## Embedding Learning Strategies and Study Skills Instruction in Academic Courses to Increase International Student Autonomy

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### Academic skills and international students

International students can come to the U.S. with proficiency in English but not necessarily with the academic cultural knowledge commonly acquired by students who experience the American educational system. According to Shapiro, Farrelly, and Tomas (2014), “Many international students may have studied some aspects of culture in English as a foreign language classes, but may not have been taught how these cultural elements play out in higher education” (p. 11). Cultural differences in academic instruction such as a lack of attention to study skills and learner strategy instruction can cause issues for international students who did not acquire these skills. This skill deficiency can be misinterpreted by professors as a lack of English proficiency, laziness, or intentional academic dishonesty. In language learning, increasing a student’s strategic competence is essential for making students competent learners outside the classroom. The same principal applies to increasing international student competence in their major studies. According to Oxford (2006), students’ ability to use learning strategies in their disciplines “distinguishes experts from novices” (p. 125).

### Cultural norms and learning

- Academic culture varies widely from country to country.
- Explicit study skills instruction is not common (Jordan, 1997).
- Many cultures have a passive/receptive attitude toward learning.
- Rote memorization and a lack of questioning of the professor’s knowledge is expected.
- Some cultures honor scholars through repetition of their ideas, often without citation.
- Library use is culturally bound; students are not allowed to borrow materials (Jordan, 1997)

### General to specific – the importance of academic content

It is important to join learning strategies with specific academic disciplines. Even if a student has gone through an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, according to Brick (2012), “as learners move into a specific discourse community, they need to learn to think, write and speak like a member of that community” (p. 171). Teaching students discipline-specific study skills creates stronger learners within their areas of study.

### How can professors improve students’ study skill and learner strategy use?

Professors can easily help bridge the academic skills culture gap in their classrooms for their international students by embedding exercises and brief lessons that focus on relevant study skills, learning strategies and understanding American academic standards and norms. Handing students the keys to producing successful assignments helps them to become capable, autonomous students.

### Embedding skills instruction: three examples

#### Assignment type: Article review

**Issue:** Understanding the differences between the types of articles that are acceptable for a review – not only mainstream media vs. academic articles, but trade publications, newsletters, and company publications.

**Teaching the skill:** Have examples of appropriate sources ready in class for students to review. Note the differences between them. Point out clearly what types of sources are acceptable for the assignment.

**Review:** Give students 5 links to 5 articles and have them discuss which ones are acceptable (can be done online).

**Follow up:** Have students send a link to the article they choose for the assignment before they turn in the review.

**Estimated class time:** 20-30 minutes

#### Assignment type: Research paper of any scope or size

**Issue:** Finding appropriate resources through Mobius and databases is often a barrier for international students. Many are unfamiliar with navigating the large number of resources available to them. Narrowing results of searches and determining key words for searches can be difficult.

**Teaching the skill:** Arrange a class meeting at the library. Webster’s library staff can lead orientations focused on a variety of skills – searching databases, using Mobius, and avoiding plagiarism. The session can be tailored to the academic content of the course, and can be extensive or brief.

**Estimated class time:** 30 to 90 minutes, depending on how extensive the instruction is

#### Assignment type: Presenting article or chapter summaries

**Issue:** Students may have trouble differentiating between main idea and detail in articles. This will lead them to present PowerPoint summaries that are too long and detailed or too brief to get across the main ideas of the text.

**Teaching the skill:** Explain the typical structure of articles in the discipline. Provide students with graphic organizers to help them organize the information you want them to pull from the articles. Have them practice in class with a common article.

**Review:** Assign them a second common article to read, summarize, and place in a PowerPoint.

**Estimated class time:** 30 minutes

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