



Managing expectations for Multicultural Classrooms

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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.

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 maximize 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).

- ✦ 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.



Figure 2. Clarifying expectations can contribute to a better understanding of outcomes.

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.

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