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**Nurturing Environment: The Best Strategy**

What kind of strategies can an instructor use to really help promote students’ confidence in an INTO Mason Graduate Pathway? The number of INTO Mason students is increasing and in particular its graduate students. Most international are from different educational background and they are also not fluent in English because it is their second language. In totality, this would be of a negative effect to their adjustment process. Therefore, the majority of these students have difficulty in class participation in U.S. universities; they need to take time to adapt to new learning strategies in George Mason University and eventually develop fear in the classroom as they deal with the uncertainties of the new environment.

Consequently, compared with Americans, international graduate students feel more fear and lose confidence in the same classroom which impacts their cognitive processes as well as academic success. It is the INTO program’s responsibility to address this issue; to provide effective strategies for their students by easing them into the academic system and by ensuring a welcoming atmosphere that allows them to express themselves regardless of their English language abilities. Thus, I believe that providing a nurturing environment is the most relevant strategy for the context of students in an INTO Mason Graduate Pathway. This paper will illustrate that nurturing a conducive environment could be an effective strategy to help graduate students in INTO Mason succeed in three aspects.

In the article titled “Recognizing Student Fear: The Elephant in the Classroom”, T. Scott Bledsoe and Janice J. Baskin (2014) defined the meaning of fear, giving common types of student fears and providing eight key strategies to manage their fear-based behaviors, achieve their emotional balance and help them to succeed in academics. Several factors lead to students’ fear in the classroom, such as academic challenges, competitive environment, cultural differences and personal crises (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014). At the end of the article, the author concluded that instructors have the opportunity to make the student feel less fearful in the classroom through the use of the following strategies: educating themselves, recognizing student fear, creating nurturing environment, providing campus resources, having positive attitude to communicate with students, and other strategies. Though, the fear that the students experience is seemingly a giant, when it is resolved, the resolution will greatly contribute to students’ academic success.

There are several positive outcomes that can prove creating a nurturing environment is very good for INTO graduate students. First of all, a nurturing environment makes students more aware of others’ cultural diversity and beliefs, promoting trust and prompting their participation in the classroom. For international graduate students, it is more difficult to relate to other students because they have already developed their identity and have no need to enlarge their circles. This method enables graduate students to be fully engaged in group work and freely talk to each other. Gabriel (as cited in Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014) said that “When students know that we value their diverse backgrounds and ethnic heritages, they will feel welcome in our class, and this feeling is important for sharing and working together”. In simpler terms, a friendly environment facilitates the relationship among students, making them willing to work together.

Secondly, a nurturing environment will benefit international graduate students because it is good for reducing their shyness, tension and anxieties and the classes will be well-organized to show more focus on individuals. The INTO Mason program has the responsibility to create their own strategy to provide a means of participation, for example, the whole class can be split into small groups to allow someone who is new to the INTO program or shy, to talk in public. Another example from Bledsoe and Baskin (2014) is that the professor can offer a time interval like five slides of PowerPoint before asking questions, so, that well-planned structure in the lecture would help students give responses with confidence. In other words, the arrangement of a class may have different effects; the instructors need to organize strategies that will be the most suitable for the class environment.

Thirdly, a nurturing environment includes using clear instructions in the class to help graduate students eliminate unnecessary fears of their disciplines. Accurate instruction can help graduate students achieve their academic goals. According to DeRoma, Martin, and Kessler (as cited in Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014), they explained that instructors should follow the syllabus and avoid giving impromptu assignment, in order to prevent students from being anxious and loss interest in the classroom environment. As an example, in my PROV class this semester, the professor gave us a rubric in every assignment which was precise that showed the requirement and related score. I did my assignment by answering the entire requirement in the rubric. This made me confident because I knew that no required information was missing. It means that clear instructions provide confidence to students and ensures that they clearly know the expectations of their professors.

Overall, creating a nurturing environment will help graduate INTO students to engage in the class, reduce their anxieties and achieve their academic goals. In addition, every experienced instructor should have their own strategies to teach students how to be more involved in activities and be rid of fear in the classroom. International graduate students will achieve much more success in the future if these strategies are implemented.

**Reference**

Bledsoe, T. S. & Baskin, J. J. (2014). Recognizing student fear: the elephant in the classroom. College Teaching, 62(1), 32-41.