



## Advising International Students

### Gestures and Communication

In the U.S., we can speak freely about what we think and believe. Some international students will need some time to adjust to this. It is best to be open with these students and let them know it is okay for them to tell you when they are uncomfortable with something you may be doing. Also, when in conversation, it is always a good idea to ask an international student what they think of a topic. They will not always openly share their opinions unless asked.

### Campus Involvement

If you asked students who have studied abroad who they became friends with while they were abroad, they would say other international students. This is the same at MassArt. Most of our international students either hang out with each other or keep to themselves. So, if you have an international student in your class, encourage them to get involved in community events. This way the international student will truly get a more complete look at university life in the U.S.

### Diet and Eating

Americans eat out more than they eat at home. This means that junk food and fast food are at the core of our diets. This is a huge problem for our international students! Many incoming students will never get used to this. The best thing to do is to encourage international students to cook for themselves (if a kitchen is available to them), find offerings on campus that will work for them, or to speak with Dining Services about making a change to the offerings on campus.

### Health

Not only is health care given freely to citizens of some countries, but alternative medicine is also available to them. All students at MassArt must have health insurance and this includes our international students. The student health insurance policy covers only basic medical needs. So if a student is used to, say, acupuncture therapy or herbal therapy, they would have to pay out-of-pocket. This may be a change from the practice at home.

## DID YOU KNOW...

Mental health problems for international students are often exacerbated by the **stress** associated with living away from home in a foreign environment.

Most international students coming from rapidly advancing industrial economies are **first generation students**.

English language difficulties and **unfamiliar methods of teaching and learning** are major challenges. If students struggle with English, “everything else suffers,” including their academic performance and their capacity to “connect” with others.

**Critical evaluation** and **class participation** are the greatest sources of study-related stress.

International students have to “self-manage” **without the familiar normative controls** and reference points of home.

Contrary to the stereotype of the wealthy overseas student, participants reported that some international students experienced **intense financial pressures**.

International students can have relatively high scores on **anxiety and depression**; and those students who felt their academic work was “below expectation” were more likely to score high on depression and anxiety.”

The health care system is **complex and difficult to understand**. It is difficult to describe symptoms in a second language.

International students tend to delay seeking professional help for mental health problems because in their home country there is a **stigma or a taboo**. Therefore, health issues can go untreated.

International students **aren’t finding a sense of belonging**, with constant running to class or a job.

International students are finding themselves **without traditional social markers** by which to navigate their new circumstances, and experiencing loss of (traditional) “community” supports in their home country.

“International Students and Mental Health.” *Journal of International Students*. Vol. 6/ No. 3 July/August 2016. <https://jistudents.org/6-3/> on 9/7/16.

# SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT MASSART

## A Guide to Assisting International Students:

- **In the classroom**
- **With cultural differences**
- **With general advising**

### ON CAMPUS RESOURCES

#### FOR STUDENTS WITH:

- MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES
- HEALTH INSURANCE QUESTIONS
- HOMESICKNESS, STRESS, ANXIETY

**CONTACT: BETSY SMITH, PSY.D., DIRECTOR COUNSELING AND WELLNESS CENTER**  
**CAMPUS LOCATION: KENNEDY, 2ND FLOOR**  
**T. 617-879-7760 COUNSELING@MASSART.EDU**

#### FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE:

- FALLING BEHIND ACADEMICALLY
- NEEDING ACADEMIC ADVISING
- STRUGGLING WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE

**CONTACT: ELIZABETH SMITH-FREEDMAN, ASSOCIATE DEAN ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER**  
**CAMPUS LOCATION: TOWER, 8TH FLOOR**  
**T: (617) 879-7280 ARC@MASSART.EDU**

#### FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE:

- STRUGGLING WITH CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT
- UNSURE OF IMMIGRATION RULES
- ASKING GENERAL QUESTIONS

**CONTACT: MAGGIE SHIRLAND, INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CENTER**  
**CAMPUS LOCATION: KENNEDY, 2ND FLOOR**  
**T: 617-879-7702 MSHIRLAND@MASSART.EDU**

## 10 Practical Tips for Faculty

International students enrich the MassArt community and provide new perspectives to the teaching and learning environment. Each culture is different, with unique social norms, religious viewpoints, and cultural expectations.

1 **Be proactive in communicating with international students.** Even a short conversation after class about the student's home country can help the student feel more comfortable and can build rapport. Do your best to learn how to pronounce students' names, even if it takes a few attempts.

2 **Normalize "office hours" on the first day of class** as most international students are reluctant to visit faculty offices unless they are compelled to do so. Keep in mind that in many parts of the world, professors and students rarely interact directly so some international students may seem initially distant or avoidant.

3 **Check-in with students after assigning group work** and offer suggestions. Clear group/individual expectations are also helpful as international students may not be accustomed to cooperating in an academic environment.

4 **Talk to students individually about participation and encourage students to share their unique perspectives;** ask questions like "how would this issue be perceived in your country?" to inject an international perspective on global issues.

5 **Be conscious of discussions/topics that presume a nuanced understanding of U.S. history and politics.** International students will often nod along in agreement although they may not follow the discussion.



6 **Recognize that language proficiency is not usually their primary barrier to academic success;** many international students struggle more with academic writing and the volume of reading assigned. Help international students to prioritize readings and refer students to campus resources for more help.

7 **Clarify your expectations on class policies** including attendance requirements, homework submissions, etc. If you notice an international student missing a deadline or arriving late to class consistently, use these situations as teachable moments and emphasize the importance of promptness and deadlines in the United States. Remember that international students are going through a process of cultural adjustment. Classroom culture is only one of the many ways they have to confront cultural differences every day.

8 **Provide examples of successful coursework.** Often international student struggle to understand what qualifies as an "A" paper or presentation. Providing samples of "A" work can help international students to track their progress and to identify areas where they need to improve.

9 **Understand the difference between degree-seeking and exchange students.** Exchange students make up the minority of international students at most U.S. colleges and universities are less likely to be familiar with U.S. academic culture and may experience more initial challenges.

10 **Collaborate with your office of international students and scholars.** Unsure if an issue with one of your students reflects a cultural difference? Working directly with the international student office is a great way to handle challenging interactions with students. Keep in mind that international students may have to make academic decisions to protect their immigration status. In these cases, it's best to advise students to seek help in the international student office.

University of San Diego, Office of International Students and Scholars (from NAFSA International Educator, Nov+Dec. 14. [https://www.nafsa.org/\\_/File/\\_/ie\\_novdec14\\_fsa.pdf](https://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/ie_novdec14_fsa.pdf) on 6/14/16)

### Immigration Status

Please remember that since international students are on a student visa to study in the United States, there are certain restrictions regarding course load, withdrawing from classes, documented illness, working off-campus, student participation in internships, that must be reported to the International Student Advisor or the international student could compromise his/her immigration status. If you have any questions about this, please ask the IEC for information about maintaining F-1 visa status or J-1 visa status or email Maggie Shirland, International Student Advisor, at [mshirland@massart.edu](mailto:mshirland@massart.edu).

### Language

MassArt does not have an ESL (English as a Second Language) program. Therefore, students entering have to pass the TOEFL (or Test of English Fluency Language) which lets us know that they have a high understanding of the English language. This does not, however, mean that their speaking ability matches their level of understanding. Don't assume that since a student has a hard time speaking that they don't understand what you are saying, and always be patient.

### Educational Background

The U.S. classroom setting might be a bit odd to the international student. Here, students engage in open conversation with their professors, can speak candidly and openly, and sometimes can talk without having to hold up their hand first. Many of our students come from places where the classroom is simply a lecture. Critical thinking and creativity are not a part of their classroom experience. Many students adjust to this quickly though and actually find the ability to give their opinions very refreshing; for others this can be a difficult change from their prior experience.

### Religion

In most countries, religion is as much a part of their culture as flour is to bread. It is important to remember that in some countries, there is no freedom of religion. To many international students, religion is very private.

### General Attitudes

We in the U.S. tend to be frank, outspoken, and opinionated compared to other countries in the world. Some international student might find this obnoxious, while others will find a sort of freedom with it. Also, our ideas of "independence" and "individuality" could be confusing to some students. They may be coming from a country where dependence and conformity are viewed as virtues! As with anyone who is different from you, it is best to learn from them and their life story and try to understand where they are coming from.

Adapted from Westfield State University, Vera Vlasenko, International Student Advisor