



# TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**2022/2023 Regional Asia/Pacific Islands**

**Community of Practice**

Brigitta Richmond

Kate Maruyama

Krista Miller

## INTRODUCTION

With a population of roughly 1.4 billion people, the second most populous country in the world, research suggests that India will soon outnumber China in international student mobility. Many students from India are looking at study abroad programs and traveling to countries including the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. There are many key considerations in choosing a destination country, however, once they are on site students may not receive the support they need. With a rise in international students from India, it is important to understand the challenges they face with accessibility, identity and community support.

Indian students comprise a large and growing number of international students on US campuses. What can you do to support these students?

## UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF INDIA

India is extremely diverse and as such, the students will also come from a variety of backgrounds. Do you have a picture in your mind about “what India looks like” or “the typical background of an Indian student”? Be aware of that bias, because it might not be reflective of all students’ experiences.

- **Diverse weather and geography:** India includes every climate from tropical beaches in the south, frigid Himalayas in the north, deserts in the Northwest, and forests in the south central.
- **Many communities:** Indians identify with a myriad of different “communities”. Factors that inform the community to which an individual identifies may include: religion, ethnic group, language spoken, state, and caste. For one specific example, India is almost 80% Hindu, but Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and many other religions are also practiced. In addition, there are several hundred languages that are spoken in India.
- **Economic disparity:** The richest 1% in India own over 40% of the nation’s wealth and the poor live in extreme poverty. A thriving middle class also exists in India.
- **Urban and rural experiences:** Migration to urban centers has been increasing in India, but the majority of the population lives in rural areas. Access to resources can vary tremendously in urban vs rural areas.

It is extremely difficult to quickly encapsulate all of “India” or “Indian students” or “Indian culture”. Keep an open mind that one student from India will likely come from a very different background, identity and circumstances than another student.

## SIMILARITIES OF THE INDIAN STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S.

Despite India's diversity, there are some commonalities that run through the Indian student experience in U.S. higher education, with some being true of any student that is immersed in a new culture. Consider these challenges as you look to support students from India.

- **Different education systems:** Indian students may need to learn the intricacies of the U.S. education system such as the emphasis on student discussion in class and accessibility of professors during office hours.
- **Experience of microaggressions and culture shock:** Students may feel out of place in American culture, and may experience subtle acts of exclusion, both in the classroom and socially, because of their cultural differences.
- **Support structures:** While your campus may have many support structures in place to help students, these may not instinctively be the first place a student from India turns to for support. In India, family is often the main pillar of support.
- **Suppression of identities:** Just as with many American students, your campus may be a place where students from India may feel more free to express personal identities that have been suppressed in India. Students will be reconciling that freedom with their culture.

## RESPONDING TO THAT DIVERSITY

There are a number of ways that US administrators can support international students from India. Each institution must evaluate the resources of the institution, the needs of their students and adjust accordingly. However, these tips can provide administrators with ideas.

- Offer virtual advising appointments prior to departure to the US. Students may face various challenges and this can affect their perceptions even before they arrive. Students may need additional support to navigate the visa process, on campus housing, meals, and much more.
- Hold pre-departure advising sessions that include both international and domestic students.
- Create a survey for all international students prior to coming to campus to understand their needs. Do not assume all students have the same needs.
- Create a student mentor/mentee program where students from India can get support from their peers and/or faculty.
- Engage the international students and domestic students by creating cultural learning opportunities.
- Educate the student population by hosting events on the cultural elements of Indian students. Find resources to learn more about Indian culture by organizing restaurant trips, watching documentaries, etc.
- Encourage domestic students to be open minded and embrace diversity.
- Create opportunities or events where Indian students can express their identities on campus.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Diversity Abroad - [Collaboration to Advance Inclusive International Student Support](#)

Diversity Abroad - [Supporting and Engaging International Students in the Classroom: A Brief Resource for Faculty](#)

Diversity Abroad - [Preparing Indian International Students for US Diversity](#)

Education USA - [India](#)

IIE - [Open Doors 2022 India Fact Sheet](#)

Inside Higher Education (2018) - [Increase International Students: India's Initiative](#)

Ipsos Global Religion Report 2023

NAFSA Association of International Educators - [Five Way to Support Indian Students Studying in the United States](#)

Martirosyan, N., Bustamante, R., Saxon, D. (2019). Academic and Social Support Services for International Students: Current Practices. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 172.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1208150.pdf>

[Oxfam Report on Inequality 2023](#)

University World News (August, 2022) - [Universities Need a Wide Safety for Foreign Students](#)