



# BEST TIPS FOR ADVISING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

When advising an international student, the goal is the same as for all students: To provide information, guidance, and support leading to academic success, graduation, and a productive post-graduation life. The mission doesn't change, but how you achieve it might. Below are some suggested tips for advising international students.

## 1) GET TO KNOW THE STUDENT

*Just like the UIC student body as a whole, UIC international students are diverse.*

- **Where do they come from?** - In 2016, 4,397 international students representing 100 countries and territories made up the international student population at UIC - 465 undergraduate and 3,746 graduate. The largest populations were from India and China. Some international students come to UIC directly from abroad (est. 90% have never visited the U.S. previously) while others may have already studied or lived in the U.S. for years. Many international students are "Third Culture Kids."
- **What do they study?** – The top three academic programs for international students for fall 2016 were Engineering, Computer/Information Science, and Business Administration. Many students transition to working in the U.S. after graduation via F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) and the 24 month STEM OPT extension. International students may be studying at UIC under a number of program structures: Tutorium in Intensive English (TIE), UIC Global, Undergraduate or Graduate Degree-Seeking, Short-Term Exchange, or Special Program (e.g. CMBA, UAEDP, Non-Degree Certificate Programs).
- **Dig deeper** – Advisors who practice proactive advising models can incorporate questions aimed at understanding how an international student's particular cultural background may be informing their academic experience:
  - *How would you describe your family's involvement in your academic plan?*
  - *How did you choose this major? Was it something you've always wanted to study?*
  - *What does a successful student look like in your home country?*
  - *What are some acceptable ways to handle feeling overwhelmed or stressed in your home country?*

## 2) COMMUNICATE INTERCULTURALLY

*Apply intercultural communication techniques to enhance advising relationships.*

- **Explain cultural differences** – Academic culture is a product of its greater context. Students unfamiliar with U.S. culture may be equally unfamiliar with our unspoken rules of university protocol. Think about what we *assume* our students should know and ask if it may be helpful to discuss these topics more directly with international students. For example, it may be helpful to explain how the advising relationship works at UIC; what are the expectations for the advisor, what are the expectations of the student, and what are appropriate/inappropriate ways to interact (e.g. repeated emails, showing up without an appointment, etc.).
- **Empower English language learners** – Some international students are native English speakers, others are living and breathing English for the very first time. Empower English language learners and increase their understanding by slowing speech, avoiding idioms or slang, repeating points often, checking for understanding, utilizing visuals or drawing, and following up appointments/conversations in writing. Avoid the reflex to simply speak louder or in an overly-simplistic manner. For more formalized support, point to resources such as the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) or the Tutorium in Intensive English (TIE).
- **Become curious about miscommunication** – When miscommunication or conflict does occur, practice the culturally competent attitude of curiosity! What role might cultural difference have played in this incident? What assumptions about behavior did I bring to the situation? How could I learn about how this situation is typically handled in the student's home country/culture? Could I respectfully talk to someone from the home country/culture about my doubts?





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## 3) CONSIDER IMMIGRATION STATUS

*Academic status and immigration status are closely connected. It's not necessary to become an expert on immigration regulations but understanding a few key concepts can be helpful.*

- **The immigration check-in and class registration connection** – F-1 and J-1 international students may enter the U.S. no more than 30 days prior to the start of their academic program. After their arrival, per U.S. Federal Regulations, the Office of International Services (OIS) must confirm that each student has entered in the appropriate status to begin studies. OIS accomplishes this task through the Immigration Check-in process, aided by the SEVIS registration hold. Due to these requirements, many international students approach the class registration process later than other new students and with a significant amount of uncertainty. Anything advising departments can do to demystify the class registration process prior to the international students arrival on-campus will help ease these concerns.
- **Full-time enrollment** – F-1 and J-1 international students must maintain full-time enrollment throughout the duration of their academic program – see the OIS website for a definition of the full-time enrollment requirement. International students should not drop below full-time at any point during a required academic term. Additionally, international students must be aware when registering for Academic Skills Program (ASP) and online courses as regulations limit the how these courses count toward the full-time enrollment requirement for international students.
- **Work and “work-like” activity** – The majority of international students are studying at UIC on students visas. This means regulations require that they be first and foremost, students. Work or work-like activity (unpaid internships, off-campus research, rotations, etc.) can be done in many situations but often requires advising or formal authorization from OIS or United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). This is especially true if the activity takes the student off-campus.
- **Changes** – Major changes to an international student’s academic plan such as needing more time to study, changing a major, advancing to a higher degree level or taking a leave of absence require coordinated updates to the student’s immigration record. International students navigate these changes best when they bring the academic department and OIS together early and often to advise and manage the requisite paperwork.

## 4) ENCOURAGE CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

*Research shows that international students who are engaged with the campus community and develop relationships with U.S. individuals are more likely to thrive and persist to graduation.*

- **OIS programs** – The Office of International Services organizes a host of programs and activities that provide international students the opportunity to engage with the UIC international community, U.S. culture, and the Chicagoland area. Visit the OIS website ([ois.uic.edu](http://ois.uic.edu)) or follow OIS on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to view upcoming events.
- **Intercultural friendships** – Research and anecdotal evidence show that intercultural friendships are especially impactful for international students and U.S. students alike. These are the rich intercultural experiences that can lead to the more nuanced cultural understanding that campus internationalization strives for. That said, venturing outside a cultural friend group can be challenging for any student, but particularly complicated for a student from a more collectivist culture. In the classroom, group projects and presentations can be a way to encourage intercultural friendship in a more structured way.
- **Culture shock** – Campus engagement is also a great way to manage symptoms of culture shock in a positive way. At its worst, culture shock can feel very isolating and cause an international student to view the host culture in a negative light. Providing opportunities to learn about the host culture can help the international student build more realistic expectations that are characteristic of the process of cultural adaptation.





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## 5) EMBRACE COLLABORATION

*The conversation around advising international students is complex and ongoing. Because our ability to assume understanding is limited when communicating across cultures we often need to go a little further when supporting an international student.*

- **Call ahead, print it out, show instead of tell** – Directions, whether they be procedural or to help someone find a location, are some of the more difficult things to understand in a second language, or a second culture. With international students, it can be effective to go a little bit further to help them make the connection to the next step or resource. For example, for students coming from a culture where power distance is conceptually larger than here in the U.S., the idea of knocking on the Dean’s office door may be extremely intimidating; advisors can use their higher position of power to call ahead and lay the foundation for the student’s visit.
- **Utilize the Office of International Services** – OIS is the on-campus resource for student, scholar, and employee immigration advising and support. However, the office can also collaborate around topics of intercultural communication and understanding. We are open to hosting meetings, creating workshops, or providing expertise for any project you think could help support the UIC international community, UIC faculty and staff that work with the international community, or general UIC internationalization efforts – give us a call!

## OIS STUDENT SIDE LIAISON CONTACTS

- **Engineering (ECE & CS)** > Ryan Miller (rmill1@uic.edu)
- **Engineering (All other majors)** > Mindy Ward (mward9@uic.edu)
- **LAS** > Claudia Valencia (cvalen25@uic.edu)
- **Education, CUPPA, Social Work, CADA** > Michelle Blank (mblank@uic.edu)
- **Business** > Caitlin Chavarria (caitlin1@uic.edu)
- **Dentistry, Pharmacy, Public Health, Medicine, Nursing** > Sarah Lockton (slockton@uic.edu)
- **Special Programs (CMBA, UAEDP, Non-Degree Certificate Programs)** > Steven Stull (sstull@uic.edu)
- **UIC Global, UIC Athletics** > Kathleen Neelsen (neelsen@uic.edu)





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## ACTIVITY #1 – BRAINSTORM

*List some ideas for proactive advising questions aimed at revealing culture.*

## ACTIVITY #2 – IDIOM ERASER

ADVISOR: Hi Jing! I'm psyched you're here. Your Prof just shot me an email and it sounds like you're in a bit of a pickle.

JING: Hi! Oh, you have my teacher's email?

ADVISOR: Yeah, I'm just going to cut to the chase, she believes you may have plagiarized your paper.

JING: The last paper? I worked really hard on that!

ADVISOR: I want to give you the benefit of the doubt, but I need you to tell me straight, did you cheat?

JING: No!! At least...I don't think so...What does plagiarize mean again?

## ACTIVITY #3 – CASE STUDY

Tatiana is a first semester undergraduate student from Russia. She is not doing well in her Calculus 100 class and the professor has advised that she withdraw. Tatiana tells you that she has normally excelled in Math but that she is struggling to understand the professor in the large lecture. Withdrawing from the course would put Tatiana below 12 credits but staying in the course could impact her GPA.

*How might you proceed as Tatiana's academic advisor?*

## ACTIVITY #4 – STORYTELLING

*Turn to your neighbor and share the story of a time when you might have experienced culture shock.*

Culture Shock: The set of emotions that results from having the familiar structures of one's own culture taken away.

## ACTIVITY #5 – BRAINSTORM

*List some ideas (BIG and small) for how your department or office could collaborate with OIS around international student support.*

