Tips for New and International Instructors/TAs

Here are some tips to assist you in learning how to teach in an American-style classroom, how to connect with your students, and how to improve as a teacher.

1. Practice your English.
* As international instructors, we may need to improve our English, especially our accents. I find it’s helpful to speak more slowly and loudly in the class. In addition, we also learn through sharing American culture. It’s sometimes a good idea to use famous movie, popular sports or breaking news as examples to support your lectures.
1. Prepare and organize for the lectures
* It’s important to understand the background and needs of your students, and establish a clear learning purpose for the lectures. It’s also a good idea to review the previous lectures at the beginning of class, and summarize the lecture at the end of class.
1. Use alternatives to lecturing.
* Besides improving our lecturing, we could also use other resources for our classes, such as slides and whiteboard. I find it’s helpful to write down detailed steps or key words and emphasis them when teaching.
1. Utilize office hours.
* It’s a good idea to encourage students to come to office hours because the face-to-face meetings are usually very effective. You can help individual students better during your office hours.
1. Know US classroom culture
* It is very important to know the US classroom culture when teaching. American teaching style is student-centered, which may be different from other countries. Interacting with students is very important.
1. Learn the background of your students
* We need to realize that students may have learned differently in high school and are from different schools and different places. We cannot assume the students know the same things. For example, when we teach in an intermediate level or a higher- level course, we cannot assume that students have learned and mastered all the topics from the entry level. Thus, it’s important to get to know the background of your students at the beginning of the semester and then adjust your teaching to meet gaps in their knowledge.