How to Support International ELL Law Students When You Only Have a Few of Them

By Sue Liemer

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Many law schools in the United States, particularly those in large urban areas, have cohorts of international students pursuing a J.D. or LL.M. degree. Such schools often have separate sections of Legal Research and Writing (LRW) courses for their international law students. Using best practices, these law schools may have professors with expertise in teaching legal English, legal writing, and legal research to students from countries with a variety of primary languages and legal systems. These professors may also have experience translating United States legal, political, and social cultures to students from different cultural backgrounds. Law schools with large cohorts of international students may have additional programming in place to help them acclimate to their new environment, such as special orientation activities and a student organization that plans opportunities to socialize.

Other law schools, however, particularly those outside large urban areas, often have only a few international students at any given time, sometimes just one or two per class. This article addresses ways to meet the needs of a small cohort of international law students. Law schools admitting these students have the same obligation to provide appropriate support for them as law schools with larger cohorts of international students.1 Law schools with just a few international students, however, may not be able to justify allocating significant additional resources for them.

International students with English as their primary language likely will be on a level enough playing field when they access the many types of support available to all law students. The support already in place in most United States law schools include formal academic support programs, faculty office hours, faculty mentors, upper level student teaching assistants or tutors, student organizations, wellness programs, financial aid counseling, and the like.

For the lone international student in the class who has English as a second (or third) language, however, different types of support often will be more helpful, especially before and during the first semester of law study. This article offers suggestions for supporting such students in ways that leverage existing resources, efficiently for the school and helpfully for each student.

I. What Could Go Wrong?
First, consider what could go wrong when a law school does not identify international students who are English Language Learners (ELL)2 as needing specialized support and does not provide that support. Many highly capable students may struggle, or even fail, unnecessarily. As an example, here is a worst-case scenario from some time ago, when I taught in a different law school:

I learned after the fact about a J.D. candidate who came from an Asian country and for whom English was his second language. This student

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1 The American Bar Association (ABA), the accrediting agency for law schools in the United States, requires that: “A law school shall provide academic support designed to afford students a reasonable opportunity to complete the program of legal education, graduate, and become members of the legal profession.” Standard 309(a), ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools 21 (2017–2018).

2 Some readers may be more familiar with an older term, “English as a Second Language” or “ESL,” which is now more commonly used to refer to instructional programs, rather than the students in such programs. For a helpful glossary, see http://www2.ncte.org/blog/2017/09/esl-ell-generation-1-5-why-are-these-terms-important/.
had not come to law school straight from his undergraduate studies. He was a young business executive, with a family of his own, a wife and children back home. He showed so much promise that his company decided to do something unprecedented in his home country: underwrite his J.D. degree at a law school in the United States. Some people from his country previously had had United States J.D. degrees underwritten by various government programs or non-profit foundations. But he was the first to have his employer send him to the United States to obtain an American law degree, in order to enhance his career and make him even more useful to the company upon his return. Evidently, he and his family were prepared to make the necessary personal sacrifices to take advantage of this plum opportunity.

When this student arrived at the law school in the United States that had admitted him, he was the only international ELL student in his class of some 130 entering first-year students. One criterion for his admission was his nearly perfect TOEFL score. He had access to all of the same support programming that the rest of the first-year law students received. He worked hard, and he worked long hours, many more hours than the rest of his classmates. Indeed, he studied most of his waking hours, most of the week. He did not see his family back home until the winter break, and he was not known to socialize with his classmates. He had a lot riding on succeeding as a J.D. candidate. His legal writing professor predicted early on, however, that his English language skills were not strong enough to succeed in the legal writing course. By the end of the semester, this lone international ELL student did not achieve a GPA sufficient to continue in law school with any chance of successfully acquiring a J.D. degree. He left, returned to his country, and by all accounts had a pretty miserable experience all around. Returning to his family and to an employer who had held him in such high regard must have been very difficult. Coming from a culture that highly values “saving face” surely only compounded the personal and career cost for this student. As difficult as failing law school may be for any student, in the United States it is relatively common for young adults to start to prepare for one career and end up changing their life trajectories. In other countries, the shame of failure, particularly in an academic enterprise, may be far greater, so great as to ruin someone’s lifetime prospects.

II. How Might a Law School Do Better?
The next time that same law school admitted an international ELL student as a J.D. candidate, the admissions office notified me during the summer, as I had requested in my role as the legal writing director. This student also came from an Asian country, a different one, and she had a nearly perfect TOEFL score, too. Determined to give this student a more reasonable opportunity to succeed, I contacted the university’s International Students Center and explained the situation. That office provided information about its resources and also put me in touch with the university’s Center for English as a Second Language (CESL). Most research universities in the United States, whether public or private, have some kind of office or center for international students akin to my school’s CESL.

A. Work With the CESL Office
In the CESL office, I discovered kindred spirits, professors who love language just as much as legal writing professors do. The CESL professors were knowledgeable and genuinely excited about their work. Plus, they had bona fide training, expertise, and experience in working with international ELL students. They were used to working with ELL graduate students who arrived from many different countries to pursue Masters and Ph.D. degrees, and who then were expected to teach undergraduates in their fields.

Because the CESL professors were so knowledgeable about language acquisition skills for advanced university students, in one half-hour meeting, I

3 TOEFL is an acronym for Test of English as a Foreign Language.

An additional goal was to minimize, to the extent possible, the stress any student being tested might feel . . .

was able to explain to two of them the language demands of studying law. They knew the difference between English language skills used to navigate daily life in the United States, English language skills needed to be ready to start an undergraduate curriculum, and English language skills needed to study for a language-intensive, advanced degree. They also understood quickly my explanation that studying law in the United States requires students to use English at a post-college level when reading, listening, speaking, and writing. They agreed that no TOEFL score could be relied on to accurately report a graduate student’s skill level5 in all these aspects of language usage. And they understood that even a perfect TOEFL score does not certify that a student has the English language skills to study law in the United States successfully.

In that same half-hour meeting, I learned about the CESL resources available for our lone entering international ELL law student. The CESL professors already knew how to look beyond the TOEFL score and assess the English language skills of international ELL students seeking higher degrees. Working together, with their knowledge of how to teach ELL and my knowledge of how to teach professional level communication skills for the practice of law, we devised a plan to assess our new law student’s English language skills levels. In addition, the CESL professors explained that they already had developed and fine-tuned English courses targeted specifically at the population of international ELL graduate students. These courses already were on the fall semester schedule. If appropriate, they informed me, a law student would be welcome to take one of these courses. If we ever had enough international ELL law students to fill a separate section, the CESL professors said they would be happy to teach it.

B. Assess Each Student’s English Skills Level

Next, I created the assessment instrument that the CESL professors and I had spoken about. Our main goal was to assess how the English language skills of the new international student compared to her J.D. classmates, almost all native English speakers. An additional goal was to minimize, to the extent possible, the stress any student being tested might feel, so we could achieve a reasonably accurate assessment of her functional English language skills level, while helping her feel supported during the process.

For the subject matter of the assessment, I purposely chose a topic that did not require any prior knowledge of the law but was law-related and indeed part of the law school curriculum. That subject turned out to be part of an introduction to negotiation skills, with an explanation of the two general types of negotiators’ natural styles, either cooperative or competitive.6 Many other topics would serve the goals of this type of assessment just as well.

The student did not receive the written instructions describing the assessment until it actually began. This approach meant that understanding the written instructions was a factor in the assessment. I did take special care to write the instructions in plain English,7 and the CESL professors reviewed the instructions to ensure they were clear and lacked the need for any unusual cultural knowledge.

Each portion of the assessment had a time limit, calculated to be at least twice the time a native speaker might need to complete each portion and to keep the length of the full assessment no longer than two hours. The varying dynamics of the test helped break up the time span and provided natural pauses. Another reasonable choice might have been allowing the student whatever amount of time she needed on each portion. The amount of time a student needs

5 See, e.g., Lan Thi Vu & Phu Hoang Vu, Is the TOEFL Score a Reliable Indicator of International Graduate Students’ Academic Achievement in American Higher Education?, Int’l J. on Stud. Eng. Language & Literature 11, 18 (2013) (concluding that “[t]here is no or very low significant correlation between the TOEFL scores and GPA according to the objective data of international graduates’ input, so TOEFL scores cannot be regarded as an effective predictor of academic success.”).


7 See generally Richard C. Wydick, Plain English for Lawyers (5th ed. 2005).
to complete each portion could provide useful information about skills levels. We decided that the standardization of time limits would be useful. Time limits would help us figure out how to fine-tune the assessment instrument based on our initial experience with it. They would also make it easier to compare the results of future students with the results obtained from this first assessed student. And they would provide the student being assessed with a reliable sense of whether she was proceeding with each task at a pace we expected.

The student was allowed to bring her laptop, pen, pencil, eraser, and a dictionary of her choice into the assessment room. She was told ahead of time that she would be able to continue to access these items during the assessment. Paper was provided for her. These allowances were meant in part to minimize unnecessary stress on the student. We did not want one or two vocabulary words to trip up her as she was working in her second language. When studying law, she naturally would be able to look up words and would gain additional vocabulary. The professors most involved in the assessment, the legal writing director and one of the CESL professors, were working in nearby rooms, in case a question arose.

For the reading component of the assessment, I chose a law school textbook reading assignment on a negotiation topic. I was more interested in finding out whether the entering international ELL student could read and understand more ordinary English, written at a level we assume entering law students will understand easily. The student was allowed to underline, highlight, and write notes on the hard copy as she read. The time limit for the reading portion was 25 minutes, roughly twice the amount of time a careful, fluent reader likely would need.

For the listening portion of the test, I had on hand a video recording of a law professor introducing negotiation skills to a first-year class. I used the part where the professor explained that generally negotiators have one of two natural styles, either cooperative or competitive. Similar video recordings should be easy to find, either by asking a professor who teaches the chosen subject matter or by searching online. This excerpt was about seven minutes of a law professor’s lecture, delivered with all of the non-verbal cues of ordinary, in-person speech,10 and at the level of vocabulary and syntax commonly used in a law school classroom. Again, it did not cover legal theory, legal doctrine, or black letter law, specifically because most law students do not arrive at law school already familiar with how to process that type of information. They do arrive, however, ready to start learning those processes. To simulate a law school’s classroom conditions, the student saw the video recording only once. She was allowed to take notes as she watched and listened. The time limit for this

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8 Krieger & Neumann, supra note 6.

9 See Rosa Kim, Lightening the Cognitive Load: Maximizing Learning in the Legal Writing Classroom, 21 Persp: Teaching Legal Res. & Writing 101 (2013) (stating that “[t]here is little doubt that law school learning taxes the working memory and stretches its limits . . . . Even if some students are able to take in the new information, the ability to process complex concepts is compromised when the working memory is overloaded.”).

10 See Michael J. Higdon, Oral Argument and Impression Management: Harnessing the Power of Non-Verbal Persuasion for a Judicial Audience, 57 Kansas L. Rev. 631, 636-652 (2009) (explaining that much of oral communication is non-verbal and relies on characteristics such as volume, inflection, pitch, timing, non-words, facial expressions, and body language).
portion of the assessment was fifteen minutes, to allow time to transition to and from it.

Next, the writing component of the test consisted of a prompt for the student to answer, in her choice of either handwriting or typing. The prompt simply asked the student to write one page on what she had learned about the two types of negotiating styles. No particular format was required or suggested, so the student could decide how best to organize and express the information learned.

Giving ELL students the choice of whether to handwrite or type may be important for some. English uses the "qwerty" keyboard. Many other languages that use the Roman alphabet have different keyboards. And obviously, languages using other alphabets have their own keyboards, too. Thus, the keyboard that an international ELL student uses may be quite different from the qwerty keyboard that most readers of this article use instinctively. A student used to a different keyboard for her first language may type instinctively in that language and then have to think through more consciously how to type on a qwerty keyboard, hunting and pecking more. Any native English speaker who has ever tried to type on a different Roman alphabet keyboard can attest to how much it slows down and frustrates the writing and thinking processes. However, the assessment’s goal was not to assess the student's typing or handwriting skills. Presumably the typing or handwriting skills of an able-bodied young adult using English would improve with practice. Thus, the student was given the choice.

The time limit for the written portion of the test was 50 minutes, again roughly twice what this portion of the assessment should take a native English speaker. In addition to the items she already had with her, the student was allowed to keep a hard copy of the reading assignment, her notes from the reading, and her notes from watching and listening to the video recording. She was told ahead of time that she would be able to continue to access these items as the assessment proceeded.

Once the assessment was completed, the legal writing and CESL professors both found it helpful to assess the written portion. All legal writing professors can compare the fluency, clarity, and mechanical accuracy of the prose to those of typical incoming first-year law students. Any legal writing professor with a few years of experience critiquing first-year law students’ papers should be able to perform this part of the assessment. The legal writing professor can apply the same criteria used for the writing mechanics and clarity of a first legal writing assignment. Many legal writing professors assign a short diagnostic writing assignment at the beginning of the first semester. The legal writing professor could edit the appropriate parts of a rubric or other assessment instrument used for one of those diagnostics (or almost any first-semester legal writing assignment) for use in this context. As with all mechanical errors made by new law students, the same exact error that shows up repeatedly should count as just one error, in the sense that it shows just one misunderstanding. However, different types of language errors should count separately.

The CESL professor’s assessment of the student’s writing should be required, in part, to fill the gaps in the legal writing professor’s expertise or experience. Some legal writing professors will be strong grammarians, have first-hand experience working in multiple languages, or bring other task-specific skills to the ELL assessment. Few legal writing professors, however, will have all of the same expertise that a CESL professor brings to the task. Conversely, few CESL professors will be familiar with the level of language skills needed to succeed in law school. Even if the legal writing professor and the CESL professor arrive at similar conclusions, having each assess the writing of an ELL student provides a worthwhile check on the

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11 The exact text of the prompt read:
Please write a summary of what you learned during the reading and listening portions of this evaluation. Please summarize the main points and include examples to help illustrate the main points. Your examples may come from the reading, the videotape, your own imagination, or any combination of these sources.

You may write your summary with a pen and paper or your computer.
Please use regular paragraphing. Please do not write more than one page.

12 "Qwerty" refers to the layout of the alphabet on the keyboard, a pattern of letters that was developed in the 1800’s for typing in English. See Jimmy Stamp, Fact of [sic] Fiction? The Legend of the QWERTY Keyboard, SmithsonianMag.com (May 3, 2013) (last visited July 10, 2018).
To make this part of the assessment less stressful than being called on in a Socratic method law school classroom, we structured it as a conversation.

Mechanical writing errors that are common among entering first-semester law students may be overlooked for this assessment. For example, an international ELL student may use the wrong preposition after a verb or to start a prepositional phrase. Choosing the colloquially correct preposition is the last aspect of a new language that a non-native speaker consistently performs correctly. Increasingly, first-year law students who are native speakers choose the wrong preposition too and will need correction, instruction, and practice. Another example of a mechanical error that many first-year law students will need instruction in anyway is achieving parallel structure in lists of items, especially if each item in the list is a phrase. The legal writing professor should pay more attention to the types of mechanical writing errors that rarely are seen among native English speakers in the first-year class, such as odd word order in a sentence or multiple errors in verb tenses.

The final portion of the assessment focused on the ability of the international ELL student to speak in English. To make this part of the assessment less stressful than being called on in a Socratic method law school classroom, we structured it as a conversation. Two of the CESL professors and two law professors, including a legal writing professor, were present. Of possible significance for some international students, depending on their native culture, is for the professor doing the assessment to take gender into account. In some circumstances, it may be preferable for a female professor to assess a female student. Our assessing professors also varied in age. In retrospect, one CESL professor and one legal skills professor would have sufficed because many incoming law students regardless of their language fluency would be plenty nervous in a conversation with four professors.

The CESL professors began the conversation by exchanging informal pleasantries with the student, asking questions about her background and the like. They asked the law professors ahead of time not to join in the conversation until the topic turned to the subject matter of the earlier portions of the assessment. This initial conversational exchange gave the student something very familiar and easy to talk about, herself. From the law professors’ perspectives, this exchange helped create some rapport with the student and let her know the professors were genuinely interested in getting to know a little about her. To the extent it helped her relax a bit, it allowed her to function in spoken English more as she would in a non-assessment situation.

From the CESL professors’ perspectives, the initial conversation was an integral part of their assessment of the student’s spoken English skills. They reported that they use routine conversational exchanges to assess a student’s baseline level of fluency in spoken English. What the law professors perceived as an ice breaker turned out to be an important part of the CESL professors’ assessment. Thus, this seemingly trivial aspect of the assessment turned out to be important for our goals of accurately assessing the student’s English language skills, while simultaneously limiting her stress and helping her understand our overall intent was to be supportive.

The law professors then proceeded to ask the student to describe what she had learned during the assessment and asked follow-up questions related to the subject matter. The student had already absorbed the information via reading and listening. She also had consolidated her learning by thinking about how to write about the new information. And then, as she was writing, she had figured out what vocabulary and syntax to use to describe what she had learned. At this point in the assessment, she had reinforced her use of English related to the subject matter four different ways. The subject matter was not difficult for a college graduate to

13 After initial introductions, the CESL professors asked questions like: “What city do you come from?” “How long have you been in the United States?” “Have you found a place to live in our town?” As instructed, the law professors only listened during this part of the conversation.
understand. Thus, her spoken description of what she had learned was likely a reasonably accurate representation of her ability to express herself in spoken English on a topic relevant to the study of law.

At the end of the conversation, a CESL professor asked the student how she felt she performed during the assessment. An open-ended question may provide additional useful information at the end of the assessment. Sometimes a student’s perception of her language skills is not accurate, and she may need guidance on that topic; other times a student’s perception may confirm the assessors’ conclusions.

Our assumptions that the oral English assessment was reasonably accurate was reinforced by the fact that it was occurring in the context of an informal conversation. Although she was speaking with four professors, they were not in a classroom, they were dressed casually in mid-summer attire, and they were careful to use supportive and encouraging language and non-verbals. The situation differed greatly from the performative speaking when a first-year law student is called on to answer Socratic questioning in front of their classmates, who may number anywhere from 60 to 120, depending on the law school. This assessment conversation took place at a leisurely pace, over approximately 20 minutes.

As a word of caution, although many law professors may think they can identify a non-native speaker’s level of spoken English fluency, the assessment of oral English skills is best left to the professionals. Native speakers not trained to make this type of assessment may place undue weight on aspects of oral communication that make listening more difficult, such as the speaker’s accent or inflection. Mirroring the legal writing professor’s expertise and experience in diagnosing and weighing written English problems, the CESL professors have expertise and experience in diagnosing and weighing spoken English problems. Just as the legal writing professor will know which writing skills are typical of entering law students and likely to improve quickly upon immersion in legal studies, the CESL professor will know which speaking skills are typical of entering graduate-level international ELL students and likely to improve quickly upon immersion in an entirely English language environment.

I have heard tales of law schools assessing entering international ELL students in ways far less likely to produce accurate results. Suffice to say, a single conversation on the telephone with an administrative assistant is not adequate. The assistant may not really know who is on the other end of the telephone conversation. And, of course, few administrative assistants have actual expertise in assessing ELL skills.

A conversation using Skype or a similar platform is also problematic in other ways. The student may experience the exchange as more of a formal interview, less of an everyday conversation. Conversely, a student used to communicating via Skype with friends may approach the exchange too casually. A student also may not be savvy about simple production adjustments needed to create the type of video that the professors on the other end of the conversation are used to seeing on a screen.14 If your goals include helping the student feel supported and getting an accurate read on the student’s oral English skills, Skype is less likely to be helpful.

Conducting the type of in-person assessment described above, the total law school resources used consisted of about two days of the legal writing director’s time, most of it in the middle of the summer. Once the assessment instrument was created, simply scheduling and administering it takes only a few hours of the legal writing director’s time. The CESL professors are also less busy in the summer, making it the ideal time for conferring about and creating the assessment instrument.

First-year law students typically arrive on campus for an orientation program a week before others. Many law schools encourage their first-year law students to move into new housing the week before orientation starts, as law school orientations typically include academic work. Other international university students usually

14 While serving on law school hiring committees, I have seen young lawyers participate in Skype interviews without adjusting the height of their screen, the background in the room, or their non-verbals in ways that would make what the committee sees on the other end of the conversation more flattering to the candidates.

“[A]lthough many law professors may think they can identify a non-native speaker’s level of spoken English fluency, the assessment or oral English skills is best left to the professionals.”
The legal writing professor gave detailed feedback on the student’s written English throughout the semester. So the CESL office is less likely to be swamped the week before. Encouraging new international ELL law students to arrive even earlier than their first-year law school cohort will allow the professors involved to complete the assessment sooner and to have more time to put any needed accommodation in place. The ELL student will have more time to acclimate, too.

C. Provide Appropriate Accommodations

Once the law school has a reasonably accurate assessment of the English language skills of an international ELL student, what happens next? In the case described here, the legal writing director, the CESL professor most involved, and the law school’s associate dean for academic affairs had a conversation about the assessment results. Based on the student’s prior academic record, we started with the assumption that she was highly motivated, had strong language skills in her first language, and knew how to learn at the level expected for the study of law. Based on the in-house assessment, the legal writing director noted significant aspects of core English writing skills that the student needed to work on to achieve fluency in basic written English. Also based on the in-house assessment, the CESL professors noted significant aspects of English speaking skills that the student needed to work on to achieve fluency in spoken English. Remember, this student had an almost perfect TOEFL score.

We concluded that the student was fully capable of succeeding in achieving a J.D. degree, if she were given time to strengthen her English language skills. We understood that her immersion in an English language environment would contribute to quickly improving her core English skills. We also understood that all first-year law students have to learn new, discipline-specific vocabulary and language conventions. The combination of improving her English language skills while meeting the challenges that all first-year law students encounter seemed to be more than educators should expect a student to handle successfully in just fourteen weeks. Overloading the student was not a sound pedagogical approach. Instead, we decided to provide a course accommodation.

We chose to drop a first-semester course from the student’s schedule. In its place, the student took the highest level language course the CESL professors taught to international ELL students entering the graduate school. However, the student did not receive credit for that course, and she had to complete it to continue in law school. She also had to make-up the dropped first semester course the following fall semester. The accommodation specified that a review would take place to determine how best to proceed after one semester. In essence, this incoming law student had the equivalent of an Individual Education Plan (IEP). It was in writing and signed by the student, the assessment professors, and the associate dean.

The dropped course was a casebook course, not the legal writing course. Our reasoning was that the legal writing course provided detailed instruction and recursive practice using English in a legal context. The legal writing class sessions were held in small sections, and frequently included small group exercises. Thus, the student had more opportunities to speak English during these classes than other ones. The setting for speaking in those classes was also less stressful than in the larger Socratic classes. The legal writing professor was used to frequent in-person conferences with students, providing additional opportunities for conversations within the context of the discipline. And the legal writing professor gave detailed feedback on the student’s written English throughout the semester, in addition to feedback the student received in the course taught by CESL. Because the legal writing course is the one with the most language instruction and practice, arguably it should be the last one cut from an international ELL student’s schedule.

Another benefit of being in the legal writing course was the access it gave the student to a Teaching Assistant (TA) who was a strong writer. The legal writing TAs always received training and ongoing guidance from the legal writing professors and helped

15 See Kim, supra note 9.
to increase the professors' reach. For an international ELL student (as for any first-year student with more language challenges than their peers), the legal writing professor can assign a TA to meet once a week with that student. Past experience shows that simply telling the new student to meet once a week with the TA may not work. Likewise, simply having the TA contact the student to encourage a weekly meeting may also not work. International students from many cultural backgrounds may shy away from extra assistance and may not want to admit that they could use some help. The way to bypass this reluctance is to have the TA tell the international student that the professor, who is the TA's work supervisor, has assigned the TA to meet once a week with her, and if the TA fails to do that, he will lose his job. The international student will likely not want that to happen. So she will meet weekly, start talking, and eventually have useful tutoring sessions.

Thirty percent of law schools in the United States today also have a Writing Specialist,16 often a professional with a Ph.D. in English, focusing on the teaching of rhetoric and communication. The in-house Writing Specialist is a prime resource for an international ELL student (again, as for any student with more language challenges than their peers). The legal writing director or associate dean can assign the student to meet once a week with the Writing Specialist, starting during orientation week. At first, those meetings may be guided by the ELL student's questions stemming from the CESL course lessons, the use of written English throughout the law school learning experience, or even daily life in the United States. Once the first short legal writing course assignment is returned with the legal writing professor's written critique, that feedback then can guide the weekly meeting between the Writing Specialist and the ELL student. Those meetings about written law school course work are far more likely to happen and to be productive if they are routine and some rapport has already been established, even before the first legal writing paper is returned.

Even at a university with services and programming in place for international ELL students, if the law school fails to identify students who need that assistance and connect them to it, a student's academic experience may be disastrous. The first missed opportunity may be when a law school admissions director fails to flag an international ELL student early for extra support. Ideally, the academic support director and legal writing director should be informed about a student's ELL needs in mid-summer. Another missed opportunity may take place when the law school registrar assigns the student randomly to a legal writing section. The student may end up in a section taught by an inexperienced professor who is ill-equipped to identify the student's specific needs or know where to locate assistance. Educators preparing students for a profession literally ruled by language and its nuances should not be missing these opportunities to provide appropriate academic support to students they have admitted.

D. Work With the International Students Center, Too

The assistance of the International Students Center need not end where it began, providing the law school with information on resources available around the campus. Law students are, indeed, different from other international students in some ways. In many ways, however, they have the same needs as other international graduate students. They typically are younger adults, away from home for an extended period of time, learning to live, work, and study in a foreign country and culture. Although law students likely will have less time than other international students to enjoy the educational and social programming geared to international students' unique needs, they can still benefit from being connected to the International Students Center's information stream. Until true fluency is achieved, functioning in a second language alone can drain a student's mental, emotional, and physical energy17 (even before taking into consideration the impact of the study


Everyone involved agreed that the student was ready to enter her second semester of law school situated on an even playing field with the other first-year law students.

III. What Could Go Right?
The student who first used the assessment and accommodations described in this Article was a little tentative at first, then came to embrace this approach with enthusiasm. From the start, the effort was explained to her in positive terms, as meant to help her do her very best work at a challenging yet reasonable pace. Her fall semester grades were discussed among the legal writing director, the CESL professor who taught her ELL course, and the law school's associate dean, as well as with the student. Everyone involved agreed that the student was ready to enter her second semester of law school situated on an even playing field with the other first-year law students. This student went on to complete law school in the routine three years and earn her J.D. Along the way, her unique perspectives added immeasurably to discussions in the classroom and outside it. Her peers easily learned as much from her as she did from them. When she returned home during vacations and after completing her degree, she did so as a success story, having been an excellent cultural ambassador from her country and having had a productive, positive experience as a law student in the United States.

The contrast between this law student's experience and the experience of the previous lone international ELL student was huge. However, it only required a modest commitment of resources to make that difference. If a small rural law school can figure out how to approach this aspect of legal education successfully, your law school can too.

Micro Essay

Introducing Law Students to Artificial Intelligence

Using artificial intelligence technology in the practice of law may sound futuristic, but artificial intelligence is already changing the legal landscape. It has revolutionized legal research and document discovery. It is also radically changing the ways law firms manage their practices. But the most important application of artificial intelligence for law students to learn is outcome prediction, where the technology helps lawyers analyze prospective case outcomes more accurately. Exposing students to outcome-prediction tools (e.g., Lex Machina and Ravel Law Legal Analytics, both of which are now available on Lexis) while in law school will better prepare them to practice law.

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