US Classroom Culture: What to Expect as an International Student and Teaching Assistant

Co-Sponsored by the Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning

CSLC (Center for the Study of Languages and Cultures) 329 DeBartolo Hall
cslc.nd.edu

EAP (English for Academic Purposes)
cslc.nd.edu/programs/eap/
Weekly Workshops, Tutoring and Consultation Services, Courses for Graduate Students
loglesbe@nd.edu

Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning 353 DeBartolo Hall
kaneb.nd.edu
kaneb.nd.edu/rsrscs/resources-for-international-faculty-and-tas/
Books in Kaneb library; Links to web resources
krudenga@nd.edu

Graduate School Professional Development Activities and Calendar
http://graduateschool.nd.edu/professional_development/
http://graduateschool.nd.edu/professional_development/pdcalendar/

There are certain prevalent American cultural values that have an effect in the classroom:

Freedom of Choice
The Rights of Individuals
Interactive Thinking
Democratic Principles
Personal Responsibility

In American Universities, students:
Choose their course of study and each term’s classes
Are expected and encouraged to speak up in class
Participate in hands-on learning
Engage in opportunities for learning outside of the classroom

International Students face the difficulties of cultural differences, and the English of
the American Academy

Classroom Language Tips:
Be prepared for class.
Look up the pronunciation of uncertain words
Practice saying key words and phrases
Prepare and practice your lesson plans...
...but don't try to memorize them
Record yourself (before or during class)
Practice with a friend, and ask for feedback on clarity

In-Class Communication
Speak slowly
Be upfront about your language ability, but never apologize
Encourage students to ask you to clarify or repeat something
Give them important material (key terms and ideas) in writing, through
handouts, PowerPoint, or writing on the board

Dealing with Nervousness
Act confident and enthusiastic about what you are teaching. Energy is
contagious!
Take care with the pace of your delivery
Look out at the audience as much as possible, and make eye contact with 2 or
3 people in different places in the room
Check in with your students to verify their understanding

Help Students Pay Attention
Use listening cues and signal words
Transitional phrases help students follow the trajectory of a lesion
Use more than just your words—pitch, inflection, body language, gestures,
and eye contact all aid in auditory understanding

Purdue OWL transitional phrases (see link in post)

Practice!
Engage in English conversation in more informal settings
Talk with other graduate students in your program
Participate in campus activities
Learn more about American cultural practices, ideas, and humor

**Develop Rapport with Your Students**
- Ask students to fill out an information card;
  - include an unusual or entertaining question
- Learn the students’ names, and encourage them to learn each other's names
- Devote energy to a positive learning environment
- Relate to your students on a personal level
- Treat your students as fellow adults
- Encourage students to interact with one another—in class discussion, and
  - before and after class
- Make yourself available
- Provide positive reinforcement
- Avoid judging students
- Give nonverbal encouragement
- Refer students to help services on campus

**Your Supervising Professor**
- Consider their teaching styles; you don’t have to copy it, but if your style is
  - very different, address that with your students directly
- Be more wary of arguing with or criticizing the professor than you might in
  - your own classes; if you are certain you have valuable critical feedback
    for the professor, wait until you can talk privately
- Always speak of the professor respectfully to your students