

## Coming to a New Academic Culture

Entering a new academic culture is enriching but can also be challenging. While your academic culture may be more or less similar to U.S. academic culture, some differences have been observed by people from most cultures. As you prepare for departure to the United States, you may want to think about what is typical of the teaching and learning styles of your home culture and how these styles differ from the U.S.

### The Three Big Challenges for Most International Students

- Expressing yourself masterfully in English
- Expressing YOUR viewpoint in papers, discussion, and research (Originality of Thought)
- Learning the rules of academic honesty as they are understood in the U.S.

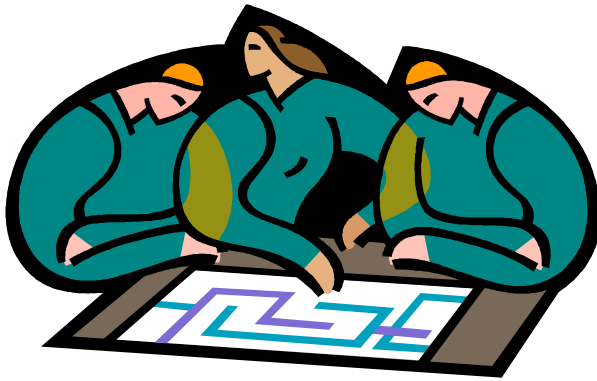


### Hallmarks of U.S. Teaching and Learning Styles

- Active participation is welcomed and often required in the classroom and can be part of your grade.
- Active participation is demonstrated through good advance preparation for class and critical comment and questioning in class in a respectful manner.
- Your own well informed and logical viewpoints are valued and vital to your success.
- Curiosity, inquisitiveness, and creativity are highly valued.
- Practical application to a theoretical concept is important.
- Extensive reading assignments and homework and frequent testing are common.
- Learning to prioritize and distill what is more and less important is vital.
- Class syllabi provide not only a timetable for readings and tests but also spell out expectations and policies and are thus a contract between teacher and student.
- Attendance of each and every class is expected and vital to success.
- Teachers are not considered the ultimate and one authority never to be questioned. They are approachable for additional clarification and assistance during posted office hours. They tend to encourage rather than censure.
- Seeking additional assistance by asking questions and seeking out tutoring is considered a sign of maturity not weakness. In fact it shows you are actively participating in and taking ownership of your education!

- Taking good notes of important points during lecture or discussion and while reading is very important.
- Speaking up in class is important even if you have an accent and may have to repeat yourself! Just because you speak with an accent does not mean you think with one and your thinking is faulty!
- Faculty advisors and general advisors are there to map out and discuss your plan of study with you in this educational system with much more choice and flexibility than you might be accustomed to.
- On the undergraduate level, it is very easy to change one's major.
- Cheating and plagiarism, as they are understood in the U.S., are taken very seriously and can lead to dismissal from the university.
- A classroom environment and relationship with instructors that appears more relaxed does not indicate lower performance expectations.
- Multiple choice exams are common in the lower level courses.
- Written homework and papers must usually be typed.
- Group work is frequent and valued.
- The ability to use technology is an expectation.
- Technology is used to supplement lectures—often with Power Point—which can speed up the lecture pace.
- The weighted credit system of grading must be understood.

Information compiled from Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada by Charles Lipson and thoughtful feedback from ISU International Students.



**Critical thinking** consists of [mental](#) processes of [discernment](#), analysis and [evaluation](#). It includes possible processes of reflecting upon a [tangible](#) or [intangible](#) item in order to form a solid judgment that reconciles scientific evidence with common sense. In contemporary usage "critical" has a certain negative connotation that does not apply in the present case. Though the term "analytical thinking" may seem to convey the idea more accurately, critical thinking clearly involves synthesis, evaluation, and reconstruction of thinking, in addition to analysis.

Critical thinkers gather information from all senses, [verbal](#) and/or [written](#) expressions, [reflection](#), [observation](#), [experience](#) and [reasoning](#). Critical thinking has its basis in [intellectual](#) criteria that go beyond subject-matter divisions and which include: [clarity](#), [credibility](#), [accuracy](#), [precision](#), [relevance](#), depth, [breadth](#), [logic](#), [significance](#) and fairness.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical\\_thinking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking)