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Andrew Coletti

Hello and welcome back to this episode of the T in teaching. This episode marks the start of season three, where we will continue to explore topics in online education. In this episode, our host, instructional Designer Shavonda Saki, sat down to speak with Fox professors Bertram Guillotine and Thomas Fung about designing courses for international students. Together, they discuss the challenges of designing a course for all students, as well as tools and advice to improve course design.

00;00;31;18 - 00;00;34;05

Andrew Coletti

Thanks for listening and please enjoy.

00;00;40;09 - 00;00;53;23

Shavonda Sackey

Hello, Bertrand and Tom, and welcome to the podcast. today we will be discussing the international students and how to design courses for them. So our first question I have a little, prelude to that, which is internationals at temple. the second largest student demographic when it comes to students enrolled in the master's programs, according to the 2023 2024 Temple University Factbook. What is one thing that you feel most faculty members might overlook, but does greatly affect international students?

00;01;20;06 - 00;01;21;17

Thomas Fung

I'll start first. I think that, from my view, we have to create a sort of what I would call it a more of an inclusive design. I think is beyond language. You know, remember one time listening to the radio that, this woman by name. But Sylvia Poggioli, she was a foreign correspondent for NPR for over 40 some years. She recently stepped down and retired, and she was interviewed on the radio. And she said that, you know, sometimes understanding a foreign language is great. But she said that you have to understand the history and the culture of the country. I took it to heart, to me is kind of like to be able to have that sort of cultural competencies. Right! To understand sort of like, you know, students background, whether they are from China or from Africa or from India, and so on. so that would be the first thing that I sort of put myself into help myself to, to sort of get to that cultural competency level. That's the first thing that I would do.

00;02;18;04 - 00;02;21;06

Bertrand Guillotin

Right. I agree. I think you need to, I wouldn't say have some rules of engagement, but somewhat of, a way to make the students feel comfortable. So, of course, on the faculty members may, underestimate the, difficulties of students, especially if they have an accent. Right. Everybody has an accent, but they might be extremely uncomfortable participating. So if 20% of the grade is on participation. And that's a stressor for students. So giving them another option, other than asking questions, you know, making comments and maybe calling on them, making them feel comfortable and also saying that they have an accent because everybody does.

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Bertrand Guillotin

In terms of origin. Tom has a great point. I would go beyond that and say, you're from China, but what city. Right. You are from Ghana? Okay. Ghana is in West Africa right. That's Africa is not a country. Yeah. You know sometimes we have those misperceptions that are very uncomfortable. For students who feel like they are from Ghana. They are not from South Africa. Yes, it's the African continent. But to Tom's point, learn a little bit about your students. You have the roster, and you see if they are international, and then ask them questions and then go a little bit out of your faculty. Powerful position because some students actually have this power distance in mind. Yeah. Multicultural dimensions and behavior. We do not challenge the faculty that come from a background where they take notes. They don't ask questions very different than the US educational system. So, we have to explain a little bit of, of that, making them feel comfortable and going outside of our comfort zone as a faculty member saying, I am from a small town.

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Bertrand Guillotin

This is where I come from. You don't necessarily show that on the first day, but this is one way to tell them, hey, it's okay to share a little bit if you're comfortable. because yes, you might be from China, but you're not necessarily from Shanghai. Where are maybe more people speaking English on a regular basis than other smaller sized cities? So, it just sets the bar, and then people have things in common. And so, you know, I've either traveled to your country or we find things in common. You can do icebreakers, of course you can do all kinds of things. But I'd say multicultural dimensions, even if it's just on the surface of it. Right. To understand what might prevent students from participating and being successful.

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Thomas Fung

I would like to piggy-back on Bertrand's concept about the whole inclusiveness. Right. So, I, I'd like to redesign the classroom if that's an in-person class, I as opposed to sort of like the whole traditional facing day. The instructor I would rather create it is like small round tables, you know, and then doing the whole spatial design. Bertram, I think that we could create a sort of like a sense of community, a sense of belonging in this way because, like, you know, if somebody just came in from overseas. Overcome the whole cultural biases or language barriers. And so, if we could create a sort of like a less, you know, a more inclusive spatial environment Right, there's two so there's like, they're not being marginalized. They could form a team, they could create a sort of collaboration. I think that it would sort of make them more comfortable, in learning, you know, and I will further add to that, I find it often if we we've shared, some of the, the lectures in advance. And encourage them to do sort of like, you know, translation because I notice a certain people, student would actually, have a dictionary with them. Right. Okay. Totally. Fine. Yeah. And they would write down in their, in their native language their. Right. So I think that to share that, PowerPoint file reading in advance. And also of course it depends on what the top because I think that, animation of video in advance will also be very helpful. Color coding and I'm not I'm not saying that to, to lessen the, the complexity of the materials, but, but to get them in doses, right. You know, that would be greatly helpful.

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Shavonda Sackey

And I'm glad you mentioned that because that takes us to the second question that I have, with the points that you have just discussed, like finding common ground and breaking, any barriers that they might face, do you think? And again, you've mentioned about the physical classroom and building it in such a way that they are able to form the teams or, meet people, talk to people, forces them to speak to each other? The same challenges faced in an in-person classroom. Are they the same challenges that you'd have on an online classroom? Is it harder? Is it easier? Do you have to be more creative in the online space?

00;07;05;22 - 00;07;09;05

Thomas Fung

Yeah. I think that, you know, I'm very much a high context person, meaning that I walk 100 miles and see you for five minutes. You know? So we have to agree that, the whole modality is changing, right? You know, so, I'm still working on this whole thing is like, how do we how do I engage, on a virtual basis? Right. I've been reading up on this whole notion of getting gamification. Right. It's sort of like I'm not an expert in that, but there's been sort of like a pedagogy coming in now is to create a sort of like a video game, kind of a saying that that people, you know, could, could play and then could learn. But the whole, virtual engagement, still a challenge to me. I'll be honest with that. I would agree. I mean, clearly face to face again, read, facial expressions, the body language, they can as well. Online is very difficult, obviously. Especially when the turn off that camera. Yeah, right. We're doing a virtual exchange right now with the United Arab Emirates. And, my students have a very, very tough time when I, when their counterparts on the same team are not just eight hours ahead of the time and tired. Maybe, but the camera is off. Yeah, it's very hard to discuss anything. So, beyond that, I think that you can engage people online, with interactions, you know, students can share their background as much as they are comfortable with their, classmates. And then the faculty can use that sporadically to make a connection. Right? Beyond the Geographic diversity, national cultures, if somebody has already, had some work experience or internships, that can also be to be, brought into the conversation. I do that a lot. That is more of those, possibilities with graduate level students and undergrad, but still. Right? If they don't have a professional experience, or backgrounds yet, maybe they talk about their dream jobs. Yeah, you know, things like that. So

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Bertrand Guillotin

You just have to be a bit more creative with how you're going about finding out. Yeah. Creative also authentic. Yeah. So yeah, sometimes I share a picture of my dog, and I say, by the way, I have a four legged to and they're there like yeah, yeah. Little things like that. Creativity. Yes. Yes. Absolutely. The whole notion of cyber presence. Right? Because you could have a virtual engagement. But, you know, there's a whole notion, what I call it, sort of like the whole cyber presence, you know, like, it's kind of, it's kind of like that, the lights are on, but nobody's home. Yeah, yeah. But yeah, yeah.

00;09;56;01 - 00;09;59;08

Thomas Fung

So I, I find that if especially in online classes that, I try to bring in the notion of sort of like sense of, of, of relevance. Right. Whether it is it's a personal relevance or physical relevance, you know, for example, I talk about lead time in inventory. Right. And I would suggest that people just like, go to your faucet at your house, you know, pop in your condo, you turn the water on. You have water you don't need because the lead time to get water in your house is zero. Yeah. So you don't have the, you know, the story. But where it's like if you go into, like, you want to have strawberries in the middle of the winter. And then that story you would have to be refrigerated. So, so then and of course it's not grow all year round and you have to have inventory. So I try to bring sort of these sort of everyday examples into it, you know, because in, in a virtual space, I could only do so much, yes, yes, absolutely. I agree.

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Shavonda Sackey

And based on, Bertrand and what you mentioned about creating that from getting them engaged, after you get that information, when you know who your student is, how or what are the factors that you would take into consideration creating or designing that course, knowing that you have some form of diversity in the class? Can you share certain things that you are mindful of when you're creating those courses?

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Bertrand Guillotin

Absolutely. So to Tom's point, you know, in terms of relevance, if I have, a supply chain student and my international business course and I see, an article in the press about strikes either at the ports on the East Coast and the Gulf Coast or strikes coming from Canada, knowing the interactions we have between Canada and the US in terms of trading partners. Then I share it with the class. And I mentioned to the student, "Brendan", by the way, I know you, studying this. So probably something of interest, right? What do you want to share? reactions, comments. And so we keep the course dynamic, to make sure that we go back to relevant. It's not just for us as faculty, but for them.

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Thomas Fung

A couple of things. So, I find that it's like, if they need extra time because English is not their first language. Right. You know, so those kinds of things that like, I reformat my PowerPoint files so that, using maybe more color coded, more animation, more GH5, pictures and things like that. Right. and now, of course, with zoom, there's a recording. So, so that helps, right? You know, I know there are people that, are kind of sensitive to people actually recording in class.

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Bertrand Guillotin

Yes. I'm okay with that, but I know that it's kind of it's sometimes people don't like that, you know? Yeah. Yes. Sorry. Here comes to mind is, also delegate the so-called faculty power right to other students. So, whether somebody is struggling online because that's the first online course or whatever, just to make sure that the teams are supportive of each other. Right. And so if you have domestic students who are way more comfortable in participation, they can go and breakout sessions and then basically help their classmates. Say this is a ten week course or even a six week course. Yes. And somewhere along week three, you realize that your teaching or the learning isn't as effective as it should be. Assignments have been submitted, readings are being done, but you're not getting. The fruit, so to speak, of your labor. What can a faculty member do to quickly pivot to get that learning back on track without losing engagement, without, you know, going in and changing the whole thing.

00;13;27;04 - 00;13;28;24

Thomas Fung

Well, I think that I it's from my own experience. I use the, office hours, you know, it's almost kind of like private tutoring, if you think about that. Right? Yeah. I really enjoyed doing that to some extent. I know it's a little bit of time consuming and labor intensive, but, I look at that as more of my way to get to know the students background culture and get to know them. Yeah. as a person more than as a student, right? Yeah. And I find it to be which is very helpful because I could slow the pace down a little bit. Right.

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Bertrand Guillotin

You know, you know, this speaks to me in terms of, running graduate level courses on a five week basis. Yes or no, four weeks. And basically, I tell the students right off, there's a lot of work to do. We opened the course early, as you know. Yeah. And basically, we communicate. So I tell them week one, this is what's coming. This is where you're doing well. This is what you need to keep in mind with your team what's coming. So give them a perspective of where they are. Of course we need to encourage them. Yeah. I think that that's also a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yes. Because then you also take a chance as faculty to like okay. Well, in the second half I'm going to make it. We know the grading and everything else. And then if you're really not making progress, rewind and recap. Yeah, I do some recaps that, for strategy, especially because there's so many concepts, even if you try to level set at the beginning with everybody on the same page with, a lot of them don't absorb it within the first week. So yeah, okay. This is where we are and this is where we're going. And it's okay if you're lost. You know, just reach out.

00;15;07;08 - 00;15;08;01

Shavonda Sackey

It's hard for one man or one person, one woman, even, to do everything. How are you consistently connecting to your students?

00;15;08;02 - 00;15;45;02

Thomas Fung

You know, I like the way you talked about, sort of like the whole, what I call it, socialization is a very key aspect of learning. Just a couple of weeks ago, I took my, MSO5001 to Chinatown. We had a nice dinner. There's seven of us.

It kind of breaks the barriers down a little bit. People are free to the kind of expressed anxiety, which is, you know, we're not we're not kind of be like, you know, complaining about things, but we say, hey, listen, man, I, you know, I'm having this kind of a challenge, you know, and oftentimes that people rely on technology. Technology is only a tool.

Right?

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Bertrand Guillotin

I can only emphasize all this. I would say additionally. So LinkedIn is very nice, right. to, to share networks and, and basically make them feel welcome. canvas crucial I think is very helpful, Right. So if you if you have a great instructional designer, we have them. It makes your life so much easier. Yeah. If you don't know if the class was just added last minute because nobody else, you know, so the, the gap in the schedule, which happens, it becomes, a train does, left the station you're trying to catch. And it's very hard to do. So I think you have to if you're not completely ready for any reason, technological, whatever. Just admit it. Yeah. Tell the students I'm catching up. And I tell the students real trust a process, right? We're not giving you the homework just because we want a great stuff. We're giving you the homework to give you the resources.

00;16;43;02 - 00;16;47;03

Shavonda Sackey

Thank you very much, Tom and Bertrand, for joining me on this podcast.

00;16;47;05 - 00;16;51;04

Bertrand Guillotin & Thomas Fung

Thanks for having us. Thank you. Thank you.