Working with Freshmen International Students: Helping Them Explore Research Topics and Learn How to Use the Library with Active Learning Method

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Background
- All first-year students participate in First Seminars during their first semester at Case Western Reserve University.
- First Seminars are small (at most 17 students) interdisciplinary courses that promote critical thought and academic inquiry, and are writing intensive.
- International students complete a writing sample after arriving on campus for New Student Orientation.
- After the review of their writing samples, they are enrolled into either a section of First Seminar focused on academic English, or they are prompted to select from regular First Seminars.
- First Seminars for international students are smaller (10 to 12 students per class), and class topics usually focus on challenges faced by international students, comparison of Western and Eastern cultures, and the impact of globalization.

Active Learning Activities
Ask students to retrieve books based on the Library of Congress (LC) Call Numbers, and check them out to learn the check-out process.

Connect students to award-winning books on China written by journalists who have studied and lived in China for many years.

Help them learn the other side of the story – the perception of China from Western perspective.

Introduce them to the concept of Subject Headings: United States -- Foreign relations – China vs. China -- Foreign relations.

Topics Explored to Compare American and Chinese/East Asian Cultures
- Uber in China: Uber only got a share of around 10 percent in China, compared to Didi Chuxing's more than 80 percent.
- Tipping in China makes a comeback after being eradicated by Chairman Mao's government in 1949.
- Xiaomi mobile phone, an indigenous Chinese mobile phone brand, once outsold Apple and Samsung in China. But now the company is struggling.

Will active learning method experimented with in Chinese classrooms produce independent thinkers who will challenge the supreme authority of teachers, or of anyone else?

China's popular sports typically do not involve physical contact. American Football has practically no history in China.

Conclusions
- Active learning activities provided students hands-on experience with the LC Call Numbers and Subjects Headings.
- Librarian's experience of studying and living in both China and the U.S. helped the students explore topics that are relevant and intriguing.
- Collaboration with instructors of First Seminars for international students has been the key to successful library instructions.