

RU-FIT (First Year International Transition) Course

Need/Rationale

According to the 2017 Open Doors report, U.S. higher education has seen a dramatic increase in the number of international students in recent years, from a total enrollment of 623,805 in 2007/2008 to 1,078,822 in 2016/2017. There have been marked increases for eleven consecutive years. When compared to a decade ago, there has been an increase of 85%. Much of this increase, especially in the public universities can be attributed to the 23% average reduction in state funding per student since 2008. The top two countries of origin i.e. China and India contribute 50% of all international students in the U.S. South Korea currently is the third leading contributor. The rapid increase has necessitated academic support that addresses international students' needs. Their unique challenges include (but are not limited to) acculturative stress, cultural barriers, English language weakness, mandatory compliance with immigration regulations, and lack of familiarity with American academic integrity standards and/or teaching methods. The above stated trends are certainly evident at Rutgers University. The number of first year international undergraduate students has increased from 358 in 2012 to 687 in 2017. Nearly half of all international students that attend Rutgers are from mainland China. Chinese students are a significant part of the fabric of the university community.

As International student enrollment at Rutgers University continues to rise, so does the need for academic support services that addresses their unique needs. More and more institutions are focusing their attention and resources on recruiting international students but neglect to provide effective academic support services to promote international student success.

Alignment with Rutgers University Strategic Plan

The New Brunswick Strategic Plan (2015-2020) recognizes that "International students play a vital role in promoting New Jersey's global connections and intellectual resources and help boost Rutgers' profile around the world. Yet these students face certain unique challenges: culture shock; unfamiliarity with American academic culture; studying, writing, and interacting in a nonnative language; and sometimes radically different ideas about how to study and succeed academically." Following the goals set by the Strategic Plan, in 2016, the then Chancellor of New Brunswick campus, Dr. Richard Edwards, created a central administrative office, Office of International Academic Support (IAS Office) under the auspices of Rutgers Global, and charged it to enhance academic success of international students, to reduce redundancy in programming, and ease the complexity of navigating the decentralized University structure.

Given the importance of first year experience to students' success and retention, the IAS Office, in partnership with academic schools and units at Rutgers, created a multi-school transition course called RU-FIT (First Year International Transition) to provide a strong academic foundation for first year international students to succeed at Rutgers.

Course Description

RU-FIT is a one-credit course designed to aid international students in a successful transition to Rutgers University. This course aims to help students develop a foundation for a well-rounded college experience, connect students to Rutgers resources, promote engagement within and outside the classroom and communicate university expectations. RU-FIT is taught by Peer Leaders who are rising Junior and Senior students at the University and have demonstrated a commitment to first-year international student success. The Peer Leaders will also be required to take a three-credit pedagogy course offered by the Learning Centers. Finally the Peer Leaders will meet with RU-FIT Advisors on a weekly basis to review lesson plans and troubleshoot any problems or concerns. The ultimate goal of this transition course is to assure preparedness by assisting students to understand what it means to academically succeed at Rutgers.

In academic year 2018-2019, the course will be offered as a mandatory course for first year international students enrolled in School of Arts and Sciences, School of Engineering and School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, and serve over 500 students.

Topics covered by the course include but are not limited to the following:

| TOPICS |
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| Syllabus Review / Syllabus Workshop: Turning Syllabi into “Action Plans” |
| Learning Environments @ Rutgers |
| Curricular and extra-curricular resources available for success Matching Needs to Resources |
| Study smarter not harder |
| Academic Integrity |
| ESL / Cross-Cultural Communication |
| Advising / Spring Schedules |
| Growth Mindset + Resiliency (Optimizing your potential) |
| Gearing up for end of semester |

Course Goal and Learning Outcomes:

Upon successfully completing this course, first year undergraduate students will have achieved the following learning outcomes:

- Understand academic expectations at Rutgers University
- Understand how to navigate curricular and co-curricular resources.
- Assess their academic strengths and weaknesses and develop appropriate steps in order to achieve academic success
- Demonstrate an awareness of goal setting/implementation processes by establishing a goal and an action plan for the academic year
- Gain knowledge of important University policies such as Academic Integrity and Academic Standing, and be compliant with those policies
- Begin to apply learning skills such as time management, critical thinking, academic writing, group projects, presentation skills that are key to academic success
- Demonstrate self-reliance and self-direction
- Identify a change between high school and college in the academic, social and interpersonal realms

Timeframe: Fall 2018

Primary metrics for assessing the success

The course will be rigorously tracked and evaluated. Some key metrics include:

- SERU (Student Experience in the Research University)
- GPA (Grade Point Average)
- First year retention
- Early alert systems to flag “at risk” students’
- Decline in academic integrity violations by international students
- Tracking usage of resources provided to students such as the Learning Centers, Writing Program etc.