This document includes some general guidelines and information for advisors of international students. 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 most common adjustment challenges international students face. Not all international students will experience these challenges and some may experience challenges not identified here. Please contact Ann Deppman, x58540 or adeppman@oberlin.edu, for additional guidance.

**First Year, First Semester Considerations**

Assess academic preparation:
- Written materials & test scores (admission materials)
- ESOL placement test (placement recommendation and essay)
- General comprehension (ability to follow conversation, email instructions, etc.)
- Past educational experiences (ask about past experience writing papers in English, etc.)

Initial advising and registration:
- Encourage registration for an ESOL/RHET/W-Int. course (if recommended as a result of ESOL placement test)
- Encourage student to review syllabi posted on blackboard for courses being considered
- Inquire whether there are family expectations of certain coursework or field of study
- Address cultural assumptions that may emerge regarding certain areas of study
- Frame help-seeking behavior as a positive in U.S. academic culture
- Remind students that they must register for a full-time load of at least 3.5 courses per semester.

Before fall break:
- Check-in with student and FYSP, RHET, or another professor re student’s academic adjustment
- Follow-up as needed
- Review P/NP, W options
- Inquire whether student has accessed any support resources

Midterms/spring semester advising and registration:
- Ask student for own assessment of performance course by course
- Discuss any concerns raised by FYSP or other faculty
- Inquire about amount of time spent studying
- If student avoided taking reading/writing courses in the first semester, encourage again
- Inquire about adjustment outside the classroom
- Inquire about communication w/ friends & family back home

**If Concerns Develop:**

Writing: refer to writing center, encourage student to take RHET 100 or another RHET class if student has not already registered for one, or to Mudd reference librarians for help with citation issues.
General academic performance: refer to professor’s office hours, student academic services for tutoring, reading strategies or time-management, and CLEAR for assistance with sciences and QFR courses.
Cultural adjustment: refer to Ann Deppman, Andres Fernandez, or Counseling Center.
Residential life: refer to RA, or to Ann Deppman or Andres Fernandez.
Unsure?: refer to Ann Deppman.
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 a student’s course of study and career path. Students from these cultures may not feel at liberty to pursue coursework that contradicts the wishes of the family. Likewise, students from these cultures may feel obliged to take certain coursework in order to satisfy their family.

Decision-making: International students may come from a culture where decisions about academic and social activities were 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 tend to diminish the importance of adhering to rules or policies and may expect that exceptions or favors will be available if they connect with the right person.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THAT MAY AFFECT ACADEMICS:

Honor code: International students may come from cultures with different standards for academic citation. Students from these cultures, particularly those from collectivist societies such as China, will benefit from explicit instruction regarding expected 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.

Critical thinking: International students may come from a culture where there is an expectation that there is one right answer or one correct interpretation of events. Students from these cultures and may struggle with thesis development and support in papers and in general with questions for which there is no “right” or “wrong” answer.

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 in some courses class participation is a requirement that will affect their grade.

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.

Accessing resources: International students may come from a culture with a lack, or negative connotation of, support resources. Students from these backgrounds may be reluctant to seek help and need encouragement to access support resources.

Choice of major: International students may come from a culture 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.

F-1 Visa Regulations to be aware of (no action needed from Advisor):

- Students must register for a full-time load unless they have obtained a visa exception.
- Students may work on campus without authorization up to 20 hours per week.
- Students may not work off-campus until they have completed 1 year (2 full-time semesters) of academic study, have declared a major, and have successfully applied for employment authorization under the terms of their visa.
- Off-campus employment must be directly connected to the student’s declared major.
- Some STEM majors (3-2 Eng, ACHS, Biochemistry, BIOL, CHEM, CSCI, ENVS, GEOL, MATH, NSCI, PHYS) are eligible for additional employment benefits.

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