What comes to mind when you think of:

International students + Online learning?
Online learning spaces are never neutral. Everything you do, design and teach is rooted in culture.

Competency: Have cultural humility to acknowledge that your teaching methods & course content are based on culturally-informed values and ways of knowing.
Ask yourself, “Whose interests seem to be best served by my content, design and teaching practices?”*

Competency: Interrogate your pedagogy, content and design for areas of exclusion, racism, xenophobia and bias that may privilege the knowledge and behaviors of some students over others.

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Culture itself isn’t the barrier, it’s our thinking about it that is.

**Competency:** Believe that student diversity enriches the learning space.
Acknowledge—and resist—the urge to think in categories of we and they.

Competency: Avoid language and concepts that might marginalize or stereotype individuals or groups.
“The curriculum is disabled when it does not meet the needs of diverse learners.”

David Rose (a UDL founder)

Competency: Recognize that there are culturally rooted ways of teaching & learning that shape behaviors in areas like communication, relationships, participation style, group work, and issues of self-awareness and self-disclosure.
By demanding international students adapt to U.S. academic norms, you may be operating from a deficit mindset.

Competency: Be familiar with and practice anti-racist & culturally sustaining pedagogies that promote access and inclusion.
You don’t need to be familiar with everyone’s cultures to be culturally inclusive.

Competencies: (You do need to...)
- exhibit openness, curiosity and empathy towards cultural differences and demonstrate enthusiasm for diverse global perspectives.
Background

The accessibility and portability of digital media has allowed learners from around the world to participate in U.S. higher education in ways that were unthinkable even two decades ago (that’s good news!). However, these evolutions in diversity have not seen parallel transformations in how online learning is conceived and created (that’s bad news).

Despite evidence of the role cultural norms play in shaping learning processes, culture is rarely considered in the design and facilitation of online courses. This can have a negative impact on learners, and often affects international students in unequal ways. The increasing diversity of students enrolled online requires courses that are designed with cultural inclusiveness in mind. Yet many instructors are unprepared for this shift.

Cultural Inclusion:

Recognizing and appreciating cultural diversity and integrating it in a way that enriches the overall learning experience of students.

(Adapted from Barker, M., Frederiks, E. & Farrelly, B. (2016). Creating a culturally inclusive classroom environment. Source)
Research Questions

1. What competencies (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) do experts believe that U.S. instructors need in order to design online courses that are culturally inclusive for international students?

2. What competencies (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) do experts believe that U.S. instructors need in order to facilitate online courses that are culturally inclusive for international students?

3. What instructor competencies, if implemented, do experts believe will most improve international students’ online learning experiences and environment?
Preliminary Results

By soliciting the input of experts in online learning, cultural competence / culturally responsive pedagogy, and international education, I progressively build consensus around a list of requisite instructor competencies. The resulting list includes 15 knowledge areas, 17 attitudes and 20 skills to help instructors create more inclusive online courses for international students.

View an interactive summary of the Top 12 Instructor Competencies (and share your thoughts!)

View the full list of 52 competencies as identified and ranked by experts.
Key Take-Away

The cultural inclusion of international students in online courses is **an important—and often overlooked—aspect of campus DEI efforts**. It is essential that we, as online instructors and instructional designers, recognize that our content, design and teaching practices are rooted in culturally informed values and assumptions.

A key take-away from this project, is that **much of the current effort around supporting international students in online courses is established on a deficit model of thinking**. To practice cultural inclusion in online courses, instructors must truly believe that international student diversity enriches the learning space and select their course design, content and teaching methods accordingly.

This research points to the fact that, more than possessing specific knowledge and skills, there is a need for instructors to “**internalize and have a disposition about culture, power & knowledge**” (Dixson, 2021, p.359) when it comes to our thinking about international students in online courses.

Method

Using a 3-round Delphi study, I solicited input from 29 experts in online learning, culturally responsive pedagogy / cultural competence, or international education. Data collection took place April - August 2021.

The research participants included both scholars and practitioners with experience working in higher education in the areas of online learning, cultural competence/culturally responsive pedagogy, or international education.

The charts to the right describe participants’ self-identified level of expertise in each area.
Delphi Process

**Round 1**
- Participants: Generated ~400 suggestions of the knowledge, attitudes & skills that instructors need.
- Researcher: Distilled suggestions into a list of 100 competencies by combining & refining items.

**Round 2**
- Participants: Verified & further refined list of competencies by rating each on a 5-point helpfulness scale.
- Researcher: Analyzed the results & trimmed list, retaining 52 "very helpful" and "most helpful" items.

**Round 3**
- Participants: Ranked lists of 15 knowledge, 17 attitude & 20 skill competencies using Q-sort.
- Researcher: Analyzed the level of agreement among experts and ordered lists from most to less essential.
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