

Encouraging Participation

With small changes to your teaching, you can take advantage of the benefits that multilingual students bring to your class. Nearly half of Mason students are multilingual, and they have different levels of fluency. However, the strategies below are designed to help you support both multilingual and other students.

Faculty FAQ: How can I encourage ML/Int'l students to participate more during class?¹

"Students who come from primarily lecture-based classroom cultures may not immediately understand the value of participating in class discussions.... Even when international students are eager to participate, they often express frustration that conversations move too quickly or the language is too informal for them to understand and contribute in a meaningful way." (Skipper).

For most students who do not speak English natively, English language proficiency is a great cause of stress and concern (de Araujo, 2011; Phillips, 2004). Since these students are typically aware of their lower-level fluency, they may feel more anxious about participating in English-only discussions, particularly discussions in which native English speakers are present. Faculty across the disciplines can support students by creating a class space that provides low-stakes opportunity for speaking practice, builds the students' linguistic confidence through encouragement, and emphasizes other ways in which students can share their knowledge with their peers. Here are some tips to support linguistic development and emphasize students' strengths and knowledge in the classroom:

- **Know your students' thoughts about discussion:**

- **Run an email or in-class survey**

Send a list of yes/no questions about discussion and ask students to respond to them. Questions should focus on what students feel/think about the expectation of discussion. See Appendix A below for a list of sample questions by the professor Stephen Brookfield. You can then share your findings from the survey and have students recognize that you acknowledge their concerns and thoughts about this form of class participation.

- **Make a list of expectations WITH your students**

Ask students to write two or three specific things they expect themselves and their peers to do in order to create an engaging discussion. Let them share their thoughts with one or two peers before choosing one to share with the whole class. Find a way to save the thoughts shared in the large group and use them as the class' expectations on discussion and participation.

- **Set up your students for a successful class discussion:**

- **Share your lecture materials and questions ahead of class if possible**

With more time to think about the class content using questions, students can better prepare their comments and feel more confident to participate in class discussions. Use the questions as jumping-off points for the class discussion.

- **Ask students to send you their questions and artifacts ahead of class**

This means they will get to think about what they want to share in the discussion before they come to class. Students can bring relevant questions, artifacts etc related to the class' content and share those with the whole class in-person or via an online platform. This

¹ Skipper, K. *Helping Multilingual/International (ML/Int'l) Students Succeed: Frequently Asked Questions.*

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allows them to contribute even though they may not speak as much during large-group discussions.

- **Besides talking, use activities that let students use all their skills (writing, listening, reading)**
 - **Think-Pair-Share**

Give students a few minutes to consider a thought or question. Put them in pairs or small groups to discuss their thought or question. This set-up is typically less intimidating for the students to speak up and share their thoughts, so require that each student speaks (or allows time for their peer to speak).
 - **The Gallery-Wall**

Display different passages or questions from the class text around the classroom. Students then move around the room reading the passage/question and write a brief comment about it in their notebooks. If you would like to see their notes, provide post-it notes for students to write on and stick next to the passage or question.
- **Model discussion moves before your students so that they know what good discussion looks like:**
 - **Paraphrase what you understand**

As you listen to students' ideas during class, paraphrase what you understand and let them clarify as needed. This encourages more back-and-forth exchanges while allowing you to model how to clarify meaning during a conversation.
 - **Build on your students' comments**
 - **Ask your students some questions in response to their questions**
 - **Listen!**

Remember Culture!

- **Avoid using too many colloquial or informal expressions²**

Informal or colloquial expressions can confuse multilingual students resulting in less participation.
- **Reflect on the role culture and personality play in participation and discussion**

Through a write-up or think-pair-share, ask students to talk about how participation and discussion looked like in classes at their previous schools. How were they expected to contribute to the class? Could they ask questions during class time, or were they expected to ask them in a different venue? How do they personally prefer to participate in the class: lecture, small-group discussions, writing?

² Skipper. *Helping Multilingual/International (ML/Int'l) Students Succeed*.

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References

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Appendix A:

These questions have been drawn from S. Brookfield's "Ten Questions" activity:

1. What do you hope to achieve by using discussion?
2. What has stopped you from participating in discussions?
3. What happens when a discussion goes well? What does it look, feel and sound like?
4. What does a good discussion leader do?
5. How can we create the conditions for good discussion?
6. What's the worst discussion you've ever participated in and what made it so awful?

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Other Recommendations and Teaching Resources



Apply Today

Nelson, J. (2017). "1st 5 minutes of class: Getting students engaged." *Innovation of Teaching and Learning*, (9). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.13021/G8itlcp.9.2017.1871>

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Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. "Online discussions" Retrieved from <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/online-teaching/digital-teaching-tips/online-discussions/>



Listen Today


Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU (n.d). "Collaborative Learning" [Video] Retrieved on Aug. 7th 2019 from <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-management/collaborative-learning/>

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| | <p>Teaching in higher ed. (n.d). Cultural competence. Retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast-category/cultural-competence/</p> |
|  <p>Read Today</p> | <p>Eby, K., Jaconbsen, S.K, Lukes, L., Zhang, Z., Reid, E.S. & Jensen, A. (2017). "Students' Experiences in Mason's Active Learning Classrooms." <i>Innovation in Teaching and Learning</i>. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.13021/G8itlcp.9.2017.1915</p> <p>Ericson, R. (2018). "Adapting Active Learning Techniques for Traditional Classroom Settings." <i>Innovation in Teaching and Learning</i>. Retrieved from: https://journals.gmu.edu/index.php/ITLCP/article/view/2150</p> <p>Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. "Active learning". Retrieved from: https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-management/active-learning/</p> <p>"Mason impact: Creating engaged students and well-rounded scholars prepared to act." (2018, March 8). <i>Center for Teaching and Learning: Faculty Conversations</i>. Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/programs/stearns-center-opportunities/faculty-conversations/</p> <p>Zawacki, T., Habib, A., Hajabbasi, E. Antram, A., & Das, A. (2007). Valuing written accent: International voices in the U.S. academy. Retrieved from https://writtenaccents.gmu.edu/research-findings/critical-thinking/</p> |

Do you have other resources to share? Send them to stearns@gmu.edu