



Dear President Sullivan, Provost Plumb, Associate Vice Provost Kha, and the St. Thomas Community,

We are a group of international faculty at St. Thomas. When we say “international,” we mean that our countries of origin are not the United States. Even though we are from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, we share an important commonality: we are a part of the St. Thomas community. Most of us have received doctoral degrees from a major university in the United States, and the majority of us can speak at least two languages competently. Like our domestic colleagues, we have made significant contributions to St. Thomas through our teaching, our professional engagement, and our service to the community.

However, we feel the urgent need to write to you today to raise our concerns regarding the negative bias targeted against international faculty, which has not only adversely impacted our morale, but has hurt St. Thomas’ strategic goal of globalization, of attracting *and* retaining international faculty in the long-term. Most importantly, it is contradictory to the inclusive climate the university is striving to achieve.

International faculty are oftentimes from non-native English backgrounds. Because our English is perceived to be different from that of our native speaking colleagues, we are often subject to the “linguistic stereotyping” from both our students, and even our colleagues. Our linguistic variation is perceived to have negative impact on student academic performance, which echoes the long-standing so-called “foreign teacher problem.” Extensive research in different disciplines with large samples of students, however, shows little evidence that the linguistic background of non-native English-speaking faculty members has an adverse effect on student learning outcomes¹.

While non-native English-speaking faculty members are as effective as their native speaking colleagues in higher education, research has repeatedly shown that minority faculty members, including faculty of color and non-native English-speaking faculty, not only suffer from negative stereotypes and biases, but are judged more negatively than their White and native-speaking counterparts in both student perceptions and performance evaluations².

¹ Jacobs, L. C., & Friedman, C. B. (1988). Student achievement under foreign teaching associates compared with native teaching associates. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59, 551-563. Marvasti, A. (2005). U.S. Academic institutions and perceived effectiveness of foreign-born faculty. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 39, 151-176.

² Bavishi, A., Madera, J.M., & Hebl, M. R. (2010). The effect of professor ethnicity and gender on student evaluations: Judged before met. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3, 245-256. Blackwell, L.V., Marvriplis, C., & Snyder, L. A. (2009). Diverse faculty in STEM fields: Attitudes, performance and fair treatment. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2, 195-205. de Oliveira, E. A., Braun, J. L., Carlson, T. L., & de Oliveira, S. G. (2009). Students’ attitudes toward foreign-born and domestic instructors. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2, 113-125. Weinberg, B. A., Hashimoto, M., & Fleisher, B. M., (2009). Evaluating teaching in higher education. *Journal of Economic Education*, 40, 227-261.

In the latest Committee on Teaching Evaluation's (CTE) Report on Concerns of Racial and Gender Bias in IDEA Results at St. Thomas, released in November 2017, CTE found "statistically significant differences in average 'Excellent Teacher' and 'Excellent Course' IDEA scores between male and female faculty and between white faculty and faculty of color (with female faculty and faculty of color receiving lower scores, on average, than male faculty and white faculty, respectively)." As CTE's report noted, "Our dataset includes 3,376 faculty evaluations for faculty of color (13.2% of the total) and 21,220 faculty evaluations for white (non-Hispanic) instructors (83.2% of the total)...the category 'Faculty of Color' includes those faculty who report their race/ethnicity as Asian (5.3%), Hispanic (3.7%), Black or African American (3.1%), as well as both American Indian/Alaskan Native faculty and faculty of two or more races (1.2% total)." Although the study did not separate International Faculty from the "faculty of color" category, the majority of international faculty are from either Asian (including East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian,) Middle Eastern, or Latin American countries, placing us among the faculty of color.

The biased perception seen in the IDEA scores has inevitably affected our teaching evaluation, annual evaluation, and consequently, merit pay as well as tenure and promotion. It reduces the international faculty's morale, as we are evaluated as less competent than our native-speaking colleagues. This contributes to the campus climate demonstrating a lack of inclusivity and contradicts to the university's initiatives in diversity, equity and inclusivity (DEI).

In addition to the linguistic stereotyping displayed in our teaching evaluation, international faculty are often subject to cultural tokenism (i.e., instead of being evaluated based on our intellectual contributions and instructional abilities, our cultural heritages become the source of either positive or negative evaluation of our performance).

Below is a short compilation of qualitative evidence from both our students and colleagues:

"I know a lot of the students complained about your accent, but they were just ignorant to society." (Student comment in teaching evaluation, demonstrating most students were concerned about the faculty's linguistic variation)

"How does she correct my English? She's not even a native speaker!" (Student comment in teaching evaluation, demonstrating linguistic stereotyping by equating non-native English linguistic background with a lack of credibility and a lack of competency)

"The faculty of X department reflected and discussed at length the reality that one of Dr. Jane Doe's great strengths is indeed the fact that she brings a diverse and multicultural perspective to the teaching of her courses, yet many observed that her greatest strength is possibly her greatest weakness: the difficulty being that in the X discipline, specifically, it is absolutely essential to be able to demonstrate, as well as evaluate, students' excellence in written and oral communication skills." (Excerpt from an international faculty's tenure letter from the faculty's department colleagues, demonstrating both tokenism and linguistic stereotyping. Faculty and department names were removed.)

Some of the international faculty are also concerned about issues such as cultural taxation (e.g., repeatedly being asked to educate our students and colleagues, and provide answers to fix the systemic biases), and cultural ambassadorship (e.g., repeatedly being asked to be the spokesperson for the entire country/culture where we were originally from), although some of us would welcome students and colleagues to inquire about our cultural heritage, embracing conversations related to culture and cultural differences.

The St. Thomas community has dedicated a significant amount of energy and resources to anti-bias trainings, particularly since the racist incident in Fall 2018. Amongst the intentional efforts and endeavors, however, we are disheartened to see the systemic issue of racism and biases is entrenched in our community, affecting important decisions made. For example, the Faculty Senate had dismissed the significant negative impact of biased evaluation on faculty of color, including international faculty, and voted against making both concrete and significant changes to the current practice of using IDEA in evaluating faculty, despite the mounting evidence from both the literature and our own institution, as well as repeated pleas of change from faculty of color.

Thus, we international faculty would like to provide suggestions, and reiterate the importance of training and education in this historic anti-bias campaign:

1. Training for first-year students on working with international faculty, combating against linguistic stereotyping, or equating faculty's variations of English to incompetence and reasons of undesirable grade.
2. Training for faculty at large to evaluate international and multilingual colleagues in combating against linguistic stereotyping and cultural tokenism in tenure and promotion evaluation.
3. Increasing the sensitivity and empathy of faculty and staff with respect to the negative impacts of biased evaluation on international faculty's performance and morale in general. This would promote inclusivity, and contribute to attracting *and* retaining international faculty from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
4. In April 2019, Faculty Senate passed the language in the Faculty Handbook to task department chairs and deans to contextualize IDEA results in evaluating international faculty's and faculty of color's instructional performance both in annual evaluation and tenure and promotion. However, such efforts will unlikely make real impacts given the fact that no training has been provided to the administrators on how to "contextualize." From our experience with the latest annual evaluation, we unfortunately did not see any specific contextualization being added to our evaluations.
5. At the Spring 2019 commencement, Provost Plumb stated that new measures in evaluating faculty teaching would be explored. We were excited to hear the statement, looking forward to the new measures. We echo the CTE's suggestion that IDEA evaluations should be used only as a formative tool to help instructors to improve on their teaching techniques, not a convenience for reducing our teaching performance to a simple number, let alone a number that is biased against non-White faculty, including international faculty.

Of course, this list is not exhaustive regarding what we can do to make St. Thomas a more inclusive and equitable place where *everyone* feels valued to thrive. We welcome more ideas and input from our colleagues and administrators in this ongoing and collaborative endeavor. We thank you for your support.

We reached out to Anti-Racism Coalition (ARC) for its endorsement and received word from many of its members that ARC stands in solidarity with us, in recognition of the ways that negative biases have harmed us and the entire University's efforts to create a more inclusive, welcoming, and hospitable climate.

In solidarity,

On behalf of 22 international faculty at St. Thomas

Xiaowen Guan, Associate Professor of Emerging Media

Marites Guino-o, Associate Professor of Chemistry

Tatyana Ramirez, Associate Professor of Graduate School of Professional Psychology

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