

Understanding and Supporting our International Students

James Flammer
Assistant Director of Retention
International Students and Scholars
The University of Arkansas

Cindy Rauth
Program Coordinator
English Language and Cultural Studies
Spring International Language Center
The University of Arkansas

University of Arkansas international student enrollment

1424 international students

5.6% of total student body

702 undergraduates

719 graduate students

Spring 2017

UA international student enrollment:

Top 5 countries

China	149
Panama	148
India	106
Saudi Arabia	95
Bolivia	85


Top fields of study

Electrical Engineering	107
Cell and Molecular Biology	67
Civil Engineering	67
Industrial Engineering	61
Chemical Engineering	58

Spring 2017

63 students enrolled at the UA
are from countries on the Travel Ban list

Spring 2017

A solid green horizontal bar spanning the width of the slide at the bottom.

Challenges for international students

- **New culture**
- **Second (additional) language**
- **New educational system with different rules and expectations**
- Concerns with visa regulations
- Financial concerns
- Pressure from family, government, and/or scholarship requirements

(“Cultural Variations”, n.d.)

Profile of a UA international undergraduate a Panamanian scholar

PAPSS full scholarships:

- Full scholarship: tuition, room and board, books and travel
- ✓ 1 year to complete English language training
- ✓ 4 years to complete undergraduate degree
- ✓ Minimum 2.7 GPA
- ✓ Collateral to guarantee fulfillment of scholarship*

***If the student cannot fulfill the scholarship requirements, the student must repay the loan in full.**



Profile a UA international graduate student a doctoral student in Engineering

- **UA Graduate Assistantship:** Grader or Research Assistant
- spends most of his / her time in the lab
- little time for social activities
- rarely interacts with Americans
- days can pass without ever speaking English



- In the beginning, speaking and writing in English are very challenging.
- Students struggle to understand how to interact with their advisors.

international graduate students: challenges in navigating relationships

*I was surprised to find professors and students interacting like friends, like there is equality. It is **difficult for me to know how to address professors** and I have learned that modesty is often inappropriate. In emails, for example, I cannot write the way I would in Japanese, like “I humbly request....”*

(Japanese graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University
as cited in “Cultural Variations”, n.d. pp 6)

Top Academic Challenges

(rated by UA international students as *somewhat* to *very challenging*)

1. Presenting in front of class
2. Writing assignments
3. In-class writing (including tests)
4. Completing group projects
5. Understanding lectures
6. Multiple Choice tests
7. Note taking



(Keogh & Rauth, 2013)

Top Academic Challenges

(rated by UA international students as *somewhat* to *very challenging*)

**written
English
language
skills**

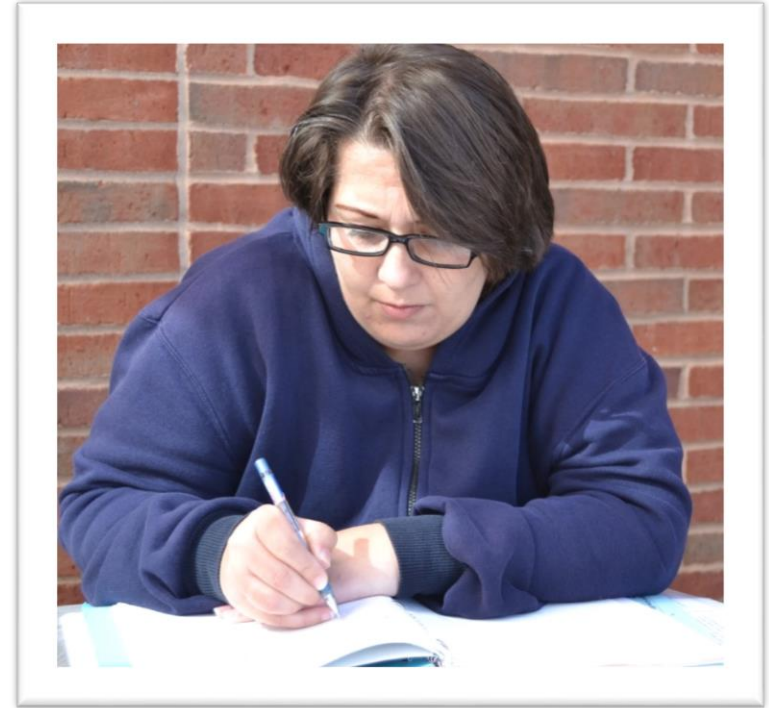
1. Presenting in front of class
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Keogh & Rauth, 2013

“The testing time is too short. We know the material, but we need more time to read and respond on the tests. I have never finished a test.”

– Focus group participant



Keogh & Rauth, 2013

Academic Integrity

*“I thought summarizing related articles and giving my thoughts were good format for the paper. **I did not know proper way of making referencing.** I had by no means any intention to steal other peoples’ works. I did not realize that this would cause this big trouble for me. However, the result is bitter because of my ignorance of reference format.”*

(Korean graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University as cited in “Cultural Variations”, n.d. p12)

Top Academic Challenges

(rated by UA international students as *somewhat* to *very challenging*)

speaking
skills
&
cultural
adaptation

1. Presenting in front of class
2. Writing assignments
3. In-class writing (including tests)
4. Completing group projects
5. Understanding lectures
6. Multiple Choice tests
7. Note taking



(Keogh & Rauth, 2013)

UA international students in a focus group say...



*“I don’t speak in class. Other students do, but **I feel nervous about my questions**. I have to write it out before I say it. If the professor asks me to repeat my question or clarify it, my brain freezes.”*

*“I don’t feel comfortable to speak in front of the professor because **he doesn’t understand my pronunciation**. I ask questions after class. I am afraid the **other students will laugh at me**.”*

(Keogh & Rauth, 2013)



“Team projects are hard. All of my partners are Americans. I made a recommendation in a group project, but they didn’t listen to me. They just ignored me. If I were American, I could explain more specifically and maybe be more persuasive.”

– Focus group participant

(Keogh & Rauth, 2013)

Cultural variation in interaction and communication

the role of context

Role of Context

Much of the message is **encoded in the context**.

Meaning tends to be more **implicit**, often transmitted **non-verbally**. **What is NOT said may be more important** than what is.



High Context

Low Context



Meaning is generally **direct** and **explicitly** expressed. **Words are the primary carriers of meaning**. Speakers tend to communicate in ways that **reflect their feelings**.

Role of Context

High Context

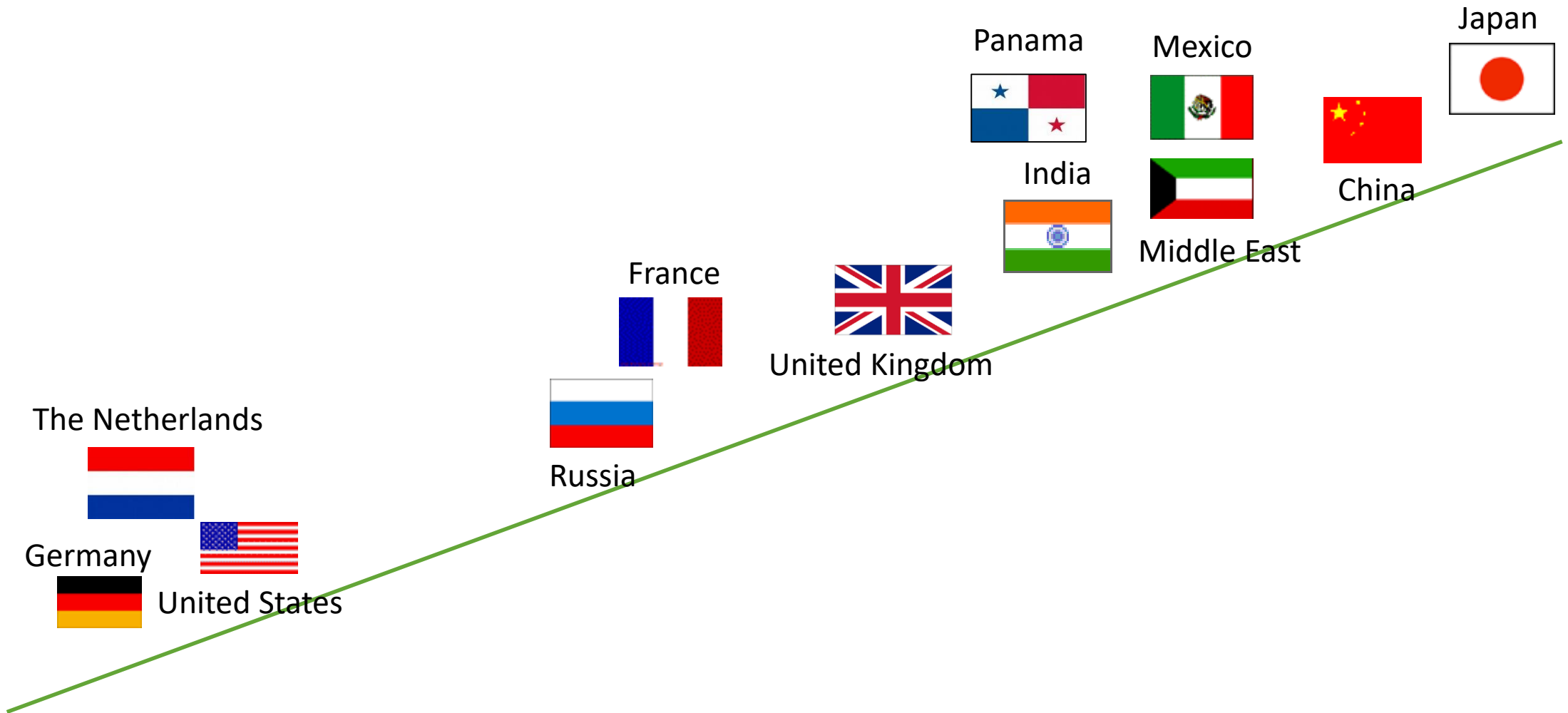


United States

Low Context

Role of Context

High Context



Low Context

(Storti, 1999; Dingeman, 2010)

Cultural Values

Low Context

Individualist

self-reliance, independence
Individual achievement; competitive

Direct

Verbal message explicit;
words carry meaning; expressing emotions
less use of non-verbal message; informal

Face is Less Important

truth before feelings;
okay to say “No”;
goal: to exchange ideas and opinions

High Context

Collectivist

group interdependence
group achievement; cooperative

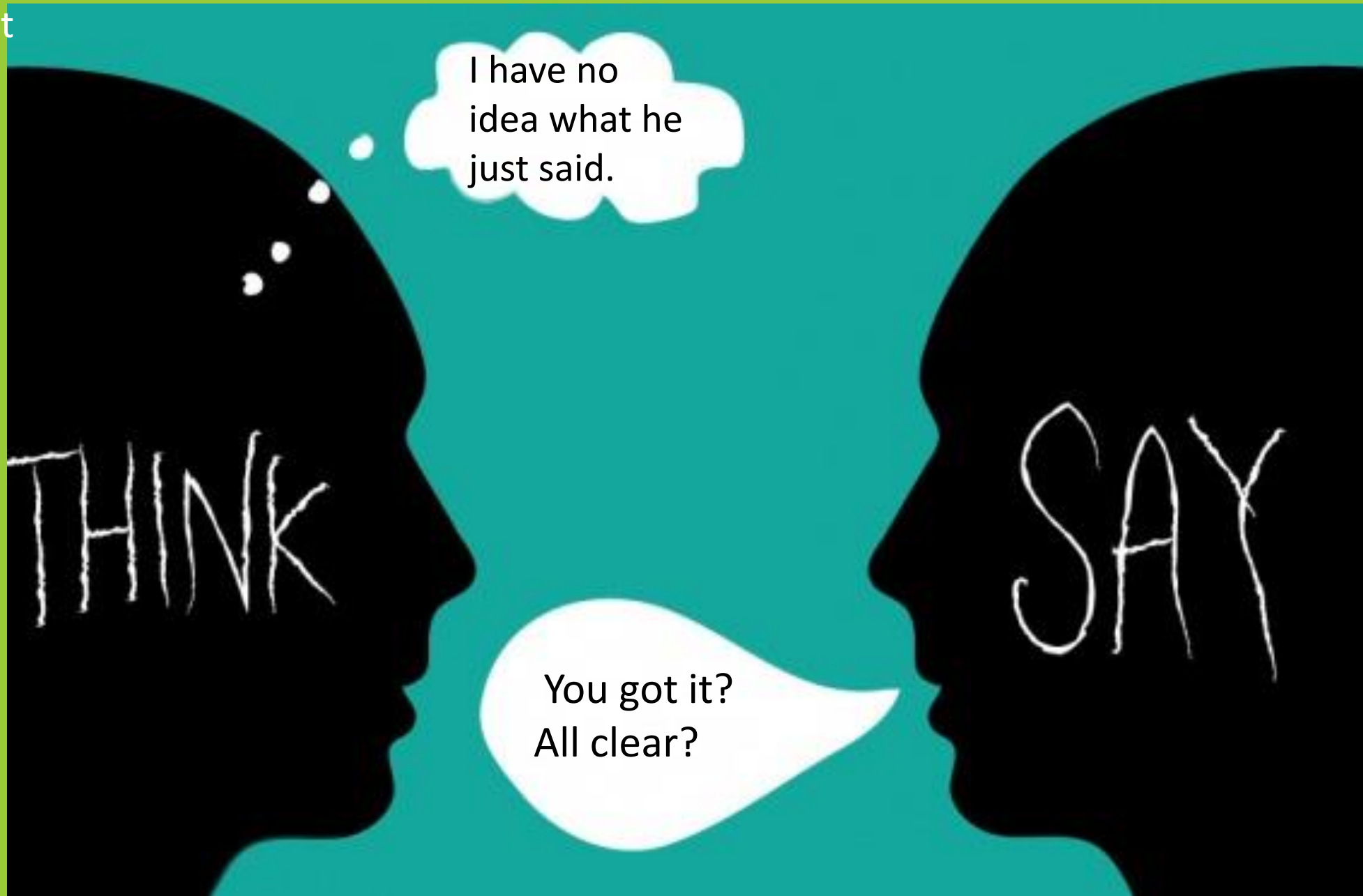
Indirect

verbal message implicit;
context: situation, people & nonverbal
message important; formal

Face is More Important

preserve harmony; do not embarrass
another; NOT always okay to say “No”,
goal: preserve the personal relationship

high context
culture



low context
culture

High Context

Association

Attention to group process



Low Context

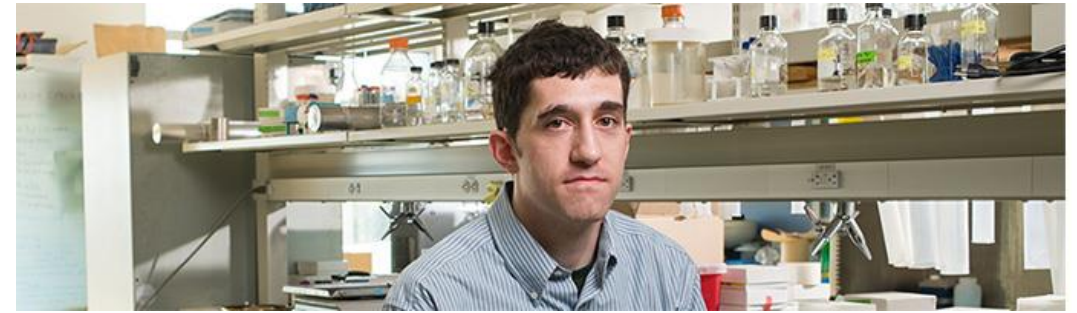
Attention to goal



Case study: *Group work*

Mila, an out-going international junior from Brazil, was required to complete a group project in one of her Business classes. She was initially excited about the prospect of getting to know three of her American classmates but was quickly dismayed. Mila found that none of her peers were able or willing to do their work on time. She did not know what to say to them, nor did she feel comfortable approaching the instructor. In the end, Mila did all of the work by herself and put everyone's name on the project.

Case study: balancing family & school



Mehmet worked hard to gain admission and secure a graduate assistantship at the University of Arkansas. He was excited about the possibilities for himself and his family (wife and 2 kids). Due to a rigorous visa process, he arrived in Fayetteville 2 weeks after the semester had started. He struggled to find housing for his family and once they were settled, he found that he was spending the majority of his time in the lab (including most Saturdays and Sundays). When he did take time for his family, he was reprimanded by his advisor for not being in the lab. Two months into his assistantship, Mehmet needed to take care of some family business, so he left the lab. Upon his return, he was immediately called in by his advisor who informed him that his assistantship had been terminated. He was left to figure out how to support his family and continue his studies.

How can faculty better support international students?

How can we create a more inclusive classroom & campus?



How faculty can better support international students in their studies:

Writing assignments:

- Assign some low-stakes / pass-fail assignments that incorporate peer or instructor feedback
- Provide detailed, specific feedback
- Provide examples of completed assignments
- Provide opportunities for revision; review writing assignments in stages
- Be explicit in your expectations for academic integrity
- Inform students of the Writing Support Center through **Class +**

(Redden, 2017; “Cultural Variations”, n.d.)

UA International Students use of the Writing Center (Class +)

52% never use the campus writing center

32% don't even know it is there

} UNIVERSITY
WRITING
CENTER

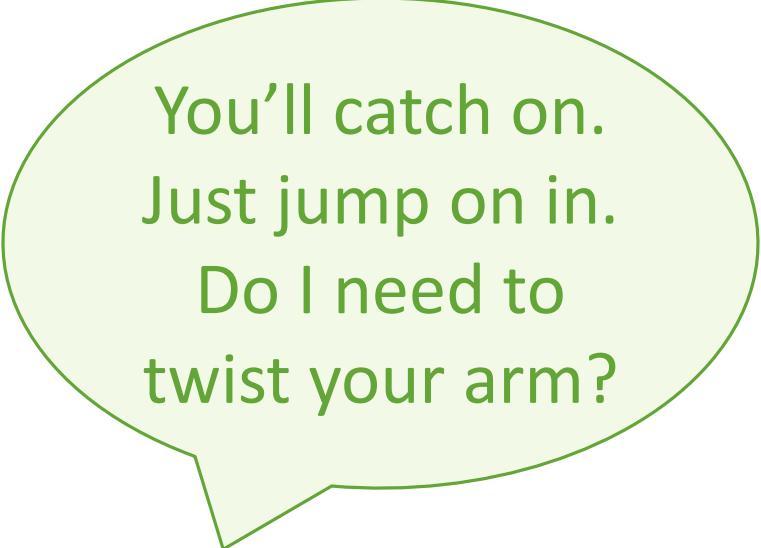
(Keogh & Rauth, 2013)



How faculty can better support international students in their studies:

Understanding lectures and readings:

- Present the material in multiple ways (supplement with visual support)
- Make classroom materials available after class
- Provide examples of course content from your students' home countries
- Speak more slowly; be aware of idiomatic language



You'll catch on.
Just jump on in.
Do I need to
twist your arm?

(Redden, 2017; "Cultural Variations", n.d.)

*“If the teacher’s lecture is based on the book, if I miss something **I can read the book**. If it’s not, I cannot catch that info later.”*

- Focus group participant

(Keogh & Rauth, 2013)

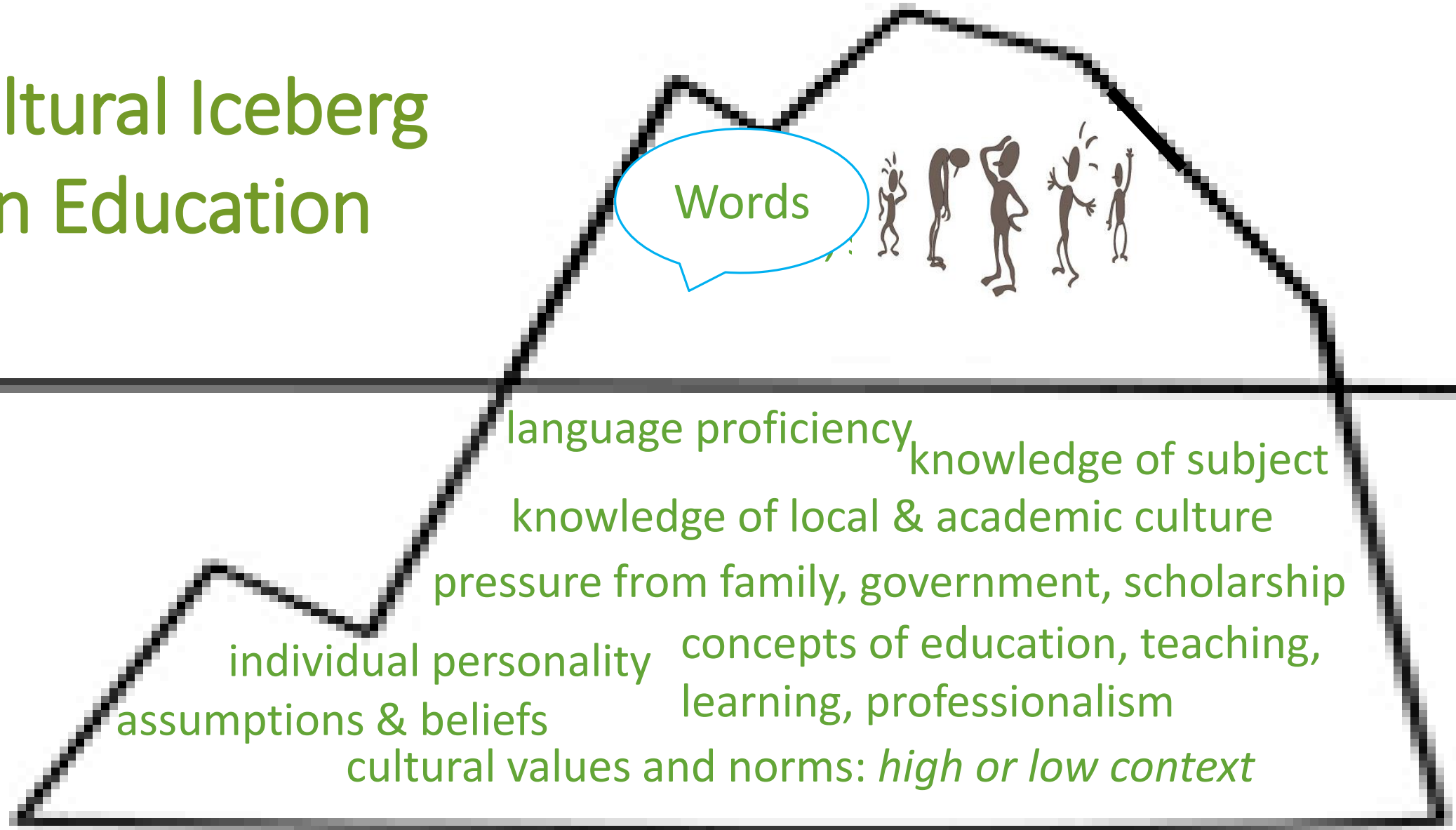
How faculty can better support international students in their studies:

Class discussions and group work:

- Explain why you think discussions & group work are valuable
- Explain / model how you expect students to participate, and how you will assess class participation
- Allow for peer feedback after discussions or group work
- Include non-U.S. examples in course content
- Elicit and encourage understanding of international students' perspectives

(Redden, 2017; “Cultural Variations”, n.d.)

Cultural Iceberg in Education



Resources on campus

International Students & Scholars

- Michael Freeman, Director
- James Flammer, Asst. Director of Retention

Sponsored Student Programs

- Gloria Flores Passmore, Director
- Catherine Cunningham, Program Coordinator

PAPSS (Panamanian) Scholars Program

- Mayra Torres, Assoc. Director for Special Programs

English Language and Cultural Studies Program

- Leyah Bergman Lanier, Director Spring International Language Center
- Cindy Rauth, Program Coordinator

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