

Some Tips for Being a Great Visiting Professor Abroad

- Tailor your course for your foreign students
 - Your students might be undergraduates because law is a four or five year undergraduate degree in many countries. Tailor the level of materials accordingly.
 - If possible, see if you can Skype in to someone else's course at the law school you will be visiting, so you can see the student level and language level first hand before you come.
 - Think about what it is about American law that will be relevant to them and their legal practices.
 - If teaching Civil Procedure for instance, students will be less interested in how to file a small tort case in state court than they will be in how to obtain evidence in complex cross border litigation.
 - Don't assume the U.S. way of doing something is automatically the model the foreign country should emulate. Some countries have long had institutions that the U.S. is just developing. For instance, in Russia, victims of crimes also have the right to an attorney.
 - But on the other hand don't be overly critical of U.S. models either. Sometimes Russian students wonder why American professors are so quick to criticize U.S. legal institutions.
 - Think about including a comparative perspective—students less need to know the details of American law than to think about why we do it a certain way. “We do X in the U.S. but in some countries they do Y instead. Why do you think we do it X way and other countries do Y? What are the pros and cons of each? Which do you think works/would work better in your country?”
 - Tailor your hypotheticals to the local culture. Ask your colleagues at the foreign institution whether a particular hypothetical scenario will make sense to the students.
- Think carefully about assigned books and readings.
 - It takes even a fluent speaker about twice the time to read in a foreign language than it does to read in your native language. So try to reduce the readings to about half what you would assign to a class in the U.S.
 - When assigning a book, think about costs.
 - Don't assign a book unless it's available electronically. International shipping can easily add 50% to the cost of the book. Some publishers will work with you to give the foreign school reprint permission if an e-textbook isn't available, but this takes lots of advanced planning.
 - Local salaries or exchange rates may make even an e-textbook out of range for many students.
 - If possible, assign creative commons materials.
 - Ask the school about the fair-use doctrine in the foreign country to know how much you can reprint without violating copyright.
 - Don't create open book exams. Several students may be chipping in to share the same textbook and an open book exam creates difficulties for them.

- Don't dumb down your course too much, but do dumb down your language.
 - Our students will understand rocket science if you can teach it in eighth grade English.
 - Foreign students don't know American idiomatic expressions, slang, or popular culture references. Jokes sometimes go over less well than you might expect. (Try your joke out among teachers in the school before you try it in the classroom.)
 - Speak loudly and don't mumble. When ask to repeat something, don't automatically change a word to another one but first state your original sentence again more distinctly. Then repeat the concept in other words.
 - Avoid speaking in brain bursts but try to keep your cadence fairly even. It sometimes helps to prepare what you are going to say in advance in order to do this.
 - Pause frequently to ask questions that test understanding. Students often nod and smile even if they don't know what you are saying. That can be misleading, so test for comprehension frequently.
 - Write key legal terms on the board or on a Powerpoint. Students may be trying to equate a term with the local equivalent, or might know a word in writing but not understand your pronunciation. Being shown the spelling will help.
 - But avoid Powerpoints with lots of text, it will take students too long to read it when they need to focus more carefully on what you say.
 - Think about providing your notes or summaries of key terms to students in advance, or at least after the course.
 - Think about recording podcasts for students to listen to again later.
 - On exams, be careful about questions, particularly multiple choice questions, that might not have common words or clear cultural references. Once I gave a multiple choice hypothetical about a contract to mow a neighbor's lawn, only to find out that students didn't know what a lawnmower was. It wasn't the custom to mow grass in the country.
 - If you are teaching with an interpreter instead of to students who know English, learn to work with an interpreter before you leave.
 - Provide the interpreter notes and key words in advance.
 - Speak in complete sentences.
 - Pause frequently to give the interpreter a chance to repeat your words before forgetting or getting confused.

- Expect upward facing students.
 - Unlike American students who might be writing notes or typing on their laptops for much of the class time, to differing extents in different countries, foreign students tend to look at and actively listen to the teacher. This can be gratifying but also a little disconcerting if you aren't used to it.
 - In some cultures students will only write down what you write on the board. You may need to tell them when you want them to write something down.

- Don't necessarily avoid political discussion, but don't become actively involved in local politics.
 - Politics doesn't necessarily have to be the elephant in the room. Ask your foreign colleagues to what extent it's OK to discuss U.S. or local politics with students.

- Sometimes students will be curious about U.S. politics, especially about things they may have read on the internet or seen on TV, but won't bring it up unless you do for fear of being impolite.
- Students may be happy to tell you their opinions on their local politics, but try to avoid telling them what their opinions should be on their own local politics. This can be viewed as a bit imperialist.
- Find out the school's grading policies before you go. In some cultures, such as England for example, it's rare for a student to be awarded more than 80% of the points on an exam, and 60% can be a B. In others cultures, less than 80 percent can be a failing exam grade.
- Be aware that many cultures are more bribery, sexual harassment or plagiarism tolerant than the U.S.
 - If the school doesn't mandate a grading policy, make your own grading policies clear at the outset of the course, and stick to them.
 - Think about including some objective features in your grading, or blind grading your exam. The school might not have a blind grading policy, but you can impose one yourself.
 - In many instances students will go out of their way to be helpful, to show you around their city, etc. Keep in mind that if you are grading your course, students might be expecting a good grade in return for favors. It's better not to become too close to a particular students or to rely on any particular student for help.
 - If you hold parties or events, make sure to invite all your students or none.
 - Carefully explain your understanding of what constitutes plagiarism at the beginning of the course, and then explain in again before any papers are due. Even then, expect that some papers might be plagiarized. In some cultures, attribution is simply not the norm. Consult with the school administration about how to deal with instances you find.
- Try to be independent outside the classroom.
 - As much as the host school and your fellow professors may want to be helpful, you can become a burden if you don't develop at least a little independence after a few weeks in the country.
 - Try to pick up at least the basics of the language before you go.
 - If you are booking your own flights try to book arrival times when the school can reasonably have someone meet you at the airport.
 - Unless you will have a car, try to learn how to use public transport soon after you get to the city. Try to quickly learn your route back and forth to the school and to the nearest sources for groceries and sanitary needs.
 - Because of the potential bribery tolerant cultures, mentioned above, try not to rely too much on favors from students to get around.
 - Learn how to do most of your basic computer operations yourself before you go. The school might not have computer personnel who can explain in English how to connect to the wifi, show a Powerpoint, or print a document.

- Install voice over internet apps (WhatsApp, Telegram etc) on your phone so you can call home without charge. In some countries, even local calls are usually made over these apps.
- Be aware that in some cities fast internet connections might not exist, even in top hotels.

I'm sure there are thousands more hints for being a successful foreign visitor, but that will get you started. Feel free to write me if you have questions or want to add some suggestions.

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