Information for Faculty and Advisors of International Students

This document has been developed as a general resource for faculty & advisors of international students. Oberlin's international students come from approximately 40 different countries and bring with them a rich diversity of backgrounds and cultures. While most international students settle in quickly and thrive at Oberlin, some may need time to adjust to Oberlin’s academic culture. The cultural differences identified in this document represent some of the more common adjustment challenges international students may face. Not all international students will experience these challenges and some may experiences challenges not identified here. Please contact Ann Deppman, x58540 or adeppman@oberlin.edu, for additional guidance.

Cultural differences that may affect advising

- **Liberal arts**: International students may come from a culture where all undergraduate coursework is taken in the field of the major. Students from these cultures may be surprised to learn that they will need to fulfill distribution requirements at Oberlin.
- **Family influence**: International students may come from a culture where the family plays a significant role in determining what a student’s choice of study and career path may be. Students from these cultures may not feel at liberty to pursue courses of study that interests them if that course of study would contradict the wishes of the family.
- **Decision-making**: International students may come from a culture where decisions about academic and social activities were all made for them. Students from these cultures may need additional assistance planning a course of study in their first semesters.
- **Role of silence**: International students may come from a culture where silence is a comfortable response and is interpreted as a sign of respect. Students from these cultures may struggle with class participation or may pause at length before responding to a thought or question.
- **Face**: International students may come from a culture where it is important to preserve ‘face’. Students coming from these cultures may be risk averse and avoid admitting weakness or need for help.
- **Regard for rules**: International students may come from a culture where there is little confidence that rules will be applied equitably. Students from these cultures may have a tendency to diminish the importance of adhering to rules or policies and may expect that exceptions or favors will be available if they ask the right person.

Cultural differences that may affect academics

- **Honor code**: International students may come from cultures with different standards for academic honesty. Students from these cultures, particularly those from collectivist societies such as China, will benefit from explicit instruction regarding citation practices and limits on collaboration.
- **Writing assignments**: International students may come from a culture that used writing assignments as a means to report rather than as a means to develop information. Students from these cultures may benefit from taking advantage of the Writing Associates program, connecting with resources available in Student Academic Services, and taking entry-level courses in Rhetoric.
- **Memorization**: International students may come from a culture that emphasized memorization and repetition. Students from these backgrounds may struggle with open-ended assignments and how/what/when/where/why questions.
• **Class attendance:** International students may come from a culture where class time was spent covering the same material that was in assigned readings. Students from these cultures may be surprised to find that class periods cover different content from the readings and that they will be responsible for both.

• **Class participation:** International students may come from a culture that did not encourage class participation. Students from these cultures may be surprised to learn that they must contribute to the classroom discussion and may need assistance in overcoming cultural barriers towards speaking in class.

• **Grading:** International students may come from a culture where work was marked “right” or “wrong.” Students from these backgrounds may be confused by constructive feedback and may struggle with questions for which there is no “right” answer.

• **Accessing resources:** International students may come from a culture with a lack, or negative connotation of, support resources. Students from these backgrounds may have a difficult time seeking help and need extra encouragement to connect with sources of support on campus.

• **Choice of major:** International students may come from cultures where certain majors are considered more employable than others. Students from these cultures may be inclined to think quite pragmatically about their choice of major.

**English as a second language**

• International students for whom English is a second language occasionally request extensions due to the extra time it takes them to read and write in English. Extensions during the regular semester are at the discretion of the faculty. Being a non-native English speaker is not considered a disability and will not give rise to an extra time accommodation during the final exam period.

**Visa Regulations that affect academics & employment opportunities**

• **Full time requirement:** Visa regulations require international students to register for a full-time load each semester. They are allowed an exception in the final semester to take only as many courses as they need in order to complete their degree. An exception to this regulation exists for students who need a part-time load for medical reasons.

• **Choice of major:** Some international students want to stay in the U.S. to work after graduation. Visa regulations allow students to apply for permission to work in the U.S. if the employment that is connected directly to their major. Some majors allow students a longer period of employment than others. International students who wish to stay in the U.S. to work post graduation should consult with the international student advisor regarding the length of employment the regulations currently permit for their major.

**Faculty often express an interest in creating a classroom environment that is supportive of international students. As appropriate, the following techniques may be helpful for all students and are especially supportive of international students:**

• Provide students with 30-60 seconds to think before responding to a question.

• Provide key vocabulary before class.

• Provide written and verbal directions for tests and assignments.

• Limit the use of cultural references and idiomatic expressions.

• Invite the sharing of international perspectives.

• Provide clear guidelines for academic honesty expectations.