A Faculty and Staff Guide

Supporting International Students

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UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD
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Introduction

This guide is meant to serve as a reference to faculty and staff interested in supporting international students throughout their time at the University of Hartford. You will find information on academic expectations, cultural differences, academic advising considerations, and other general recommendations for working with the international student population. If you have additional questions, you may contact either Nicole Kurker-Stewart or Richard Lazzerini. Please also refer to our website.

Course Structure and Expectations

Given various cultural barriers, it can be helpful to clearly define your expectations for all students at the start of the course:

- Describe the purpose of the syllabus and each of its components.
- If relevant to your course, clarify the distinction between take-home, in class, and open-book exams.
- Review your expectations for course assignments and class participation. You may want to further clarify that throughout the course, it is not only acceptable but anticipated for students to respectfully share differing opinions.
- Clearly define your expectations regarding collaboration and group projects, including which portions of the assignment can be done in a group, and which must be done individually.

Grading System and Course Credit

Students may be unfamiliar with our grading system and the standard calculation of GPA. They may not understand the concept of course credits, such as the number of credits assigned for each course, and how that number is calculated into their overall GPA. Explain your grading system, including letter vs. number grades, the percentage of each assignment as it pertains to the overall grade, and the effect of your course’s final grade on the student’s overall GPA.

Academic Integrity

Incorporate a clear, prominent statement in the syllabus regarding academic integrity in your classroom, and review it on the first day of class. Go over the definitions of common terms relating to academic dishonesty as they pertain to your course, such as
plagiarism, cheating, fabricating/ facilitating academic instruction, etc. Finally, explain the range of consequences that can occur as a result of academic dishonesty.

Research and Citation Methods

Research and citation methods differ among educational systems around the world. Some students may come from societies where attribution is unnecessary, or where paraphrasing is considered disrespectful. In other cultures, citing word-for-word without mentioning sources might indicate a level of respect to the author, whereas changing the author’s text may be judged as disrespectful. Again, it is helpful to clarify citation expectations with your students, or direct them to the Student Success Center for a workshop on plagiarism and proper citations.

- Define your required citation style, distinguishing if necessary how your style differs from other citation methods.
- Offer samples demonstrating both correct and incorrect citations, including appropriate paraphrasing techniques.
- Provide students with resources, such as the Student Success Center, the Center for Reading and Writing, Learning Plus and more.

Written Assignments

Guide students with written assignments by providing examples for topics or specifying the desired topic. Request the use of particular resources in the paper (for example, articles, books, interviews, etc.). Provide students with reviews and feedback at various stages throughout the writing process. Encourage students to ask questions and clarify your expectations during each stage, including accuracy of citation methods, scope of the topic, use of materials and information from peer students, etc.

Student/Instruction Relationship

Students may come from a culture where education is formal and instructor-based, compared to the less formal and student-based educational structure here in the United States. They may not be accustomed to the type of close relationships professors have with their students. Consequently, they may feel uncomfortable meeting with a professor in an informal setting. Open dialogue, discussion, and questioning of the professor may go against cultural norms in their home country. Be patient with students, and clarify your expectations for the relationship.
Faculty Office Hours

If students come from a background where meeting with a professor outside of class is not customary, they may not utilize office hours until they feel more comfortable. Encourage students to utilize your office hours and other appointment times to further their understanding of your expectations for class meetings, papers, examinations and other assignments.

Collaboration vs. Competition (Working Together)

Depending on the country of origin, students may be accustomed to an educational environment of greater competition and less collaboration with their peers. They may not understand how to collaborate successfully, so it can be helpful to clarify what constitutes acceptable collaboration both inside and outside of the classroom.

Common Knowledge

With such diverse backgrounds, the concept of “common knowledge” will also vary across cultures. For example, in a collectivist culture, knowledge is generally considered to be community property. In this case, the concept of intellectual property may be quite foreign. Therefore, it is worthwhile when discussing general themes to provide a brief introduction and background on the topic for those who grew up in a culture outside of the United States.

Academic Advising Considerations for International Students

I. Full-time Course Load Requirement

International students on the F-1 or J-1 visas must be enrolled in a full-time course load each semester. For undergraduates, this means a minimum of 12 credits each semester and a minimum of 9 credits each semester for graduates. Exceptions can be made for students in the following cases, provided they complete a “Reduced Course Load Application Form” signed by their academic advisor:

- Students with a valid, documented medical excuse
- Students in their first semester who are experiencing difficulty with English and/or course reading requirements
• Graduate students whose course load can be considered full-time due to a research project or other exceptional reason as clarified by the academic advisor.

It is important to note that students should NOT be advised to withdraw from a course, even if they are failing, if that withdrawal will result in the student being enrolled in a less than full-time course load. To avoid this violation of immigration status, students must complete the reduced course load application with their academic advisor and meet with the International Center for authorization prior to withdrawal. Receiving a W in a course at the end of the semester is the same violation as if the student dropped the course during the add/drop period.

II. Employment Regulations

International students are not eligible to engage in any employment off campus without previously applying for work authorization through the International Center. Students are however permitted to work on campus up to a maximum of 20 hours/week during the academic semesters and up to 40 hours/week during school breaks. Please note that international students are not eligible for federal work study positions. Students can visit the International Center for a list of eligible employment locations on campus.

III. Scholarship Guidelines

Students may be subject to stricter requirements than the general visa stipulations outlined above, based on the sponsor of their individual scholarship. For example, students may be required to maintain a certain GPA, major in a particular subject, and/or be restricted to completing their academic program within a specified timeframe. In these instances, please refer the student to the International Center for guidance.

IV. Internship Requirements

After an international student has been enrolled full-time for one academic year, s/he is eligible to complete an internship, paid or unpaid, as part of his/her academic program. Off-campus internships for credit are limited to 20 hours per week during the academic year, and 40 hours per week during school breaks. Exceptions can be made, provided that the internship advisor explains to the
International Center in writing the need for a full-time internship. Please refer the student to the International Center for internship authorization.