



Teaching Across Cultures: A Pedagogical Guide for Online Faculty in Higher Education

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Introduction

Teaching Across Cultures: What many faculty do when they teach online classes. Online education has allowed access to higher education for learners from across the globe and from diverse cultural backgrounds. The “anywhere, anytime” evolution of online education has made it more globalized in recent years. As faculty navigate teaching in multicultural online learning environments, it is important that they build their cultural awareness and develop strategies to create more inclusive and engaging online classes.

In this book, *Teaching Across Cultures: A Pedagogical Guide for Online Faculty in Higher Education*, faculty will learn strategies they can use to effectively teach multicultural online classes. This book is intended to serve as a guide for faculty who want to enhance their online teaching. Throughout this book, faculty will engage in various forms of self-reflection to help them consider how their current teaching strategies can evolve.

In Part 1, [Building the Foundation for Culturally Responsive Online Teaching](#), faculty will develop foundational knowledge of intercultural teaching. The chapters in this section will explore the rise of online and international education and cultural considerations in online learning.

In Part 2, [Designing Culturally Inclusive Online Courses](#), faculty will learn how to design courses that meet the needs of diverse learners. The chapters in this section will provide faculty with strategies for creating accessible and engaging content, building community in online learning, and developing intercultural competence.

In Part 3, [Supporting Diverse Learners and Self-Reflection](#), faculty will learn how to support learners from various cultural backgrounds. The chapters in this section will provide faculty

with strategies for online communication across cultures and how to support online learners from diverse backgrounds. The final chapter in this section and book will encourage faculty to continuously engage in self-reflection.

This book is intended to be a valuable resource for faculty who want to create more inclusive and engaging multicultural online learning environments. New and seasoned online faculty alike can benefit from this book.

Upon reading this book, educators will be able to:

1. Develop awareness of how culture impacts online learning in higher education.
2. Identify factors that influence student learning styles, communication preferences, and educational paradigms.
3. Design culturally inclusive online courses to meet the needs of diverse learners from various backgrounds.
4. Create a sense of community and belonging in online learning environments.
5. Develop strategies to support online learners from diverse backgrounds and with various needs.
6. Engage in continuous self-reflection to build cultural awareness, online teaching practices, and cross-cultural connections.

For audio learners, there is an AI generated Podcast based on this book below:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.palni.org/teachingacrosscultures/?p=4#audio-4-1>

Disclaimer:

In this text, the terms “Eastern” and “Western” are used to reference broad cultural trends commonly found in different parts of the world. “Eastern” is generally associated with parts of Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, and India, where education often emphasizes memorization, respect for authority, and knowledge transfer from teacher to student. “Western” is generally associated with the United States, Canada, and parts of Europe, where education focuses on critical thinking, active learning, and questioning of ideas. These are broad generalizations and individual learners within any country may have educational preferences that are different from these generalizations.

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PART I

PART 1: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ONLINE TEACHING

In Part 1, Building the Foundation for Culturally Responsive Online Teaching, faculty will develop foundational knowledge of online and intercultural trends and frameworks. The chapters in this section will explore the rise of online and international education and cultural considerations in online learning.

[Chapter 1: The Rise of Online and International Higher Education](#)

In chapter one, faculty will explore recent trends in online learning and international student enrollment in higher education. This chapter focuses on the globalization that online education offers and how the increased diversity in online courses impacts the online classroom.

[Chapter 2: Cultural Considerations in Online Learning](#)

In chapter two, faculty take a deeper dive into the specific challenges international students face in online learning environments. This chapter provides faculty with cultural dimension frameworks to help them identify how various cultural factors can impact learning in online classes.

1. The Rise of Online and International Higher Education

Chapter Overview

In chapter one, faculty will explore recent trends in online learning and international student enrollment in higher education. This chapter focuses on the globalization that online education offers and how the increased diversity in online courses impacts the online classroom.

Growth of International and Online Higher Education

Currently in the United States, international student enrollment in higher education is growing at its fastest pace in more than 40 years ([Institute of International Education \[IIE\] Open Doors, 2023](#)). According to Open Doors (2024), in the 2022-2023 academic year, “1,057,188 international students from more than 210 places of origin, studied at U.S. higher education institutions... a 12 percent increase compared to the previous academic year.” In the 2023-2024 academic year, this number rose again to 1,126,690, with international students

accounting for 5.9% of the total U.S. higher education population (IIE Open Doors, 2024).

According to the IIE Open Doors Report (2024), in the 2023-2024 academic year, the top countries of origin for international students in the United States were:

- India: 331,602 students
- China: 277,398 students
- South Korea: 43,149 students
- Canada: 28,998

These four countries account for over 60% of the total international student population in U.S. higher education.

Not only is international student enrollment on the rise, but online education in higher education is also experiencing growth. [Welding \(2023\)](#) states that, “in 2021, 11.2 million college students (60%) took at least one class online.” Although international students on F-1 visas do have restrictions on the number of online courses they are eligible to take, the surge in online learning has not excluded them. Additionally, online learning has made it possible for learners from all over the world to earn their degree from U.S. institutions while in their home country.

This guide will provide educators with strategies they can use to positively impact their international students’ satisfaction and success in online learning environments by creating inclusive online classrooms. As online and international enrollment continues to grow, it is important for U.S. institutions and higher education faculty to consider the unique factors that impact international students’ satisfaction and success in online courses.

20 Years of International Student Trends



Source:
opendoors
data.org

The Impact of Educational Paradigms on International Students

International students may face challenges due to the different educational paradigms between Eastern and Western cultures including teaching practices and cultural learning styles. Chen et al. (2008) explain that Eastern learners tend to listen to understand information, whereas Western learners question to understand. Additionally, Eastern learners are generally more reserved than their Western counterparts, and there are distinct differences in how these cultures share ideas (Wang & Reeves, 2007).

International students also acquire content differently from their American counterparts. Eastern cultures often emphasize content retention through memorization via exams and readings, while Western cultures prioritize application and analysis (Wang & Reeves, 2007). Critical thinking skills and idea expression are key differences between Eastern and Western educational approaches.

Not only are the educational paradigms between Eastern and Western cultures important for educators to consider, there are other cultural considerations that impact learning online. In Chapter 2: Cultural Considerations in Online Learning,

we will take a deeper dive into the differences between cultures and how it impacts learning. We will then reflect on our own cultural identity.

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2. Cultural Considerations in Online Learning

Chapter Overview

In chapter two, faculty take a deeper dive into the specific challenges international students face in online learning environments. This chapter provides faculty with cultural dimension frameworks to help them identify how various cultural factors can impact learning in online classes.

Language considerations

One of the most evident barriers for international students studying in the U.S. is language. However, in online learning, language barriers can be even more challenging. According to a study conducted by Kumi-Yeboah (2018), instructors shared that language barriers impacted their interactions with international students due to the non-verbal communication that occurs in online courses. Students find online courses can magnify communication challenges because of the delayed communication and difficulty of asynchronous classroom communication in conveying meaning and personality (Liu et

al., 2010). Even though most universities require English test scores for admission, international students still feel that language barriers are one of the biggest challenges when taking online classes (Liu et al., 2010). Learners even express that they have to spend triple the amount of time reading in English than in their first language. Participants in Wang and Reeves (2007) study also confirmed communication as the biggest issue due to a lack of facial expressions which would help international students to better understand their peers and instructors.

One advantage of online learning for international students is the ability to edit discussions until they are mostly free of grammatical errors. In face-to-face classes, live interactions would not have this same benefit. Another benefit, as shared by a student participant in Liu et al. (2010) study, is that asynchronous discussions can be helpful because the misunderstandings that can arise from accents are non-existent. While there can be benefits to communication for international learners in online learning environments, Wang and Reeves (2007) share that if language was not a barrier more than half of the learners' challenges in online classes would have diminished. Although language barriers are more difficult to overcome, online instructors can become aware of the language barrier facing international students and try to use strategies to decrease this barrier. Strategies to overcome language and communication barriers will be discussed further in [Chapter 5: Online Communication Across Cultures](#).

Cultural Dimensions

Geert Hofstede's (2011) proposes a Cultural Dimensions Theory with six dimensions that influence cultural variations: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus

short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. These dimensions significantly impact educational settings. For instance, instructors in Western cultures are less likely to assume a dominant role, favoring learner-centered approaches (Sadykova & Meskill, 2019).



These educational differences can cause stress for learners adapting to a new culture while balancing their own cultural preferences (Chen et al., 2008). The consideration of how learners from diverse cultures will adapt to potentially unfamiliar education systems is

essential to the success and satisfaction of the international student population.

[Green et al. \(2022\)](#) break down Hofstede's 6 Dimensions into more detail. Let's explore them.

01. Power Distance

Power is a normal feature of any relationship or society. How power is perceived, however, varies among cultures. In **high power-distance** cultures, the members accept some having more power and some having less power, and accept that this power distribution is natural and normal. Those with power are assumed to deserve it, and likewise, those without power are assumed to be in their proper place. In such a culture, there will be a rigid adherence to the use of titles, "Sir," "Ma'am," "Officer," "Reverend," and so on. The directives of those with higher power are to be obeyed, with little question.

In **low power-distance** cultures, the distribution of power is considered far more arbitrary and viewed as a result of luck,

money, heritage, or other external variables. Those in power are far more likely to be challenged in a low power-distance culture than they would in a high power-distance culture. A wealthy person is typically seen as more powerful in western cultures. Elected officials, like United States Senators, will be seen as powerful since they had to win their office by receiving majority support. However, individuals who attempt to assert power are often faced with those who stand up to them, question them, ignore them, or otherwise refuse to acknowledge their power. While some titles may be used, they will be used far less than in high power-distance culture. For example, in colleges and universities in the U.S., it is far more common for students to address their instructors on a first-name basis, and engage in casual conversation on personal topics. In contrast, in a high power-distance culture like Japan, the students rise and bow as the teacher enters the room, address them formally at all times, and rarely engage in any personal conversation.

02. Uncertainty Avoidance

This index shows the degree to which people accept or avoid something that is strange, unexpected, or different from the status quo.

Societies with **high uncertainty avoidance** choose strict rules, guidelines, and behavior codes. They usually depend on absolute truths or the idea that only one truth decides all proper conduct. High uncertainty avoidance cultures limit change and place a very high value on history, doing things as they have been done in the past, and honoring stable cultural norms.

Low uncertainty avoidance cultures see change as inevitable and normal. These cultures are more accepting of contrasting opinions or beliefs. Society is less strict and lack of certainty is more acceptable. In a low uncertainty avoidance culture, innovation in all areas is valued. Businesses in the U.S.

that can change rapidly, innovate quickly, and respond immediately to market and social pressures are seen as far more successful. Even though the U.S. is generally low in uncertainty avoidance, we can see some evidence of a degree of higher uncertainty avoidance related to certain social issues. As society changes, there are many who will decry the changes as they are “forgetting the past,” “dishonoring our forebears,” or “abandoning sacred traditions.” In the controversy over same-sex marriage, the phrase “traditional marriage” is used to refer to a two person, heterosexual marriage, suggesting same-sex marriage is a violation of tradition. Changing social norms creates uncertainty, and for many changes are very unsettling.

03. Individualism and Collectivism

Put simply, you can think of an **individualistic culture** as an “I” culture where members are able to make choices based on personal preference with little regard for others, except for close family or significant relationships. They can pursue their own wants and needs free from concerns about meeting social expectations. The United States is a highly individualistic culture. While we value the role of certain aspects of collectivism such as government and social organizations, at our core we strongly believe it is up to each person to find and follow his or her path in life.

In a highly **collectivistic culture**, a “we” culture, just the opposite is true. It is the role of individuals to fulfill their place in the overall social order. Personal wants and needs are secondary to the needs of society at large. There is immense pressure to adhere to social norms and those who fail to conform risk social isolation, disconnection from family, and perhaps some form of banishment. China is typically considered a highly collectivistic culture. In China, multigenerational homes are common, and tradition calls for the oldest son to care for his parents as they age.

04. Masculinity versus Femininity

Expectations for gender roles are a core component of any culture. All cultures have some sense of what it means to be a “man” or a “woman.” **Masculine cultures** are traditionally seen as more aggressive and domineering, while **feminine cultures** are traditionally seen as more nurturing and caring.

In a masculine culture, such as the U.S., winning is highly valued. We respect and honor those who demonstrate power and high degrees of competence. Consider the role of competitive sports such as football, basketball, or baseball, and how the rituals of identifying the best are significant events. The 2017 Super Bowl had 111 million viewers, (Huddleston, 2017) and the World Series regularly receives high ratings, with the final game in 2016 ending at the highest rating in ten years (Perez, 2016).

More feminine societies, such as those in the Scandinavian countries, will certainly have their sporting moments. However, the culture is far more structured to provide aid and support to citizens, focusing their energies on providing a reasonable quality of life for all (Hofstede, 2012b).

05. Long-Term Orientation and Short-Term Orientation

People and cultures view time in different ways. For some, the “here and now” is paramount, and for others, “saving for a rainy day” is the dominant view.

In a **long-term culture**, significant emphasis is placed on planning for the future. For example, the savings rates in France and Germany are 2-4 times greater than in the U.S., suggesting cultures with more of a “plan ahead” mentality (Pasquali & Aridas, 2012). These long-term cultures see change and social evolution are normal, integral parts of the human condition.

In a **short-term culture**, emphasis is placed far more on the “here and now.” Immediate needs and desires are paramount, with longer-term issues left for another day. The U.S. falls more into this type. Legislation tends to be passed to handle immediate problems, and it can be challenging for lawmakers to convince voters of the need to look at issues from a long-term perspective. With the fairly easy access to credit, consumers are encouraged to buy now versus waiting. We see evidence of the need to establish “absolute truth” in our political arena on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and gun control. Our culture does not tend to favor middle grounds in which truth is not clear-cut.

06. Indulgence and Restraint

A more recent addition to Hofstede’s dimensions of culture, the indulgence/restraint continuum addresses the degree of rigidity of social norms of behavior. He states:

Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms (Hofstede, 2012a).

Indulgent cultures are comfortable with individuals acting on their more basic human drives. Sexual mores are less restrictive, and one can act more spontaneously than in cultures of restraint. Those in indulgent cultures will tend to communicate fewer messages of judgment and evaluation. Every spring thousands of U.S. college students flock to places like Cancun, Mexico, to engage in a week of fairly indulgent behavior. Feeling free from the social expectations of home, many will engage in some intense partying and fairly limitless behaviors.

Cultures of restraint, such as many Islamic countries, have rigid social expectations of behavior that can be quite narrow.

Guidelines on dress, food, drink, and behaviors are rigid and may even be formalized in law. In the U.S., a generally indulgent culture, there are sub-cultures that are more restraint-focused. The Amish are highly restrained by social norms, but so too can be inner-city gangs. Areas of the country, like Utah with its large Mormon culture, or the Deep South with its large evangelical Christian culture, are more restrained than areas such as San Francisco or New York City. Rural areas often have more rigid social norms than do urban areas. Those in more restraint-oriented cultures will identify those not adhering to these norms, placing pressure on them, either openly or subtly, to conform to social expectations.

To learn more about Geert Hofstede's Six Dimensions including videos on each dimension, you can visit [his website](#).

Considerations

[Worthy et al. \(2022\)](#) states that the cultural value dimensions identified by Hofstede are useful ways to think about culture; however, Hofstede's theory has also been seriously questioned. Most of the criticism has been directed at the methodology of the study beginning with the original instrument. The questionnaire was not originally designed to measure culture but rather workplace satisfaction (Orr & Hauser, 2008) and many of the conclusions are based on a small number of responses (McSweeney, 2002). Although 117,000 questionnaires were administered, the results from 40 countries were used and only six countries had more than 1000 respondents. Critics also question the representativeness of the original sample.

The study was conducted using employees of a multinational corporation (IBM) who were highly educated, mostly male, who performed what we call 'white collar' work (McSweeney, 2002). Hofstede's theory has also been criticized for promoting a largely static view of culture (Hamden-Turner & Trompenaars,

1997; Orr and Hauser, 2008) that does not respond to changes or influences of other cultures.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory has been challenged by some individuals so it is important that faculty recognize the limitations of Hofstede's theory. The world has changed in many ways since Hofstede's research began. Faculty should not solely rely on this framework when building their cultural awareness; however, it is still a great resource that faculty can use to begin understanding the various cultural differences that exist not only within our world, but within their classroom. By learning more about these dimensions, faculty can recognize how individuals from different cultures may perceive and approach life differently whether through communication, decision making, or in social interactions.

Hall's Cultural Variations

Edward T. Hall, an influential researcher in the area of cultural variances and their significance in communication, has also played an important role in understanding intercultural differences. As shared by [Green et al. \(2021\)](#), in addition to the 6 dimensions from Hofstede, Hall identified two more significant cultural variations (Raimo, 2008).

Monochronic and Polychronic

Another aspect of variations in time orientation is the difference between monochronic and polychronic cultures. This refers to how people perceive and value time.

In a **monochronic culture**, like the U.S., time is viewed as linear, as a sequential set of finite time units. These units are a commodity, much like money, to be managed and used wisely; once the time is gone, it is gone and cannot be retrieved. Consider the language we use to refer to time: spending time; saving time; budgeting time; making time. These are the same terms and concepts we apply to money; time is a resource to

be managed thoughtfully. Since we value time so highly, that means:

- Punctuality is valued. Since “time is money,” if a person runs late, they are wasting the resource.
- Scheduling is valued. Since time is finite, only so much is available, we need to plan how to allocate the resource. Monochronic cultures tend to let the schedule drive activity, much like money dictates what we can and cannot afford to do,
- Handling one task at a time is valued. Since time is finite and seen as a resource, monochronic cultures value fulfilling the time budget by doing what was scheduled. Compare this to a financial budget: funds are allocated for different needs, and we assume those funds should be spent on the item budgeted. In a monochronic culture, since time and money are virtually equivalent, adhering to the “time budget” is valued.
- Being busy is valued. Since time is a resource, we tend to view those who are busy as “making the most of their time;” they are seen as using their resources wisely.

In a **polychronic culture**, like Spain, time is far, far more fluid. Schedules are more like rough outlines to be followed, altered, or ignored as events warrant. Relationship development is more important, and schedules do not drive activity. Multi-tasking is far more acceptable, as one can move between various tasks as demands change. In polychronic cultures, people make appointments, but there is more latitude for when they are expected to arrive. David’s appointment may be at 10:15, but as long as he arrives sometime within the 10 o’clock hour, he is on time.

Consider a monochronic person attempting to do business in a polychronic culture. The monochronic person may expect meetings to start promptly on time, stay focused, and for work

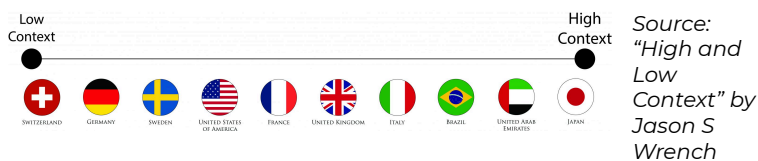
to be completed in a regimented manner to meet an established deadline. Yet those in a polychronic culture will not bring those same expectations to the encounter, sowing the seeds for some significant intercultural conflict.

High Context and Low Context

The last variation in culture to consider is whether the culture is high context or low context. To establish a little background, consider how we communicate. When we communicate we use a communication package, consisting of all of our verbal and nonverbal communication. As you have learned, our verbal communication refers to our use of language, and our nonverbal communication refers to all other communication variables: body language, vocal traits, and dress.

In **low-context cultures**, verbal communication is given primary attention. The assumption is that people will say what they mean relatively directly and clearly. Little will be left for the receiver to interpret or imply. In the U.S. if someone does not want something, we expect them to say, “No.” While we certainly use nonverbal communication variables to get a richer sense of the meaning of the person’s message, we consider what they say to be the core, primary message. Those in a high-context culture find the directness of low-context cultures quite disconcerting, to the point of rudeness.

In **high-context cultures**, nonverbal communication is as important, if not more important, than verbal communication. How something is said is a significant variable in interpreting what is meant. Messages are often implied and delivered quite subtly. Japan is well known for the reluctance of people to use blunt messages, so they have far more subtle ways to indicate disagreement than a low-context culture. Those in low context cultures find these subtle, implied messages frustrating.



Navigating Academic Integrity

Another cultural consideration that we as educators need to recognize when teaching diverse learners is the cultural differences regarding academic integrity. We previously discussed different cultural dimensions and variations, and these factors can have an impact on academic misconduct in U.S. higher education. As previously shared, some cultures are known as Collectivist cultures. In Collectivist cultures, ideas of an individual are generally not credited to individuals, but instead acknowledged as collective wisdom. Campbell (2017) shares that "students who grow up with this perspective may not understand why citations at the end of a research paper are important; furthermore, citations might even make them feel uncomfortable, as they recognize individual authors above the community as a whole. It's important to acknowledge this discomfort as a student adopts the Western model of academic integrity." We also discussed that in many cultures around the world, memorization is prioritized in learning, unlike in the United States where critical thinking is encouraged. In many countries outside the United States, the emphasis of memorization and direct reproduction of textbook content during exams leaves little room for interpretation or critical thinking. Consequently, students from these backgrounds may struggle with understanding the expectations of paraphrasing and originality in academic writing.

This section on Navigating Academic Integrity in relation to teaching across cultures could be an entire chapter or even a book of its own. Over the years, there have been many studies conducted on this topic as international student enrollment in the United States has climbed (Hayes & Introna, 2005). Whether intentional or unintentional, domestic and international students engaging in academic misconduct is a concern for most educators. However, what is important is for us as educators to understand how we can help students navigate academic integrity.

Here are a few important first steps:

1. Recognize the different cultural dimensions and variations of your students related to academic integrity in the United States and understand that what might be considered academic misconduct in our culture might be viewed differently in another culture.
2. Provide clear guidelines, expectations, and instruction on how to maintain academic integrity. If a student, domestic or international, engages in academic misconduct, think about how you can teach them how to avoid plagiarism in the future. Telling students that they failed an assignment due to plagiarism without telling them specifically what they did wrong and how to avoid it in the future lacks a fundamental element of our role as educators: teaching.
3. Encourage critical thinking through sharing their own opinions and engaging in the course activities and assessments in a meaningful way.
4. Provide constructive and timely feedback on students' written work and offer guidance on how to improve academic integrity. We will dive deeper into feedback in a later chapter, but feedback is essential in helping your students navigate academic integrity.
5. Know the academic support resources that are available for students at your institution. Provide your students with

- access to these resources regularly throughout the class.
6. Incorporate case studies or examples of academic misconduct from various cultural perspectives to enhance students' understanding of the complexities involved.
 7. When you encounter plagiarism, consider approaching it as a teachable moment. Provide specific feedback about expectations and guide students on how to properly paraphrase and cite their work.

Culture Generalizations

Frameworks like Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's Cultural Variances are great starting points for educators seeking to gain more knowledge on broad cultural patterns. However, it is important to also recognize that every culture is highly complex and diverse. In this book we discuss "Eastern" or "Western" ideologies, but assumptions should not be made that these terms represent every individual within these categories, regions, or countries. No country is culturally homogenous; region, socioeconomics, religion, and personal experiences all contribute to how individuals learn and communicate. Consider the United States. We would not assume that every American feels comfortable speaking up in class or taking the lead on a group project. Educators should use the frameworks discussed throughout this book as a resource for reflection, but not as cultural generalizations.

Your Cultural Identity

Now that you have a better understanding of the cultural considerations we as educators should recognize when teaching diverse student populations, it is time for some self-reflection. By better understanding your own cultural identity, you will be better prepared to recognize the different cultural identities of your students. This will allow you to be more open-minded and aware of their unique challenges when taking

online courses in the United States, a culture different from their own.

To help you reflect, here are some questions for you to consider.

1. How comfortable are you questioning authority figures (instructors) in a classroom?
2. Do you feel your primary loyalty is to yourself and your immediate family, or to a broader group like your community?
3. When working on a project, do you value competition and assertiveness, or cooperation and building relationships?
4. How comfortable are you with ambiguity and uncertainty in new situations?
5. How much emphasis is placed on nonverbal cues like gestures and facial expressions in your culture to convey meaning?
6. How will you continue to learn about different cultures throughout your teaching career?
7. Consider a time when you experienced a misunderstanding with a student or an academic integrity issue. How might what you have learned in this chapter allow you to view the situation differently?

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PART II

PART 2: DESIGNING CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE ONLINE COURSES

In Part 2, Designing Culturally Inclusive Online Courses, faculty will learn how to design courses that meet the needs of diverse learners. The chapters in this section will provide faculty with strategies for creating accessible and engaging content, building community in online learning, and developing intercultural competence.

[Chapter 3: Creating Accessible and Engaging Content](#)

In chapter three, faculty develop strategies on how to design online courses that accommodate diverse learners and learning styles. This chapter provides faculty with the tool and resources they need to design courses that are accessible and engaging to all online learners.

[Chapter 4: Building Community in Online Learning](#)

In chapter four, faculty learn the importance of building a community in their online courses. This chapter provides faculty with guidance on how to encourage and motivate learners, facilitate intercultural discussions, and create online learning environments that promote collaboration among learners from different backgrounds.

[Chapter 5: Intercultural Competence in Online Learning](#)

In chapter five, faculty reflect on their own cultural awareness and how this can impact their online classes. This chapter provides faculty with strategies on how to develop their intercultural competence to promote inclusivity in their online classes.

3. Creating Accessible and Engaging Content

Chapter Overview

In chapter three, faculty develop strategies on how to design online courses that accommodate diverse learners and learning styles. This chapter provides faculty with the tool and resources they need to design courses that are accessible and engaging to all online learners.

Designing Accessible Content and Inclusive Design Principles

Online courses often reflect the cultural context in which they are developed; icons, symbols, and strategies for organizing and distributing information are not universal and can create an additional layer of unfamiliarity for some learners (Hannon & D'Netto, 2007). Additionally, multilingual learners may feel intimidated by the high demands for written communication in English, experiencing anxiety over correctness in forum posts and email exchanges (Day et al., 2021). How can faculty reduce these barriers for online learners from diverse backgrounds? Throughout this chapter, strategies will be

shared that faculty can use to create a more inclusive, accessible, and engaging online learning environment.

Many online faculty are not knowledgeable in instructional design and inclusive design principles. At many institutions, online faculty do not need to be experts in these areas because there are development teams who specialize in these topics and can offer faculty guidance. However, faculty teaching online should have a general knowledge of how to design accessible content and be familiar with inclusive design principles, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Although this book focuses on intercultural teaching, creating accessible content is essential for all learners, regardless of their ethnicity. The Special Education Technology Center provides a [checklist](#) that faculty can use when creating content to ensure greater accessibility for all learners.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Design

The instructional design of online courses significantly influences the success, satisfaction, and motivation of international learners. According to Wang and Reeves (2007), instructional design holds greater importance than the technology used because of the impact it has on cultural issues. Just as faculty require cultural awareness about their learners, instructional designers also need this knowledge (Kung, 2017). Research indicates that a lack of diversity in the design of online courses can put international learners at a disadvantage compared to their American peers (Liu et al., 2010). However, there are strategies that faculty and instructional designers can use to create culturally responsive online courses that effectively motivate and engage learners from diverse backgrounds. These strategies will be shared in the following section of this chapter.

it is important to note that instructional design should always

be created for the intended learner. Therefore, it is important that faculty and instructional designers understand the diverse backgrounds of the learners who will be participating in the online course. Strategies for creating culturally inclusive online courses involve using multiple assessments, diverse cultural pedagogies, a mix of synchronous and asynchronous methods, appreciation for various cultures, incorporating American and global resources, and integrating audio and video aids (Liu et al., 2010). Research also indicates that the navigation of online courses is equally as important as the content of the course. A student in a study by Karkar Esperat (2018) shared how their difficulty with navigating their online course almost caused them to give up. Thus, effective organization in online courses significantly influences student motivation and progress. In the same study, all participants preferred module to module navigation, finding it less overwhelming.

The instructional design of online courses is an important factor in international student success and satisfaction in online courses. Instructional designers and faculty should incorporate both U.S. and international content and create courses that are easy to navigate. As Sadykova and Meskill (2019), shares, “when online courses are well designed and orchestrated, they can foster dynamic, socially, and culturally situated communities that study in multimodal ways that include forms of interaction distinctly different from live, face-to-face classes” (p. 5). By not employing these strategies, international learners may be put at a disadvantage and have struggles in their learning of course outcomes.

Engaging Content

Online learning requires significant motivation and self-discipline; however, students report that it can also reduce their feelings of motivation to persist with coursework (Aristovnik et

al., 2020; Day, 2021). Not only is it important to create accessible content in online education, but it is also essential for student learning that educators create courses that are engaging and motivating. There are many ideas and strategies that could be shared on the topic of engaging and motivating online learners. However, this section will focus on big picture strategies and skills that online faculty can use to motivate and engage their learners, ultimately leading to improved student learning outcomes. However, additional strategies and resources will be shared for faculty who wish to deepen their knowledge on this topic.

Engagement Strategies

Creating effective online learning environments requires faculty to engage learners in ways that promote active participation and reduce feelings of isolation. According to the *TEC-VARIETY* framework by Bonk and Khoo (2014), successful engagement includes using a variety of strategies that promote a psychological sense of safety, curiosity, and interactivity. For example, including interactive activities, especially in asynchronous courses, allows learners to engage more with course materials and with one another. To achieve this, online instructors should use a variety of interactive activities and assessments. This variety helps meet the needs of diverse learning styles and can keep learners motivated. Another engagement strategy, which will be shared in more detail in a later chapter, is the use of collaborative learning techniques, such as peer-to-peer activities and group projects. In multicultural online classrooms, group projects can be especially beneficial by providing opportunities for social learning, which not only deepens understanding but also helps create a sense of community.

Here are a few engaging instructional strategies, shared by

Dr. Curtis Bonk a Professor at Indiana University, that educators can use in their online classrooms:

1. **Eight Nouns Activity:** Learners describe themselves using eight nouns and engage with peers by responding to what they have in common.
2. **Online Café Question Exchange:** Learners are encouraged to leave questions for the instructor or classmates in an online forum.
3. **One-Minute Papers or Muddiest Point Papers:** Learners write brief reflections on the most confusing aspects of a lesson to help educators address areas of misunderstanding.
4. **Structured Controversy Task:** Learners engage in online debates by taking pro and con positions on a topic, which can deepen their critical thinking and understanding of different perspectives.
5. **Jigsaw:** Learners are divided into groups where they first become experts in a particular topic and then share their knowledge with their peers.
6. **Online Role Play Personalities:** Learners are assigned different roles (such as optimist, devil's advocate, etc.) in discussions to simulate real-world scenarios.
7. **Pruning the Tree (20 Questions):** Learners ask yes/no questions in a discussion forum to guess a concept.
8. **K-W-L or K-W-H-L:** Learners post in a discussion forum what they already know, what they want to know, what they have learned, and how they will apply the learning.
9. **Reverse Brainstorming:** Learners engage in a discussion forum, providing responses on how they would “worsen” an issue, then reflecting on what solutions are implied from their reversals.
10. **Six Hats Role Play:** Learners wear different “hats” representing specific modes of thinking and respond

in discussion forums according to their assigned roles (White Hat: Data, facts, figures, info (neutral); Red Hat: Feelings, emotions, intuition, rage; Yellow Hat: Positive, sunshine, optimistic; Black Hat: Logical, negative, judgmental, gloomy; Green Hat: New ideas, creativity, growth; Blue Hat: Controls thinking process and organization).

These strategies can help create more engaging and interactive online learning environments, increasing both individual participation and community building. These are just a few strategies that faculty can use to motivate and engage their online learners. However, it is also important to consider how these engagement strategies might impact international learners, who may come from educational cultures with different expectations for classroom participation. For example, the *Eight Nouns* exercise could be a less pressure icebreaker for international students because it focuses on self-expression without emphasizing grammar correctness. However, the *Structured Controversy Task* might feel intimidating for students who are not yet comfortable with debating. Educators should consider the timing of these activities, provide clear instructions, and create a supportive environment to help all learners feel comfortable participating. For additional resources on how to engage and motivate your online learners, review the resources section at the end of this book.

Personalization, Flexibility, and Learner Autonomy

To create a motivating and inclusive online learning environment, faculty need to provide learners with personalization, flexibility, and autonomy. To do this, faculty should try to understand the unique motivators of their online learners. What are the learners in your class hoping to achieve upon completion of the course? Once faculty have a better

understanding of these unique motivators, they are able to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the unique needs of their learners.

According to Bonk and Khoo's (2014) TEC-VARIETY framework, offering learners autonomy and choice plays an important role in increasing learner motivation. To provide learner's more autonomy over their learning, faculty can allow flexibility whenever possible. This will allow learners to progress through the course at their own pace, meeting the needs of their busy schedules.

Khoo and Bonk (2022), reiterate the need for learner autonomy in their book *Motivating and Supporting Online Learners*. Another way to provide learner autonomy is to provide options for assignments. For example, to meet the learning outcomes of the course, you might allow learners to select from a variety of assessment that meet these outcomes. Could an essay, video, or other interactive assessment all demonstrate mastery? This allows learners to choose their own learning path and gives learners control over their learning journey. At the same time, this can provide faculty with more creative and varied assessments, making the grading process more enjoyable.

These types of approaches align with self-determination theory, which highlights the need for autonomy in creating intrinsic motivation (Bonk & Khoo, 2014). Learners are more likely to be engage and motivated in a course when they feel they have control over their learning and can pursue topics of relevance or interest to them.

Another strategy to promote learner autonomy is scaffolding (Bonk & Khoo, 2014). When faculty can break down complex topics into smaller, simpler steps, it can help build confidence. This is especially true for learners who may feel overwhelmed by the coursework. When faculty can provide learners with incremental steps towards mastery of a topic or learning outcomes, they are providing structure, but also allowing

flexibility for learners are varying levels leading to higher success.

The books *Motivating and Supporting Online Learners* and *Adding Some Tec-Variety* are just a few resources that online faculty can use to incorporate engaging and motivating strategies into their online courses. By providing learners with personalization, flexibility, and autonomy, faculty can help meet the needs of their learners helping the to succeed.

Case Study One: Designing Culturally Inclusive and Accessible Online Content

Case Study:

Dr. Amina Dowlery is an online instructor at River University. This semester, Dr. Dowlery is teaching an online graduate level economics course. In her online course she has a diverse population of students including students from the U.S., India, China, Nepal, and England. In week three of her eight-week course, Dr. Dowlery sends a short check-in questionnaire to her students to solicit feedback. After reviewing the feedback, she realizes that a few of her students are having difficulty understanding course materials related to United States specific economic policies and market structures presented in case studies throughout the course. She recognizes that some of her international students might be struggling to relate to the the U.S. specific scenarios and cultural references.

Dr. Dowlery realizes that she needs to adapt her course to her learners' needs to ensure their success and mastery of course outcomes. She decides that because this is a live course she is not going to make major changes to the course now, but she will work on redesigning it for future semesters. However, to help her students this semester, she begins to incorporate supplemental materials with global examples and case studies. Instead of relying solely on the U.S. specific examples, she begins to share case studies and articles on emerging markets in India, trade agreements in China, and economic changes in the European Union.

At the end of the course, Dr. Dowlery reviews her end of course survey results and finds that her results are higher than normal. She is surprised to see that not only did her international students appreciate the global materials added to the course, but her U.S. students also found them valuable and felt that they learned a lot from the global content. Overall, her students were success and she felt likes she added more substance and relevance to her course.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does incorporating global examples support student engagement and comprehension in online courses?
2. How can faculty ensure their course materials are inclusive and accessible to a diverse population of students?
3. What strategies can online faculty use to

identify students who are struggling with engagement or comprehension?

4. How can faculty balance designing culturally responsive courses while also ensuring student learning outcomes are being met?
5. How can faculty encourage peer-to-peer engagement to create more culturally diverse online discussions?

Attributions

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4. Building Community in Online Learning

Chapter Overview

In chapter four, faculty learn the importance of building a community in their online courses. This chapter provides faculty with guidance on how to encourage and motivate learners, facilitate intercultural discussions, and create online learning environments that promote collaboration among learners from different backgrounds.

Guiding Intercultural Discussions

Karkar Esperat (2018) found that the lack of faculty participation and communication in their online classes leads to international students feeling isolated. It is crucial for students to have faculty who actively engage in their online classes. Faculty should be participants in the class by facilitating discussion forums and other interactions among students (Karkar Esperat, 2018). In a study conducted by Chen et al. (2008), a student shared that a more active role taken by her faculty in facilitating interaction and participation within the online course would have significantly impacted her overall learning experience. Not only do faculty need to be actively

participating and communicating in their online classes, but they also need to be facilitators of online course engagement and peer interaction.

Online faculty have a social responsibility to build a community in their online classes by facilitating group work and other peer interactions (Karkar Esperat, 2022). Many international students want a sense of community which can be challenging to achieve in online courses. However, with proper facilitation faculty can create a sense of community and engagement among their students. It is also essential that faculty create a culturally inclusive learning environment through cross-cultural collaborative learning strategies. This will not only foster a better online learning environment for international students, but domestic students as well. Online courses with diverse learners are advantageous, allowing participants to broaden their perspectives and views by learning from others with different backgrounds. Faculty play an important role in ensuring that cross-cultural collaboration among learners occurs in a positive and inclusive environment.

The faculty's role stands as the most influential factor in determining the success of international students in online classes. Online course faculty need to provide timely responses and quality feedback to students, actively participate in the course, and foster cross cultural and peer interactions to ensure student learning. Research indicates that international students in online courses tend to fixate “on the faculty and what the faculty did and did not do in the class since the faculty is the most important aspect of the course” (Kung, 2017, p. 484). Additional research supports the theory that international student satisfaction and success in online courses is positively influenced when faculty use online pedagogy, provide guided instruction, are active in their courses, give students quality feedback, and facilitate peer collaboration (Karkar Esperat, 2022). This demonstrates the significant role the faculty plays in online learning for international students.

Encouraging Active Student Interaction

International students are more likely than American students to want to build learning communities in their educational pursuits. When international students from other countries come to study in the U.S., and take online classes, they can often feel isolated. Engaging in peer collaboration and interaction within their online classes can assist in making them feel connected and satisfied in their academic endeavors. Faculty play a vital role in fostering peer-to-peer and cross-cultural interaction through the activities they include and the facilitation they provide during their online courses. However, there can still be challenges in building collaborative learning environments including cultural and time zone differences.

Cultural differences can significantly impact peer collaboration in online learning. Research indicates that students from Eastern cultures tend to be less outspoken, more reserved, and less independent (Wang & Reeves, 2007; Kung, 2017). In group work this can be a challenge as American students may assume more leadership roles, delegate tasks, or take on a larger portion of the assignment. This would be disadvantageous to international learners who may suffer from less learning of the content as a result. Additionally, Chen et al. (2008) found that Western learners can also come off as “cold” during peer interactions because they tend to focus more on the task than on the interpersonal relationships.

While group work can present challenges, it also leads to broaden perspectives, higher levels of engagement, increased motivation, and friendship for both international and domestic students in online courses. Another obstacle for peer collaboration in online learning is time zone differences. With students accessing online education from various parts of the world, time zone differences can result in delayed responses during group work activities. While asynchronous online

learning can make it easier for students studying in different time zones, synchronous online learning has been found to be better at fostering peer collaboration and interaction (Liu, et al., 2010).

There can be challenges in peer-to-peer collaboration and interaction; however, the benefits outweigh these obstacles. According to Kung (2017), peer collaboration can help build confidence in international students as it allows them to realize that fellow students are experiencing similar challenges in adapting to a new culture and learning environment. A lack of a learning community in online courses can be a barrier to international student satisfaction and success. However, implementing appropriate strategies to cultivate a collaborative culturally inclusive online learning environment can not only address this issue, but also lead to increases international student satisfaction, engagement, motivation, and learning.

Building Your Online Community

Many online instructors find it challenging to create a sense of community within their online classes. However, by fostering community, learners experience higher levels of motivation, engagement, and overall learning. Here are a few strategies you can use to build your online community:

1. **Recognize Community Building as Continuous:**

Community building is not a one-time occurrence; it is a continuous process. Incorporate regular opportunities for connection and reflection throughout your course by individually checking in with your learners, engaging in group discussions, hosting live virtual office hours, or using other frequent engagement strategies.

2. **Tailor Community Building to Learner Demographics:**

Adapt your approach based on your audience. As previously mentioned, understanding the cultural and educational backgrounds of your students is important, as relationship dynamics may vary significantly across cultures.

3. **Support Different Types of Relationships:** Recognize the different types of relationships that occur in your online classes, including instructor-to-student, student-to-student, and student-to-self. To foster instructor-student interactions, create trust by being accessible and empathetic, and create personalized interactions whenever possible. For student-to-student interactions, encourage peer engagement through group work, discussion forums, peer feedback, or other collaboration methods. Lastly, for student-to-self interactions, encourage self-reflection.
4. **Establish Expectations Early:** Set clear expectations for communication, participation, and collaboration early in the course, and model the behavior you expect by being consistent, timely, and respectful in your interactions.
5. **Be Flexible and Inclusive:** Recognize that online learners and international learners face unique challenges. Be flexible when possible, considering that your students may be in different time zones, have varying technology access, accessibility needs, or face other life challenges.
6. **Provide Learner Autonomy:** Online and international students often value independence. As mentioned previously, offer students autonomy in how they engage with the course and the online community.
7. **Use Learners' Preferred Names:** International and American students may have preferred names different from their legal name. In some cultures, students may feel more comfortable choosing an American or different name for class. Allow them the flexibility to select the name they prefer and use this as their name throughout

the course.

8. **Be Genuine:** Authenticity is crucial in building community. Make sure your communication aligns with your personality and teaching style. If humor comes naturally to you, embrace it. If not, find other ways to connect with students that feels more genuine to who you are.
9. **Embrace Feedback:** Seek feedback from your learners throughout the course and when possible adapt to their unique needs.
10. **Embrace Diversity:** Leverage the diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives of your learners by encouraging them to share insights from their cultural experiences.

To build community in online learning, faculty need to be intentional and adaptable. Faculty who focus on building relationships and creating an inclusive environment create a more supportive and engaging environment for their learners.

Case Study Two: Cross-Cultural Group Work

Case Study:

Simon Turner is a professor at Morton College who teaches undergraduate courses. While he primarily teaches seated classes on the traditional campus, he also teaches online undergraduate business courses. This semester, Simon is teaching an twelve week online undergraduate management course with a diverse

group of students. Not only does he have U.S. learners from varying professional backgrounds, he also notices that he has international learners from China and Japan.

In Simon's class, the final assignment is a group project where learners have to work together to create a business plan for a new product. The students are assigned to their respective groups in week six and begin working on their final projects. In week eight, Simon reviews the group check in assessment and finds that his student groups are facing challenges. He learns that some of the students are not participating as much as others, creating frustrations among group members. He then reviews each group's specific discussion forum and sees that some of the students are less vocal than others.

After a deeper analysis, Simon realizes that his students from China and Japan are less vocal and engaged, while his students from the U.S. are dominating the discussions and taking on leadership roles. As a result, the U.S. students feel that the students from China and Japan are not equally participating and are disengaged and the Chinese and Japanese students feel overlooked and that their views are not as important.

Simon realizes that the cultural norms around hierarchy, communication styles, and group dynamics are influencing his students' interactions and group work. He recognizes that he needs to intervene. Simon decides to introduce more structure into the group project. He begins by assigning rotating roles and also has his students participate in the six hats role play

activity related to their topic. Simon also begins engaging in the group specific discussion forums to encouraging all students to contribute to the discussions and ideas for the project.

In the final week, Simon reviews the final group project peer assessment and find that the results have greatly improved and all students felt like equal participation occurred. The students from China and Japan felt more valued and heard, and the U.S. students appreciate the shared responsibility. Simon is thankful that his structured approach helped create a more inclusive online learning environment.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you experienced cultural backgrounds influencing group work in your online classes?
2. What other strategies could Simon have used to ensure equal participation in his group projects?
3. What strategies can you use to create a more engaging online learning environment where cultural differences are embraced?
4. If you added a more structure approach to group work, how would you assess your students future engagement throughout the course?
5. How can faculty build cultural awareness in their online classes without making assumptions on students' backgrounds?

Attributions

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5. Intercultural Competence in Online Learning

Chapter Overview

In chapter five, faculty reflect on their own cultural awareness and how this can impact their online classes. This chapter provides faculty with strategies on how to develop their intercultural competence to promote inclusivity in their online classes.

Building Intercultural Competence: Tools and Strategies

Instructing online classes requires a different set of skills than face-to-face classes to engage and motivate learners. Transitioning from a face-to-face course to an online course while using the same instructional methods is likely to lead to learner dissatisfaction and a decrease in learning. According to Karkar Esperat (2022), faculty teaching online should understand the best practices of online teaching pedagogy to increase student learning and satisfaction. While teaching international students in online courses, it is essential for faculty to apply online pedagogy practices while also

incorporating cross-cultural pedagogy practices. Students can encounter feelings of being frustrated, overwhelmed, discouraged, and have less overall success in their online classes if their faculty are unprepared to teach online courses (Karkar Esperat, 2018).

Teaching online courses with students of various cultural backgrounds requires additional strategies that faculty should apply to ensure the success and satisfaction of learners in the course. Faculty teaching multicultural online courses need to be familiar with the best practices for online teaching and also be culturally knowledgeable of who the learners are in their class. According to Sadykova and Meskill (2019), online faculty need to better understand their own practices and their requirements so as to model, guide, mediate, and sometimes explicitly instruct international students in culturally appropriate ways of being and communicating in U.S. academic contexts if we wish to improve completion rates and slow attrition in online courses (p. 18). Numerous sources emphasize the need for faculty to be more proficient in online and cultural pedagogy to foster further collaboration among students, increase student learning, and improve student engagement and satisfaction in their online courses (Kung, 2017; Kumi-Yeboah, 2018; Sadykova & Meskill, 2019; Karkar Esperat, 2022; Wang & Reeves, 2007).

Strategies:

1. Recognize your cultural biases and take time for self-reflection. Use the questions from Chapter One to guide you.
2. Acknowledge cultural differences in your class and make an effort to understand your students' various backgrounds.
3. Learn about your students' cultures by doing some research to better understand their perspectives.

4. Use culturally relevant examples throughout your course.
5. Keep communication simple and clear, avoid using jargon.
6. Set clear guidelines and allow flexibility when you can.
Learners from different cultures may have different approaches to time management.
7. Encourage peer-to-peer and cross-cultural interactions.
8. Try to understand the challenges your students face by studying in a new culture and be patient and empathetic.
9. Provide individual support and resources to students who need them.
10. Ask your students for feedback to keep improving your course and your teaching.

Building Your Cultural Awareness Reflection Questions

1. How do you define “intercultural competence” in your role as an educator, and how does it impact your teaching practices?
2. How do you think your own cultural background influences your teaching style and interactions with learners?
3. What steps have you taken to become more culturally aware?
4. How do you ensure that learners from different cultural backgrounds feel valued and included in your classroom?
5. How do you address cultural misunderstandings that arise in your classroom?
6. How do you create a learning environment where all cultural perspectives are respected and celebrated?
7. In what ways do you encourage learners to share their cultural experiences and perspectives in the classroom?
8. How do you ensure that your course materials, examples,

- and resources reflect diverse cultural perspectives?
9. What strategies do you use to learn about the cultural backgrounds of your learners, and how do you integrate that knowledge into your teaching?

Attributions

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PART III

PART 3: SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNERS AND SELF-REFLECTION

In Part 3, Supporting Diverse Learners and Self-Reflection, faculty will learn how to support learners from various cultural backgrounds. The chapters in this section will provide faculty with strategies for online communication across cultures and how to support online learners from diverse backgrounds. The final chapter in this section and book will encourage faculty to continuously engage in self-reflection.

[Chapter 6: Online Communication Across Cultures](#)

In chapter six, faculty will develop strategies for best practices in online communication. This chapter highlights the importance of culturally sensitive online discussions and how to avoid the potential for misunderstandings that can arise in multicultural online learning environments.

[Chapter 7: Supporting Online Learners from Diverse Backgrounds](#)

In chapter seven, faculty will explore strategies to support online learners from different time zones and those facing technology issues. This chapter focuses on providing support, resources, and equitable learning opportunities to all learners.

[Chapter 8: Continuous Improvement Through Self-Reflection](#)

In chapter eight, faculty discover the importance of continuous self-reflection. This chapter encourages faculty to assess their own teaching style, identify areas for growth, adapt where needed, and continue to learn and develop to become a more culturally responsive instructor.

6. Online Communication Across Cultures

Chapter Overview

In chapter six, faculty will develop strategies for best practices in online communication. This chapter highlights the importance of culturally sensitive online discussions and how to avoid the potential for misunderstandings that can arise in multicultural online learning environments.

Facilitating Culturally Sensitive Online Discussions

In many online learning environments, online discussion forums are the primary way students interact with one another and with their faculty. Discussion forums can be a great way to build an online community and engage learners in online classes. However, to be effective, faculty need to be actively engaged and promote collaboration. In multicultural online classes, faculty should also encourage learners from diverse backgrounds to share their perspectives and be mindful of cultural differences in communication styles. For example, if

one of the discussion forums in a class is intended to be a debate, it might be challenging for some international learners to actively participate. When faculty are active in the discussion forums, provide thoughtful responses, are culturally aware, promote deeper conversations and global perspectives, they create online discussions that are more engaging and dynamic.

Incorporating Culturally Aware Instructor Feedback

Quality instructor feedback is vital to student learning in any educational setting; however, in online learning it has been found to be a major influencer to students' success. According to Karkar Esperat (2022) instructors who provide meaningful and quality feedback to their students are demonstrating compassionate love. Compassionate love means the instructor has a genuine concern for student success and satisfaction in their courses and actively employs methods that ensure meaningful learning experiences. Participants in a study by Karkar Esperat (2022) stated that quality written feedback had an impact on their overall success in the course. For international students, quality feedback can provide them with the confidence needed to progress in their course (Karkar Esperat, 2022). Not only is quality feedback crucial to student success, but instructors should also provide international students with clear, step-by-step instruction of the requirements of the course (Karkar Esperat, 2022). This guidance is especially beneficial for international students who are new to the U.S. education system, and who have limited experience in online learning, offering them clear direction.

Providing quality and timely feedback is important to all learners in online courses; however, providing culturally

sensitive feedback is equally as important. Feedback that is culturally sensitive is written or provided in a way to learners respecting the way they may interpret or act upon the feedback. By creating feedback that is culturally sensitive, faculty can personalize their feedback to each individual student to make the feedback more relatable and constructive, leading to increased understanding of the course outcomes and less possibility for misunderstandings. By becoming more culturally aware, faculty can gain the knowledge needed to be culturally sensitive in their feedback. Other strategies that faculty can incorporate to have more culturally aware feedback are:

1. **Clear feedback:** Ensure that your feedback is clear and avoid using jargon or overly complex language.
2. **Feedback variety:** Provide learners with a mix of written, audio, or video feedback. By providing learners with a variety of feedback, you can reduce the chances of misinterpretation. Additionally, for international learners, hearing tone may assist them with deeper comprehension of the feedback and help them feel more supported.
3. **Rubrics:** Provide learners with clear assignment expectations that can be easily understood by all learners. Additionally provide rubrics and assessment examples.
4. **Encourage questions:** Encourage students to ask questions about the feedback you provide. Send an email or post an announcement letting them know you are happy to answer any questions they may have related to their feedback.
5. **Personalize feedback:** When providing feedback, reference the students individual work. This can help international students better understand the expectations, but also help to motivate and encourage

them for future assessments.

6. **Continuous feedback:** Don't just provide feedback on major assessments, offer small feedback check ins throughout the course.
7. **Consider tone:** Learners from high context cultures may find direct feedback as overly critical or even disrespectful. Provide feedback that is clear, but also sensitive. For example, instead of writing: "This paragraph is unclear. You need to rewrite it," a more culturally sensitive approach might be: "Thank you for your thoughtful ideas in this paragraph. To make your points more clear for readers, consider reorganizing these sentences or adding an example." Both messages communicate the need for revision, but the second example softens the directness while still providing clear guidance.

Quality and timely instructor feedback is an essential component in online education. For additional support on how to give effective feedback to your online learners, you can visit [Purdue Owl's section on feedback](#).

Addressing Potential Misunderstandings

In asynchronous, online courses where communication is primarily written, it is easy for misunderstandings to occur between faculty and students. This can be even more likely to happen with learners from different cultural backgrounds. There have been many examples and strategies presented throughout this book that faculty can use to reduce the potential for misunderstandings. Let's revisit a few and consider a few additional strategies:

1. **Easy navigation:** Ensure your online course is easy to

navigate and find information. Some universities rely on course templates to help reduce learner cognitive load in the navigation of online courses. You can also refer to Quality Matters to learn more about how to design effective online courses.

2. **Clear communication:** Provide your learners with simple and clear communication, throughout the course, in discussions and on feedback, for assignment instructions, and in other written or verbal communication.
3. **Encourage open communication:** Engage your learners by creating an online culture where they feel comfortable asking questions and reaching out if they are confused about course assessments or activities.
4. **Offer support:** Provide learners who need additional support with resources throughout your course.
5. **Provide global examples:** Provide global examples in your communications to help international students relate to the material and resources.
6. **Question forum:** Create a “community café” or questions forum where learners can ask questions related to the course.

Case Study Three: Culturally Sensitive Feedback

Case Study:

Dr. Ella Everly is teaching an online course at Vera

University. She has a diverse population of students including international learners. Throughout the course, Dr. Everly has been promoting cross-cultural discussions, providing clear guidelines for assignments, and has been motivating and encouraging her students through regular check ins. Overall the course has been very successful. In week four, Dr. Everly began grading a major assessment and wanted to ensure she provided detailed and thorough feedback. After sharing the feedback with her students, she had two international students message her upset with the feedback they received. These students are from the Middle East and are familiar with more positive feedback and felt that Dr. Everly's feedback was too direct and critical. Dr. Everly intended the feedback to be thorough providing clear areas for improvement, but did not consider the feedback may appear harsh to her international learners or demotivating.

Dr. Everly decided to revisit the feedback she left of each students paper. She recognizes that the feedback mainly focused on areas for improvement. She decided to modify her feedback to provide positive comments before and after her constructive feedback. She also decided to incorporate some audio feedback as well so her students could hear her tone and might better understand the feedback provided. After modifying her feedback, she sent an announcement to the class letting the students know that if they have questions about their specific feedback they could setup a meeting with her during her office hours.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do cultural differences impact the way your learners receive feedback?
2. What strategies can you implement that ensures your feedback is supportive, but also constructive?
3. How can offering a variety of feedback methods (video, audio, written) improve comprehension?
4. How can you assess the impact adjusting your feedback approach has on your students performance and motivation?

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7. Supporting Online Learners from Diverse Backgrounds

Chapter Overview

In chapter seven, faculty will explore strategies to support online learners from different time zones and those facing technology issues. This chapter focuses on providing support, resources, and equitable learning opportunities to all learners.

Strategies for Supporting Learners with Time Zone Differences

Faculty who teach online classes will likely have students from different time zones. Time zone differences can present unique challenges for online learners. In synchronous online classes, these challenges can be more difficult than in asynchronous online classes. However, time zone differences affect all online learners. To support learners from varying time zones, faculty should include the time zone with the assignment due date and time. Faculty could also provide learners with a “grace” period for assignment submissions. For example, say an assignment is due on Sunday, October 20th at 11:59PM EST,

faculty could provide a one day “grace” period without penalty. This would not only provide learner flexibility, but also account for varying time zones which could confuse students. Faculty should also be mindful of their office hour times. Staggering office hours at various times throughout the week and day will ensure accommodation of different time zones. Lastly, faculty should ensure they are communicating assignment due dates and times with time zone regularly throughout the course. By utilizing some of these strategies to support learners in different time zone, faculty are reducing a barrier students may have, allowing them to focus more on the course content and stay motivated in the course.

Addressing Access Issues

The utilization of and access to technology is a vital component of online classes. Without technology literacy or access learners will likely struggle to be successful in the course. Additionally, learners who are taking online classes in the U.S. while in their home country may face additional challenges, such as restrictions on course materials. Faculty can help support students with access issues by ensuring that most of the materials can be easily downloaded for offline access. This can allow students without a stable internet connection to download the materials and read them offline. Additionally, if faculty are using external technology platforms, it is important that they provide, clear step-by-step instructions on how to access these resources and provide help resources for students who might need assistance. For learners who cannot access certain materials due to restrictions by their country, faculty can provide students with alternative resources that meet the learning outcomes of the course.

Ensuring Equitable Learning Opportunities Through Resources

Ensuring equitable learning opportunities in online classes is not always easy and does not always have to rely solely on the faculty member. Each university is different, but many offer a wide range of student support services designed to meet the needs of online learners. Faculty who teach online should become familiar with the resources available for students. This allows faculty to build additional support for the students outside of the classroom. Some important student support services that faculty should be familiar with and share with their students include:

1. Tutoring assistance
2. Mental health services
3. Accommodation and accessibility services
4. International services
5. IT services

Throughout their online classes, faculty should proactively share these resources, especially in the first few weeks when students are likely to face challenges. Additionally, ensure that links and contact information for these resources are available within your online class and easily accessible.

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8. Continuous Improvement Through Self-Reflection

Chapter Overview

In chapter eight, faculty discover the importance of continuous self-reflection. This chapter encourages faculty to assess their own teaching style, identify areas for growth, adapt where needed, and continue to learn and develop to become a more culturally responsive instructor.

Inclusive Online Learning Reflection

Now that you have learned how to create inclusive online learning environments, let's reflect on what you consider an inclusive classroom. The [Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University \(2017\)](#) defines inclusive teaching as “an explicit intellectual and affective inclusion of all students into our fields and disciplines, through course content, assessment, and/or pedagogy.” In other words, it means designing and teaching courses to ensure equitable access and participation for all students, regardless of their background, learning style, ability, or other personal

characteristics. This does not mean removing academic standards or course expectations, but rather ensuring that all students have a fair opportunity to engage with the material and demonstrate their learning. By fostering inclusive classrooms, faculty create a sense of belonging, respect, and value for each student's unique perspective and experiences. Not only do inclusive classrooms improve equity and access, they also allow diverse perspectives that enrich the learning experience for all students. For intercultural classrooms, they also prepare students for an increasingly globalized world and empower and motivate students from all backgrounds to engage in the course.



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To start this chapter, here are a few additional questions about inclusive classrooms to begin your self-reflection.

1. How does your personal definition of an inclusive classroom align with the Sheridan Center's definition, how does it differ?
2. Reflecting on your current online course, which aspects already promote inclusivity, and which areas could benefit from improvement?
3. What are some specific strategies you can implement in your next online course to ensure equal access and

participation for all students?

4. How do you currently gather feedback from students on the inclusivity of your course, and how could you integrate more student input?
5. How do cultural backgrounds influence both students' learning and your own teaching style?
6. Does your course design and teaching methods consider the unique needs of students from diverse cultural contexts?
7. Are there elements in your course content or delivery that might unintentionally reflect cultural bias?
8. Do you invite diverse perspectives into classroom discussions, and how can you encourage more cross-cultural interaction?

The Importance of Reflection in Culturally Responsive Teaching

As highlighted throughout this book, in culturally responsive teaching, self-reflection is an important practice. The continuous process of self-reflection allows faculty to better understand the cultural influences that shape their teaching, identify biases, and ultimately improve the learning experience for all learners. The importance of self-reflection when teaching across cultures has been shared in many chapters throughout this book, let's reflect:

Creating Accessible and Engaging Content (Chapter 3):

Consider the following:

- How are your course materials designed to ensure they are both accessible and culturally inclusive?
- Could your materials unintentionally reflect a single cultural perspective while excluding others?
- Do your course activities and assessments engage

and relate to a diverse range of cultures?

Building Community in Online Learning (Chapter 4):

Consider the following:

- How can you facilitate peer interaction and create opportunities for cross-cultural engagement?
- Do your communication methods support all students in feeling included in online discussions?
- How can you encourage students from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their perspectives to enhance your online classroom?

Intercultural Competence in Online Learning (Chapter 5):

Consider the following:

- How could your own cultural biases influence interactions with students?
- Do you make assumptions about your students' learning styles based on cultural stereotypes?
- What strategies can you implement to better understand and address the cultural backgrounds and needs of your students?

Supporting Online Learners from Diverse Backgrounds (Chapter 7):

Consider the following:

- How can you support students who come from different time zones, have limited access to technology, or face language barriers?
- How could you find better ways to assist learners, such as offering flexible deadlines or providing additional resources for those who need it?
- What steps can you take to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equitable access

to learning opportunities in your course?

By reflecting on the chapters throughout this book, I hope you recognize that culturally responsive teaching requires ongoing reflection, it is not a one time process. Through continuous self-reflection, you can ensure that your teaching evolves to meet the diverse needs of all your learners, creating a more engaging and inclusive online learning environment.

So What's next?

This book has emphasized the importance of continuous learning, reflection, and improvement needed to become a more culturally responsive instructor. So what's next? Below are a few strategies for you to consider as you take what you learned from this book and apply it to your teaching practices.

1. **Revise Your Course Content:** You can start by reviewing your course materials and asking yourself if the content reflects a diverse range of cultural perspectives. For example, do your activities and assessments include global perspectives or are they mostly focused on Western ideas? You can also assess your content for accessibility. Confirm that your content can be easily understood by learners from different cultural backgrounds or accessibility needs. Utilize the checklist shared in chapter three to aid you.
2. **Promote Cross-Cultural Collaboration:** Reflect on how you encourage collaboration among students in your online classes. Are you intentionally creating opportunities for students from different backgrounds to interact and learn from one another? Cross-cultural collaboration helps to build community and enhance the learning experience, but it does requires thoughtful facilitation.

3. **Develop Your Intercultural Competence:** Building intercultural competence requires continual growth. Engage in professional development, to continue learning more about online learning and cultural diversity. By continuing to expand your knowledge, you can improve your ability to teach a diverse student body. Additionally, collaborate with your peers to share best practices or challenges in creating culturally inclusive online classrooms can help you grow as an educator.
4. **Enhance Communication and Feedback:** Reflection in culturally responsive teaching means recognizing the diverse ways students communicate and engage in online environments. Revisit how you provide feedback to students. Ensure you are offering constructive, culturally sensitive feedback. Feedback plays a vital role, particularly for international students, in building confidence and guiding them toward success. Additionally, consider your communication style and ensure you are using clear language and avoid jargon.
5. **Collect and Act on Student Feedback:** Reflection is not only about you personally assessing your own teaching practices, but it should include solicited feedback. Gather feedback from your learners, listen to their feedback, and act upon their feedback.

In culturally responsive teaching, there is no final destination, it is just an ongoing adventure of teaching across borders. Throughout this book, the importance of ongoing reflection has been highlighted, but it is equally as important to continue learning. Continue conducting research and engaging in professional development related to teaching multicultural and online classes. By following these next steps and committing to continual learning, you are not just enhancing your own teaching, you are actively contributing to a more inclusive, engaging, and culturally diverse learning environment.

End of Book Survey

Please share your feedback in this [End of Book Survey](#) to provide the author with helpful feedback that can be used to enhance this book.

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Resources:

Instructors and instructional designers looking to deepen their understanding of culturally responsive online teaching may find the following resources useful:

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