5-2012

Alleviating International Students' Culture Shock and Anxiety in American Academic Libraries: Welcome, Ahlan Wa Sahlan, Anyeong Hae Sae Yo, Bienvenidos, Huan ying, Sanu Da Zuwa, Shalom, Swaagat hai

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Alleviating International Students' Culture Shock and Anxiety in American Academic Libraries: Welcome, Ahlan Wa Sahlan, Anyeong Hae Sae Yo, Bienvenidos, Huan ying, Sanu Da Zuwa, Shalom, Swaagat hai

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Introduction

In 2009, more than 3.69 million students attended college outside their native country. (OECD 2011, 318) The largest percentage, 17%, or 623,119 of these students, chose to come to American universities. (Institute of International Education 2010a) The next three most popular destination countries were the United Kingdom with 13%, France with 8%, and Germany, also with 8%. (Bhandari 2009) International students and their families contributed $18.77 billion to the U.S. economy in tuition, fees, and living expenses. The three largest recipients were California with $2.834 billion, New York with $2.296 billion, and Texas with $1.2585 billion. (NAFSA 2011) The five universities with the largest international student populations were the University of Southern California, University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign, New York University, Purdue University-Main Campus, and New York's Columbia University. The five countries that sent the most students to American universities, by number, are China, India, South Korea, Canada, and Taiwan. International students' major fields of study were business and management, engineering, physical and life sciences, mathematics and computer science, and the social sciences. (Institute of International Education 2010b)

International students received 24% funding from the host college, but were responsible for the remainder from personal, family, and home government resources. (Institute of International Education 2010b) Thus, the need to do well in college is a cause of great stress. Failure, in some cultures, would lead to losing face, which is a feeling of intense shame, reflecting badly on self, family, and even country. Additional pressures could come from a need to maintain high grade-point ratios in order to retain scholarships, or from trying to complete a three year program in two years. The greatest difficulty is tackling academic English with only a cursory, ESL (English as a Second Language) knowledge of the language. (Greenfield, Johnston, and Williams 1986, 229) Even though they watch American motion pictures, and have internet access, visiting students still experience culture shock. Academic culture shock can be defined as having feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and depression when adapting to a new cultural environment. (*Key Words in Multicultural Interventions: A*

Dictionary, 1999, 89-90) Since a student's academic success is partially determined by being able to navigate the library's information resources, a librarian can be that student's compass, buoy, and lighthouse.

There are other differences between international and domestic students. Their educational systems are sometimes more rigid, where rote memorization is preferable to developing original ideas. Often there is very little class participation because of large class size, and a cultural reluctance to challenge the instructor's authority and knowledge. Additionally, because textbooks are either not available, or too costly, the teacher is frequently the only disseminator of information. (Greenfield, Johnston, and Williams 1986, 229) Librarians need to be aware of these differences, and, during library classes, they should encourage international students to feel free to express themselves in class, and in their research papers.

Librarians can connect with this special population by contacting the college's ESL program, (Bordonaro 2006, 240) or the International Students' Office. The Library can assign one or more librarian(s) as liaison(s) to this group, and schedule a workshop before the semester commences, or during orientation week. When conducting the workshop, or if there are international students in a library instruction class, the following techniques can be applied: Use library jargon sparingly, but if you do, explain it. Library and research-related words are sometimes homonymous. A "citation" could be confused with a parking ticket, an "abstract" could be a type of art, a "journal" in French is a newspaper, (Amsberry 2008, 355) and "faculty" in British means the same as a course of study or a school within a college. (Sackers, Secomb, and Hulett 2008, 39) It should be remembered that for ESL speakers, library terminology is considered a "third language." (Kamhi-Stein and Stein 1998, 173)

The Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association has produced two handouts, the polyglot "Instruction for Diverse Populations Multilingual Glossary Language Table" in six languages, (Instruction Section of the Association of College & Research Libraries of the American Library Association 2008a) and its concomitant English language "Definitions." (Instruction Section of the Association of College & Research Libraries of the American Library Association 2008b) The cover page for this handout could read "Welcome to the Library," in the different languages spoken in your school. Bordonaro 2006, 240)

To find out the English proficiency level of your non-native speaking students, speak with the instructor before the library lesson. Plan on extra time for questions, and be sure to ask "Does anyone have a question?" Avoid American idiomatic expressions and cultural references. Expressions like "coming out of left field," "touching base," and "putting a John Hancock" on a paper, will not be understood. Enunciate words clearly, and only a little bit slower than with native speakers, allowing for pauses at the end of a thought. Do not supply the answer too quickly after proffering a question. If no one answers, ask the question again, and if a student has difficulty in answering the question, use linguistic scaffolding, that is, provide the right word, without completing the sentence for them. Ask open-ended questions instead of interrogatives preceded by a verb of being. Silence, or a nod, is not necessarily a sign of understanding. Ask them to paraphrase important concepts. (Amsberry 2008, 356) Remind students to bring their syllabus, or detailed assignment, from their professor, when going to ask for reference assistance.

Explain the roles of library staff, (Hughes 2010, 84) their titles, functions, and educational attainments. Like their American counterparts, many international students mistakenly believe that anyone who works in a library is a librarian. Briefly mention Library of Congress call numbers, and how books are shelved. Frequently, foreign systems have only closed stacks, and the alphabet is not read from left to right. Explain, that, unlike in some countries, borrowing books and internet usage are free, (Hughes 2010, 82) and that printing costs are not exorbitant. Although they are proficient in internet searching, international students, often, are not proficient in database search techniques. Nor are they aware that some databases transliterate articles into other languages. (Buckner and French 2007, 10) A survey revealed that 43% of international business students at the University of Illinois did not have any experience with computerized library resources in their home countries. (Song 2004, 370) The differences between keyword versus subject searches, and use of the thesaurus need to be taught.

These students should also be informed if the library's resources include e-books, multimedia materials, and laptop loans. Be sure that library database instruction is hands-on, instead of just lecture and demonstration. (Kamhi-Stein and Stein 1998, 174) Furthermore, students should be given the procedure to follow for off-campus access to the databases.

A research study conducted at the State University of New York at Albany showed key areas in which international students needed instruction in order to successfully write a research paper using library resources: how to locate books using the online catalog, with an emphasis on how and why to locate call numbers; what the differences are in content among newspapers, magazines, journals and books; and the different functions of library personnel. (Chen 2011, 228)

Due to cultural and educational differences, international students encounter difficulties with the concept of plagiarism. Plagiarizing a source without appropriate assignation can be considered an honor to the original author. (Evans 2006, 10) In mainland China students are taught that knowledge and information cannot be owned by any individual, but that they belong to the collective society. Therefore, citing is not necessary. (Mundava and Chaudhuri 2007, 171) A Coordinator of the Writing Studies Department at the University of Minnesota indicated in 2004 that, in one semester, "85% of all scholastic misconduct reports of plagiarism at the U of M are against ESL students." With much training of international students and faculty, that number is currently down to less than one-half. (Holt 2011) Professors Chen and Van Ullen's study indicated that the international student's greatest difficulties regarding plagiarism were how to paraphrase, how to identify citation styles, the elements of a citation, and why, when, and how to cite. (p 216)

International students approach librarians at the Reference Desk with much greater anxiety than native speakers. (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, and Daley 1997, 8) In a study conducted at Texas Western University, 34.4% of international students asked friends and classmates for information needs: the same percentage as those who went to the reference librarian for assistance. (Yi 2007, 673) Some of these students believe their questions to be too basic, that they are disturbing the librarian, (Swope and Katzer, 1972) or that a librarian only imparts information to a select few. (Koehler and Swanson 1988)

From interviews with international students, it was ascertained that the function or role of the reference librarian was unclear. They did not wish to impose on, or trouble the librarian with their questions, nor did they know that it is the reference librarian's function to assist students with research questions. (Kumar and Suresh 2000, 334) Language barriers also impede a successful reference interview. From personal experience, if I am unable to understand a particularly difficult accent, I ask the student to write it down. From the literature, other impediments include a lack of knowledge re: open versus closed stacks, interlibrary loan, OPAC, Library of Congress call numbers, and lack of reference service. Also, shame in not knowing about these services will stop an international student from asking questions in order not to appear ignorant. (Liestman 2000, 366-367)

The following are recommended solutions. When I see a student looking around the library the way a tourist would, gaping at New York skyscrapers for the first time, I approach her/him. I do not ask the expected, "May I help you?" because the response is invariably, "No, thank you." Instead, I engage them in conversation: anything from the weather, to "Did you know we are open seven days a week?" or I describe what the difference is between reserves, reference, and circulating books, while pointing towards the locations of these items. This opens up a dialog, which, can then lead to a good reference interview.

In a study done in eleven English speaking colleges, the following best practices led to a high degree of international student satisfaction. (Curry and Copeman 2005) Smile at the student who has approached you at the reference desk, and speak first, saying "How can I help?" while maintaining eye contact. Also, move away from the reference desk and walk over to one of the computers with the student. (Curry and Copeman 2005) Sit down next to them and do not be in a standing position. The following encounter between the author and an international student, who requested research assistance, occurred some time ago; she was sitting, I was standing. I asked her to hit the enter key; she pressed the control key; I asked her to press the tab key; she pressed the shift key. She appeared uncomfortable. No matter what action I asked her to do, she did something else. I asked her what was wrong. She responded with, "You are standing, I am sitting. You are older and standing, yet I am younger and sitting." This was a sign of disrespect toward someone who was older. So I grabbed a chair, and sat next to her. The rest of the reference interaction went very well. She responded positively to all my directions. From that incident I realized that if a student is uncomfortable, he/she is prevented from learning. That interaction became the impetus, and inspiration for this paper.

Speak slowly, and enunciate words clearly, with pauses after several statements. Give the student

permission to speak by asking if he/she has any questions. Be patient, and spend time with her/him, without making the student feel rushed (Curry and Copeman 2005). If other students are waiting, get the international student started, and let them know that you will return to them shortly. Ask clarifying questions. What specific topic is he/she looking for? For what course is the information needed? Must the sources be in a particular format? Must the sources be from books, magazines, or scholarly journals? Rephrase the research question in your own words, or write it down to confirm what the student is looking for.

Explain keyword searching, and the strategy used to conduct a search on the library databases. Also instruct student to evaluate and select relevant materials from the list of results. (Curry and Copeman 2005: 416) Explain library and research jargon, such as peer reviewed, full-text versus citation/abstract results, and call number. Before concluding the reference interview, tell the student what to do if he/she cannot find the book in the stacks, and follow-up with, "If you need more help, be sure to come back to the reference desk."

I realize that many of the recommendations in this paper are generalizations, and for every rule there is an exception. Whereas one nationality prefers eye contact as a sign of respect, this author, in a conversation with a West African, was told that it could be construed as an act of aggression. Therefore, it should be remembered that international students are heterogeneous and multicultural, with each individual student imbued with her/his own personality and experiences. This paper is meant to increase the librarian's sensitivity to this increasingly growing college population. In addition, many of the aforementioned techniques described in this paper can be used in a broader educational context with underprepared domestic college students, or with those in remedial English classes.

In conclusion, international students are highly motivated to succeed in American academia. As service oriented librarians we should use all available best practice methods in library classes and reference interviews. After they complete their education, and these students return to their home country, or eventually settle in the United States, hopefully, their experience in the library will have been productive, positive, and fulfilling.

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