FAQs about working with multilingual and international students

1. How are students placed into the Intensive English Language Program, and how many terms do they spend in the program? What do students study in the IELP?
   International students are required to pass an English exam (IELTS, TOFEL to name a couple). If the student falls below the passing mark, then they are required to either take English language classes in an intensive English language program. PSU then allows students to either complete the IELP program with a 2.7 gpa to enter PSU classes, or the student can again take the English exam until they earn passing marks. In the IELP, students take progressive levels of Grammar, Writing, Reading, and Listening and Speaking. The IELP helps students ready for passing the PSU required exams, and prepares students for general university assignments. The IELP doesn't prepare students for particular classes; for example, ECE 177 or BA 101. Students will need to learn the particular vocabulary, skills expectations, and vernacular of the different disciplines from the department housing the course. (link answer to the IELP curriculum).

2. How does the IELP help students transition into PSU classes?
   They must complete a 6- or 9-month Pathways Program in the IELP as of Fall 2016.

3. How can students from different language backgrounds learn English in the same class?
   Classes are taught in English and students from all language backgrounds study English together.

4. Is there specific tutoring support for multilingual students here at PSU? What are their options?
   Multilingual students can receive tutoring at the IELP Learning Center for a fee (https://www.pdx.edu/esl/ielp-learning-center) and free workshops on academic skills. The Writing Center has an ESL specialist available to students. The library’s Learning Center is also available, though their focus is more on content than on English language accuracy.

5. Are all of my students from other countries international students?
   International students have to take classes in the IELP? Most students from other countries are international students, but many international students never study at the IELP because they have already passed the required PSU English exam.

6. Why can it be difficult for a multilingual student to adhere to American university expectations about plagiarism?
   Students' perspectives on plagiarism, and what constitutes plagiarism, may vary depending on where they where they grew up and what they learned in school. Some students may come from a culture where ideas are not owned, but shared, so plagiarism is a foreign concept. In many cultures sharing ideas is
expected, and it shows respect to use other’s ideas. Sometimes, international students really don't understand that using an expert’s voice is not as preferred as the students’ burgeoning authority in their topic in an American university. Plagiarism and cheating are not always synonymous in other cultures. Telling a multilingual student “don't plagiarize, use citation” is often not enough to make a student understand cultural conventions. The concept of using another’s words as stealing may be a completely new idea. Students have to practice the integration of paraphrasing, summarizing, citation, and response into their own work to exercise moving from one author’s voice to their own.

7. **Why don’t my students come to office hours?** International students may be hesitant to ask for help or not immediately identify that they are not understanding information in class. International students are more likely to be first generation American university students and unfamiliar with common classroom practices, like who to ask questions of and how to communicate with professors. It may be best to approach students individually and not in front of the whole class.

8. **What counties do my students come from, and why are they studying in the United States?** International students are from all over the world. They come to the U.S. for a variety of reasons, including to participate in the liberal arts design of American universities opposed to liberal arts programs in the UK or Australia. Or, some students come here to learn the infrastructure of universities and will return to their home countries to develop both civil infrastructures and university infrastructures there. Or, perhaps some students may not have done well on required entrance exams in their home country, and have come to the US to complete their studies in hopes of better jobs at home. It really depends on the student.

9. **Do international students have different classroom expectations than American students?** Teaching practices vary widely from country to country. In many cultures students are passive recipients of knowledge, and these students may feel confused and uncomfortable with the American professors’ expectation that they participate actively in class. They may also question the value of group work and view student presentations as a questionable use of class time because these skills are not valued at home.

10. **Why is there a gap between my international students’ writing and speaking skills?** In some countries learning occurs primarily through texts; students from these countries may have had a great deal of practice reading and writing in English, but they may have had little opportunity to practice speaking or to hear anyone talking in English. They may understand most of their readings but struggle to understand lectures. On the other hand, students from cultures with strongly oral learning traditions may speak very fluently but have relatively less exposure to written English. These students may have poor spelling and handwriting and little understanding of the mechanics of punctuation.
11. I've just read an assignment by a student which I am 99% sure he did not write. However, extensive googling is turning up nothing, so I'm having a hard time proving that he did not plagiarize. Plagiarism happens for a multitude of reasons, the most common is cultural differences and expectations of both the student and instructor in the first place, and poor time management and skills on the student's' part in the second place. An multilingual student may be from a culture where ideas are shared, not owned, so the practice of using others’ ideas and not citing may be common and respectful. The student may not know how to consider someone else’s ideas as “owned”.

12. Is there someone I can talk to if I've got questions about teaching multilingual students? You can contact Annie Greenhoe at greenhoe@pdx.edu