

# 10 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

## 1 WEBSITES

Some countries restrict access to platforms like YouTube, G-Suite, U.S. media outlets, and others, which can prevent students from accessing class materials.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Consider providing multiple synchronous and asynchronous avenues so students can use platforms that are available in countries with media restrictions or unreliable internet connections.
- Keep in mind that some students also may have concerns about data privacy and surveillance technologies.

## 2 VPN

Many international students rely on **Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)** to access class materials. Any problems with the VPN system may impact students' ability to attend classes, submit assignments, or take exams. Streaming audio and videos through Zoom while using VPN can also be very slow.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Some students may be unaware of VPN. If so, please direct them to [this website](#) for more information. UCSD offers its VPN for free!
- Students can check the status of campus networks and systems at [Status.ucsd.edu](https://status.ucsd.edu)
- Refer students to [IT Support](#) if they need tech support.
- Provide links to videos through chat when possible so students can watch it on their own as VPN speed can impact the video.

## 3 TIME ZONE DIFFERENCES

Many international students are attending classes from different time zones, which may mean that their classes occur during nighttime their local time. Inability to attend live lectures, office hours, and social events can create high levels of stress and negatively impact their academic performance, sleep routines, and well-being.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Encourage students to use tools like [The World Clock](#) to confirm their local times for meetings or deadlines.
- Be mindful of time changes in the Spring and Fall and how it will impact students residing abroad. Remind students of "Spring Forward" and "Fall Back" as students may be accustomed to a certain time difference and with these Daylight Savings Time changes, the time difference may also change.
- Offer class materials asynchronously when possible and record synchronous classes.
- Be flexible with exam times to accommodate time zone differences. Consider offering a 24 or 48 hour exam window.
- Consider offering office hours, tutor hours, and study groups that accommodate different time zones. Additionally, stress that office hours are also available by appointment.

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## 4 ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

International students may feel uncomfortable approaching professors and TAs due to intercultural communication and power-distance dynamics. Additionally, certain classroom participation and engagement strategies will be unfamiliar to some students.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Provide clear guidelines for participation and allow time for a participation learning curve if points are accrued.
- Provide more accommodations for grading and inform students early about grading policies.
- Consider creating project and study groups with students in similar time zones to ease coordination and facilitate collaboration.

## 5 SKILLS

Skills learned in other educational systems may not match those expected by instructors using primarily American teaching methods and may vary in level of proficiency.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Regularly identify the skills you want students to learn and apply, being very explicit about the extent to which students need to absorb material and the extent to which they should question material presented.
- Provide feedback on students' work, especially written assignments. It can help students improve, as English may not be their first language. Students also benefit from seeing examples to better understand what is expected of them.
- Add subtitles or closed-captions for lecture videos and upload the notes or transcript to make it easier for students to follow.
- Coach students on how to communicate their needs to you so they can advocate for themselves in the future.

## 6 CULTURE

Cultural differences and limited knowledge of U.S. culture, history, or slang can hinder student participation and success in the classroom.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Use universal examples or provide explanations and context where needed.
- Reduce use of jargon, acronyms and slang to facilitate student understanding and participation.

## 7 CONNECTEDNESS

Many international students may struggle with feeling connected to the campus community.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Consider implementing a background questionnaire early in the term to learn about students' past academic experiences, goals, concerns, or other information that could help you plan relevant and inclusive learning and/or social engagements within the course. Students' connectedness to the campus community often begins with their course environment.
- Create more opportunities for student interactions throughout the term. For example, breakout sessions, study groups, group competitions, TA sessions at hours that work in multiple time zones such as 7pm PST.

## 8 VISA UNCERTAINTY

The uncertainty with the logistics for current/future terms, and issues with obtaining visas and traveling are causing significant stress for international students. Due to the closure of many embassies and visa delays, students face much uncertainty when it comes to being able to return home if they are in the U.S. or being able to come to campus. This makes long-term planning very stressful and difficult. Students in the U.S. also may be dealing with expired visas and not knowing if they should stay or leave.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Refer students to the [International Students & Programs Office](#) for any visa-related issues concerning their admission, enrollment, employment and travel/reentry.

## 9 STRESS – COVID-19

For international students who are currently in the U.S., navigating the healthcare system can cause a lot of stress as the system may differ from that of their home country. For those taking fully remote courses, students may be experiencing stress from either living at home under less than ideal learning conditions or continuous family pressure to return home because of health and safety concerns. They may also be concerned about having adequate financial support and obtaining health services. Understanding and adhering to various procedures that continue to evolve, especially when traveling internationally, can be very stressful for international students.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Encourage students to meet with their undergraduate college advisor or graduate student coordinators for support.
- Refer students to an [international student advisor](#) when needed.
- Share [health and wellness resources](#) and [campus recreation resources](#) with students.

## 10 HOMESICKNESS

The feelings of homesickness and not knowing when students will see their families and loved ones again are strong among international students. When dealing with a family loss, international students currently in the U.S. face a very difficult choice of remaining in the U.S. or risking not being able to return if they depart the U.S.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Be mindful of these challenges that some students may be facing. Encourage students to meet with their Dean of Student Affairs or utilize various resources at the [Counseling & Psychological Services](#) for support when needed.

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## RESOURCES

Helpful sites for faculty, staff and TAs to support students include:

### SITES

- **iResource:** On-campus resources to support international students.
- **Academic Success:** Resources and learning strategies for students.
- **Advising Guide:** Immigration-related resources for international students
- **CAPS:** Mental health and wellness resources for students residing internationally.
- **iEvents:** Calendar of virtual events and programs
- **Housing:** FAQ regarding on-campus housing
- **iPrograms:** Virtual student experience and engagement programs
- **Student Affairs:** Comprehensive COVID-19 FAQ information for students
- **Triton Tools & Tidbits:** Podcast that is focused on discussing topics that will engage and enrich student life and education.