms on PowerPoint slides, boards, or handouts. Many students need to see even terms in writing since they might not recognize the pronunciation of the words when they hear them. Also, seeing how the words are spelled enables students to look them up in a dictionary.

- Write key terms on the board or during the lecture or provide a written list of the terms. Point out these terms during the lecture to draw attention to them.

- Use clear cues (such as "You don't need to write this down…" or "Getting back to our main topic…") to indicate digressions or return from them to the main points.

- Try pausing after key words and important points to give students time to process ideas and take notes.

- Maximize student engagement in the lecture, e.g., through group work and careful seating arrangements that encourage international student participation with U.S. students.

- "Be prepared for gaps in understanding and view them as opportunities for review, collaboration and discussion." (Source: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents)

After the lecture:

- Check students' comprehension, e.g., by giving short quizzes, having students create questions about the lecture in groups or posting questions on the screen that students answer in groups, or assigning quick writing assignments, such as a "minute paper" at the end of class—asking students to list anything needing further clarification.

What international students say about best practices:

"Students in my country don't ask questions during lectures. Lectures are not participatory. Tell me in advance if you expect me to interact with you during lectures and give me enough time to answer your questions. I need more time to get my words together than my classmates."

"In my country, my professors tell me everything I need to know in the lecture, and I don't have to look up any information on my own."

"One professor gives me short quizzes in the middle of her lectures. That actually helps me pay attention and listen better."

"I think the best way to help students is to use PowerPoint presentations with images and send students the PowerPoint presentations with the notes after class."

"I had a great professor who set up an online discussion board and the students used it to ask and answer questions."

"One of my professors slows down a little when she is discussing challenging concepts and she provides graphs to help me understand what she is saying. Those techniques are useful."

"Examples. Examples. Examples. I can't understand difficult concepts in English without lots of examples and detailed analysis of them."

"Review what you are saying every once in a while. That gives me a second chance to hear what you are saying and understand it."
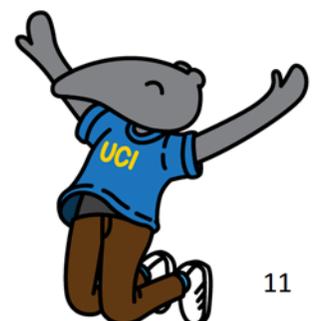
"For lecture courses with accompanying slides, consider making very short podcasts (less than 5 min) that go over specific concepts and/or examples in the slides. This gives international students a chance to review these concepts and examples as many times as they want to with your accompanying explanations."

A lot of my international students have told me they particularly appreciate the podcasts like this I make for my classes (I use the UCI-provided Replay software that synchs with EEE).

Lisa Perlman, Associate Professor – Cognitive Sciences

"I ask students, especially international students, to repeat in their own words the important concepts presented in my lecture. This serves several purposes. The approach helps me: 1) gauge whether my lectures are effective or whether I need to try another approach; 2) interact with students in the class and have them practice their English; and 3) provide an alternative presentation of a topic to help other students better understand.

"I ask students to give me a short two or three sentence discussion of three of the main topics of the lecture. (They choose the topic.)"

John Larue, Professor – Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering

"I always post my PowerPoints at least one day before class to help students prepare for class and minimize the cognitive load for note-taking."

Penelope Collins, Associate Professor – Education

5. Tips for Helping Your Students Understand Your **Assignments**

When designing assignments, there are a few steps you can take to help your international students understand what is being asked of them and what the expectations of particular assignments are.

- Think about **bolding** or *italicizing* important information such as key concepts, tasks involved, and due dates.

- Provide clear instructions on submission procedures. Consider whether students are expected to turn in hardcopies or submit an assignment online.

- Consider providing student samples and/or models of the assignment. Models can help set clear expectations for assignments regarding content, length, and formatting.

- Think about dividing an assignment up into parts and/or giving you or your T.A. the ability to check for your students' comprehension when they are still in the process of completing it.

- Use a listserve to provide an alternative way for students to seek clarification about assignments from classmates.

"I like professors who ask questions to make sure I understand the assignments."

"One professor paired students with other students in class. She told us to ask each other questions when we did not understand assignments. We don't use this technique in my country, but I found it useful."

"I find it helpful when my professor reviews complicated assignments in class."

"I had problems keeping on top of my assignments, because in my country the instructors usually took responsibility for reminding the students of deadlines and here it seems professors just mention deadlines once and never remind students of the deadlines again."

Faculty voices:

"I make my expectations clear. I include in my syllabus a full description of the requirements for the final essay, and post the rubric that will be used to grade that essay at the start of the quarter."

Penelope Collins, Associate Professor – Education

6. Tips for Providing **Feedback on Assignments**

Many international students expect feedback on assignments and even on tests. Some may have come from educational backgrounds in which detailed feedback on papers, tests, and assignments is normal and expected. Below are ways you can give feedback as well as considerations you may want to keep in mind.

Giving feedback to students on their writing:

- Explain your technique of giving feedback to your students. For example, you might say, "*I left two to three notes at the end of your paper.*" or you might say, "*Please do not expect extensive feedback on this draft because it is your final draft.*"

- Encourage students to come see you during office hours with specific questions about class content and/or assignments and/or refer them to your TA for more detailed feedback regarding their work.

- Give feedback that emphasizes the value of students' contributions.

   Content—Content feedback can vary depending on the writing you are evaluating (e.g., an exam, a paper, or homework) and also the number of drafts you are assigning.

   Grammar—Grammatical accuracy is important and expected among professional academic audiences. In general, second language writers value their

instructors' feedback on their grammar errors. Underlining or circling errors on the first paragraph of an assignment is an effective way to bring to the students' attention the importance of editing and/or seeking assistance.

Vocabulary—Students appreciate your feedback on their vocabulary. If you have time, suggest words and expressions that students can use to improve their writing. It does not help students much if you tell them specific words are used incorrectly if they have no idea why they are used incorrectly or what words to replace them with.

- Refer students to campus resources, like UCI's Writing Center.

Giving feedback to students on their use of oral language:

- Encourage students to meet with you during office hours to provide feedback on their oral language use.

What UCI international students say about best practices:

"I like professors who do not embarrass me by correcting my speaking ability in class. Sometimes my classmates laugh at me when I talk."
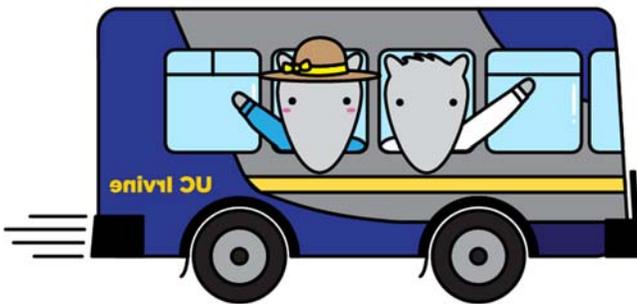
"I love lots of feedback on my speaking, but especially appreciate it when professors give it to me in their offices."

"I find it helpful when my professor or a TA reviews written feedback with me."

"As long as I can understand the feedback, I find feedback on my writing useful. I can't understand cursive."

Faculty voices:

"When I pair students up in my writing class to proof read work for one another, I try to form pairs of students who are also ESL but not from the same native language. I find they are less intimidated working with other ESL students but they tend to have different strengths and weaknesses."

Kevin Roth, Assistant Professor – Economics

7. Tips for **Grading** International Students
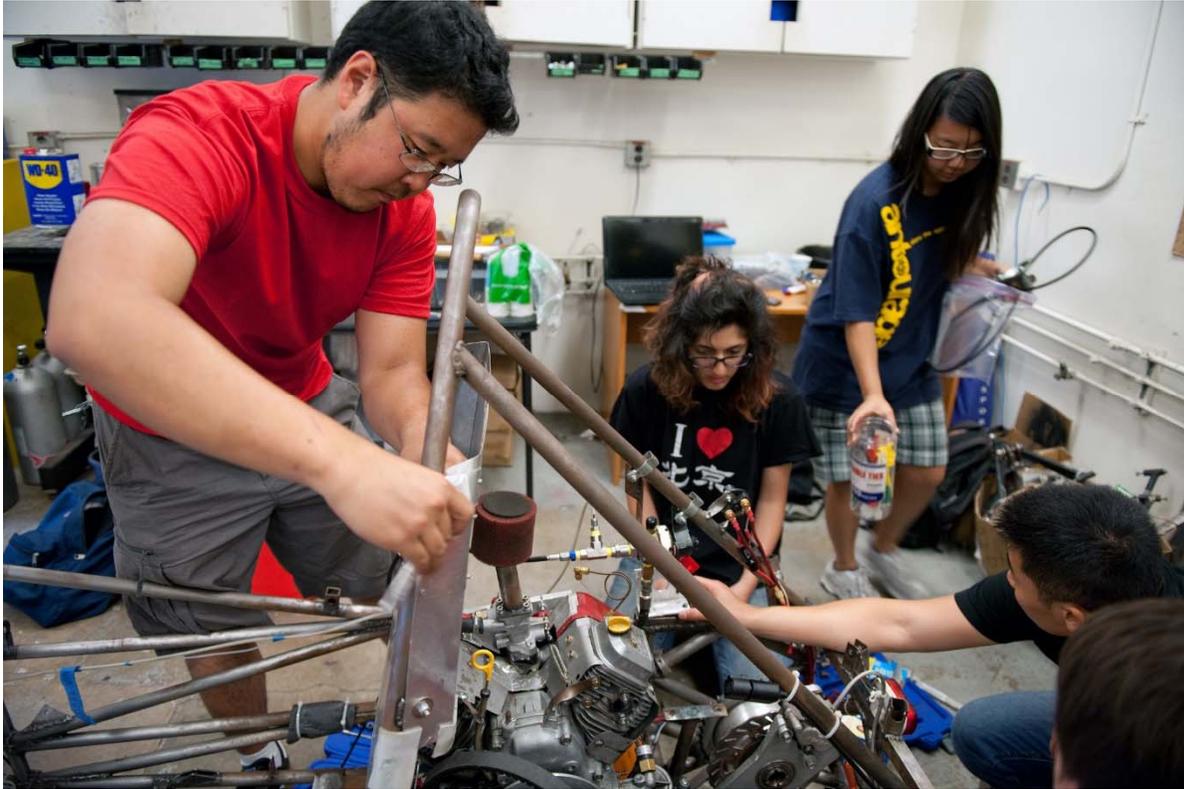
Provide clear grading criteria and course learning objectives. If you are grading students on their knowledge of content and not language, tell them that at the beginning of the quarter. If you are grading students on their ability to use the English language in speech and/or writing, explain exactly how you plan to weight your grading of content and language. Consider giving students clear grading rubrics or descriptions.

What UCI students say about best practices:

"One of my professors gave me two grades on my papers - one for my use of English and the other for my understanding of concepts. Since he told me he would do this at the beginning of the quarter, I thought that his way of grading was fair."

"I didn't expect my Bio instructor to grade me down because my English wasn't "perfect," and fortunately he didn't. He told me that he was grading me on my knowledge of the subject and my ability to communicate my ideas clearly and he was not worried if I made a few grammar errors that did not affect my communication much."

"My professor told me in advance that 90% of my grade would consist of my knowledge of subject matter and 10% of my course grade would consist of my ability to communicate orally on class projects. That seemed fair."

"I know of no single effective approach to grading international students in various discipline areas. Instructors should consider the different types of assignments that students do in their courses (exams, quizzes, oral participation, oral presentations, lab reports and decide what is most important and weight those factors accordingly."

"Determining how much to weight language and content when assigning grades and conveying this information clearly to students in both speech and writing at the beginning of the quarter can save faculty time and help ensure a grading process that is fair and consistent. Setting clear standards and grading guidelines early on can help you avoid student complaints. "

"When faculty members become concerned about grading international student writing fairly, they can check in with others who can offer good advice."

Robin Scarcella, Professor & Program Director
Program in Academic English

8. Helping Faculty Teach International Students: **Useful additional resources**

Website Materials

NAFSA
Michigan State University
Teaching for Diverse Populations
Office of Faculty and Organizational Development
http://fod.msu.edu/oir/teaching-diverse-populations

University of Michigan
Center for Research on Teaching and Learning. Teaching International Students: Pedagogical Issues and Strategies.
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalstudents

Northeastern University
https://nuonline.adobeconnect.com/_a833303360/p3w24wcjve9/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal

UC Berkeley
Center for Teaching and Learning
Creating Conditions for (International) Student Success
http://teaching.berkeley.edu/creating-conditions-international-student-success

Wilmington University
http://www.wilmu.edu/faculty/documents/WilmUTipsforESL.pdf

University of Denver
Teaching International Students
http://otl.du.edu/teaching-resources/teaching-international-students/

Brandeis University
https://www.brandeis.edu/das/downloads/HelpingYourInternationalStudentsToSucceed.pdf
https://www.brandeis.edu/das/downloads/InternationalStudentsandClassroomPedagogy.pdf

Articles

Brett, J., Behfar, K., & Kern, M. (2006). Managing Multicultural Teams.
Harvard Business Review 84(11), 89-96.

Kisch, Marian (2014). Helping Faculty Teach International Students. International Educator.
November/December 2014. http://www.nafsa.org/_/file/_/ie_novdec14_fsa.pdf

9. Faculty Voices

"*I find it very useful in my classes, especially those with international students, to pause repeatedly in my lecture and ask a question that captures a key concept and wait for an answer. Usually, after a few seconds of silence, a student will volunteer an answer that creates a dialog and encourages other students to participate in a collegial discussion.*"

Ahmed M. Eltawil, Associate Professor - Engineering

"*Encourage students to seek help from offices like LARC; encourage them to talk to academic counselors, TAs, and professors as well as their fellow students; find different ways to inform them about university policies, regarding issues such academic integrity.*"

Yong Chen, Professor - History

In my upper level Ecosystem Ecology course, I write my notes on the board and do not distribute them before or after class. Although I know distributing slides in advance is popular among professors, I find that students do not process the course material as well if they have already printed out the notes. Copying the notes from the board builds writing skills, and I write slowly enough that all students can keep up. Also, this approach encourages attendance in lecture because my notes are only available there. So even for classes in which the slides are distributed, I would encourage international students to constantly actively summarize and write down what the professor is actually saying in class rather than strictly relying on pre- printed powerpoint slides.

Steven Allison, Associate Professor,
Ecology & Evolutionary Biology School of Biological Sciences

"*I teach the prep class (Chem 1P) for students who didn't qualify for our general chemistry series (the Chem 1a-c series) and I teach one of the general chemistry series courses. The class size ranges from 350-450. With this size I know few if any students by name. I post lecture notes prior to the class and video or audio recording lectures is fine with me.*"

Donald Blake, Professor - Chemistry

"I always post my PowerPoints at least one day before class to help students prepare for class and minimize the cognitive load for note-taking."

"I include in my syllabus a full description of the requirements for the final essay, and post the rubric that will be used to grade that essay at the start of the quarter."

Penelope Collins, Associate Professor – Education

"I ask students to give me a short two or three sentence discussion of three of the main topics of the lecture. (They choose the topic.)"

"I ask students, especially international students, to repeat in their own words the important concepts presented in my lecture. This serves several purposes. The approach helps me: 1) gauge whether my lectures are effective or whether I need to try another approach; 2) interact with students in the class and have them practice their English; and 3) provide an alternative presentation of a topic to help other students better understand."

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"I ask students to represent companies involved in a catastrophic failure and require them to participate in meetings, explaining key concepts to the entire class. Typically, four students play the roles of attorneys and four students play the roles of technical expert witnesses who interact with the attorneys and write a report to them. A practicing attorney gives a guest lecture during the quarter to help the students understand civil litigation in the US. The attorneys present their evidence orally in an opening statement at the end of the quarter in front of the entire class. Over 100 students in the class develop conceptual knowledge pertinent to engineering and at the same time learn about ethics and the US legal system all while developing their English skills."

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"I give international students an opportunity to participate by asking questions about economic or environmental policy in China, Korea, etc. This puts them at an advantage relative to native speakers but implicitly examines their understanding of the concept."

"When I pair students up in my writing class to proof read work for one another, I try to form pairs of students who are also ESL but not from the same native language. I find they are less intimidated working with other ESL students but they tend to have different strengths and weaknesses."

Kevin Roth, Assistant Professor – Economics

"I have found that many international students are used to a more rigorous setting where the professor talks and the students rarely participate. I tell my students that in the US it is common to raise your hand if you don't understand, come talk to me after class, and also look for me at my office. This might be perceived as inappropriate where they come from but here it shows your interest in the material and raises your profile with the professor."

German Enciso Ruiz, Associate Professor – Mathematics

"For lecture courses with accompanying slides, consider making very short podcasts (less than 5 min) that go over specific concepts and/or examples in the slides. This gives international students a chance to review these concepts and examples as many times as they want to with your accompanying explanations."

Lisa Perlman, Associate Professor - Cognitive Science

Prof. David Igler makes expectations clear to students by telling them:

"In Humanities classes you will asked to think, read, and write critically--not memorize names or dates or passages of text."

"In lecture classes you should plan to work closely with your Teaching Assistant. You should always feel free ask your TA questions and go to them for individual help. This is their job."

"In lecture courses some portion of your grade is based on class participation. This means you should be actively engaged in class discussions or your grade may suffer."

"Plagiarism and/or cheating will most likely result in a failing grade for the class. If you do not understand what plagiarism means, simply ask your professor."

David Igler, Professor – History

Thank you.

The presence of international students at UCI provides the campus with tremendous opportunities. It not only helps our students understand a rapidly changing world, but also provides instructors and professors with a stronger professional profile and global perspective. Paying attention to the international students in your class will be rewarding. Thank you very much for your continuing efforts to teach international students effectively.