

Quick Tips for Supporting International Community's Mental Wellbeing

In this handout, we will provide some quick tips for supporting the international community. We will also include a list of unique challenges/stressors that the international community faces during the pandemic, as well as other challenges that the international community faces along with their domestic counterpart.

Quick Tips for Supporting the International Community

1. Educate yourself about common issues that the international community encounters during the pandemic (see unique issues/stressors the international community faces and other common issues)
2. Proactively reach out to members of the international community that you have a connection with or to build rapport
3. Provide space and time to listen to concerns from the international community - ask what they need, but also share your personal experiences
 - i. Be proactive in bringing up conversations such as time management, stress management, zoom fatigue, managing motivation, etc.
4. Acknowledge the courage and resiliency they demonstrate during this time
5. Encourage students to communicate their needs with you
6. Provide options for students who need accommodation for time differences
7. Help normalize the experience of feeling stress and uncertainty during pandemic and validate their feelings
8. Connect the international community with resources (focus on the benefits of utilizing those resources and the how to access the resources) and follow up to check in afterwards
 - i. Self-help resources: <https://mentalhealth.uiowa.edu/>
 - ii. Encouraging them to utilize counseling resources on and/or off campus
9. Population to consider:
 - i. International graduate and professional students
 - ii. Undergraduate international students
 - iii. Incoming/new international students (who might or might not have been in the U.S. before)
 - iv. International colleagues
10. Some UI students who are working on Optional Practical Training (OPT), Curricular Practical Training (CPT), or Academic Training might not be in Iowa City area (ISSS advisors might be their primary contact on UI campus)
 - i. Encourage the students to access the self-help materials and local mental health resources
11. Contact International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) at iss@uiowa.edu for questions regarding working with international students.
12. Please see the [International Student Support Guide](#) the Academic Support & Retention compiled for additional strategies to support international students in the classroom.

Unique issues/stress the international community faces:

- Family and loved ones back home are impacted by COVID-19 more at different time (for example, as early as January for students from China, February and early March for students from South Korea, Iran, and Italy, now (late May early June) for Russia, UK, Brazil, Spain, Peru,

India, Pakistan, Mexico, Bangladesh), and thus the pandemic has impacted some members of the international community for a much longer duration.

- The international community is impacted by the pandemic financially as well, whether it is because of situations back in their home country, or here in the U.S. However, other than the Student Emergency Fund, most are not eligible for additional financial aid. This financial burden adds to the level of stress that the international community is already experiencing.
 - Graduate and professional students (some undergraduates as well) who have their own families here in the U.S. face tremendous financial burden because of the needs to support their family here as well as the family back home
- Travel restrictions – many countries have restricted international travel. Some members of international community are stuck in the U.S. because of limited opportunities and financial burden to go home. They might feel homesick and a heightened level of isolation.
- Everchanging immigration policies affected international students, whether they choose to remain in the U.S. or return home during this time.
 - For those who remain in the U.S. during this time:
 - Some are afraid of leaving the U.S. out of concern of not being able to return
 - The most recent SEVP guidance (now rescinded) added tremendous stress to F-1 international students, concerning whether they would be forced to leave the country, with limited flight options, having their study and other plans disrupted
 - For those who have returned to their home country:
 - Some are concerned about whether they can get back to the U.S. to continue their education or employment
 - Many are also concerned about the changes in immigration policies that may prevent them from continuing their current study, research, or work outside of the U.S.
 - A lot of members in the international community are concerned about having even more limited opportunities for education, research, and employment because of explicit changes in policy or implicit bias or discrimination because of the potential policy changes.
- For those who are not in the U.S., they are taking classes or working from different time zones, ranging from 1-2 hours difference to 14-18 hours difference.
- For those whose first language is not English, they might need to put additional time in their academic responsibilities in regular circumstances. Changes in assignment formats mean that they need to adjust their learning styles, often time takes up additional time to meet the academic expectations, thus adding to their stress level.
- Lack of understanding of other national or regional events leads to feeling confused or uncertain.
- Lack of familiarity with healthcare system and other resources causes hesitation to utilize resources or reach out for help.
- Feeling of safety – different countries have been managing the pandemic differently, which will impact the international community’s feeling of safety in the U.S.
- For international staff and faculty members, concerns about how potential furloughs would affect their immigration status and ability to stay in the U.S.

- Other events that are happening in their home countries, such as natural disasters or other political events.

Other common issues:

- Different international communities (e.g., the Muslim community, the Black community, the Asian community, etc.) continue to face racism towards them.
- The international community is facing other issues that domestic students or other communities are also facing, such as concerns about health and safety, adjusting to the virtual environment, maintaining motivation, dealing with Zoom burnout, etc.