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## Speaking their language: Developing a bilingual LibGuide for Chinese students.


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# Speaking their language: Developing a bilingual LibGuide for Chinese students.

## **Abstract**

This article documents the development of a bilingual English/Mandarin library guide for the Chinese student population of Fort Hays State University. Growing international student populations across the country mean that many university libraries need to customize services for unique student groups. At Forsyth Library of Fort Hays State University we serve over 3600 students from China. We sought to develop further services for this student group. Please note that throughout this paper, when referring to “Chinese language,” we are specifically referencing Standard Mandarin, which is predominant among our Chinese students.

## **Keywords**

International students, LibGuides, Bilingual, Multilingual, China, Chinese, Guides, Translation

## Introduction

International students make up over 5% of the U.S. post-secondary student body (International Student Enrollment, 2018) and contribute \$39 billion to the U.S. economy each year (Saul, 2017). According to the 2017 Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Report, their numbers have grown steadily over the past seven decades, from approximately 26,000 in 1950 to well over a million in the 2016-2017 school year (IIE International Student Enrollment Trends, 1948/49 – 2016/17). This report states that “there were 85% more international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities than were reported a decade ago” (IIE Open Doors 2017 Executive Summary, para 2).

However, there are signs that this growth is slowing. A survey of five hundred colleges conducted by the Institute of International Education in the fall semester of 2017 found that *new* international student enrollment fell seven percent (Baer, 2017). The drop appears to be caused by a variety of factors, including cuts in international scholarships in the home countries, fear of violence against immigrants in the U.S., changes in American society and political culture, and increased competition for these students from other countries (Saul, 2017). Figure 1 shows that state universities in Kansas have experienced the same pattern of growth in international student enrollments, followed by a recent decline:

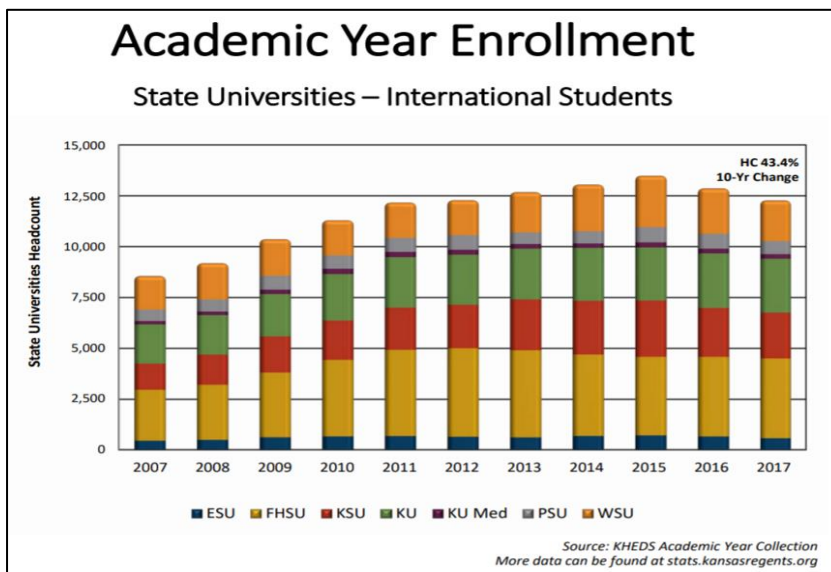


Figure 1. Graph showing the number of international students enrolled in state universities in Kansas, 2007-2017. Reprinted from *Highlights of System Enrollments* by E. Frisbie, 2018, p. 10. Retrieved from [https://kansasregents.org/resources/Enrollment\\_Presentation\\_2018.pdf](https://kansasregents.org/resources/Enrollment_Presentation_2018.pdf)

## Fort Hays State University International Student Population

Fort Hays State University is located in Hays, Kansas, a city of 21,000, located in North Central Kansas. Despite our isolated, rural location, Fort Hays has developed strong ties to international partners around the world, and attracts a variety of international students to our primary campus. Of the 229 international students on the Fort Hays campus in 2018, over 100 were originally from China (M. Kohl, personal communication, April 18, 2018), making this a substantial population group on campus, and one that frequently makes use of library resources.

In addition, Fort Hays maintains two ongoing partnerships with universities in China: SIAS International University in the Henan Province, and Shenyang Normal University in Liaoning Province. At these universities, Chinese students receive instruction from Fort Hays State University faculty, working toward attainment of dual degrees from Fort Hays and the parent university. Currently, students at SIAS International University can receive the following degrees from Fort Hays: B.B.A. in Management, B.S. in Organizational Leadership, B.A. in Global Business English, B.S. in Computer Science, and B.S. in Health Studies. Shenyang Normal University students can receive a Bachelor of Business Administration and a B.A. or B.S. in Organizational Leadership. Our combined enrollment at these two schools in 2017 was 3,570, accounting for over 23% of our total student population (Fort Hays State University QuickFACTS, 2017).

Our Chinese student population is a major service group for Forsyth Library. However, there have been numerous barriers to this service. Due to the major distance and time zone difference, it has been difficult to get information about the students at our partner schools that is consistent and actionable. No consistent liaison had been established between the library and our faculty abroad, and requests for information from faculty were often anecdotal, contradictory, or went unanswered.

In the spring of 2017 a Qualtrics survey was distributed to all faculty. This survey measured both awareness and satisfaction with library resources and services. It was our first formal survey which included China faculty participation, and we received several useful & informative comments which clearly indicated both a need and desire for increased services for our student populations abroad.

- *A library liaison would be very helpful to us in China as students' interaction/impression of librarians is marginal.*
- *I know students have access to the online library, but I highly doubt that they are aware of this or that they know how to use it.*

- *I would like to have a module of virtual instruction/introduction to my students embedded in Blackboard that I could possibly use as a quiz to help them with research outcomes and APA formatting.*
- *A Chinese translation, or China-friendly version, of the library instruction and research guides would be very useful.*

## **Developing Services**

Following our surveys, we started thinking about the feasibility of creating a web page specifically for our Chinese language students. There is a distinct gap in library services for this population group, at our institution and others. A 2010 study of international students at three Californian universities by Knight, Hight, and Polfer found that international students are often “an underserved population” (p. 581). This study recognized the need for specific outreach to this population, and encouraged the creation and promotion of targeted web pages for international student groups. However, in a 2013 study of 83 Chinese students in American academic libraries by Appalachian State University and two Chinese university partners, only 8% reported that their library offered website materials in their native language (Shao, Scherlen, Johnson, Xu, & Hu). This is despite the fact that, according to a 2002 review by Conteh-Morgan, studies of Chinese students in American universities have routinely cited lack of English-proficiency as the primary factor hindering library use.

Twelve percent of these students in the Appalachian State study stated that a version of the library website in Chinese would be the most helpful step the library could take in becoming more accessible to them. While this may seem low, the study also refers to this step as “low hanging fruit” (p. 34), as it is considerably easier and more cost effective than, for example, providing a librarian fluent in Chinese, which was rated as most helpful by 18% of respondents. The collaborative California study found that international students value the internet and regularly keep up-to-date through online media sources. This reinforces a study where researchers at La Trobe University found that among their international student population, library web pages were the preferred way of learning about library services for 49% of students, outpacing personal contact with library staff and library tours (Sackers, Secomb, & Hulett, 2013). Online tutorials were also cited as preferable to in-class demonstrations for learning about the catalogue and library databases.

This preference for online materials is unsurprising when examining the cultural differences between American and Chinese students. A 2014 study from multiple universities in China showed pronounced library anxiety among Chinese students, focused around the use of library resources and a perceived lack of knowledge when speaking to library professionals (Song, Zhang, Clarke, 2013).

Knight, Hight, and Polfer confirmed that in the American Universities, Chinese students readily use the library as a place for quiet study and collaboration, but rarely engage with reference services. In a 2006 study of international student use of libraries at the University of Alberta, Morrissey and Given note that the cultural ideas common in Chinese society may prevent international students from seeking help from librarians. They encountered multiple subjects who believed that if they could not find something, this was their problem, not the library's, and that librarians, as people in a position of authority and importance, should not be "bothered" (p. 229).

A language gap only exacerbates this issue; Morrissey and Given found that a majority of college level Chinese students had overestimated their English-language skills, and were particularly overwhelmed by library jargon. They found that those who struggled with oral comprehension missed a great deal of information during library orientation sessions. While we do offer one-shot instruction each semester to our cohorts of international students, this study, along with the fact that we never interact with our students abroad in any meaningful way, led us to conclude that creating a stable, bilingual guide for our students was an appropriate step to meeting their unique information literacy needs.

### **Determining Content**

Throughout this project, it was important for us to recognize how our Chinese students differed from our traditional student population. A study at McGill University found that Chinese students faced unique challenges in the areas of searching, evaluating information, reading, writing, and citing (Zhao & Mawhinney, 2015). They found that because Asian cultures often focus on recitation as a form of learning, there is not as much emphasis on citing sources as in Western culture. This makes knowing how and when to cite, as well as skills like paraphrasing, less common among Chinese students.

This reinforces the findings of Morrissey and Given, who urged targeted support for Chinese students in the areas of plagiarism, copyright, and appropriate citation strategies. The McGill study also found that many Chinese students struggle with database searching and constructing search strategies. They found that often students will not have the necessary vocabulary to approach library resources. "The Catalog," for instance, was cited by several students as a confusing term. Beres and Woloshyn of Brock University in Canada specifically note the need to foster acquisition of research-related vocabulary for Chinese students, as this is often not covered in their previous English instruction (2017). Yu-Hui Chen and Marky K. Van Ullen of the University at Albany summarize much of this in their study, where they create specific workshops for international

students on the topics of formulating research questions, locating and evaluating sources, acknowledging sources, citation styles, and paraphrasing (2011).

We target each of these concepts specifically in our guide, and we attempt to do so in a manner more consistent with Chinese learning strategies. Where possible, we used videos to better illustrate concepts and maintain student interest.

- Our [Library Vocabulary](http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/vocab) page (<http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/vocab>), for example, strives to create an authoritative vocabulary list by combining characters from the Instruction for Diverse Populations Multilingual glossary language table (ACRL, 2015), with definitions of our own creation and those of the University of Denver Library (Houghton & Hornreich, 2017). With this page, we hoped to clarify for our students the terminology used throughout the guide, and present as clearly as possible the contextual meaning of various library terms.
- Our [Research Databases](http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/databases) page (<http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/databases>) provides a step-by-step guide to the process of searching which students can easily replicate. It explains what a database is, how to select the best one for your topic, and how to search. We sought to recommend resources that would appeal directly to our Chinese students, such as general databases geared toward specific content types, and databases that allowed for a Chinese language interface. We included instructions on how to access each of these features.
- For [types of articles](#), [citing sources](#), and [paraphrasing](#), we again attempted to break down the processes into individual, replicable components that would be easy to summarize and understand. ([http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/peer\\_review](http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/peer_review), <http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/citing>, <http://fhsuguides.fhsu.edu/bilingual/paraphrasing>.)

## Translating

To ensure that our content was understandable and engaging for Chinese students, we hired a Chinese graduate student worker, Alick Lei, to aid us in our translation efforts. Alick was a graduate of SIAS University, one of our partners in China. We decided to use a student translator out of a desire to translate for content and understanding, rather than vocabulary alone. We felt that working closely with someone unfamiliar with library jargon would provide greater clarity and context, and allow us to translate with our students in mind.

Using a human translator proved preferable to machine translation in several ways. Many library terms do not have consistent one-to-one translations in Chinese, and Alick was able to provide context and explanations of certain

concepts, and negotiate the transition in grammar between the two languages. Thanks to Alick's hard work, our guide is entirely bilingual, and designed to appeal to our students abroad.

In 2007, the University of Alabama translated a library information page for their own Chinese students (McClure & Krishnamurthy, 2007). They had also come to the conclusion that their international students were more comfortable seeking help within the virtual space than directly from a librarian. To circumvent the same issues of poor machine translations that we encountered, the University of Alabama team advertised positions on various international student email lists, before hiring a library student from China.

### **Platform choices**

We chose Springshare's LibGuides platform for creating this guide, which allowed for easy modification and customization. We made this decision after working with the university on an outage of our website in China in 2016. We found that Google APIs integrated into the university website caused the failures, but that the library's LibGuide pages had no similar issues, and were consistently accessible from both our Chinese campuses. Furthermore, few people in China own personal computers, while smart phones are common. LibGuides allowed us to easily design a guide that works well on mobile devices.

We chose to use the academic video platform ILOS rather than YouTube, as the ILOS platform was much more reliable in China.

### **Conclusion**

While we have received positive responses on the bilingual guide from both faculty and students, this has been largely anecdotal. It is our intention to survey our international faculty and students, as well as our on-campus Chinese students, to assess the usefulness of the guide. We also plan to implement user testing of the guide by Chinese students on-campus, to help us recognize what we may have missed or what could use improvement.

We are currently assessing the need for additional bilingual guides. While there are no other large groups of international students on campus who share a common language, we do have a prominent and growing Hispanic population on campus. Having conducted this process once in the past and with the Chinese guide as a model, it could be very easy to adapt materials to other languages, particularly Romance languages where machine translation software will be more accurate.