ACRL Academic Library Services to International Students Interest Group
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International Students: Cultural Complexities of Research and Libraries
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Discussion Notes

The book *Understanding the International Student Experience* by Catherine Montgomery is a highly recommended resource.

We should be aware of and try to address the needs of international transfer students as well as first year freshmen. Some students attend a two-year college and then transfer as a way of avoiding entrance requirements like SATs. International students can be "at-risk" and need help to avoid failing and dropping out.

Cultural background can influence the educational process in a variety of ways. It can effect students' choice of research topics and their approach to academic integrity issues such as plagiarism. Gender can also be an issue; some international students may be uncomfortable with librarians of a particular gender.

International students in the U.S. come primarily from Asia, particularly India, China, Korea, and Pakistan, as well as from Latin America. Many international students are majoring in Engineering and may not have assignments that require library use. Indian students often don't need to take required ESL classes because they are taught in English. We need to find other ways of reaching these students.

Most campuses have an office for international students that provides services, helps students with visas, etc.; some also work with study abroad students. Some offices organize field trips for students that help create a sense of community. These offices are great resources for academic librarians. Other ways of reaching international students are through ESL and EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classes, graduate student housing, and student clubs.

Consider offering library workshops for international graduate students and including a tour, since students may be unfamiliar with the physical layout of libraries. Also consider offering workshops during breaks (i.e., spring break) because international students may stay on campus.

The principals of "universal design" can also apply to international students. Avoid library jargon and words like "stacks," that students may not be familiar with. The ACRL Instruction Section's multilingual glossary of library terms and definitions of research terms in English are great resources:
http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/projpubs/languagetble.pdf
http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/projpubs/definitions.pdf

Communicate in multiple ways, such as orally, in writing, using graphics, etc. Use printed handouts. Value what international students already know, avoid "talking down." Include diverse viewpoints in teaching, avoid U.S.-centric prompts and examples. Don't assume students are familiar with American movies and other aspects of American cultures, or that they view things from the same perspective as an American would.

Multilingual, multicultural staff and librarians can help students feel more comfortable asking questions. Librarians with language skills can also help international faculty with publishing in English. Providing materials in students' native languages can help students who are under pressure, in crisis or in danger of failing.

Examining our own assumptions can help us understand our international students. Avoid assumptions about students' understanding of academic integrity issues. Chinese students are not necessarily taught that copying the work of masters is acceptable. Patchwriting (copying and pasting pieces from other sources combined with the students' own writing) is widely practiced and can be part of the learning process. An excellent article about plagiarism and patchwriting is "Plagiarisms, authorships, and the academic death penalty" by Rebecca Moore Howard in *College English*, 1995.

International students may not be familiar with library services such as self-service copy machines, open stacks, interlibrary loan, and online reference services. Be prepared to show them how to use copiers, etc.

UMass Amherst Libraries has a library guide for international students:
http://guides.library.umass.edu/intl-students