CHAPTER NINE

# Forging Multiple Pathways:

## Integrating International Students into a Canadian University Library

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This chapter will describe five different projects undertaken at the Brock University Library in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, which represent different pathways toward integrating international students into academic libraries. These projects were designed to welcome and introduce international students to the library as well as to support their extended learning by the library. Each of them represents a different type of pathway toward that goal of integration.

The five projects described in this chapter include the creation of a special welcome sign, the provision of a staff development workshop for student peer assistants, the construction of a specialized LibGuide, the development and use of an online library English as a Second Language (ESL) workbook and general online library tutorials, and the deployment of a self-access cart. These projects can easily be adapted to an American college context.

Brock University is a mid-sized university in Ontario, Canada with approximately 18,000 students, out of whom about 2,400 are international students. Of the total number of international students, about 1,800 are undergraduate students and about 600 are graduate students. Most of the students come from China (1,200), followed by students from India (150), Nigeria (130), the United States (50), Pakistan (50), Germany (40), and Saudi Arabia (40).

This chapter begins with a short foray into the library literature that deals with international students. It cites some examples in the literature of the many ways in which academic libraries have tried to integrate international students. This brief literature review is followed by descriptions of the five projects that form the main content of this chapter. Following these descriptions, the chapter ends with a consideration of how these projects offer multiple pathways for integrating international students into academic libraries.

# Background Literature

The library literature on international students continues to grow. Although a recent systematic review[1] notes that it is not as prevalent as might be expected, it is still a topic that seems to be of more interest in recent literature than was the case in the past.[2]

Some of this literature offers examples of different ways that academic libraries have tried to integrate international students into their campuses. These ways include offering specialized library programming for international students, such as orientation workshops,[3] library instruction/information literacy sessions,[4] stand-alone online library tutorials,[5] and online video tours in different languages.[6]

Engaging in outreach efforts to international student groups on campus[7] is an additional method of integration found in the literature. This could also include direct marketing of library information to international students about available library resources and services.[8,9]

Other ways to integrate international students into academic libraries focus on librarians' abilities to work more effectively with them. Examples include broadening librarians' linguistic and cultural knowledge when working with non-native speakers of English[10–14] and offering tips for enhancing one-on-one interactions with these students in library settings.[15]

Librarians working with other campus partners is another way found in the literature that can serve to better integrate international students into North American libraries. Examples here include librarians working with international and multicultural student services staff[16] as well as with ESL instructors.[17]

A final method of integration worth highlighting in the literature is the attempt by librarians to better understand library experiences from the international students' own perspectives. This literature offers librarians insights into understanding the information-seeking behavior of international students[18] as well as diverse cultural perspectives on academic educational issues such as plagiarism[19] and class participation.[20]

The descriptions of the five projects offered in this chapter seek to bolster the library literature examples cited above. These projects offer further examples of ways in which academic librarians can try to integrate international students into their libraries. This chapter also offers the framework of multiple pathways as a more encompassing way to consider the importance of all these different ways to integrate international students.

# Pathway One: Welcome Sign

The first pathway is an example of how librarians can broaden their awareness of the linguistic diversity that international students bring to campus. Its purpose is to promote the integration of international students into libraries through this heightened awareness.

This pathway took the form of a direct welcome. It involved the creation of a physical sign of welcome from the library to new international students, and it was created with direct input from the international students themselves. This project asked new international students to write "My name is _ and I come from _" in their native languages at an orientation program at the start of an academic year. The new international students were asked to do this in their own handwriting with a pen on paper in order to give the resulting poster a very authentic, individualized, and personal feel.

Once the poster was designed, it was printed and posted at the front door of the library; it also appeared in digital form on monitors inside the library. Many international

**Figure 9.1. Welcome Sign.**

students, both students who had signed as well as students who had not, appreciated the friendly gesture of welcome. They all expressed pleasure at seeing their native languages on display. This simple and small gesture from the library paid off large dividends in public goodwill from all international students on campus.

# Pathway Two: Student Worker Development Workshop

The second pathway is an example of employing student peers to help librarians integrate international students into the library. Its purpose is to promote the integration of international students into libraries through student-to-student peer learning.

This pathway took the form of a staff development workshop for student employees who worked as peer assistants in the library. These library student peer assistants staff their own reception desk within our library and they often interact with international students on campus. An interactive workshop was conducted with them to discuss best practices for one-on-one interactions with international students at library service desks. The workshop began with each peer assistant receiving a paper slip that contained a tip or a statement about working with international students who are non-native speakers of English. The list of tips and statements appear below.

The workshop ran by having each student peer assistant read the tip or statement, then indicate if it made sense to them, and then had them add a personal example or experience if they wished. A short group discussion followed each tip. In this way, the content of each tip was covered by going around the table in a circle. Discussions were supplemented by my own experiences working with non-native speakers of English in libraries.

The tips and questions came from my own personal experience as an ESL instructor being applied to a library context. ESL teaching focuses on communicative strategies coming out of the four language skill areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. So, tip number one, for example, stresses the need for communication flowing back and forth between speaking partners. In another example, comprehensibility refers to a person making themselves understood, as opposed to comprehension, which refers to a person understanding something that someone else has said. Both comprehensibility and comprehension are important in a communication exchange. Further examples include stressing the importance of circumlocution—using different words to describe something if the original explanation was not clear. Another is using recasting, offering feedback indirectly in the form of a question—for example, saying, "In the stacks?" if a student asks for something "in the sticks." The most important tip is probably asking, "Does that make sense to you?" instead of asking, "Do you understand?" because the first question puts the responsibility for a successful interaction mainly on the person doing the explaining (i.e., the person at the service desk) as opposed to the person asking the question who might equate not understanding something with being personally deficient.

The conversation at this workshop was then guided by my inserting those types of explanations as given above into the discussion. I only added these further comments after the tip was read and the student peer offered their own interpretation, understanding, or experience with the particular tip.

This workshop was well received by the student peer assistants who added plenty of experiences of their own with international students to the discussion. It also underscored the important role that student peer assistants can make in helping international students adapt to a new academic climate.

The result of this workshop on peer assistants was a heightened sense of awareness when dealing with international students at the service desk. A copy of the tips was kept at the desk for referral. International students seemed to feel more comfortable coming up to this desk to ask individual questions of the peer assistants.

## TIP SHEET FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERACTIONS
### Working with International Students: Tips for Peer Assistants

Tip 1:  Remember that every interaction is a two-way street. Both parties must participate and work with each other to make it successful.

Tip 2:  Understand what comprehensibility is.

Tip 3:  Understand what comprehension is.

Tip 4:  Use circumlocution ("talking around").

Tip 5:  Attitude makes a difference.

Tip 6:  Use multiple learning styles.

Tip 7:  Show sympathy, but practice empathy.

Tip 8:  Be open to working with a third person.

Tip 9:  Use conversation repair techniques: using fillers and pauses.

Tip 10: Another conversation repair technique: speaking more slowly. (How can you do this without sounding patronizing?)

Tip 11: Another conversation repair technique: admitting you did not understand what was asked.

Tip 12: Use recasting (offering feedback in the form of a question).

Tip 13: Don't correct people's grammar mistakes. (Why not?)

Tip 14: Observe successful interactions.

Tip 15: Learn from your own mistakes.

Tip 16: Read more about working with international students.

Tip 17: Attend lectures or programs on working with people from different cultures.

Tip 18: Make international students feel welcome. (How might you do this?)

Tip 19: Solicit feedback. ("Does that make sense to you?" is better than "Do you understand?")

Tip 20: Brainstorm with other staff members.

Tip 21: Try to learn another language yourself.

Tip 22: Smile.

# Pathway Three: LibGuide

The third pathway is an example of developing online library material that international students can access individually on their own as a learning aid. Its purpose is to promote the integration of international students into libraries through online library support that points them to language-learning resources.

This pathway took the form of a LibGuide created for both international students who are non-native speakers of English and for domestic students who are learning a foreign language (http://researchguides.library.brocku.ca/international). Its intent was to show international students that other students on campus were language learners as well and that the library wanted to support them all equally.

The content of this LibGuide contains links to books, websites, online tutorials, writing guides, and other sites deemed helpful for both second- and foreign-language learners. The welcome section offers a link to "welcome" in many different languages and email contacts of library staff members who speak languages other than English. Contact information also includes my personal identification as a liaison librarian to international students and foreign language students as well as access to an online "book me" link tied to my personal meeting calendar.

Links to locally held language learning material available in and through our own library offer access to ESL material such as our library's collection of easy readers for English-language learners, the IELP (Intensive English Language Program) collection (http://catalogue.library.brocku.ca/search~S0?/tIELP+readers/tielp+readers/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CB/exact&FF=tielp+readers&1%2C529%2C), and books in our collection, such as *Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada*[21] and *Study Skills for Speakers of English as a Second Language*.[22] Links to local ESL material also include access to the Accent Coach, a pronunciation program developed by a professor of Applied Linguistics at the university (http://www.englishaccentcoach.com/index.aspx). Local foreign-language learning material includes links to the Chinese book collection of the local Confucius Institute on campus (https://brocku.ca/confucius-institute/) as well as directions for finding further foreign-language learning material in specific foreign languages in our catalogue.

Links to websites outside of the library's holdings include, once again, both ESL and foreign-language sites, including Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab (http://www.esl-lab.com/), *Writing in North American Higher Education: A Primer for International Students* produced by OWL (the Online Writing Lab) at Purdue University (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/683/01/), and such sites as *Foreign Language Newspapers* (http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/) and *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (https://www.ethnologue.com/).

Outcomes from making use of this LibGuide can be seen from increased statistics on page views. After the LibGuide was made available, its usage steadily increased over the course of time. Beginning with fewer than ten hits during the week when it first appeared, usage numbers gradually increased into the hundreds as time went on. At last check, the usage was more than 1,100 hits. Its direct impact on student work has not been formally measured to date but anecdotal accounts from both faculty and students have included "thank you"s for making it available; it has also been placed into course management systems pages for students to make use of as a language-learning resource.

The purpose of this LibGuide is to serve the language-learning needs of both non-native speakers of English as well as domestic students learning foreign languages.

Its uniqueness lies in serving both of those student populations through one vehicle in a stand-alone way. This represents another way for integrating international students into libraries by emphasizing that other students on campus are language learners as well and that the library supports them all.

# Pathway Four: Online Library ESL Workbook and General Online Library Tutorials

The fourth pathway is another example of posting library material online for international students that they can refer to again and again as a means of extending their learning. Its purpose is to promote the continued integration of international students into libraries through ongoing online library support.

The online library workbook and tutorials described in this section also appear on the LibGuide described above. They are being considered as a separate pathway because they were created specifically to support the library needs of non-native English speakers rather than their language-learning needs, and because they flowed from a structured environment toward open individual use later on.

This pathway took the form of both an online library ESL workbook and general online library tutorials for international students who are non-native speakers of English. The online library ESL workbook was created as a supplemental tool for in-person ESL library workshops, and the general online library tutorials were made available in a specifically targeted way for international students, through a certificate program established by the campus office for international student services.

The online library ESL workbook (http://researchguides.library.brocku.ca/c.php?g=210701&p=2233745) was designed as a visual aid for in-person library instruction workshops for ESL student writing classes. It consists of a series of multiple-choice, true-false, and fill-in-the-blank questions. The questions are meant to be worked on by groups of students in library workshops, who then share their answers with the rest of the class until all the content is covered. The content appearing in the questions includes selecting good starting places, choosing keywords, using searching tips, evaluating results, and finding more good sources. Library skills that are meant to be identified and practiced through the use of this workbook encompass constructing effective search statements, using phrase searching, identifying subject headings, understanding what relevance means, and learning how to limit, sort, and evaluate results.

The utility of this online library ESL workbook lies in its simplicity. It is easy to access, follow, and share in classes where the content is being introduced, demonstrated, discussed, and applied. It serves an anchor function in these library instruction classes as the basis for shared classroom discussion.

The general online library tutorials, in contrast to the online library ESL workbook, were not created for a particular class or specifically for international students. Instead, they were created and made available on the main library website for anyone interested in taking them. Their targeted use for international students came about through a voluntary certificate program created by the international student services office called the "Certificate for Success." This certificate was a program developed to

introduce new international students to the services offered by many departments and units across campus, including the library (https://brocku.ca/international-services/certificate-for-success).

The library component of the Certificate for Success program directed any interested international student to complete these general online library tutorials within the course management system used by the university. The library created a new course called Library Research Skills in which to house the general online library tutorials and to add an accompanying short, ten-question multiple-choice quiz. The reason for constructing a separate course in the course management system and adding a quiz component in this way was to give interested international students evidence to show that they had completed the tutorials for the certificate. Their general use on the open library website would otherwise not have tracked their identifiable personal use or successful completion.

The general online library tutorials were comprised of two separate tutorials, one called "Getting Started" and the other called "Beyond the Basics." Both take the form of a series of sequential pages that include definitional text passages along with embedded videos and interactive quizzes. Pages can be read, videos can be viewed, and embedded quizzes along with the quiz at the end can be taken as many times as a student wishes, with no time limit. Getting Started covers using keywords to search effectively, finding books and articles using our discovery tool, and understanding the differences between popular and scholarly articles. Beyond the Basics covers learning how to use citations to expand a search for articles on a subject, using Google Scholar more effectively to find resources, evaluating information that is found online, and understanding key concepts such as peer review and plagiarism.

Outcomes related to student learning from the online ESL workbook are connected to general library abilities of the upper-level writing students who had a library assignment in their classes. Instructors for those writing classes continue to request the answer sheet from me, both before and after library workshops have been offered. This means that the use of this workbook is being reinforced in these classes outside of the physical library presence of in-person one-time-only workshops. This usage of the workbook stems mainly from word-of-mouth communication between the ESL writing coordinator and me, the ESL instructors and me, and among the ESL instructors themselves. As for the general online library tutorials, usage comes from international students choosing to use this module as an elective in the certificate program. Uptake numbers in the program have been minimal, perhaps due to recent staff changes in the international student services offices, but its continued availability still offers a library component choice to future certificate students.

The purpose of both the online library ESL workbook and the targeted general online library tutorials are to offer online learning support to international students that begins in structured environments but remains available for ongoing future individual use. The online library ESL workbook does this through its use as an in-class tool created to introduce international students to library research strategies; it is also posted publicly for later referral. The general online library tutorials do this by offering an avenue for more in-depth library learning by any interested international student within a structured certificate program that can then be accessed and taken at any time. Both represent a pathway that aims to integrate international students into academic libraries through ongoing online support and availability.

# Pathway Five: Self-Access Cart

The fifth pathway is an example of supporting one-on-one interactions with international students outside the library as a way to integrate them into the library. Its purpose is to promote the integration of international students into libraries through individualized personal support outside the physical confines of the library.

This pathway took the form of a self-access cart. A self-access cart is a physical cart full of resources that is attended by a person with the ability to help students in an informal one-on-one manner to extend their learning outside the classroom. This cart represents a mini and mobile version of a self-access center, a place originally designed to support language learning outside a language classroom.[23] Its use here as a library mechanism represents the adaption of a language-learning vehicle into a library learning one. The use of this self-access cart was unique in the library environment as the library does not have self-access carts for any other population.

The creation, stocking, and deployment of a self-access cart that could also include a library purpose was first initiated by ESL instructors at the university. The cart contained print resources such as books, puzzles, vocabulary games, and decks of playing cards, as well as laptops that could easily connect to online university resources and information. It also had a large welcome banner stationed nearby. Figure 9.2 shows what the cart looked like.



**Figure 9.2. Self-access cart.**

This cart offered ESL students many ways to extend their English-language learning beyond their language classrooms. University employees staffing it included ESL instructors, staff nurses, and librarians. The library component fits easily with the mandate to extend the learning of the ESL students beyond the classroom in an informal, self-directed, non-mandatory way. It was placed inside the international services building, where people staffing it could easily be seen, approached, and talked to by all international students. The international student center is a separate physical building on campus apart from the library. This is the place were ESL students take ESL classes and where staff and

instructors in ESL Services have their offices. The self-access cart was placed in the main student lounge on the first floor of the international services building. This lounge was a comfortable room with couches, tables and chairs, a microwave, and large open windows on the main floor of the building. When not in use, the self-access cart was kept in a corner of the lounge. And in the case of the library, its staffing coincided with due dates of library research assignments for papers.

As a physical manifestation of out-of-classroom learning, the self-access cart serves a useful purpose. Participating in this initiative can give librarians an excellent opportunity to come out of the library and into the international students' own physical spaces. In this way, it can operate as both a mini reference desk and as an outreach vehicle. Librarians can answer questions from ESL students about library policies and direct them to useful sources of information for their assignments.

The use of a self-access cart by librarians can offer another way to integrate international students into academic libraries. This way reverses the normal entrance pattern of international students coming to the library by having a librarian instead go out to them. It offers a novel form of integration. In addition, it can offer the library a wider form of integration by presenting the library as a place on campus where international students can extend both their language learning and their library learning simultaneously.

# Benefits of Multi-Pronged Approach

The five pathways described in this chapter offer multiple ways for librarians to help integrate international students into university libraries. Interested librarians could probably replicate most of these projects in their own home library settings without undue stress, effort, time, expertise, or high cost.

These avenues represent different ways to reach out to and support the needs of international students in academic libraries. The strategies include reaching out to individual international students as well as to groups of international students. In addition, they include ways to work directly with international students in person and to support them online. Finally, they include ways to reach international students both inside and outside the library.

- **Individuals and groups.** Reaching out to individual international students can be accomplished in the creation of a welcome sign in various native languages and through student library workers being educated in ways to better support communication with these students. Reaching out to groups of international students can be beneficial as well in integrating them into academic libraries. This could take place in a class environment, such as using an online ESL library workbook in library instruction classes or through making general online library tutorials available to all interested students in a certificate program.
- **In person and online.** In-person engagement can occur with the welcome sign and with the ESL workbook inside writing classes. Online contact and support can be offered through the creation of a specialized language LibGuide or the promotion of general online library tutorials to international students.
- **Inside and outside the library.** The welcome sign can reach them inside the library, for example, while the self-access cart can reach them outside the library. Both provide an avenue for librarians to connect with international students but they make use of different spaces to accomplish the same goal.

The five pathways described in this chapter offer many benefits for librarians wanting to connect international students to their libraries.

- Creating a welcome sign in different native languages fosters awareness of the linguistic diversity that international students bring to campus.
- Running a staff development workshop for library student workers empowers peer-to-peer student interactions in the library.
- Creating a LibGuide that includes both ESL and foreign-language learning material helps integrate international students by showing that there are other language learners on campus, too.
- Using an online library ESL workbook in a classroom and targeting general online library tutorials through a certificate program offers international students both initial and ongoing online library support.
- Staffing a self-access cart in an international services building offers librarians a way to support international students in their own physical spaces.

Deepening or establishing relationships with other campus partners can also offer ways to reach out to and connect with international students on campus. Librarians working with ESL instructors is one way, as seen above with the ESL workbook, as is working with general offices that deal with international students already placed in degree programs, as seen above with the general online library tutorials being made part of a certificate program. Other campus partnerships to explore could come from reaching out to academic support services to potentially offer joint programming on writing effective research papers, managing citations, and using citation styles appropriately. Plagiarism workshops could be another joint venture with academic support services, such as writing centers. It also benefits the library as an organization, making the library more visible on campus and putting the library on par with other departments. It also fulfills the university's strategic goal of internationalization.

Integrating international students into academic libraries can take place in many ways. Offering multiple avenues to international students underscores the message that the library is interested in helping them become successful, just as it is for domestic students. Librarians have many options at their disposal for exploring and creating multiple pathways to support international student success.

# Notes

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