

# Cross Cultural Communication at a Distance



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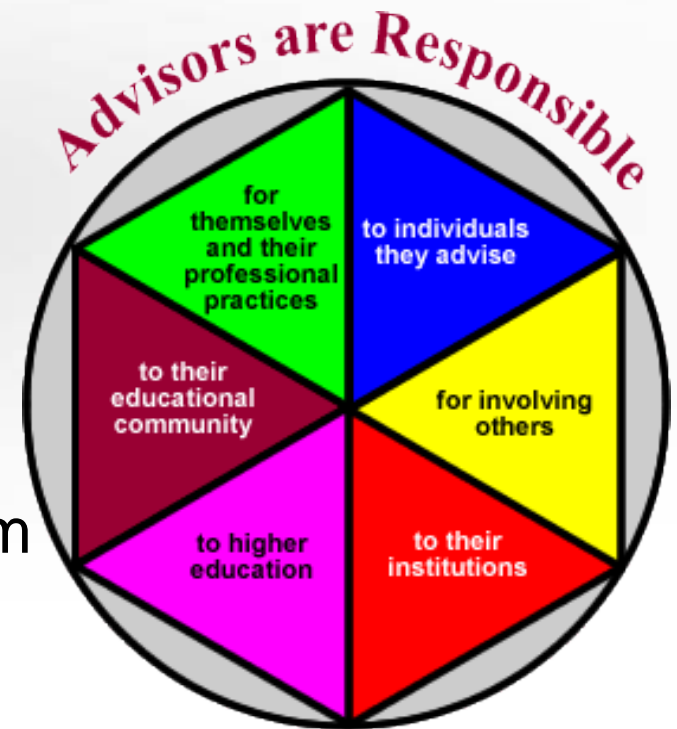
Global Campuses in Europe and Asia

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# NACADA Core Values and Advising Diverse Populations

“Advisors are responsible  
to the individuals  
they advise.”

It is particularly important to recognize and respect the diverse backgrounds of our students to help reinforce realistic self-perceptions and help them plan for their futures.



NACADA (2004)



# Culture and Communication

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Students from diverse backgrounds (domestic and international) may or may not share the same assumptions about the world as we do. Their cultural values may differ from ours.

Understanding cultural diversity can provide an advisor with necessary information to advise individual students more effectively.

Improving cultural competency can help us anticipate and meet needs of our students more effectively.



# Culture and Communication

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- Culture and communication are linked – our values tell us what is considered normal and usual.
- The way in which we articulate our thoughts and needs are often informed by what we assume everyone knows and values.



» Miscommunication may occur when cultural values are misunderstood or misinterpreted.



# Diversity and Identity

“Multicultural, intercultural, cross-cultural awareness indicate a sense of “self” and a sense of “other.”

Race and ethnicity are only two of the many identity factors that contribute to our worldview.

How do you identify yourself?





# Diversity and Identity

Other identity factors include:

- gender
- socioeconomic status
- level of acculturation to majority norms
- geographic region of origin, level of mobility (both physical and geographic)
- sexual orientation
- educational achievement
- speech patterns
- family structure
- religious beliefs
- age cohort
- health status
- varieties of "challenges" and "ableness"
- various types of life experience



Bethany Keller, Webster University

Cunningham 2003



# What is “culture”?



- Culture is “shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people which result in characteristic behaviors” (Storti).
- We all belong to various cultures including:
  - national cultures
  - subcultures (based on regions, tribes etc)
  - organizational or corporate cultures
  - industry cultures
  - professional
  - functional cultures (Himachali).

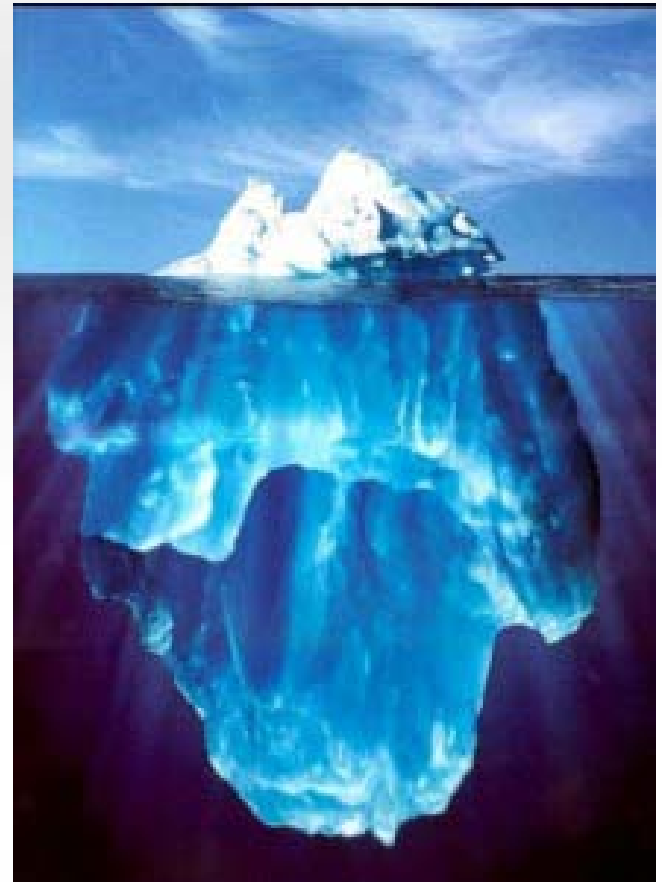


# Metaphors – Culture as an Iceberg

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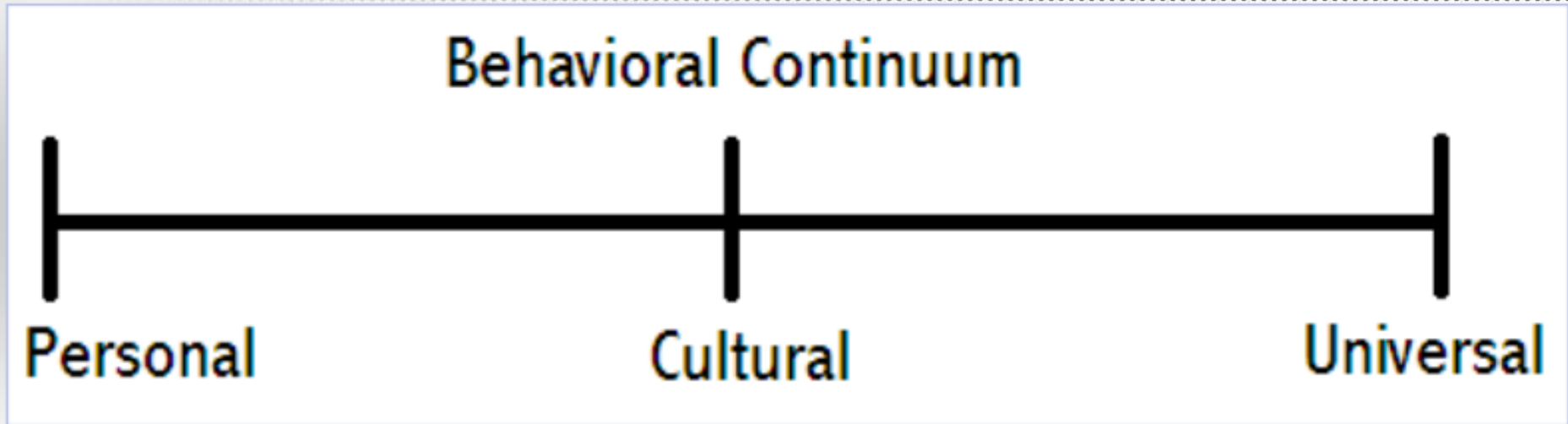
Culture has two dimensions:

- Visible dimension (behavior)
- Invisible dimension (attitudes, assumptions, norms, values, and core beliefs)





# Not all behavior is cultural



Sleeping with a window open, speaking a foreign language, preferring books over movies, not liking to wear a veil, enjoying a hobby

Using utensils, speaking the language of your parents, respecting older people, wearing a veil, eating kosher foods

Using language, raising children, eating regularly, seeking shelter and companionship, mourning the death of a parent

# What is your communication challenge?

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- In what format do you conduct most of your advising at a distance?

Email?

Phone?

Instant Messenger?

Other Method?



# Styles of Communication - Context

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## High context cultures

- Meaning is implied, may be communicated nonverbally or indirectly.
- Group membership is important – harmony and avoiding confrontation are valued.
- Time is viewed as endless, more fluid and open than structured.



## Low context cultures

- Explicit communication
- Group membership is fluid
- Time is structured and organized

Storti, based on the work of Edward T. Hall.

# Context and Advising Scenarios

## High Context Cultures

- Students may be less likely to ask questions, may need to adjust to scheduling appointments.
- Nonverbal cues may help determine meaning and give advisors clues when meaning is implied.
- Students may ask questions that seem off topic or use understatement when needing assistance (I just have one small question...)
  - For example: Arab, American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Latin American cultures.



Storti, based on the work of Edward T. Hall.

# Context and Advising Scenarios

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## Low Context Cultures

- Students may be likely to ask direct questions.
- Students are often accustomed to scheduling appointments.
- Spoken word carries meaning, not much is implied.
- Students form new relationships and join groups at will, relationships may change with time.
  - For example: German, North American, Swiss, and Scandinavian cultures.



Storti, based on the work of Edward T. Hall.



# Power distance

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## High level of power distance

- Status is hierarchical in terms of power, occupation, wealth; social roles are clearly defined by in group membership.
- Status is ascribed not achieved.
- Roles inform appropriate behaviors.

## Low level of power distance

- People are equal regardless of wealth, education, etc.
- Status can be achieved through effort or group membership





# Power Distance and Advising Scenarios

## High Level of Power Distance

- Students may interact with professors and advisors with deference and respect, as required by perceived social obligations.
- Students may be less likely to ask direct questions for fear of disrespecting or acting inappropriately with an authority figure.
- Students may seek to negotiate grades, rules, guidelines with advisors for whom they identify as those who hold power in academia.

Students put a value on conformity.





# Power Distance and Advising Scenarios

## Low Level of Power Distance

- Students may interact with professors and advisors informally and without great forethought.
- Students may be inclined to ask direct questions or require answers to many questions at once.
- Students may identify advisors as members of their new academic in group or individuals whose role it is to serve their needs.
- Students put a value on independence and creativity.



# Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication

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- People tend to interpret and evaluate behavior before we understand it.
- People are quite willing to stereotype groups of people, which prevents us from interpreting behavior accurately.



Hofstede, G.J. 2002

# Avoiding Stereotypes

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- The difference between stereotyping and generalizing is mindfulness and avoiding “automatic” reactions.
- Culture general theories can be very helpful in framing and conceptualizing experience.
- Culture specific knowledge, skills and awareness can inform advisors on what behaviors and communications patterns to be aware of when advising students.







# Mindfulness in Communications

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Become mindful of our own behavior to combat tendencies towards misinterpreting other's behavior.

Misinterpretations occur when we are not aware of our own unconscious interpretations of others' behaviors and signals, which may be heavily influenced by culture.



Gudykunst 2004

# Steps to Avoiding Stereotypes

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Stages of how we attribute meaning -

- 1) Observation
- 2) Interpretation
- 3) Evaluation
  - Decreasing our tendency to evaluate (snap judgments of good v. bad based on our own biases) reduces potential for misunderstanding.



Hofstede, G.J. 2002

# Steps to Avoiding Stereotypes

- “Ways to decrease the tendency to evaluate are:
  - Maintain appropriate distance
  - Recognize that you cannot change a culture (or yourself) overnight
  - Do not judge someone from another culture by your own cultural values until you have first come to know them and their cultural values.”
- Use NAFSA’s D.I.E. Framework for unfamiliar intercultural interactions.
- Describe, Interpret, Evaluate





# Rapport Building

- Do not treat all students the same (Harding 2005).
- Greet students by name.
  - If you are speaking by phone, if you are not sure how to pronounce a student's name, try your best and ask if you got it right.
  - Repeat it back and note how it is pronounced phonetically in your advising file as a reminder for future contacts
- Ask questions that seek to know the student individually.
  - Analyze what the student is used to and compare to what is expected now.



# Advising by email (or other print form)

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- Listening skills are the foundation of good advising.
- When advising by email, transfer your listening techniques to the manner in which you READ the student's thoughts, ideas and questions in writing.

» Use empathetic, active and reflective listening techniques when reading student communications and determining your written response.







# Empathetic Listening



- Assume difference between oneself and the other. Hear from the other's viewpoint instead of our own.
- Use the “Platinum Rule” (i.e. “Do unto others as they themselves would have done unto them”) rather than the Golden Rule (i.e. “Do unto others as you would have done unto you”).



# Active Listening



- Listen/read with the purpose of understanding.
- When advising only by email or other print form, carefully read what is said and what is NOT said to avoid misunderstanding.
- What are the student's unasked questions? Can you anticipate what hasn't been asked?
  - When communicating in writing, provide time for students to process and respond.
  - If your own response time is varied, explain what can be expected.



# Reflective Listening

- Ask leading questions and open-ended questions to draw out information. Allow for follow up when advising by email.
- Listen to what the student is saying. Or, read carefully when advising by email.
- Reflect the information – Clarify
  - “I want to be sure I understand. I hear you saying ...or I see that you are asking about... Do I understand you correctly?”
  - When you wrote “X”, did you mean ...?
- Ask for confirmation “Does this make sense to you?” and wait for the student to fully respond.
- Allow for silence – we tend to talk over our students to avoid “awkward” pauses.



# Format, Timing and Frequency of Contact



Review the format, timing and frequency of your communication in order to frame the advising conversation and prepare the student to actively make decisions.

- Is your first contact with the student upon arrival?
- Can you contact the student through e-mail, IM, or letter format ahead of time?
- Can you refer students to online resources to prepare for arrival?
- Can you reiterate in personal conversations information provided in writing ahead of time?



# Focus on Meaning



1. Do not assume sameness.
2. What we think of as normal or human behavior may only be cultural.
3. Familiar behaviors may have different meanings.
4. Do not assume that what we meant is what was understood.
5. Do not assume that what we understood is what was meant.
6. We do not have to like or accept “different” behavior, but we may find it helpful to understand where it comes from.
7. Most people do behave rationally; we just have to discover the rationale. (Although it is important to keep in mind that a preference for rationality can be a culturally bound preference).



Storti 1994 in Carlstrom 2008

# Provide information in writing



- Use templates to provide information in writing – advising syllabi, brochures, informational pieces.
- Follow up phone appointments with email templates.
- Avoid academic jargon (GPA, credit hour, etc)
  - Contracts – Try X, Y, Z. Follow up in two weeks for review and evaluation.
  - Break tasks into steps. Do x first then work on y.





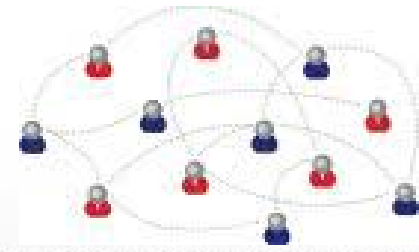
# Cultivate curiosity, explore competency

1. What cultural ground do I share with this student?
2. What cultural differences do I acknowledge, respect, and welcome?
3. What cultural differences do I fear, resist, dismiss, or minimize? How do I manage these differences during the advising session?
4. Do I behave or think differently with this student than I do with other students?
5. How comfortable am I, as a person of culture, with this student?
6. Do I view the student as expert of his/her own cultural experiences?
7. Do I attend to the use of language in the advising meeting to make sure terms have a shared understanding?
8. Do I inquire, in a culturally appropriate way, if what I am saying is useful to the student?
9. Do I check to see if I am reading nonverbal cues correctly?
10. Do I check to see if my cultural perceptions are accurate?



Plummer, D. L. 1995 in Carlstrom, A.H. 2005

# Networking for Support



- Identify the experts on your campus whom you can rely on for support and assistance with difficult advising scenarios and to whom you can refer students in situations outside of your expertise area.
  - International Services
  - Health Services
  - English as a Second Language professors
  - Academic tutoring services
  - Student Services – Student Life Office
  - Housing and Residential Life



- Join professional organizations to share best practices with colleagues at other institutions.

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