

SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONER

Inclusion Practices to Meet the Needs of International Students in Higher Education



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International students have long sought to study in the United States (US), which hosts the largest number of international students, 1.1 million in 2017 (Zong & Batalova, 2018). Competition between higher education institutions in the US to attract international students has increased due to undergraduate enrollment decreases. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2018), undergraduate enrollment in the US decreased by 7% between 2010 and 2016. Since its establishment, the international program at Lewis-Clark State College (LCSC) is focused on making student success a priority, even in times of decreased numbers.

In 1980, the idea of bringing international students to LCSC was generated by a small group of people (Taylor, 2001). In the first year of the Institute of Intensive English (IIE; then called IEI), the educators of the program had five students from Venezuela, three students from Saudi Arabia, and a student from Hong Kong. The program at LCSC soon grew to around 180 students by 1987. The program was then reformatted, and the numbers of students decreased to 61 in the year after the changes were in place (Taylor, 2001). Since then, there have been many increases and decreases in the number of international students attending college classes and participating in the IIE program at LCSC. Currently, with lower numbers, the LCSC international program has turned their focus not only on increasing numbers, but also to look for ways to increase support for international students as they transition from the IIE program to taking college classes with non-international or “domestic” students and college instructors.

International Student Programs

LCSC offers many program options for international students. Students can earn a degree, study for a semester, study for a year, study intensive English through our IIE program, or a combination of IIE and college classes through our Bridge program. Many international students choose to attend LCSC because our IIE program allows us to admit students who are at the intermediate or advanced level, and may not yet meet regular college admission requirements. LCSC is also known

for its small class sizes and high-quality instruction. The IIE offers a comprehensive and intensive English-language program, commonly referred to as an Intensive English Program (IEP), for students who are determined to be at the intermediate or advanced level. These students attend 24 hours of English-language classes each week. Bridge students attend 18 hours of English-language courses each week, in addition to a three-credit college class.

Through successful completion of a Bridge program, students are given admission into college without taking specific English proficiency assessments. This program is rigorous and demanding. However, graduates recognize the important preparation the program offers for successfully studying in the US. Once students complete the IIE program, they are eligible to attend college and are transitioned into regular college classrooms with domestic students and college instructors.

Need for Inclusive Practices

LCSC has a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), which was established in 2014. The CTL supports faculty in their endeavors to enhance their teaching and the student learning experience. In 2018, the CTL established an Inclusive Practices Certificate (IPC), which offers an opportunity to enhance understanding of issues related to diversity and inclusion at LCSC and to develop inclusive practices to engage and teach all of our students. A presentation to the IPC faculty was provided in the spring of 2019 (Mullen & Carmack, 2019a). The presentation reviewed the international student programs available and the admissions requirements. During the presentation the following key points were highlighted:

- Resources for international students at LCSC are limited to the writing center and the International Club (IC).
- Faculty were surprised to discover how limited the LCSC resources were and that international students had very little support outside the classroom. This heightened the faculty's awareness of the need for more support on campus for international students.
- Relaying testing requirements for acceptance into college increased the faculty's awareness of testing methods and their meaning. This led non-IIE faculty to understand why students may need additional support.
- The need for additional support for international students was compared to similar needs of rural students or nontraditional students. Faculty who engaged in inclusive practices for rural and nontraditional students were excited that they could use the same research-based practices to facilitate success for international students.

Questions regarding types of diversity generated a

discussion and awareness that many faculty members had experienced feelings of isolation and exclusion. The discussion regarding these key points allowed non-IIE educators to realize a connection and understanding of the struggles of international students. This allowed non-IIE faculty to realize how detrimental these struggles are to the success of international students and the need to incorporate inclusive practice in their classrooms to support international student success.

Inclusion Practices

Owens, Doyle, and Matz (2018) provide research-based strategies to ensure students have a sense of belonging. These strategies can be used as inclusion practices for international students to increase their sense of belonging. These strategies include (a) being culturally competent, (b) knowing how to correctly pronounce students' names, (c) being patient with different accents used by students, and (d) providing adequate time for students to translate information. When students are acquiring a new language, they must translate information provided in the new language to their first language, process the information, determine a response, and translate the response from their first language into the new language. This realization for college instructors shows the importance for providing time and patience when asking multilingual students questions or to respond in class.

Robertson (n.d.) provides research-based strategies on how to meet the needs of ELLs. These strategies can be used as inclusion practices for international students to ensure that their instructional needs are being met. The first strategy is building on background knowledge to increase comprehension. Frey (2015) provides a brief overview about assessing background knowledge and building on background knowledge. Formative assessment can be used to determine what students know and do not know. Read alouds or shared readings can be used to build on background knowledge as well as using guest speakers. However, Frey points out that it is up to teachers to build on student background knowledge.

The second strategy is explicitly teaching vocabulary and structure (Robertson, n.d.). Shehane (2017) provides an example of explicitly teaching vocabulary. He successfully pre-teaches vocabulary in an art classroom. The third strategy is increasing language production and peer interactions (Robertson, n.d.). The importance of peer interaction for ELLs is highlighted by August (2012) through science activities. These activities were used to empower ELLs to then tutor English proficient students on the science activities. This was done to equalize the status between the ELLs and English proficient students in that the ELLs had an advantage over the English proficient students, because they were taught the science

activities directly. English proficient students need to be encouraged to interact in English with ELLs.

The fourth strategy is increasing writing opportunities (Roberson, n.d.). ESL Saigon (2016) suggests the following writing activities: (a) providing pictures of vocabulary with space to write, (b) providing opportunities to practice the alphabet, (c) providing sentences with space to rewrite the sentences in their own words, (d) providing pictures with space to write their own sentences, (e) providing opportunities to practice writing words, and (f) providing new words every week for students to learn to read and write correctly. While these activities are specifically designed for young ESL/ELA learners, they can easily be adapted to be appropriate for ESL students to learn new vocabulary at the college level.

Training and Supports for Higher Education Faculty

During their presentation at the Spokane ESL Conference, Mullen and Carmack (2019b) solicited feedback regarding the training and support needed for higher education faculty to meet the needs of international students. Participants shared that they all felt excluded or that they did not belong at some point,

and it was important for higher education faculty to understand these feelings and be able to empathize with international students who may feel excluded or that they do not belong. Most of the participants shared that they had been considered a minority at some point, which also allowed them to connect with international students. The majority of the participants had traveled or lived outside the US, which they said also allowed them to better relate to international students. Many of the participants had someone outside of their culture included in their family through marriage, adoption, or other relationships. Identifying such experiences within higher education faculty through training opportunities may serve to assist them to better connect and build positive relationships with international students.

Mullen and Carmack (2019b) also received feedback from participants regarding needed supports for international students and higher education faculty. Moving forward, efforts will be made to implement these needed supports for international students and non-IIE faculty at LCSC. Efforts will also be made to continue sharing these needed supports with other professionals in the field in the hopes of increasing the success of international students.

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