

**Spring 2008 (WEC)**  
**COM 329 - Intercultural Communication**

**Class meeting dates:**

**April 12, April 26, May 10, May 17, May 31, June 7, and June 21**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

It has become a cliché to say that we now live in a “global village,” but it really is true! We can fly to anywhere in the world in a day, and we can e-mail anyone in the world in just a few seconds. We don’t even need to leave our own neighborhoods, businesses, churches, or schools to find ourselves in intercultural situations. Therefore, this course deals with the dynamics of the communication process when members of different cultures interact.

More specifically, the course will be concerned with: (1) basic differences among cultural groups in terms of values and cultural assumptions; (2) differences in language structure and thinking; (3) differences in cultural activities and rituals; and (4) differences involved in sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal messages.

The course is concerned with both a general understanding of the dynamics of cross-cultural interaction (field invariant principles that apply in any intercultural setting) as well as specific knowledge of how these principles relate to particular cultural groups (field dependent norms).

Overall, the course attempts to offer a mix of "theory" and "practice" in a variety of learning modes. The subject matter does not lend itself to a nice, neat, linear type of packaging, so be prepared to "go with the flow" to some extent. Also, certain themes and ideas will be stressed more than once. Some of this repetition is accidental, but much of it is intentional--it is my opinion that repetition is an important and often neglected element to learning.

### **GENERAL COURSE PROGRESSION**

- April 12 – May 10: basic terminology; components of culture, ways that cultures are categorized; popular theories of culture; U.S. culture relative to other world cultures; what it means to be culturally competent.
- May 17 – June 21: communication implications of cultural differences; verbal and nonverbal differences; cultural differences in persuasion.; cultural differences in relationships, education, business, and medical care; ethical issues in intercultural communication; investigation of specific world cultures.

In general, we’ll start with “culture” and finish with “communication.”

## REQUIRED READING

- Myron Lustig and Jolene Koester, Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures, 5th ed. (Pearson, 2006).
- Norine Dresser, Multicultural Manners: Essential Rules of Etiquette for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

## ATTENDANCE

Since we meet only 7 times, it is expected that you'll attend every class. It is certainly my expectation that you will miss, **at most**, one class session. There will be "informal" penalties for excessive absences--in particular, some reluctance to give you the "benefit of the doubt" if you are on the borderline between two final grades. There will also be one "formal" penalty: you will automatically not receive credit for the course if you miss more than two times, even if you have completed all assigned work. In short, coming to class regularly is one criterion for passing the course. If you do miss a class, be sure to find out what you missed; doing so is your responsibility.

## MISSED EXAMS / LATE ASSIGNMENTS

If you miss an exam, it is (a) your burden to demonstrate that the reason for your absence was legitimate and compelling, and (b) your responsibility to make alternate arrangements. The writing assignments will be subject to a point deduction if they are turned in late. With late exams and papers, please do not force me to track you down! Keep me informed.

## GRADING

At the end of the term, I will make a class distribution of the point totals. After doing so, I will consider (in approximate order of importance): (1) percentage of total points; (2) the mean and median point totals in the distribution; (3) how the point totals are "clustered" or distributed--i.e., if there are any gaps where it would be appropriate to draw a line; (4) college grade guidelines, which state that a 4.0 is work that "achieves highest standards of excellence," and a 3.0 is work which is "above basic course standards," and (5) any "intangibles"--e.g., attendance, attitude, perceived competence, class participation. (I sometimes consider these factors if you are "on the borderline" between two grades.)

I do not assume that this distribution of scores will be a "normal, bell-shaped" distribution; that is, I do not assume that there has to be a particular percentage of any particular grade. My general tendency is to be reasonably generous on the "low end" and somewhat stingy on the "high end." If you attend class regularly, finish all the work, and manage to get at least 50 percent of the total points, you absolutely will not fail--but you will really have to earn a 4.0. As implied above, I am most influenced by percentage of total points--if it's above 90 percent, you're doing an excellent job; if it's at least 80 percent, you've done good work; if it's at least 70 percent, you're probably somewhere in the "C" range; and if it's less than 70 percent, you should be concerned.

Other notes about grading: (1) You must complete all assignments in order to receive credit for the course--you may not "take a zero" on a paper, for example, and expect to pass. (2) Incompletes will be strongly discouraged, unless there is some dire emergency. (3) We will view several videotapes. Please regard these videos as "lectures" for which you are accountable on exams. (4) You are expected to read and understand college policies regarding plagiarism which are spelled out in the Augsburg College Guide. **In particular, you**

need to understand that “pasting in” large passages of text, word-for-word, from another source, without using quotation marks and without providing an in-text source citation, constitutes academic misconduct.

## **GRADED ACTIVITIES (details subject to slight modification)**

### **EXAMS (150 points)**

To give you the chance to demonstrate what you know and what you have learned, there will be exams on these days: **May 17 and June 21**. The exams will consist of true-false, multiple choice, and short answer questions. These will be non-cumulative exams, and they will have a total weight of 150 points regardless of the actual number of questions—i.e., your exam total for the term will be “re-calibrated” to a 150-point scale. **For each exam, you can use one side of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper as an aid.**

- **Exam #1 (May 17) will be based on:**
  - Lustig and Koester, chapters **1-6 and 12**;
  - Dresser, pages **71-89, 115-140, 165-175** and
  - whatever we do in class from April 12 – May 10.
- **Exam #2 (June 21) will be based on:**
  - Lustig and Koester, chapters **7-11**;
  - Dresser, pages **11-69, 91-113, 141-165, 177-181, 183-197**; and
  - whatever we do in class from May 17 – June 21.

For each of these exams, please remember that “in class” material can and will include class handouts, class videos, stories or anecdotes that have a pedagogical purpose, and guest speakers—they are all in the category of “lecture” material. And in the Lustig and Koester text, the “Culture Connections” boxes in each chapter are also “fair game” for exam questions.

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (150 points)**

### **WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 (due May 10)**

#### **Paper #1: Cultural experience interviews (40 points)**

On the first day of class, you will have the opportunity to meet one or more people from another country; they will be visitors from the ELS Language Center on the campus of the University of St. Thomas. In class, you will have the chance to link up with at least two of these people. Then, outside of class, you should make arrangements to spend some time with them, talk with them, and get information from them about their culture. (Coffee, meals, or even a long walk might be appropriate. Part of your task is to be a good host.) After spending some time with your interviewees outside of class, you should write a reaction paper of approximately 6 pages which focuses on at least six of the following aspects of culture:

- greeting rituals
- personal appearance
- diet and food customs
- family
- dating, courtship, and marriage
- language
- history
- religion
- education

At least one page needs to offer some sort of analysis and interpretation of your experience, with connections to “theory” expected—i.e., course concepts studied to date. You are also welcome to supplement your interview material with some additional research, but the paper should make it clear that you have had extended discussions with these people.

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2 (due May 31)**

### **Paper #2: The “Eat Street”/Midtown Global Market Experience (40 points)**

For this assignment, you must spend some quality and quantity time at one or both of the following places: “**Eat Street**,” otherwise known as Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis—from roughly 24<sup>th</sup> & Nicollet to 28<sup>th</sup> & Nicollet; and/ or the **Midtown Global Market**, on the corner of Lake and Chicago in Minneapolis. If you go to Eat Street, one of your required stops is the Shuang Hur Market on 27<sup>th</sup> & Nicollet, but you should roam around the entire area. Both of these places have a definite “intercultural” feel, with lots of shops and restaurants representing a variety of cultures. If you elect to write about this experience, you will need to spend time watching, listening, and inquiring—and maybe even participating! The general goal of this assignment is for you to have genuine intercultural experiences, but also be able to report on them and analyze them. Specific information blended with course theory is the mix you are looking for. In addition, some “outside research” in many cases will make your paper more informative. For example, it’s not enough to say, “I ate a squid taco, and it sure was delicious!” Rather, you would want to tell the reader something about tacos that might not be known, and that sort of thing involves asking questions and doing research. In other words, this paper ought to show a good grasp of theory, and nuances, and issues, and problems; it ought to educate the reader and cause the reader to think. Specific information is a plus, and connections to course material—along with any thoughtful personal insights—will make the paper complete.

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3 (due June 21)**

**Both options are 10-12 pages and worth 70 points; choose one of the two.**

**For each of these options, you are expected to share your major findings with the rest of the class on June 21. These are intended as short (3-5 minutes) and informal—do not stress out about this! Simply provide some “highlights” of what you found, not an exhaustive summary.** You won’t be “graded” on these reports, but failure to do so will mean a loss of 10 points from your total on this assignment.

### **Option A: Paper on a specific culture**

This paper should be about a particular world culture and should be a combination of these two elements:

- (1) a report on relevant published literature (that is, things in print) dealing with this particular cultural group, paying special attention to information which relates to communication (7-8 pages); and
- (2) a report on at least one interview with a member of your cultural group (3-4 pages). Remember that it is difficult for one person to accurately represent an entire culture, so keep that in mind as you write about what she or he has to say.

You may treat these as separate subjects (i.e., two separate papers) or weave them together as you go. **When you are citing literature about the culture, it is expected that you will provide in-text footnotes/source citations, using either the APA or MLA style--as well as a bibliography or "works cited" page at the end. Also, it's expected that you will number the pages to make it easier for me to make references to your paper.**

Needless to say, published literature is more readily available for some groups than for others. However, if you know how to use the full range of resources available in libraries, you should be able to find sufficient literature. Similarly, finding representatives of the various cultural groups will vary in terms of difficulty. I will try to be sensitive to these problems. As for the "interview" portion, you have lots of potential resources: classmates, friends and relatives, neighbors, ethnic restaurants, people you work with, and, of course, your own instructor.

Besides the "standard" grading criteria of submitting the paper on time, overall clarity, and quality and correctness of the writing, I'll keep the following in mind:

- **Overall thoroughness of the research.** Remember that you have plenty of time to complete this project, and you should be a diligent information-gatherer. For most cultures, you should certainly have at least five or six good published sources as an information base. (But, the "minimum" probably shouldn't be the "maximum"!)
- **Ability to narrow the topic sufficiently,** especially for cultural groups which are easy to access. For example, a "paper on Japan" would be too broad; you would need to focus on a specific aspect of the culture, such as gender roles in Japan or business protocol in Japan.
- **Ability to orient the paper to communication-related issues.** Remember that the sending and receiving of verbal and non-verbal messages is our ultimate focus in the course--not what the major exports of the nation are, or where the tallest mountain is, or who ruled the nation in 1850. In general, you'll want to focus on those aspects of the culture that are "social" and "interpersonal" in nature; try to avoid sounding "encyclopedia-ish."

### **Option B: Paper on a specific dimension of culture**

If you choose this option, you should investigate one aspect of culture and do a cross-cultural study of that cultural component. For example, you could look into differences across cultures (or between two cultures) involving things such as: greeting rituals, gift-giving practices, how business is done, educational differences, health and wellness issues, differences in hygiene, food taboos, superstitions, religious practices, courtship and dating, etc. The idea is to take one facet of culture and examine it across two or more cultural groups. Feel free to develop a particular focus, but avoid topics that are too broad to deal with effectively--for example, "holidays" (in general) would be too broad--that is, discussing many different holidays. You should make use of **multiple sources (normally, at least five different sources)** and **cite** those sources in the text of the paper—again, if you are unfamiliar with either APA or MLA style, now is a good time to learn about this. (There are plenty of resources available to help

you with source citations—you can start by going on-line and “Google-ing” either one.) You must also write approximately two pages that involve personal analysis, reflection, application, and/or criticism--that is, you need to offer a perspective and a point of view. **Suggested allocation of space:** 9-10 pages of “information” plus 2-3 pages of “reaction” or analysis.

## NON-GRADED PASS/NO-PASS ASSIGNMENT

At some point in the term, you must share with the class at least one thing which is representative of a culture to which you have some connection. It may be your “home” culture, a culture that you have visited, or the culture that is part of your family ancestry. This “thing” can be an object, an article of clothing, music, some type of food, a work of art, or anything else that can give us a deeper appreciation of that culture. Please make a brief (1-3 minute) informal oral presentation for this assignment.

### “ZERO TOLERANCE” POLICY REGARDING SPELLING

As a member of the Department of Communication Studies, where “presentation of self” is an important focus, I am concerned about your credibility. As a result, I am absolutely committed to the idea that you should never have spelling errors in any paper for any course, including this one. When you misspell words, people will judge you, even if they should not. They will draw conclusions about your effort, your attention to detail, your competence, and your intelligence. Therefore, for both papers, I will automatically deduct **FIVE** points from your total if there are more than two spelling errors, and I will automatically deduct **TEN** points if there are more than five different words misspelled. Check your spelling carefully. Do not totally trust any computerized “spell check” programs.

**Finally, I do assume and expect that you keep a hard copy or some sort of “back-up” for any writing assignments you turn in.** It’s never happened, but I want to avoid any possible disagreements about whether you have actually completed an assignment—your back-up copy is “proof” that you did do the work. I’d encourage you to save copies of any paper for any course until you get them back with a score or grade—and then I’d keep them at least until you see a course grade on your college transcript.

### REFERENCE LIST:

Axtell, R. (1990), The Do’s and Taboos of Hosting International Visitors. New York: Wiley.

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Czinkota, M., Ronkainen, I. and Moffett, M. (1996), International Business, 4th ed. Fort Worth, TX: The Dryden Press.

Devine, E. and Braganti, N. (1998), The Travelers' Guide to Asian Customs and Manners. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

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Gudykunst, W. and Kim, Y., (1992), Communicating With Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hall, E. T. (1981), Beyond Culture, 2nd ed. New York: Doubleday.

Hall, E. T. (1981), The Silent Language. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday.

Hofstede, G. (1984), Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values, 2nd ed. Newbury Park: Sage.

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Klopf, D. (1995), Intercultural Encounters: The Fundamentals of Intercultural Communication, 3rd ed. Englewood, CO: Morton.

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Martin, J., Nakayama, T., and Flores, L. (1998), Readings in Cultural Contexts. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Samovar, L., Porter, R., and Stefani, L. (1998), Communication Between Cultures, 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Weaver, G. (1998), Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations, 2nd ed. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster.

**Also check these titles:**

Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: How to Do Business in Sixty Countries

Culturgrams: The Nations Around Us (short profiles of a variety of nations)

**Finally, be sure to check the extensive endnotes and resources provided on pages 340-369 of Lustig and Koester.**

## A FINAL NOTE

We are living in an era of heightened sensitivity to cultural differences. Cynics sometimes call it an era of “political correctness.” But whatever you call it, it presents a definite tension within a course such as this.

Throughout the term, we will be trying to identify the characteristics of different cultures: mainstream American culture, subcultures within the United States, and the cultures of other nations. Doing so is inevitably an exercise in oversimplification, even stereotyping. Yet somehow, for the course to be fully meaningful, we must attempt to understand the “modal tendencies” of various cultures. That being the case, I would like to offer the following comments:

1. Whenever I (or your textbook writers) discuss the characteristics of a particular cultural group, it is ALWAYS assumed that these are modal characteristics that certainly do not apply to every member of the group. There are ALWAYS exceptions, and you should keep that in mind--especially if you happen to **interact** with a member of that cultural group.
2. In attempting to describe various cultures (both within and outside the United States), our main goal is always to understand the culture. But that does not mean that I--or anyone else in the class--is not entitled to a personal reaction to that culture. You will discover this term that some cultures have values, customs, and practices that are in stark contrast to mainstream American culture--by “American” standards, some will seem downright strange or even offensive. I see nothing wrong with making the point, when appropriate, that those of us born and raised in the USA are likely to respond with confusion or hostility to certain facets of other cultures--indeed, I think it’s a step toward confronting who we are. The reverse is also the case: if we see comparative virtues in other cultures, we should not regard this as “USA-bashing.” When all is said and done, I hope that we can arrive at a “balanced” perspective, both with regard to the USA and other cultures.
3. It is NEVER my intention to slur another cultural group. However, like you, I am a prisoner of my own background, upbringing, socialization, and values--and their attendant “blind spots.” Therefore, if you regard anything that I say as either sexist, racist, ethnocentric, or just plain misleading, I wish you would tell me so. And should others, in your view, make similar “blunders,” I think it’s appropriate to consider telling them, too. However, in the process of being honest and clear with each other, let’s try to be gentle as well--it seems to me that our goal is to help educate one another, not to humiliate or degrade.