

# Introduction

In this book, we explore the challenges and opportunities that accompany the rise of international student populations in U.S. higher education. (Herein, *higher education* refers to tertiary/postsecondary education.) Over the past decade, the number of international students studying in English-dominant countries has risen dramatically—in some cases doubling or even tripling since 2001 (see sidebar, International Student Enrollment Trends). From an institutional perspective, increasing the numbers of international students has several benefits, including diversification of the student body, higher prestige for the institution, and increased revenues during times of economic uncertainty. Alongside these benefits come a number of challenges, however—particularly for classroom instructors, who may face difficult questions such as the following:

- What do I need to know about students' cultural backgrounds in order to help them to be successful in U.S. academic culture?
- How can I ensure that the content for my course is comprehensible to students who are still learning English?
- How do I design assignments and assessments that measure student learning fairly, but still acknowledge the difficulty of doing academic work in a second or foreign language?

## **International Student Enrollment Trends**

### **Worldwide Growth Since 2001**

Host Country	Number of Students		
	2001	2005	2010
United States	475,168	590,158	684,807
United Kingdom	225,722	318,399	389,958
Australia	105,764	177,034	217,231
Canada	42,711	69,126	95,590 (2009)
Ireland	8,207	12,887	13,489
New Zealand	11,069	40,774	37,878

Region of Origin	Students Studying in the United States in 2010
Africa	36,734
North America, Central America, Caribbean	60,827
South America	32,273
Asia	479,397
Europe	70,243
Oceania	5,046

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.)

### **Top 3 Countries of Origin for International Students in 2011–2012**

Place of Origin	Students	% of Total
China	194,029	25.4
India	100,270	13.1
South Korea	72,295	9.5

Source: Institute of International Education (n.d.)

- How might I treat international students as a linguistic and cultural asset in the classroom, and help them to become institutionally integrated?

This book is written for instructors wrestling with these questions. Our aim is to help college-level teachers better understand the backgrounds, needs, and contributions of international students, so that the teachers can be effective not only in supporting this population, but in helping their institutions make the most of what an increasingly internationalized student body has to offer.

## **Defining Our Terms**

Throughout this book, *international student* refers to a student who moves to another country (the “host country”) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education (e.g., college or university). Most of these students do not speak English as their first or primary language. We use the term *domestic students* to refer to students who were born and raised in the host country (the United States, in our case) and are attending college or university alongside international students. This group of domestic students often includes *resident immigrant* students, who may have been born in other countries but attained some or all of their schooling in the host country. This third group straddles the two categories of domestic and international: Resident immigrant students also engage in cultural and linguistic negotiation at our institutions, and may have academic needs

and challenges similar those of international students. However, because many immigrant students have spent much of their lives in the host country, their past educational experiences may more closely resemble those of domestic students. Although many of the strategies shared in this book may be helpful for supporting resident immigrant students (as well as other domestic students), our focus is primarily on international students. In particular, we have in mind students who are relatively new to the United States and are navigating an unfamiliar culture in addition to developing their proficiency in social and academic English.

Throughout this book, we use the terms *instructors* and *teachers* to refer to the various individuals responsible for classroom instruction at U.S. institutions of higher education. This includes faculty at various levels, graduate student instructors (teaching assistants), and staff who have teaching responsibilities. We recognize that teaching contexts vary widely across institutions, and have tried to make this text relevant to a range of instructional situations.

## **Opportunities and Challenges of International Student Enrollment**

What do international students gain from enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities? According to international ranking agencies, the vast majority of top-ranking colleges and universities are in the United States and the United Kingdom (e.g., *US News and World Report*, 2012). The prestige attributed to these institutions has been extended to the countries in which they reside. Earning a degree from an institution in these countries is considered by many international students to be not only an academic and professional achievement, but also an indicator of English language proficiency, as well a marker of social status. For many international students, studying in the U.S. or another English-dominant country is the most viable pathway to future success, either in their home countries or on the global job market (see sidebar, International Student Enrollment Trends).

What do U.S. colleges and universities gain from international student enrollment? As we alluded to earlier, there are a number of benefits to having an increasingly international student body. Many institutions see the presence of foreign-born students as part of their

approach to internationalization, alongside other initiatives, such as study abroad programs, the establishment of branch campuses in other countries, and globally oriented curricular offerings (courses/programs) at the home institution (Knight, 2004). The goal of such efforts is to increase all students' cultural awareness and to prepare them to engage more effectively as global citizens (Knight, 2004; Leask, 2009). International student recruitment is one means by which institutions can become more globally oriented, therefore, while at the same time attracting the "best and brightest" from around the world.

However, institutional excellence is not the only rationale behind international student recruitment. The financial incentives cannot be overlooked. With the instability of economies worldwide and in the United States, and reductions in federal and state funding allocations for higher education, many U.S. colleges and universities have come to view international students as a new revenue source. Many experts have claimed, in fact, that budget shortages are the primary driving force behind increased recruitment efforts at many U.S. colleges and universities (e.g., National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2012).

This economic incentive can lead to financial exploitation. International students often pay tuition at rates higher than what is paid by out-of-state domestic students (Marcucci & Johnstone, 2007). They also may be expected to pay additional fees for required language testing or remedial ESL classes (Shapiro, 2012). Lack of institutional planning and support is also a concern, as many schools decide to admit higher numbers of international students without articulating a plan for monitoring and support of that population. This creates resentment among instructors, who may feel that they have not been adequately prepared to address the needs of this new population. As a result, concerns about fair treatment of international students are prevalent, because many institutions have not addressed the question: Whose job is it to ensure that international students have the academic, linguistic, and social support that they need to be successful?

This question can only be answered through extensive dialogue and collaborative decision-making at each institution. However, in this book, we help instructors to understand their role in fostering the success of international students in their classes. This book is undergirded by

an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of international students. We believe international students have a right to equitable treatment by their institutions, including inclusive teaching practices, appropriate support resources, and nonpunitive policies. These students also have a responsibility, however, to communicate effectively with staff and instructors, to put in sufficient effort toward their academic goals, and to make use of the programs and services designed to support them. Instructors can help 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.

## **Our Background and Motivations**

All three authors have worked in higher education for a number of years, supporting instructors, staff, and administrators in their work with international students. We have taught in a variety of settings, including public research universities, private liberal arts colleges, and English language institutes. We offer courses designed specifically for international students, as well as courses for mixed groups of international and domestic students. Collectively, we have a broad knowledge base about the beliefs and experiences of instructors, staff, and students, developed through our empirical research (interviews, surveys, etc.) as well as through our participation in countless workshops, committees, task forces, and individual consultations. We draw on this knowledge base daily in our collaborations with academic departments, writing programs, writing/learning centers, English as a second language [ESL] programs, international student resource centers, faculty development programs, and other entities. Over the years, we have observed that there are very few books written for U.S. higher education instructors on the topic of international student support. Our aim in writing this book is to present the very best of what we have to offer as teachers, researchers, and consultants—to share the insights, strategies, and resources that our colleagues have found to be most useful.

## Our Approach

### Building on What Teachers Already Know and Do

There are several key features of our approach to professional development. First is that we aim to build on what teachers already know and do. This means that we ask readers to reflect on their past experiences and to consider how those experiences inform their pedagogical practices. We aim to cultivate the sorts of “light bulb moments” we see in our day-to-day work, when teachers become aware of how a relatively small choice—such as defining key terms prior to a reading, incorporating more visuals into course lecture, using a small-group format for class discussion, or developing a rubric for writing assessment—can greatly improve academic outcomes for international students. These sorts of choices are generally considered pedagogical “best practice,” but have additional benefits for international students, as they help to increase comprehension, lower anxiety, and make expectations more explicit. We know that many instructors already think deeply about their teaching, and have likely implemented strategies and activities that are of great benefit to international students. (In fact, many of the ideas we share in this book have come from instructors who are *not* specialists in teaching English to speakers of other languages.) In essence, we aim to build on our readers’ existing repertoire of successful practices, so that they have a deeper understanding of how their pedagogical choices impact the learning experience for international students.

### Drawing on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Second, we draw on scholarship of teaching and learning to present the rationale for suggested pedagogical practices. We incorporate concepts from research in intercultural communication, applied linguistics, and education as part of the theoretical framework for this text. We pair these concepts with vignettes and examples from teachers and students across disciplines, as well as with reflection questions and other “food for thought.” We hope our readers will come away with a solid grounding in educational praxis—the intersection of theory, practice, and reflection—regarding their work with international students.

## Promoting an Inclusive Approach to Teaching

Finally, we believe that many of the strategies that are helpful to international students are in fact beneficial for *all* students. In other words, we see international student support as one component of an inclusive approach to teaching (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). We know that many college instructors have already adapted their classroom pedagogy in numerous ways to respond to the increased racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity seen in the student body over the past several decades. This book builds on that repertoire by illuminating the ways that instructors can further tailor instruction to the backgrounds and needs of international students. We show how increased attention to cultural and linguistic aspects of the instructional process can benefit all students—both domestic and international. Although we focus largely on classroom practices, we occasionally highlight ways that instructors might work with other entities on their campuses not only to support international students, but to encourage cultural competency and global citizenship for the academic community as a whole.

## Overview of the Book

In this first chapter, we have provided a context and rationale for this volume. Chapter 2 discusses the role of cultural background in the educational experiences of international students. We provide an overview of key elements of U.S. academic culture, highlighting common practices and expectations that might be unfamiliar to students who were educated in other countries. We then provide strategies instructors can employ to help international students adjust to U.S. academic culture, including ways to be explicit about expectations, build classroom community, and attend to cultural background knowledge that might be important for grasping course material.

In Chapter 3, we shift the focus to language proficiency as a factor in the teaching and learning of international students. We discuss key factors in adult language learning, drawing on theories in second language acquisition (SLA). We connect three specific SLA concepts—*scaffolding*, *interaction*, and *noticing*, to a variety of practices that instructors can adopt when delivering a lecture, facilitating class discussion, using course readings, and making other pedagogical decisions. Such practices help to further students'

language development in addition to supporting their learning of academic content.

Chapter 4 builds on the previous chapter, examining more closely how we measure student learning, through assignments and assessment. We first present some best practices in assessment. Then, we delve into some of the most difficult assessment-related issues, including cultural bias, plagiarism, test anxiety, and fairness in grading/evaluation. We end the chapter by articulating our views on some of the accommodations that are occasionally made for international students, emphasizing the importance of an inclusive approach to student support.

Chapter 5 focuses on ways to empower international students to contribute fully to our communities. We first explore how instructors can encourage students' academic and social integration. Then, we return to the concept of opportunities presented by internationalization, outlining ways that instructors can draw on the linguistic and cultural assets of international students, and can integrate global perspectives into their courses. We hope this final chapter highlights the many benefits of having international students in our classrooms, and offers insights into how we can cultivate global citizenship for all of our students. We end this chapter with suggestions for how instructors can engage in institution-wide conversations about international student support and advocacy.

Throughout the book, we use sidebars to incorporate quotes, anecdotes, scenarios, statistics, and reflection questions that reinforce key ideas. Within the text, we provide pedagogical strategies and activities applicable to content courses in a variety of academic disciplines. The appendices to this volume provide a wealth of additional “hands-on” resources, including sample grading rubrics, oral presentation resources, and information about addressing grammar errors. Also included is an annotated list of online resources and suggestions for further reading.

We hope that our pragmatic orientation throughout this book will help readers to internalize the information presented and incorporate what they have learned into course design and day-to-day classroom instruction. We believe our readers will come away with a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly internationalized student body, as well as insights and strategies that enhance the learning experience for all students.