

Hamilton

An Introduction to Multilingual Students at Hamilton College

Many instructors recognize that multilingual students are an essential and welcome part of the Hamilton College community. Instructors are committed to inclusive practices that acknowledge and build on the strengths these students bring to our classrooms, but may be less certain about what pedagogical practices are best. While the general information that follows can provide some insight into who multilingual students are at Hamilton College, the optimal way to determine how to best support and work with multilingual students is to get to know them as individuals in our classes.

Why use the term multilingual?

[Multilingual](#) recognizes the assets these students bring to Hamilton College and refers to students who communicate using multiple languages, one of which may be English¹. English as a Second Language (ESL), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English Language Learner (ELL), Non-Native English Speaker (NNES), and L1/L2/L3 are all terms that have been used to refer to multilingual students. These terms do not accurately represent students' linguistic backgrounds or experiences, as English may be their preferred or primary language, and they may also be learning English as a third, fourth, or fifth language. Additionally, native speaker ideologies are often associated with "the ability to inhabit and enact idealized whiteness rather than empirical linguistic practices" (Rosa and Flores 2017).

Who are multilingual students at Hamilton?

While international students comprise 6% of the student population at Hamilton College, not all multilingual students are international students and vice versa. In survey responses from 109 multilingual students, 59.2% of participants did not identify as international with 5% of them categorizing themselves as neither international nor non-international². In other words, multilingual students at Hamilton College are not a homogeneous group but instead come from a range of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. Some are international, some are U.S. born, some are dual citizens, and some were born in another country but moved to the U.S. prior to beginning college.

What are multilingual students' linguistic backgrounds?

Multilingual students at Hamilton College speak 42 different languages at home including:

AAVE	Korean	Jamaican Creole
Arabic	Laos	Jamaican English
Bulgarian	Mandarin	Japanese
Cantonese	Marathi	Kannada
Chinese (not specified)	Nambya	Kazakh
Danish	Ndebele	Kinyarwanda
Dzongkha	Nepali	Kirundi
French	Norwegian	Shona
Fujianese	Polish	Spanglish
Fuzhou dialect	Portuguese	Spanish
Hindi	Punjabi	Swahili
Hungarian	Russian	Tamil
Indigenous words from native language where family is from	Shanghainese	Urdu
Italian	Sharchop	Vietnamese

¹ Yuko Goto Butler's definition is helpful here: "Individuals or groups of people who obtain communicative competence in more than one language, with various degrees of proficiencies, in oral and/or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society" (p. 112)

² Based on results from a survey circulated in Fall 2021 and completed by 109 students who self-identified as multilingual.

What are multilingual students' preferred languages?

Multilingual students at Hamilton prefer 16 different languages, including:

English	Chinese
Mandarin	Cantonese
Spanish	French
Italian	Gujarati
Russian	Vietnamese
Japanese	Lebanese Arabic
Kirundi	AAVE
Bulgarian	Jamaican Creole

What do multilingual students describe as their concerns and areas of confidence with college-level writing?

When it comes to college-level writing, multilingual students have an array of concerns including but not limited to meeting disciplinary expectations, word choice/vocabulary, grammar, style, and citations. Some students also expressed concerns with being able to interpret prompts and transparency of instructor expectations.

Some of the areas students feel most concerned about are also the areas they feel most confident in--academic writing skills, disciplinary/genre expectations (including informational essays, scientific papers, lab reports, persuasive arguments), and style. Also, just as some students noted that they have “no concerns” about their academic writing, others commented that they “have nothing they feel confident in” when it comes to their writing. In other words, there is a wide range of student experiences and perspectives.

What do multilingual students describe as their concerns and areas of confidence with college-level oral communication?

Multilingual students at Hamilton are most concerned with their vocabulary/word choice, pronunciation/accent, and delivery (organization, clarity, cohesion, style/grammar) when it comes to college-level oral communication. They feel most confident expressing ideas about familiar content, engaging the audience, participating in group discussions, and communicating with others one-on-one including peers and professors.

How can we best support multilingual students and recognize the assets they bring to Hamilton?

Multilingual students noted that they find it helpful when instructors have clearly written and expressed assignment expectations not only in prompts but also grading rubrics. They also appreciate when instructors are available individually to meet and discuss assignments, as well as when instructors are receptive to conversations about how to best support multilingual students with the students themselves.

It's important to keep in mind that multilingual students have a rhetorical and linguistic awareness that is unique and a result of their fluency in multiple languages. They regularly modify their communication in response to their audience and “come with psychological and attitudinal resources, such as patience, tolerance, and humility, to negotiate the differences of interlocutors” (Canagarajah 2006).

Learning about the multilingual students in your class as individuals is the best way to inform your support. You can begin to do this during the first day or week of classes by asking all students to answer a few questions that give you a sense of who they are; one of the questions could be related to linguistic background and another could be about what students feel works best for their learning style and/or what types of classroom practices best support their learning.

You can also help connect multilingual students to the various resources on campus including but not limited to the [Days-Massolo Center](#), [the Language Center](#), [the Writing Center](#), [the Oral Communication Center](#), [the Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning Center](#), [International Student Support](#), [ALEX Advisors](#), and [Multilingual Student Support](#). Visit the [ALEX Centers & Resources](#) page for more information.

Sources

- Butler, Y. G. (2012). Bilingualism/Multilingualism in Second-Language Acquisition. In T. K. Bhatia & W. C. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism, Second Edition* (pp.109-136). Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). The place of World englishes in composition: Pluralization continued. *College Composition and Communication*, 57(4), 586-619.
- Cox, M. (2016). Identity Construction, Second Language Writers, and the Writing Center. In S. Bruce & B. Rafoth (Eds.), *Tutoring Second Language Writers* (pp. 53-77). University Press of Colorado.
- Rosa, J., & Flores, N. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, 46(5), 621-647. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404517000562>
- Vieira, K. (n.d.). *An Introduction to Multilingual Writers at UW-Madison*. Writing Across the Curriculum. <https://dept.writing.wisc.edu/wac/an-introduction-to-multilingual-writers-at-uw-madison/>