



Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
Trinity College Dublin

Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin

ACADEMIC PRACTICE AND ELEARNING: RESOURCES

Managing Expectations for Multicultural Classrooms

Dr Niamh McGoldrick,
Global Officer,
Schools of Chemistry & Physics

Summary

This resource aims to support academics in their teaching experiences with international students so that they can maximise inclusion of all learners in their classroom. From module creation to content delivery, this resource aims to provide academics with practical tips and to help them to understand the mindset of international students who elect to study in Ireland.

Student Motivation for Choosing International Study Programmes

Students decide to undertake international study opportunities for a variety of reasons. These can include (1) an increase in choice of study programmes, (2) to improve a language proficiency and (3) the opportunity to travel. However, the most consistent factor for choosing to study abroad is the opportunity to improve employability. International education demonstrates to a prospective employer that a graduate can adapt and thrive in a different cultural setting. (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016). This places a greater emphasis on the opportunities for quicker financial return once a student has completed their educational programme.

Students elect to study in Ireland for specific reasons which include Ireland's internationally well-regarded education standards, as well as Irish culture, safety and hospitality. These factors can vary in importance for different cohorts (particularly safety), but all factors contribute in some way to the academic value

that students expect from their study programmes in Ireland.

It is also worth noting that the international student population on the Trinity campus is diverse. This means that a considerable percentage of international students will have experienced lower education costs before choosing to pursue third level education overseas (Money, 2017). This places higher expectations on customer service in an Irish university and the quality of teaching that they will encounter throughout their student life cycle (Beloucif, 2018).



Figure 1. The Trinity Classroom

Student Life Cycles

Higher Education students can be classified as

- Undergraduate
- Visiting students/researchers
- Masters students
- PhD students

The student-life cycle of visiting students, visiting researchers and master's students is much shorter than the undergraduate and PhD student life cycle. Therefore, student issues are expected to be addressed at shorter intervals than those arising at undergraduate and PhD level. It is also important to consider the age of the student cohort. Academic expectations for

undergraduate students are very different to those completing postgraduate study. These differences can be more apparent across non-native English speakers and will be influenced by their previous educational experiences and their ability to access supports and services.

Tips for Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms

Assessment performance is a key indicator of a student's understanding of module content and allows staff to evaluate learning objectives while identifying student misconceptions. To minimise these misconceptions and to maximise student participation, academics should consider the following tips before preparing for a module's delivery:

- Preparation- Try to plan as much of the module content in advance. Sketch out a module timeline and incorporate assessment requests. Avoid multiple coinciding deadlines where possible.
- Manage expectations from the outset of the course - help students to understand what to expect from the module, the timelines for assessment submission, correction and results. Go through a breakdown of lecture hours, tutorials and laboratories from the module outset. (Biggs, 2016)
- Consider providing specific office hours for student inquiries.
- Consider academic assumptions- Are students in your class from similar or

diverse academic backgrounds? Will they have come through different educational experiences? Are there high entry requirements for programme admission? Will the students be used to being in the "middle of the pack?" (Bliss, 2016).

- Reflect on the timing of the module- Is the module scheduled for delivery early in semester one? If so, it may be the first class delivered to students in through the medium of English. The introductory lecture content may need to be delivered at a slower pace and to check for understanding (Staunton, 2015).



Figure 2. Clarifying expectations can lead to a better understanding of the expected outcomes.

- Consider assessment and exam format. Are your questions or essay titles clear and concise? If you are part of a multidisciplinary course or teaching a group of multidisciplinary

students, are your assessments achievable for the entire cohort?

- Consider that silence can indicate active participation in some academic cultures, while also bearing in mind the 'quiet' international student, those who want to engage in class discussion, but are unsure of the exact language or may take more time to process the language of the content/question (Carroll, 2005). Be aware that cultural sensitivities exist (race, ethnicity, gender, minority background or, religious beliefs). If students request alternative group work partners, try to accommodate reasonable requests.
- If designing group work, ensure native and non-native speakers are mixed. If group work is required early in the module, be aware that international students may not have had time to get to know classmates and may have challenges with self-selecting a group or partner.

Do

- Clarify how you wish to be addressed in class and by email. Some international students may be used to using more formal titles to address academic staff for example.
- Show flexibility for students who may have delayed start-times at the beginning of a semester.
- Produce course materials in more than one format- e.g. word doc, pdf etc. Assume that there may be access issues at the beginning of the module if lecture materials are only available through online platforms.
- At the module's outset, state whether you permit recording of lectures to facilitate non-native English speakers to review outside of class.
- Try to avoid the use of slang, jargon (academic and cultural) and acronyms as these can be culturally based and may need explanation (Staunton, 2015).
- Avoid metaphors and examples that rely on local knowledge. Use internationally relevant case studies in lecture/tutorial content.
- Provide refresher information during term on where to seek help – Student Learning Development, English for Academic Purposes, Global Room, New2Dublin, Student to Student (S2S) Peer Support and Peer Mentors etc (Dimitriade, 2015).
- Emphasise the importance of self-directed learning, which is sometimes not emphasised in other cultures

where there may be more of a reliance on the teacher for guidance.

- Try to avoid student isolation, ensure international students are dispersed amongst domestic students for group work projects. Incorporate opportunities for collaborative learning throughout the module. (Mann, 2001).
- Discuss expectations for assessments - format, word count, plagiarism, and academic standards, otherwise, be aware that these may differ from country to country depending on academic culture (Dimitriade, 2015).
- Schedule reading and assignments to build on each other throughout the module.
- Discuss the mechanism for marking and the breakdown of marks for question content, grammar and references.
- Set realistic examples in tutorials that reflect continuous assessment or exam question standards.
- Allow time for personal and student reflection at the end of the module.

The author wishes to thank Ms Louise Staunton (Global Relations Office), Dr Michael Wride (CAPSL) and Ms Susan Kirwin (Student Learning Development) for their advice and

support throughout the development of this resource.

References

- Beloucif, A., Mehafdi, M., & Komey, N. A. (2018). Expectation as a key determinant of international students' satisfaction: A case study of business school MSc students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, [JARHE-04-2017-0048]. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-04-2017-004>
- Bliss, S. et al, (2016), Strategic Enhancement Programme: Internationalising the curriculum toolkit, Higher Education Academy, Heslington, York, United Kingdom pp 11-13
- Carroll, J. & Appleton J. (2007) Support and guidance for learning from an international perspective. In Jones, E. & Brown, S. eds. *Internationalising Higher Education*, Abingdon Oxon, Routledge, pp 72-86. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203945964>
- Carroll, J. (2005). Strategies for becoming more explicit. In Carroll, J. & Ryan, J. eds *Teaching International Students – Improving Learnings for All*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, pp 26-34.
- Dimitriade, I. A. (2015), Student Learning Development, Trinity College, Dublin, How to Study at Trinity as an International Undergraduate Student, <https://student-learning.tcd.ie/assets/PDF/How-to-study-in-Trinity.pdf>
- Kingston, E. & Forland, H. (2008) Bridging the gap in expectations between international students and Academic Staff, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12 (2) pp 204-221. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307307654>

Mann, S. J. (2001) Alternative perspectives on the student experience: alienation and engagement, *Studies in Higher Education*, 26 (1), pp 7-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070020030689>

Money, J., Nixon, S., Tracy, F., Hennessy, C., Ball, E. & Dinning, T. (2017) Undergraduate student expectations of university in the United Kingdom: What really matters to them? *Cogent Education*, 4, 1301855, pp 1-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1301855>

Nilsson, P. A., & Ripmeester, N. (2016). International student expectations: Career opportunities and employability. *Journal of International Students*, 6(2), 614-631.

Staunton, L. & Dunne, C. (2015) *Diverse Voices: Listening to International Students: Intercultural Awareness and Student Support Training Guide for Staff Working with International Students*, Irish Council for International Students, Dublin, Ireland pp 44-55.