

ONE DOZEN WAYS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Our campuses are enjoying greater international student enrollment than ever before and these students bring with them a wide variety of previous library experience. Meeting the diverse needs and expectations of international students can be both challenging and rewarding. At Wright State University Libraries, we have undertaken multiple initiatives to increase international student satisfaction and engagement with the library and our services. Results from surveys, including the International Student Barometer (<http://www.i-graduate.org>), indicate we have developed a recipe for success. What follows are one dozen ingredients we have used in our recipe for connecting with our international students:

1. Meet and greet: WSU Libraries coordinates well-attended orientation tours for international students every quarter. Our secret ingredient is a heaping helping of library staff participation. Our objectives for library orientation are, “New international students see the library as a welcoming place and the staff as helpful, friendly and knowledgeable. They acquire a basic understanding of services.” Keep orientation objectives simple, focusing on approachability. Enlist lots of tour guides so you can work in small groups, promoting opportunities for discussion and questions. If students know that your library staff is approachable, they will come back to ask questions about procedures and policies later.

2. Socialize: At Wright State University, international students host numerous events throughout the year including coffee hours, poetry readings, and film viewings. Attending events that feature your international students lets them know you are interested in learning more about them and their cultures and that you support their academic success. It also gives them an opportunity to ask you questions they might not if it means having to visit the library to do it.
3. Host: Observe how your international students use your building and get their feedback on your space. Provide quiet study areas but make space for conversation to boil over. ESL (English as a Second Language) students need comfortable places to practice and listen to conversations in English.
4. Party: Most international students cannot fly home every weekend and holiday. Many have to rely on public transportation just to get around town. At WSU Libraries we have hosted poetry readings, International Student Coffee Hour, and multiple Game Nights. Events hosted at the library can be important social and cultural opportunities for international students. And remember—it’s not a party without free food.
5. Invite feedback: International students who have attended an event at WSU Libraries know we value their feedback because we ask for it frequently and offer additional resources and services based on their comments. Using both online and print surveys, we have asked what workshops they want the library to offer, what books they like to read in their home

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- countries, what study environments they prefer, etc. Whenever you have a captive international student audience, ask them what they want and give them what you can.
6. **Play:** After watching international students flock to the board and card games at one of our Game Nights, Mary Lou Baker Jones (Science and Math Librarian at WSU) developed a Games Collection in the library. We also selected more graphic novels, abridgements, and easy readers for our Popular Reading Collection. Our Popular Reading Collection is in the same room as the Games Collection, the popular magazines, and the coffee bar so students can readily participate in a variety of social, leisure activities. Consider using donated games to start a game collection that promotes socialization, communication, and fun. Be sure your book collection includes accessible texts at different reading levels.
 7. **Create:** At WSU Libraries we have created online guides that put resources useful to international students in a single, easy to navigate place. Library staff members have translated some library handouts into Chinese, French, and Arabic. Find out what hidden language skills your colleagues have and put them to good use.
 8. **Shake the money tree:** Look for grants to fund your great ideas. At WSU Libraries, Mary Lou Baker Jones and Beth Anderson (Student Technology Assistance Center Specialist) wrote grant proposals to beef up our game collection with games from other countries and to hire an international student to help create library videos in other languages.
 9. **Collaborate:** At WSU Libraries we collaborate with ESL faculty, the University Center for International Education, and community groups to share resources. Work with other campus units that support international students, ESL faculty, and international organizations in your community to cross-promote events and services.
 10. **Teach:** At WSU Libraries we work with ESL faculty to provide classroom instruction designed to teach transferrable research skills. Follow-up emails and appointments are essential aspects of instruction and many international students are surprised that these services are free. Get involved with any ESL instruction happening on your campus by offering one-shots or workshops.
 11. **Assess:** Do some kind of meaningful assessment of your instruction sessions to international students and consider sharing the results with faculty. This allows them to see which skills acquired during your session are most valuable to the international students and lets them know what areas may require more instruction later.

12. **Advocate:** Encourage publishers and vendors to integrate translation and audio features into their products. If your library is considering buying language-learning software, advocate for something that includes English language learning components.

Reach out to your international students and other campus units that work with international students to make the student experience welcoming, educational, and culturally safe. When the library is a more inviting place for international students, domestic students benefit from a more internationalized campus. Using some of these ingredients, create your own recipe for international student satisfaction and engagement.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Bordonaro, K. (2006). Language learning in the library: An exploratory study of ESL students. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 32(5), 518-526.
- Crawford, P. (2004). A novel approach: Using graphic novels to attract reluctant readers and promote literacy. *Library Media Connection*, 22(5), 26-28.
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- Jackson, P. A., & Sullivan, P. (2011). *International students and academic libraries: Initiatives for success*. Chicago, Ill: Association of College and Research Libraries.
- MacDonell, C. (2004). Making the case for pleasure reading. *Teacher Librarian*, 31(4), 30-32.
- Peters, D. E. (2010). *International students and academic libraries: A survey of issues and annotated bibliography*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press.