

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

CASE STUDIES FOR YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

Includes suggested solutions contributed by Fiona Richardson, Director, International Office and Ruth Rodgers, Teaching & Learning Specialist, CAFE

CASE STUDY # 1: “HELPING” OR CHEATING?

CASE STUDY # 2: UNITED WE FALL

CASE STUDY # 3: DON’T MAKE ME PARTICIPATE

CASE STUDY # 4: IF ONLY I COULD WRITE IN RUSSIAN

CASE STUDY # 5: SUGGESTIVE MISCOMMUNICATION

CASE STUDY # 6: WHERE’S YOUR SOURCE?

CASE STUDY # 7: TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT

CASE STUDY # 8: A TEST OF TOLERANCE

CASE STUDY # 9: SKIPPING OR “MISSING”?

CASE STUDY # 10: THEY’LL PULL MY MARK DOWN

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 1: “HELPING” OR CHEATING?

Apollonia and Irenka are both in Arthur’s Architectural Drafting course. When Arthur is grading their hand-drafted building plans, he notes how very similar the two assignments look. Overlapping them, he can see that they are absolutely identical, which cannot have happened by chance. When Arthur confronts the students, they freely admit to having collaborated on the project, and express bewilderment that there’s a problem with this. They tell him that, in Poland, where they are from, it is considered normal and appropriate to help each other succeed.

What steps should Arthur take now?

Remind the students that they are now studying in Canada and that students cannot share work here. All International students attend compulsory acculturation and plagiarism workshops which clearly describe these expectations. These expectations are also usually explained in their program orientation.

The consequences of this behaviour should be consistent with what you would do for ALL students, domestic or international. This includes the issuing of an Academic Alert if applicable.

What might Arthur have done to reduce or prevent this type of cheating in his class?

Arthur needs to be explicit in his expectations of this and other assessment in the course. Written and verbal explanation should be used. Expectations should be included in the rubric.

Be sure to be very clear.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 2: UNITED WE FALL

It is the third week of classes. June is a big fan of group work, and she typically puts students in her first year nursing class into stable learning groups starting right from the first day of class. Knowing that students prefer to work with their friends, she allows the students to self-select their groups; in each class, June has hands-on exercises that the groups work on together to support everyone's learning. She notices that five Asian students have chosen to work together as a group, but she doesn't think much about it—until midterm, when she realizes that three of the students in that group are close to failing the course. She is aware that all of the students in the group are international students from Korea and China, and all speak English as a second language. June is very concerned about three of the International students' potential for success at this point and is worried about how to manage this in her class.

What steps should June take now?

June should have personal interviews with each of the students to determine where the problem lies – is it a writing issue or an ESL issue? It is important to determine this for each individual as their reasons for struggling may be different for each student.

SALS early intervention slips can be used for referring students to SALS – consider referring the student to a particular staff member in SALS so they have someone specific to ask for when they go in, and consider having the student return the slip to you signed by SALS to confirm they have received assistance.

Refer students to on-line SALS supports in DC connect.

What could June have done to prevent this problem from occurring?

Ensure early assessment is incorporated – waiting for the midterm is far too late to be determining that students are in trouble.

Do not let students self-select their groups – group selection is one of the most stressful situations an international / ESL student can face, and this would also be an issue for shy students etc. There are numerous ways to allocate groups randomly or in a more intentional manner. You may wish to split up international / ESL students.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 3: DON'T MAKE ME PARTICIPATE

Olga's Fitness and Health Promotion class is lively and VERY interactive—these students learn best through talk and physical activity! Accordingly, Olga designs her lessons to include a lot of fast-paced activities that engage the students in talking about and interacting with the written and visual content. This year, Olga has an international student from Nigeria in the class, who speaks English as a second language. Abayomi does well on multiple choice tests, but when the class activity requires verbal presentations or group interaction, he is conspicuously silent. He seems increasingly isolated from his fellow students, and Olga is worried about him.

What can Olga do now to support Abayomi's success?

Meet with the student and determine if the isolation is an ESL issue – as he is performing well in multiple choice tests, it is unlikely that this is an indication of lack of understanding of content, rather a shyness or lack of confidence in verbal capabilities. It is important to remember that when ESL students have an issue it doesn't mean they are weak across all aspects

If it is determined that the problem is more personal in nature, refer the student to counselling services – both on campus and through telephone or face-to-face services offered by off-campus providers. Details of all counselling services available to students is available on our website: <http://www.durhamcollege.ca/services/campus-services/health-and-medical/counselling-services>

If the issue is ESL related, the student can be referred to SALS

Offer the student an alternate way to participate in a non-verbal manner for example a blog.

What might Olga have done to prevent this situation from developing?

ESL students tend to perform better in a group of three rather than a pair – this puts less pressure on each member of the group and allows additional time to listen and comprehend rather than have to feel obligated to talk and contribute. Their listening skills may be strong but verbal weak or visa-versa and a 3-way conversation assists this.

Get to know students at the beginning of semester – often a short written piece describing themselves, their background and their interests will not only help you get to know the students in the class, but provide an indication of strength of skills such as writing.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

STUDY # 4: IF ONLY I COULD WRITE IN RUSSIAN

Dima is from Russia, and she has expressed how very privileged she feels to have obtained an international student visa to study in Canada. She works very hard and is extremely attentive in Andrea's communications class. Andrea is dismayed, then, when she receives Dima's first essay and finds that it is FULL of grammatical errors. Andrea has been given to understand that Dima has the level of ESL required for the program. The ability to communicate clearly in English is critical in Dima's program, and Andrea feels that she must grade Dima against the same rubric as the other students—but if she does, Dima will fail this paper. She fears that Dima will be crushed by a failure.

What steps should Andrea take now?

Refer the students to the ESL specialist at SALS using an early intervention slip.

Ensure that any written feedback given on assignments is block written or typed. Most students (including non ESL students) cannot read / understand cursive writing.

Consider deferring the allocation of a grade and if you allow the student to resubmit, then perhaps only provide the student with a pass.

What might Andrea have done to prevent this situation from arising?

Incorporate early writing samples and scaffolding assessment.

Get to know students at the beginning of semester – often a short written piece describing themselves, their background and their interests will not only help you get to know the students in the class, but provide an indication of strength of skills such as writing.

Ensure these kind of issues are identified as a program team.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 5: SUGGESTIVE MISCOMMUNICATION

Bao, an international student from Vietnam, is struggling in Pamela's math class. Pamela has suggested that he get help from SALS, but when she asks if he has done this, he smiles and shrugs and assures her that he will do so at the earliest opportunity. Pam suspects that he has no intention of following up and she feels frustrated—if he doesn't get help soon, Bao will fail a critical course!

What might Pamela do now to motivate Bao to seek help?

It is important to understand that in some cultures a suggestion is simply that, you therefore need to be clear that you REQUIRE the student to seek help from SALS.

SALS early intervention slips can be used for referring students to SALS – consider referring the student to a particular staff member in SALS so they have someone specific to ask for when they go in, and consider having the student return the slip to you signed by SALS to confirm they have received assistance.

Determine whether the problem is a math issue or an ESL issue. This will allow you to refer the student to a specific person within SALS. If unsure, start by referring them to the ESL specialist.

What might Pamela have done to increase the likelihood that Bao would have sought help by now?

Incorporate early assessment into the course.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 6: WHERE'S YOUR SOURCE?

Valerie is teaching a first year class that involves the writing of a complex research report. Vahini, an international student from Bangalore, India, has submitted a well-written paper, but as Valerie reads it, she begins to have a lot of misgivings. Given that the assignment is a research report, almost ALL of it should be from expert sources, and Vahini's paper has only three references related to her direct quotes. Valerie writes "Please see me" on the top of Vahini's paper and, sighing, goes on to the next paper in the stack, wondering if her students will EVER learn not to plagiarize.

What steps should Valerie take when Vahini comes to see her?

All International students attend compulsory acculturation and plagiarism workshops which clearly describe these expectations. These expectations are also usually explained in their program orientation.

The consequences of this behaviour should be consistent with what you would do for ALL students, domestic or international. This includes the issuing of an Academic Alert if applicable.

Refer the student to the writing specialist within SALS using an early intervention slip.

What might Valerie have done to prevent this problem from happening?

Consider having all students undertake the online plagiarism course by SALS which is available on DC Connect. There is an assessment piece attached to this course and the verification sheet can be attached to each student's first major assignment as part of their submission requirements.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 7: TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT

Beau has several international students in his first year electrical engineering class, which involves a hands-on lab component each week. As part of their marks, students are required to submit a weekly lab report. Beau thought he had made it clear that the report was to document the weekly experiment, but when he gets the first batch of reports in, he sees that the submissions from the international students are wildly erratic, varying from a 1,000 word essay to a few sentences scribbled on a page torn from a notebook.

What might Beau do now to support the success of his international students?

As this appears to be a widespread problem and perhaps a symptom of unclear instructions / expectations, you may wish to decide not use this report as a graded piece. Provide students with samples of good lab reports. In addition, consider using this as a peer review piece – have students mark each other’s work sharing good examples.

What might Beau have done to prevent this situation from arising?

Provide a rubric.

Provide samples of lab reports – some students may have no notion of how a lab report is structured.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 8: A TEST OF TOLERANCE

Gregg has set up a 2 hour test that is worth 20% of the course. As the students come in and get ready to write the test he reminds them that there are no aids allowed. He repeats that they are not allowed to bring in anything else except a pencil and a calculator. Gregg hands out the tests and sits down at the front of the class and immediately notices that several international students are talking at low volume in their own language. He reminds them they are not permitted to talk and watches them for a few minutes. Again they start to talk but more quietly and Gregg thinks they may be sharing answers. He warns them again and they quiet down. Next Gregg notices that some of them are simply moving their papers to the edge of the desk so the others can see the answer. He also notices that, after 30 minutes, one of the international students has put his head on the desk and is not writing anymore.

What should Gregg do now?

There should be zero tolerance of talking in exams. All International students attend compulsory acculturation and plagiarism workshops which clearly describe these expectations. In addition students are told in these sessions that speaking in their own language during class is not permitted as the language of instruction is English. As the students know this is wrong consequences for this behaviour should be the same as for ALL students in the class (zero grade, academic alert). Acting on this early will also prevent it from happening in the future. If cheating is suspected, take the paper from the student in question immediately.

In relation to the student with his head on the desk, this may NOT be an indication that the student is distressed or ill, but simply that the student has finished the test. In many cultures students are not permitted to leave the room before the allotted period of the test. Quietly approach the student and inform them that if they have finished they may leave.

What might Gregg have done to prevent this situation from arising?

Ensure expectations are communicated clearly – both verbally and in writing – you could utilize the board or paper. These expectations may include clearly explaining what is meant by the term “aid” and reiterate the silent conditions of a test.

To avoid cheating consider using different versions of the test, allocating seats, using the test centre or dividing the class in two to allow for more space between students.

CASE STUDIES FOR YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM. Adapted from CAFÉ Faculty Workshop for <http://culturaldiversitydurham.weebly.com/> November 2012

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 9: SKIPPING OR “MISSING”?

Ana has a class of engaged students. There are 24 students; about half are international students. The students are often late but they do come to class. As Ana is marking the recent test she notices that the international students did very well in the first two quizzes and the trend continues. She hands the test back and all seems well. The next class, however, only four of the international students come to class and they seem to be on their computers and are not engaged at all in the classes. When Ana asks the students where their friends are, they say they don't know. The following week none of the international students show up to the class. Ana doesn't know what has happened. There is a quiz tomorrow and she expects they will come to write it as she has emailed the class a reminder, but she is puzzled by their absence in class.

What should Ana do now?

Remind students of the advantages of attending class and ensure that your class is adding value to the students learning experience.

The international office can be notified in case this absence is an indication of other issues such as perhaps working illegally / inappropriately (International students cannot work off campus in their first semester and after this only if they have been issued a work permit. Work is limited to 20 hours per week).

Is there anything Ana could have done to prevent this scenario from arising?

Ensure you have provided clarity of expectations such as timeliness and attendance.

If the students feel they have an understanding of the content of the course through the assigned readings and DC connect materials AND this has been verified in the first assessment piece, students may feel they are receiving no additional value in attending the class. Approach CAFÉ, for advice on providing added value in your classes, to ensure attendance.

YOUR CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM

CASE STUDY # 10: THEY'LL PULL MY MARK DOWN

Tim is assigning a class group task and has asked the students to form six groups according to the names he has posted on the board. One group has three students who are a visible minority, a domestic student, and a mature student. The mature student comes to Tim and tells him she does not want to work with the ESL students because the group will get a lower mark. Tim knows that one of the ESL students has heard the remark and has told the group what the student has said. He also knows that the two ESL students have some of the best marks in the class and are tutors at SALS.

What should Tim do now?

There should be zero tolerance of negative or prejudicial comments.

Tim should have a conversation with this student outside of class.

What might Tim have done to prevent this scenario from arising?

Before assigning groups, have a discussion with the class on the purpose of group work and the value that a diverse group of individuals can bring to a project.

Be clear with expectations and provide them in written and verbal form