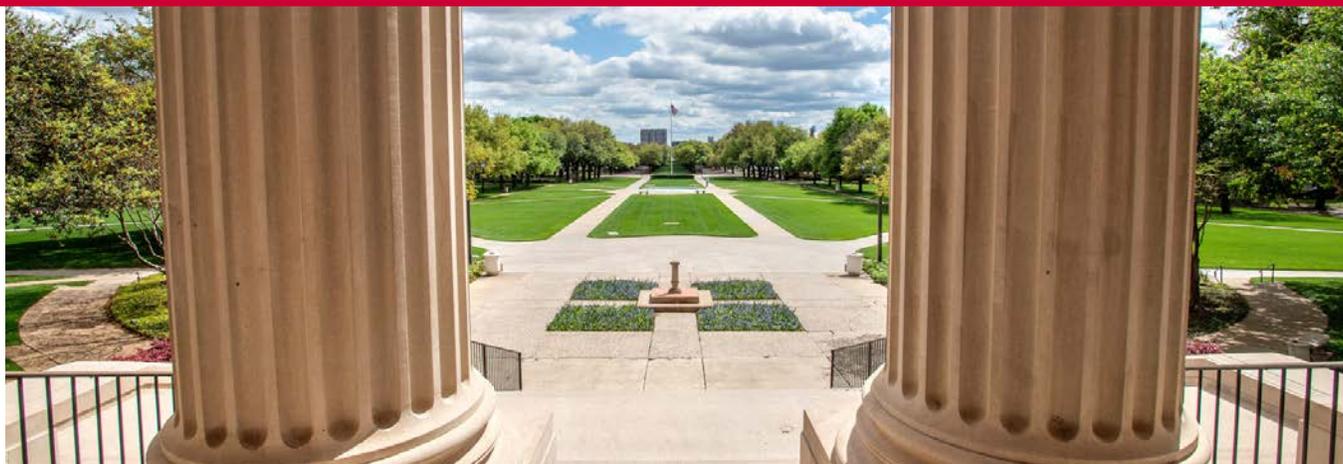# KEEP TEACHING

## Supporting Students Across Time Zones



## International Students

Over 400 international undergraduate students are engaging in virtual coursework, many of whom are outside the United States. These students are overwhelmingly connecting in from China.

Google products, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Box/Dropbox, Slack, Skype, WhatsApp, and the websites of many news outlets are blocked in China. Students in mainland China CAN access the following: Zoom, Canvas, iCloud, WeChat, Panopto, and Piazza. (For Zoom, it is recommended that students download the Chinese version: http://www.zoomcloud.cn/Download.)

International students that remained in the U.S. shared that they have stayed due to worries that they may not be allowed back in to the U.S. if they traveled.

### IN THIS ISSUE

**IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THIS FALL**

**BEST PRACTICES FOR SMU FLEX FACULTY**

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS IN CHINA**

**HOW FACULTY CAN SUPPORT REMOTE STUDENTS**

### Did you know?

ISSS has a staff member focused on international student engagement and retention. Reach out to ashleycason@smu.edu if seeking additional support.

## Buddies Beyond Borders

Buddies Beyond Borders (B3) is an international friendship program, hosted by International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), designed to foster social connections and community among all students. 93 students are currently participating, with 43% enrolled remotely at SMU.

**ISSS HOSTS VIRTUAL WALK-IN ADVISING EVERY
MONDAY THROUGH THURSDAY  TO HELP SUPPORT STUDENTS.**

## Remote Student Feedback

Fully remote students indicate on frequent student surveys that:

- If a course does not offer flexibility to view lectures or complete exams outside of the Central Standard Time (CST) zone, students are engaging anywhere from midnight to 3am,  impacting their well-being and their academic performance.
- The decrease in student-professor and student-student interaction in a remote format is challenging and can feel isolating.
- Poor internet connectivity and power outages experienced more commonly in other countries can impact student ability to engage in virtual class meetings.
-  For video lectures where a professor wears a mask, there can be language comprehension issues due to muffled sound and inability to see the speaker's mouth.

# Tips for SMU Flex Faculty

- Per policy, please continue recording all synchronous sessions. Invite your international students to watch these synchronous recordings. At this point, there are several pedagogical options to ensure students are engaged: a) create some  embedded Panopto Q&A within each recording for them to respond to; or b) create a parallel assignment for them to answer a series of questions about the synchronous recordings.

- Connect with your school's <u>Academic Technology Service Directors (ATSD)</u> for course specific solutions from the Office of Information Technology (OIT) on best practices in online technology use.

- Be mindful of sharing or creating large class files that must be downloaded which can pose a challenge with  Internet access abroad. You may consider creating a link to the document in Canvas or SMU Box that students can open without needing to download.

- Enable closed-captioning on Panopto and then review captions for accuracy to help students whose native language is not English to better understand. It can be difficult to comprehend professors in masks in video lectures. Panopto allows you to easily edit and proofread your transcripts.

- Repeat comments or questions shared by students who are in-person so that students engaging online can follow along.

# Supporting Students Across Time Zones

EProvide flexible, virtual office hours in ways that accommodate varied time zones. It is likely that students won't avail themselves of these alternative times frequently, but a little outreach will go a long way to helping all students feel supported.

To help manage multiple students across time zones consider using a map or chart to document time zones for each student as a convenient reference.

Reach out individually to students in different time zones to welcome feedback on how to best support learning outside of the United States.

Students connecting from China will experience more technical problems and may be feeling less comfortable given concerns over in-country surveillance.

 For students engaging in your course from countries with high levels of censorship (i.e. China, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Venezuela), faculty should consider sending a note to enrolled students about the potential risks of enrolling in the course or include a risk disclosure in the syllabus. Advise students that the risks are likely elevated in an online teaching environment due to course recordings, and provide students the option of enrolling another semester when the class is offered in-person if the student expresses high levels of concern.

Students in countries with high levels of internet censorship should exercise caution when employing a VPN (virtual private network) to access blocked resources. Students may assume that a university's VPN is "safe" because it is associated with the university. However, this recommendation can be problematic and in some cases dangerous for students. Accordingly, universities and faculty are urged to be transparent about the possible risks associated with using a VPN or attempting to access blocked content in another country. Generally speaking, websites hosted outside of the country the student is residing in will often be slower. Thus, it may be difficult for students to access large files such as videos and slides with high-resolution images.

# Special Considerations for Students in China

Students in China will likely be aware of the need to self-monitor their speech online due to national security laws. However, it is recommended that faculty think through the extent to which their writing assignments, discussion prompts, and test questions touch on potentially culturally sensitive topics that can pose safety issues for students. In some courses, the topics may be unavoidable. In others, faculty may be able to offer options, allowing students to write about topics that would not jeopardize their safety.

We realize that this is a serious conundrum: in the US, academic freedom is part of the backbone of higher education. SMU is not asking you to compromise your courses or instruction. But flexibility (and a measure of generosity) is warranted when assessing Chinese students' work at this time.

## Sources:

https://www.chronicle.com/article/instruction-under-surveillance

https://knight.as.cornell.edu/guidance-faculty-getting-staying-connected-intl-students#:~:text=Students%20in%20mainland%20China%20CAN,WeChat%2C%20Panopto%2C%20and%20Piazza.&text=Please%20do%20not%20encourage%20your,are%20blocked%20can%20change%20quickly.