**Teaching Multilingual Students:**

**Challenges and Strategies**

****

Image from U Central Florida

**Challenge:** Students lack discipline-specific vocabulary.

**Strategy:** Have a grad student collect and translate a glossary of common words in the field.

**Challenge**: Students are unsure how to respond to common writing prompts, like “synthesize” or “analyze.”

**Strategies:** Foreground these in a class session. Provide illustrations and examples.

Be consistent in your use of prompts.

Avoid embedded metaphor, like “leave breadcrumbs during your research.”

**Challenge**: Students hesitate to speak up in class.

**Strategies:** Allow a few minutes to make notes or freewrite answers before speaking.

Have students discuss in pairs and small groups before speaking before the entire class.

Be aware that their hesitation may be for linguistic or cultural reasons (they may not be used to active-learning classrooms).

**Challenge**: Students are not following the lecture or presentation.

**Strategies:** Don’t ask, “Does everyone understand?”

Ask students to demonstrate understanding by “saying back” (paraphrasing), giving examples, connecting a concept to a previous one…

Communicate concepts in different ways: visual illustrations, examples, stories… Put keywords on slides or blackboards. Allow students to photograph board. Share slides with them.

**Challenge**: Students still haven’t mastered subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency or definite and indefinite articles.

**Strategy:** Choose your battles. Some of these grammatical structures may be radically different in a student’s home language, and almost impossible to learn perfectly as an adult.

Consider, for example: Do you speak a Romance language? Do you ever make mistakes of noun gender? You probably do, but you can still communicate. Emphasize communication and clarity in your assessments.

**Contact:** Dr. Cheryl Caesar, WRAC, caesarc@msu.edu

Dr. Joyce Meier, WRAC, meierjo@msu.edu

Dr. Patricia Walters, ELC, walter31@msu.edu