

# Fostering International Student Success in Higher Education

Shawna Shapiro, Raichle Farrelly, and Zuzana Tomáš.  
Alexandria, VA: TESOL Press, 2014.

**In** this book, Shapiro, Farrelly, and Tomáš share methods for increasing international students' success in higher education by drawing from teachers' and students' experiences, theories and research in teaching and learning, and suggestions for best practices. It can serve those outside the field of TESOL while remaining engaging and useful for those most familiar with teaching English to speakers of other languages. Readers will find that this book stands out from other similar handbooks on international student success in higher education because of its pragmatic structure and accessible presentation. Most useful are the dialogue boxes and appendix that provide additional information, examples, and copyable rubrics and activities.

The volume is divided into five chapters, followed by an appendix that outlines practical applications of the topics. Chapter 1 introduces the challenges and opportunities associated with the increasing international student enrollment in colleges and universities and explains why there are often tensions around this trend. The remaining four chapters address the following questions: (1) How can students' cultural backgrounds affect success? (2) How can course content be made comprehensible to nonnative English speakers? (3) How can learning be fairly measured through assignments and assessments? and (4) How can instructors help international students integrate institutionally and feel valued in the classroom? The authors highlight their multi-pronged approach to answering these questions, drawing on existing scholarship, encouraging readers to reflect on their own practices, and including anecdotes from teachers and students to reinforce key ideas.

Chapter 2 outlines the concept of culture with a focus on U.S. academic culture. Special attention is paid to individualism and collectivism, with explicit connections to intellectual ownership, plagiarism, individual voice, and assertiveness. The second half of the chapter focuses on classroom activities and policies that help foster a welcoming learning environment and reduce the risk of cultural misunderstandings. Suggestions include activities such as icebreakers and structured group work, making all expectations for the course clear from the beginning, and avoiding cultural assumptions or unexplained pop culture references.

Chapter 3 moves from the cultural to the linguistic by asking what acquiring an additional language means and the factors which influence acquisition. Here the authors draw from scholarship about the effects of age, analytical abilities, and environmental and psychosocial factors in acquiring an additional language, and then connect these issues to realistic expectations instructors should have about their students, as well as to methods for increasing acquisition of disciplinary discourses. The authors underscore the ways in which non-ESL instructors can effectively facilitate language learning in any course, across any discipline.

Moving from the classroom lecture and activities into assessing student learning is the focus of the next chapter. Chapter 4 begins with various dilemmas instructors face in assessments including grammatical inaccuracy, plagiarism, lack of time to finish exams because of language barriers, and misunderstanding of directions. They discuss different types of assessments and grading policies, listing pros and cons for each. One point they make a strong argument for is explicitness in assignments and grading criteria, and they provide suggestions on how to improve the clarity of instructions and rubrics. Regarding special accommodations for international students, the authors present clear and concise arguments for outlining some accommodations, along with ways in which these accommodations can be made fair and manageable for students and instructors.

The final chapter focuses on how to support international students in achieving their goals while also providing opportunities for them to integrate into the academic community. Although the section about drawing on international students as a resource reiterates several of the main points already made in previous chapters, the discussion of institutional advocacy at the end of the chapter addresses issues that the rest of the volume is silent on: namely, the role of the institution in promoting international student success. This short but important section could easily be overlooked, but should be given adequate consideration.

Shapiro, Farrelly, and Tomaš provide readers an excellent foundation in the application of TESOL theories to practice in higher education. For those new to TESOL literature, this volume provides a starting point to prominent research and theory, which are presented in a clear and applied manner. However, the audience for this book can easily extend beyond educators with international students, because all of the recommendations for improving *international* student success would be equally powerful for *any* learner, and would enhance the learning experience for all students. Institutionally, writing centers and student success centers would especially benefit from Chapters 2 and 3, which provide a clear indication of the cultural and linguistic struggles students face throughout their academic and social lives. Centers for learning and teaching should not miss Chapters 4 and 5, which provide a foundation for teaching workshops offered to faculty. International centers and clubs should have a copy of this book available as well in order to promote inclusive teaching practices and equitable treatment. I have shared the book widely across my institution, and it was so well received at each of these offices that many purchased their own copies. I am also providing a workshop to other faculty at my university, as faculty have expressed their desire to “ensure that the rights of international students are honored and also make those students aware of their responsibilities and of the resources available to them” (p. 5). The PowerPoint for this workshop is available in appendix S1 and Shapiro et al.’s appendices will be used as a handout.

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## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article:

**Appendix S1.** Scaffolding Student Success PowerPoint.