

Psychological Safety and Team Integrity in Culturally Diverse Academic Teams: A Proposed Framework for International Student Integration

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Background/Introduction. The foreign student experience is a rich opportunity for learning and growth, yet it is simultaneously a period of profound vulnerability. Students are navigating not just new academic material, but entirely new cultural norms, social dynamics, and linguistic environments. This transition requires immense cognitive and emotional energy, making them particularly susceptible to feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Unfamiliarity with local academic practices can lead to confusion or perceived incompetence. Due to language barriers even highly proficient speakers may fear misunderstanding or being misunderstood, leading to a hesitation to participate. [6-7]

Foreign students often expend extra effort to translate, interpret social cues, and manage homesickness, leaving fewer resources for proactive engagement. Such stressors can severely undermine their sense of belonging and their ability to contribute effectively, impairing both psychological safety and subsequent team integrity. [5] This vulnerability leads to diminished learning outcomes for the entire group. [4]

This lecture examines the critical, yet often overlooked, relationship between *team integrity* and *psychological safety* for foreign students in academic environments.

The integration of international students into Czech study teams has been increasingly important in recent years, but in connection with the situation in Ukraine and the associated migration wave, it has taken on an entirely new and urgent dimension. [10] Consequently, this lecture is dedicated to the *integration of foreign*

students into Czech study teams, with particular attention given to Ukrainian students.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in a significant influx of students seeking academic refuge within Central Europe. Czech universities experienced a rapid and unprecedented shift in their international student demographics.

The data gathered by the Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ) and relevant reporting indicates a profound quantitative change that underpins the urgency of this pedagogical topic. In 2021, approximately 4,400 Ukrainian students were enrolled at Czech higher education institutions. Following the 2022 invasion, this number surged to approximately 7,400 by late 2023. [2]

This increase firmly established Ukrainian students as the second-largest non-Czech national group. This demographic reality necessitates proactive, team-level training, as virtually every student cohort and project group is now likely to include a member directly affected by the conflict.

This lecture summarizes a crucial pedagogical intervention focused on equipping students and academic staff with the practical skills necessary for the successful and sensitive integration of foreign, particularly Ukrainian students into collaborative, project-based study teams.

Lecture Objectives. The objectives of this lecture are to clearly articulate team integrity and psychological safety in an academic context and to understand the unique intersection of these concepts with the foreign student experience. I will define *psychological safety* as the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking [5], and *team integrity* as the foundation of trust, honesty, and shared ethical standards that enables productive collaboration. [8]

The session will analyse specific threats to these crucial elements on group cohesion and individual performance. Crucially, the lecture will provide *actionable strategies* for students, faculty, and institutions to proactively build inclusive and trusting learning spaces. Participants will gain practical insights into fostering

environments where all students regardless of origin feel safe to speak up, challenge ideas, and engage fully, thus maximizing individual learning and overall team success.

In the conclusion I will suggest practical, immediate strategies for students and faculty to foster these critical elements.

The core objective of the delivered lecture is to transition the audience from passive awareness of the situation to active competence in inclusive team practices.

Methodology. Utilizing a blended, case-study-driven methodology, the lecture provides a concrete framework to transform common miscommunication into robust, inclusive team dynamics, thereby mitigating risks of academic failure, social isolation, and burnout among both local and international students.

This proactive pedagogical framework involves the mandatory, instructor-guided development of a culturally sensitive team charter in project-based learning. This charter should explicitly set ground rules for communication, conflict resolution, and the fair distribution of effort, thereby standardizing expectations and fostering shared integrity.

The lecture combines theoretical knowledge with practical tips so that study teams gain concrete tools for improving cooperation and *inclusion*. Problem-based learning offers several anonymized, realistic case studies (scenarios) describing challenges a study team might face.

The Three-Step Intervention Plan

The lecture provides the following actionable framework for peer teams facing similar challenges:

1. *Sensitive Check-in* – This step should initiate conversation in a neutral setting (outside of the formal meeting) using a peer who can bridge the language/cultural gap (e.g. another foreign student). The goal is to establish trust and identify the root barrier (language, time, stress) without blame. [1]

2. *Adapt Roles and Communication* – It is necessary to immediately adjust the team's working process based on the barrier identified. It is helpful to assign self-

contained tasks rather than tasks requiring continuous, fluent verbal debate. This way you will leverage technical strengths, minimize language-induced anxiety, and ensure that early success builds confidence. [3; 9]

3. *Structured, Low-Pressure Accountability* – This includes implementing clear, public, and small milestones to ensure active, yet brief, participation from all members. This will replace passive-aggressive private confrontation with transparent, structured, and impersonal team accountability.

Conclusion and Recommendations. The lecture will conclude that effective integration into study teams is crucial for retaining and supporting foreign, particularly Ukrainian students. Success depends on the *interpersonal competence and empathy* of their peers. By reframing performance issues as systemic barriers, study teams can avoid the pitfalls of implicit bias and isolation. [1; 4]

The recommendations for academic institutions include:

- *Mandatory Intercultural Training:* Incorporating the 'Three-Step Intervention Plan' into mandatory onboarding for all first-year students to create a proactively inclusive environment.
- *Flexible Assignment Design:* Encouraging instructors to design group projects so that team members can break down the work into separate, clearly defined pieces. reducing reliance on uniform, real-time verbal communication. [3]
- *Long-Term Follow-up:* Conducting qualitative research on the long-term mental health and academic outcomes of students integrated using peer-led support models versus those relying solely on professional university services. In the peer-led groups students would be integrated and supported primarily by their fellow students (peers), often through informal mentoring, group check-ins, or the structured group work methods while students from the control group would rely only on the formal resources provided by the institution, such as university counsellors, official academic advisors, dedicated student welfare offices, or language centres.

This pedagogical intervention aims to maintain academic integrity while fulfilling the ethical imperative and to offer tangible strategies for transforming diverse groups into high-performing, inclusive teams.

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Peculiarities of Sociocultural Adaptation of Foreign Higher Education

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The growth of globalization and international communication has significantly increased the number of international students choosing to continue their education abroad in foreign universities. This transition comes with its own set of challenges, particularly in terms of cultural adaptation and language proficiency. The adaptation