Preparing students to cross cultures

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Issues in Cross-Cultural Competence

Bringing Cross-Cultural Ideas to Your Students
   Readings
   Events
   Lectures

Applied Assignments that Allow Students to Meet New Cultures
   Interview
   Visual
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**What is intercultural or cross-cultural competence**

- The ability to recognize when cultural values, expectations, and traditions are affecting individuals’ actions and behavior
- The ability to interact effectively with people from different cultural perspectives; this may require adjusting behavior to interact authentically with them
- Cultural values and expectations affect virtually everything in daily life, including how and when we eat and drink, how we interact on the street, at school, and at work, what we think about transportation and technology, and how we greet each other (hand shake, kiss on the cheek, etc.)

**Why cross-cultural competence is important**

- After graduation, students will work with individuals from around the world. Recognizing cultural expectations and values will make them more effective in their work
- Employers are looking for people with “people skills” who can work effectively in teams
- Being able to resolve conflicts and use the skills and experience of others effectively creates a “win win” situation for the employer, employee, and the project
- Culturally competent people become the “go to” people in times of confusion or conflict
- Intercultural competence is a marketable set of skills that can be developed during study abroad or experiential activities, then transferred to other spheres of life. Examples include:
  - Ability to work in a multilingual environment
  - Time management skills
  - Ability to establish rapport with others
  - Ability to deal with ambiguity
  - Ability to solve problems and resolve conflict
  - Negotiation skills
  - Sensitivity to cultural context
  - Respect for difference and diversity
  - Ability to fit in with a new group

“What’s Up with Culture” website has longer list. See [http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/File/sec2-3-1h1.html](http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/File/sec2-3-1h1.html)
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Why students downplay cross-cultural competence

- They often lack experience interacting with people from other cultures on a personal level
- They view “culture” in terms of “high culture” and visible cultural products (food, art, music) but lack experience thinking about cultural values and expectations
- They approach study abroad as a travel experience, rather than a person-to-person opportunity
- They lack the time needed to get to know people and understand their attitudes, behaviors, expectations, and beliefs

Reflection is key to recognizing how cultural values and expectations work

- It allows us to “unpack” our experiences in a non-threatening environment
- It enables us to hear and understand what others think and believe
- It allows us to recognize patterns and make educated guesses about why others act the way they do, and then to adjust our behavior and expectations accordingly
**Required Books:**
*CultureSmart: Costa Rica* by Jane Koutnik

*Plus one from the following list (your choice):*
*Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, Second Edition: Who Owns Paradise?* by Mary Honey

*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

*Hello, I am Feynner: Growing Up in the Rainforests of Costa Rica* by Terry Hallock and Feynner Arias

*I, Rigoberta Menchu* by Rigoberta Menchu, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray and Ann Wright

*Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario

**Classroom speakers:**
Costa Rican natives on campus (2)
Central American History
Latin American Media

**Required experience:**
One speaker, film/discussion or cultural event chosen from a list
Applied assignment 1: The interview

You must interview a North Carolina citizen who immigrated here from Latin America. Depending on immigration status, some residents may be very uncomfortable being interviewed, so you need to be sensitive to this. Taking photos may not be appropriate, and possibly even taking notes. If you are not able to take notes, be sure to write down notes as soon as you can after the interview. The purpose of the interview is to elicit the person’s views of his or her home country. You will want to consider some questions in advance that you would like to ask. Questions like asking the person to describe the house they grew up in, typical jobs, daily routines, foods, climate and environment, etc., might all be appropriate. If it were me, I would ask what they miss the most about their home country. You should use the results of your interview to write a four-paragraph summary of the person’s point of view, that also includes a physical description of the person as well as a description of clothing, setting or possessions that let you know the person is from another country. If you can take a photo, please include that as well. You will be expected to discuss your experiences with the person at a pro-seminar session. *This can be done with one partner to ameliorate language issues, if needed. This won’t work for everyone, though (not enough Spanish speakers), so you’ll have to think through in advance how you are going to handle this. It’s unlikely that you’ll find local citizens who speak no English at all, but you might need to be prepared to spend extra time or ask questions in simple ways. You may e-mail this assignment to your professor. Save the file as yourlastname_interview (Example: copeland_interview)

Fishbowl Exercise

Today, I will be interviewing Youssef Osman, a new faculty member at Elon who grew up in Egypt. In order for you to learn about interviewing, please take notes on the following topic. I will ask you to report back to the class on what you observe so make sure you note specific details.

1. The ways the interviewer tries to establish rapport
   Any use of active listening (give examples)

2. The organization of the questions
   What categories did the questions fall in? (give specific examples)

3. Style of asking questions
   In what way were they asked? (give examples)

4. Choice of questions
   Evidence of background research (be prepared to cite evidence)

1 Depending on the level of the class, I might arrange interview opportunities for the students or give them suggestions of where to find people to interview.
Applied Assignment 2: the Photo essay.

You must locate a place here in North Carolina that has authentic visual identifiers of Latin American culture. I'd discourage you from selecting a popular Burlington Mexican restaurant, as the visual identifiers are chosen to serve the clientele, who are primarily white North Carolinians. If you go for the margarita specials, it's not a good choice. Examples might include a store or a restaurant (there are some good options on Webb Avenue/Elm Street, if you want to stay in Burlington/Graham, and lots of good ones in Greensboro/High Point). As you visit the place (and please ask permission before you take pictures!), spend some time noticing elements of the environment that let you know that you in a Latin American place. Select 10 elements and photograph them. Each photo must have a story caption with the following elements: who, what and where of the picture. It also must include why the picture is visually representative of the culture you are trying to capture. Here is an example:

Juan Ozando and his daughter Amelia look at Quinceañera dresses at Casa de quinces in Graham. Juan said that the coming of age ceremony for his daughter is...

For the photo that you think best captures the culture visually, you must write a short paragraph describing the elements of the photo in detail and stating specifically why they represent the culture.

Your photos don't need to be super-high quality, as they will primarily be looked at on a computer screen. Please save your photos with your last name and a slug (example: sturgillquincedress.jpg). Include a Word document with the captions, listed by file name as well as the more detailed paragraph about one of the pictures, saved as yourlastname_photoguide (Example: motley_photoguide.doc)