

TRAINING TUTORS TO WORK WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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WHY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

“Training Tutors to Work with International Students” is one of the best-attended training clusters provided for all College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) level tutors at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. In addition to intensive training at the beginning of each semester, small group or cluster training on specific topics is provided during the year. St. Ambrose University, a Catholic university with three colleges and several graduate programs, has a student population of 3,000. The Student Success Center employs 37 peer tutors each year. The university has an international student population of 50 individuals from 26 countries. International students often seek assistance from tutors; however, many tutors lack experience with this diverse population.

Need for Training

How did 9/11 affect tutorial programs? Building relationships is even more important as the seeds of international understanding are planted in our tutorial programs. Learning center personnel and tutors continue to examine methods and services offered to the variety of populations that they serve. Salient questions for initial discussion among tutorial staff members are: How many international students are at the institution? Where are they from? What levels of English do they use? Are they immigrant students or on student visas, thus sojourners in the United States? How many international students use the tutorial services? What main subjects are they being tutored in? Which tutors have had international experiences or meaningful interaction with international students? What resources can be

identified on campus to help with training tutors to works with international students? How do students' successes or failures depend on their cultural backgrounds and expectations and on the institution's ability to provide appropriate tutorial and academic support services? What methods best help international students learn to their highest potential? How do we demonstrate to students of all cultures that their differences are valued?

Tips for Training

The following steps will make the tutor aware of the types of students and issues that may be experienced in the tutorial setting.

Step one: (10-15 minutes, need poster board, markers, and a designated reporter)

At the start of the training session, break the tutors up into groups in order to discuss a handful of questions. One participant can record the answers to the following questions: Have you ever known a student from another country? What were your perceptions of this student? How many of the international students at our university do you know? What do you know about their home cultures? Have you tutored an international student? If so, please share your observations about the tutorial. Have you ever experienced intercultural adjustment yourself, perhaps without even leaving America? What are some examples of things that you do that seem natural to you, but a student from another culture may find rude?

Step two: (15 to 20 minutes, need masking tape)

If there are only four or five total groups of four people, have the reporter for each group read the answers to the questions. Encourage spontaneous discussion. Go around the room jumping from group to group depending on the question. If there are over 20 people in the room, then post the answers around the room on the walls with designated areas for each question. Encourage everybody in the room to walk around and read the answers to the

questions and discuss them informally. When everyone is seated, ask what surprises they found or what things they learned.

Step three: (15 minutes) Each student should write down questions and ideas to plan for building rapport during the first tutorial with an international student. Questions that may be brought up here are: How long have you been at our university? What made you decide to come here? Where do you live in your country? How long have you studied English? Tell me about your family. In addition, the tutors should be prepared to tell the tutee about him/herself. Give the tutors time to share their plans in small groups or in a large group. Compile all of the ideas at the end so that tutors will have a variety of ways to get to know the tutee.

WAYS TO COMMUNICATE WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

At the end of the session, trainers should emphasize several effective communication techniques between tutors and international students. (Indeed, these are probably techniques for working with all students)!

- ***Know what to call your tutee; learn to pronounce his/her name.*** A student from Malaysia once shared that she was at the top of her engineering class, but the professor was daunted by her long name and always said, “Hey you with the scarf.” Her lengthy name was easily shortened to one that was manageable for anybody.
- ***Tell the tutee what name to call you!*** American names seem strange too.
- ***Write down what you are saying.*** Students often learned reading and writing English overseas better than speaking or listening. In addition, the spoken

English that is used in the United States may be different from that in the rest of the world.

- ***Talk slower and personably.*** Tutors should approach tutees, as they would want to be approached in another country.
- ***Take time to recognize the tutee on campus.*** Individuals may not know many people; the tutor has already become a support system in the learning center.
- ***What am I doing wrong?*** International students want to know if they are doing something differently from how it is done in the United States. Showing them what to do and where to go can help them. Sometimes they look lost, but are reluctant to ask for help.
- ***Some American body language may be distasteful!*** If a student does not make eye contact, it may be out of respect. Women from many cultures may not want to touch or shake hands with a male. Often pointing a finger or putting hands on the hips is a sign of disrespect in many cultures.
- ***“Yes” can mean “No”!*** Some cultures never say “no” because it is disrespectful. Tutors may need to work with tutees to get an understanding about how to line up future sessions.
- ***Time means something different.*** Being on time is very American. Work with tutees to help them understand that tutors are on a schedule.
- ***Smile!*** It cannot hurt to smile, but in some Asian cultures a smile is a sign of embarrassment.
- ***Tutoring is shameful?*** In many cultures it is shameful to ask for tutoring assistance. One suggestion is to tell the tutees that many American students work

with tutors even if they are good students and the international students will be in competition for the same grades as those students, so why not use the services?

- ***Learn about the countries represented in the tutorial program!*** Make a display in the center about a country, encourage international students to share food from home; and encourage tutors to go to events where the cultures of international students are shared.

THE BEAT GOES ON!

A few years ago, a student from Japan spent hours in our academic support center! Not only did he receive tutoring in all subjects, but also he felt comfortable just sitting there and studying. As time went on, we hinted about other places where he could go to study on campus because we had limited space for our tutorials. One day he started fumbling through his Japanese-English dictionary for a word. Finally he said, “But I do not want to move, it is so *secure* here!” After that we started calling ourselves, the Academic Secure Center! Relationships and friendships built through tutorial programs at our institutions have the potential to flourish for a lifetime. In the 21st century, it is imperative that tutors understand what to expect when tutoring a student from another culture and to be provided with techniques to make the tutorial experience a successful experience for all.