

Internationalizing the Campus

UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURES OF UWSP STUDENTS

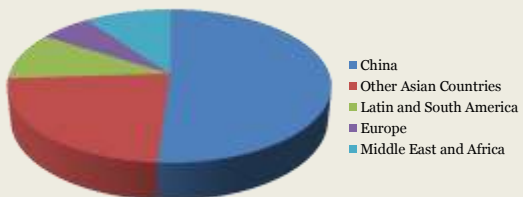
The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

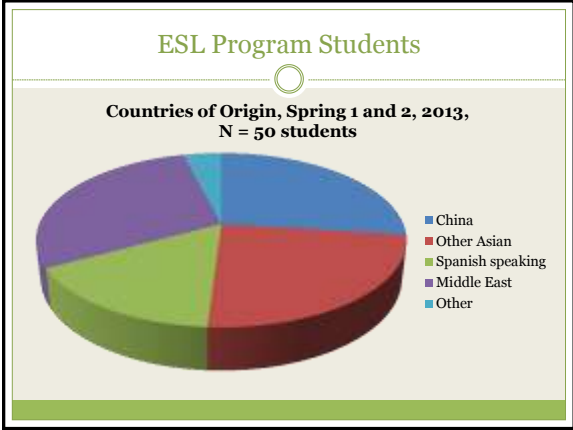
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS OFFICE



UWSP International Students

Country of Origin, Spring 2013
N = 145





Enrollment Trends—2010/2011

Source: Institute for International Education, IIE

Top countries of origin, undergraduate

| | |
|-----------------|--------|
| 1. China | 56,000 |
| 2. South Korea | 37,000 |
| 3. India | 14,500 |
| 4. Saudi Arabia | 11,000 |
| 5. Japan | 10,500 |

Top countries of origin in IEPs

| | | | |
|-----------------|--------|----------|-------|
| 1. Saudi Arabia | 11,814 | 2. China | 9,179 |
| 3. S. Korea | 6,400 | 4. Japan | 4,200 |

ESL Program History

- Began in August 1984
- Member of AAIEP since 2000; membership most recently renewed through program self-appraisal in 2010.
- AAIEP includes more than 300 members throughout the USA. Other programs in Wisconsin include:
 - Wisconsin ESL Institute (WESLI) in Madison
 - St. Norbert's College in De Pere, WI
 - English as a Second Language Program, Eau Claire

English Language Requirements for International Admission

Language Test

- iBT of 73 with subscores of 17 in oral communication and writing
- IELTS of 6.0 with no band less than 5.5

Graduation from ESL Program

- Scores of 80% or higher in all advanced classes
- Part time study at UWSP for one semester after completing at least one advanced ESL class

Program Goals

UWSP ESL Program graduates will demonstrate . . .

- 1) the linguistic skills
- 2) the academic skills
- 3) and the cultural base required for student success at UWSP.



UWSP ESL Program: English for Academic Purposes

Spring 2013

- 50% of our presently registered ESL students are conditionally admitted to UWSP
- 61% of the international students enrolled at UWSP entered via the ESL admissions path.

ESL Program Fast Facts

- Skills focus of instruction
- Four level language program, from beginning to advanced study of English
- Full time students are in class for 20 classroom hours a week. Classes are 7 weeks long, so 5 sessions a year.
- Instruction in Oral Communication, Listening and Note-taking, Reading, Writing, and Grammar.

Culture and the Classroom

IT'S NOT JUST LANGUAGE....

Case Study

You have re-designed your classroom time to include opportunities for small group instruction. You observe a group which has one international student. This student is simply not participating, even when others are trying to include him.

What does this mean? What do you do?

Silence doesn't mean incomprehension...



For students silence has many meanings:

- **Politeness** – It is polite to be silent in class. It is considered a virtue.
- **Respect** – I respect my instructor by listening and not interrupting.
- **Participation** – I am participating by being silent. I am listening to the lecture, taking notes, and attending class.
- **Maturity** – I show maturity by being silent. Students who speak quickly and loudly are immature.

Culture



Differences between Academic Cultures



“For the Chinese, knowledge is not abstract but concrete...Chinese thinkers are not preoccupied with the goal of providing rational accounts of motion and change. Instead, they seek to experience the world rather than understand it.”

Tai Ng (2007): *Chinese Culture, Western Culture: Why Must We Learn From Each Other?* Universe, Inc.

Observed Problems

*What problems have you observed
in the classroom
which may be cultural in origin?*

Observed Problems

- Lack of student integration
- Lack of critical thinking skills
- Weak extensive reading skills
- Academic dishonesty
- Lack of trust
- Inadequate study habits
- Burn out

How grades work

Students have studied concepts of communication and the different roles each one of us have. They have to describe two of their roles and how they potentially conflict.

“ Here, I have to read my syllabi carefully. I understand now that I have to be not only in class all the time, but that I also have to be very active in class participating in classroom activities and discussions. I am also expected to complete assignments and do so in time or my teacher might not take them. I am very surprised how big a part that is of my final grade.

In my country, I just go and meet the professor to understand what we study in class. Then at the end, I take the test and that test is my grade!”

Cultural Differences

The Arabian culture is non-confrontational, one which seeks the least conflict possible. Saving face is critical to maintaining this equilibrium and is often necessary to give the other party a way to exit the situation with minimal discomfort or harm to their dignity. It involves compromise, patience, and sometimes looking the other way. Saving face is regarded as a behavior of high ethics and good manners. The Arabian culture encourages people to act humbly and with sensitivity to a person's dignity, especially when that person's self-respect is endangered

*Mohammad Al Sabt
Arabian Business and Cultural Guide*

The Academic Impact of Saving Face

- Confronting a student with his failure to complete an assignment may lead to face-saving prevarication or cheating
- Confronting a student in class with his poor performance may lead to his demand for a new professor or transfer to a new school—and at least the threat to take others with him.

Solutions That Have Worked

- Meet student during office hours
- Begin with praise, move to problem, end with praise
- Help students transition to American cultural and educational expectations by depersonalizing the problem, e.g., *“At the University of Wisconsin, we are required to do it this way.”*

What would be the academic impact of...

Relational culture

It is “the duty of a friend to give help and do favors to the best of his or her ability” (Margaret Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times*)

Relationships trump rules; family trumps all relationships

Impact on the academic setting

- Greater familiarity between professor and student in US classroom may lead some to consider you their friend and therefore obligated to assist them, e.g., a kind teacher would never fail his student
- Providing answers to a friend on a test or assignment is merely fulfilling one’s duty as a friend

What would be the academic impact of...

A culture which prizes negotiation

- Debate is valued
- Marketplace bartering extends to other areas of one’s life
- Rules and policies can and should be bent for worthy exceptions—friends trump rules

Impact on Education

- Deadlines are negotiable
- Grades and promotion decisions are negotiable
- Policies are flexible and always open to exceptions
- “No” means only that I will visit your superior

Potential Conflict with American Values

- We believe in merit-based rewards and advancement
- We believe in the rule of law and generally comply with rules and policies without questioning them

Suggestions for More Effective “Negotiations”

- End every discussion with kind words, a smile, and a handshake
- Speak gently and kindly, even when your position remains unchanged

Internationalizing the Classroom



Preparing Global Citizens

“The common assumption. . . is that it is the internationals who bear the onus for poor communication, and therefore it is the internationals who must undergo transformation in the North American model. An alternative perspective, in contrast, recognizes that communication is a reciprocal process.” David Rubin

Globalizing the Curriculum

“We want our undergraduates to benefit from and be changed by interacting with classmates from many countries and cultures, but we have not asked our faculty colleagues to change their approaches or propose new courses to accommodate and reflect this shift in demographics.” David Pong

Some ideas



- Provide incentives and assignments for native speakers to reach out to international classmates
- Use international students as appropriate resources
- Propose new global-themed courses
- Adopt linguistic and intercultural approaches to render classes more comprehensible and welcoming

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International Students and Scholars Office



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ESL Program

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- Arthur Freeman, Lecturer
- Gene Hahn, Lecturer
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Success!