

Core Cultural Values and Culture Mapping

Objectives

- To offer students time to reflect upon their own and their home cultural values
- To provide students an opportunity to name, define, and discuss value differences within and across cultures
- To begin hypothesizing about the host culture's values

Relevant Pages in *Students' Guide*:

pp. 63-68

Suggested Time Frame:

Step 1: 30 to 60 minutes

Step 2: 45 to 60 minutes

Step 3: 1 to 2 hours

Note: While we want students to be aware of value differences across cultures, it can be difficult to engage them in discussions about value differences, especially if they do not have direct experience with cultural differences or ways to understand how these differences impact everyday situations. They may also lack the language to talk about these differences, either in English or the target language. This activity offers an easy way to begin exploring and talking about cultural differences.

Materials Needed

Duplicable handout *Core Cultural Values and Culture Mapping* (p. 225); you may wish to have an overhead of the handout or transfer the value labels to a chalkboard or flipchart if you do step five.

Instructions

1. This activity combines two activities from the *Students' Guide: Core Cultural Values and Culture Mapping*. Decide if you will do all three steps (assessing personal values, U.S. cultural values, and host culture values).
2. Introduce this topic with an example of a value difference you encountered in your experiences. For example, you may have worked with recent immigrants in the U.S. and heard them surprised to have older students (even people their parents' ages) in classes. They never encountered this before and are amazed that going to college at any age is possible in the U.S. Values involved in this situation might be *individualism, equality, and change, progress, and risk taking*.
3. Give a brief overview of the core cultural values from the handout.
4. Ask students to complete Step One in which they mark where they fall on the continua for each of the values. Tell students these are not contrasting continua; they don't have to choose between two values, rather they rank themselves on both.
5. Record where students place their marks on the value continua.

Note: While many students will find it easiest to compare the two values and thus mark themselves high in one and lower in the other, it's possible they will feel they can independently rank these and be similar on both the dimensions; for example, they may be fairly high on both formality and informality. In the debriefing, you will want to make sure they can support their rankings with specific ideas and examples.

Debriefing

Step One: Assessing My Personal Values

Have students review where they placed their personal values on the continua, by reflecting on the following questions:

1. *Do you have any marks on the far ends (either the highest or lowest circle) of any value continuum? If so, then you have a strong value orientation in those particular areas. Think about how this might be a source of strength for you, but also consider how your values could be a challenge in the host culture.*
2. *Were there certain values where you felt strongly about both sides of the continuum? Sometimes, the situations we are in require us to behave in different ways, for example, being focused on activities at times but focused on people at other times. How might this be a source of strength for you in the host culture?*

Step Two: Assessing My Culture Group's Values

1. Have the students work in small groups and discuss U.S. American values. Instruct them to go back to the previous charts and place a mark where they think many U.S. Americans would be on these value continua. If you have limited time, you may want to assign 2 or 3 value dimensions to each group.
2. After they have had a chance to consider the U.S. American values, ask each group to identify where they placed their marks and record their responses. Ask students to support their markings with specific examples so they are basing their markings on concrete experiences. Allow students to agree or disagree with the markings, noting disagreements with question marks. Ask the students which values were easier to mark and why that might be. If you experience resistance from students to categorizing U.S. culture, consider trying to help students see there can be some advantages to considering the role of a mainstream culture—whether or not the students see themselves as members of this mainstream. Discuss ways you see generalizations about the United States as helpful and how others might view students as U.S. Americans while overseas.
3. Make sure students feel challenged and supported:
Challenged: Are they ignoring the influence culture may have on them if they resist the idea of belonging to the U.S. culture?
Supported: Perhaps their experiences are unique in how they have developed their own values and, thus, their resistance should be supported in that they have unique experiences. At the same time, do help them understand they may be evaluated in the host country based on a perception that they are mainstream U.S. Americans.
4. Follow up on question marks by asking students to generate specific hypotheses about these markings they could actually turn into questions to collect information to help them refine their markings (see “Changing Stereotypes into Generalizations and Hypotheses” activity, p. 217).
5. Ask students to reflect on where the U.S. value markings identified in their small groups and their own individual markings overlap. What life experiences may contribute to the similarities and differences? How might these differences and similarities impact their study abroad experience; for example, the point that they may be perceived as representative of mainstream U.S. American values—whether this perception is accurate or not?

Step Three: Assessing Host Culture Values for Further Comparison

1. Have students discuss value dimensions of the host culture with someone who is from that culture.
2. Once students have gathered the information, have them consider these questions:
 - *What are the main similarities and differences between your host country and home country?*
 - *What are the main similarities and differences between you and the host country?*
 - *How might these common values vary for different groups within the host country? What might be some of the reasons for the differences?*

Step 4: Wrap-up

To conclude, ask students: *What have you learned about yourself and the host country from this activity?*

Note: Particular challenges are inherent for step 3. Most students will undoubtedly have thought quite a bit about some ways in which their own culture differs from the hosts. However, they probably have not had an opportunity to fully consider how deeply some of these contrasts may run. The biggest challenges with this activity are:

- Lack of knowledge of the host culture.

If students have extremely limited information of the host culture, one solution is to select guest speakers to work with the students and describe some of the contrasts they have experienced. Or conduct an interview yourself and share with students the interviewees' responses.

- Impossibility of describing one host culture.

Clearly, there are many cultures within each nation-state. Is there a mainstream culture in the host country that influences particular aspects of daily life? Is there a mainstream culture to the region where students will go? If the answer is no, help students understand the history and complexities of cultures involved and how this might impact their stay.

Adaptations and Extensions

Have students review the handout ahead of time and be prepared to bring in examples of what they believe might be the views of the other culture they are studying. For example, if they believe the host country is more formal than the United States, the students could support this by saying they have met faculty from the host country and the faculty do not use first names even when addressing each other.

Prepare sayings and statements from another culture for each of the aspects of culture (either in English or the target language) and have students figure out which aspects of culture are being represented by these statements.

Show a movie in the target language and assign students to watch for specific aspects of culture. After the movie, have the students describe the specific behaviors or dialogue that led them to make guesses or conclusions about the other country's perspective on a particular category.

Core Cultural Values & Culture Mapping

Below is a description of some core cultural values, presented as contrasting value orientations. Using the contrasting values described, think about where your own personal values fit and mark the appropriate box. While chances are that you are relatively high in one value and low on the other, you may be high in both, even if they are frequently viewed as opposites.

IA. Individualism (primary importance of the self)		IB. Collectivism (primary importance of the group)	
While you may seek input from others, you are ultimately responsible for your own decisions regarding where you live, what your major is, or where you decide to study abroad. You have a sense of pride in being responsible for yourself and know that others expect you to be independent. If you do something wrong, you feel guilty and are concerned about how this reflects upon you.		You make important life decisions based on the needs of the group and put the well-being of the group ahead of your own. You make major life decisions in consultation with your family, friends, and co-workers. You believe that looking out for others protects one's self and that group harmony is the greatest good. As a child, you're taught to depend and rely upon others, who in turn could rely upon you. Identity is a function of one's membership or role in a primary group. If you do something wrong, you feel ashamed and are concerned about how this reflects on your group.	
	LOW <	> HIGH	
Individualism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collectivism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2A. Equality		2B. Hierarchy	
You believe that people should interact with each other on a level playing field. While differences such as age and economic standing obviously exist, you don't feel these should be used as the basis for interacting with others. For example, you prefer to be on a first-name basis with your instructors, boss, and co-workers.		You believe strongly in status differences and that people should be treated according to their standing. Teachers, for example, are experts and should be referred to by their titles. At school or at work, you would defer to the views of your seniors and use forms of address congruent with their standing. Hierarchy is the fact of life and gives everyone a sense of their place in the world.	
	LOW <	> HIGH	
Equality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heirarchy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3A. Polychronic Time (time as an unlimited good)		3B. Monochronic Time (time as a precious commodity)	
You feel that time is an unlimited good and available as needed. People should take the amount of time necessary to do what they need to do. Life does not follow a clock; things happen when they are supposed to happen. Promising to meet someone at a certain time is not a commitment set in stone. Rather, appointments and social gatherings happen when the time is right. For example, a wedding won't start until all the people are there who were invited; when they have arrived is when the wedding is supposed to begin.		You feel that time is a precious good. It should not be wasted. Human activities must be organized with careful recognition of this fact. You take great care to plan your day to make sure you arrive to class, work, and meetings with friends and family on time. It is unthinkable to waste someone else's time. A wedding must start at the designated time out of respect for everyone's time commitments and other obligations.	
	LOW <	> HIGH	
Polychronic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monochronic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4A. Meritocracy (achievement based on what you do)		4B. Ascription (achievement based on who you are)	
You believe that people should be judged on merit and that they should earn their position and status in life. What is fair for one is fair for all. You know that when you graduate, the jobs you get will be because you have earned them. They won't be given to you because of who you are, but because of what you have accomplished. You wouldn't select people to do a job, for example, simply on the basis of their age; being older in your culture does not automatically mean being wiser.		You believe that a person's family background, age, gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics are very important in determining a person's status or standing in the community. This also establishes how you should interact with the person. For example, you would likely assume that older persons are going to be much more knowledgeable than younger ones and that their knowledge should be respected. That is how things work in the world.	
	LOW <	> HIGH	
Meritocracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ascription	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5A. Activity	5B. People
Your day is scheduled with a number of activities including work, studying, and social time with friends. You are strongly motivated to be doing something constantly. In your culture, for example, you ask people upon first meeting them what their job is or what activities they have been engaged in. Even when getting together with family and friends, you may plan an activity, like playing a sport or going to a movie. You are likely to be very task-oriented. Fundamentally, a high and positive value is placed on activity.	Who you are with is more important than what you are doing. Rather than schedule specific activities, you are most likely just to spend time with your friends and family. Being with others is particularly important in your culture. The quality of your interpersonal relations is very important; you would not let a task get in the way of a relationship.
Activity	People
LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH	LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH

6A. Change, Progress, Risk Taking	6B. Stability, Tradition, Risk Aversion
You know that almost everything around you will change—even the friends you have throughout your lifetime. You look forward to change and feel that it brings many positives to your life. Change in your culture is a good thing; it means progress. Lack of change leads to stagnation. This emphasis on change translates into people being willing to take risks and try new things.	You feel it's important to keep traditions because they bring a positive and expected rhythm to life. Friends you've had since you were young will be your most important friends throughout your life. Stability gives meaning to life. Change for its own sake doesn't make sense because it disrupts the rhythms, pace, and meaning of life. It can also disrupt longstanding relationships. This value orientation means people are uncomfortable taking risks, preferring to do things as they have been done in the past.
Change	Stability
LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH	LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH

7A. Formality	7B. Informality
You feel that people should communicate and relate to each other in a manner that strictly conforms to what is considered to be appropriate. For example, a younger person would be obligated to address and interact with an older person in a particular way that shows deference to that person's age and status (for example, using one's first name in such an encounter might be unacceptable).	Formality does not need to be adhered to rigidly; in fact, being overly formal is thought to stifle good communication and interaction. The communication and interaction rules in your culture are relaxed and flexible.
Formality	Informality
LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH	LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH

8A. Fate and Destiny	8B. Personal Efficacy
You believe human destiny is a matter of fate, something beyond one's ability to control. You are likely to see your fate being in the hands of others, such as your family, your government, or a higher being. To behave as if you can control destiny seems supremely arrogant to you, and you distrust people who hold that belief.	You believe what you do in life matters, you have control of your destiny, and you must exercise that control to make things happen. You are impatient with people who have a fatalistic attitude and value people who do everything they can to take control of their lives. To do anything less means to be irresponsible.
Fate and Destiny	Personal Efficacy
LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH	LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH

9A. Directness	9B. Indirectness
In your culture, being direct is the way to communicate and interact. If there are problems, it is important to have face-to-face conversations to resolve them. If you are not direct, you feel you are doing the other person a disservice. You are also concerned that you might be seen as dishonest if you are not forthright. Trust in your culture is based on direct, open, person-to-person communication.	You believe indirect communication is the best way to respect others' integrity and allow them to save face. If you are facing a problem with another person, you might ask a third party to intervene or you might leave subtle clues that there is a problem. A direct, face-to-face confrontation would be seen as rude and offensive. You assume people will extract meaning from the context of the situation and don't need to be told to their face about an issue. The indirect approach gives people more latitude to respond and maintains the harmony of the community.
Directness	Indirectness
LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH	LOW ← <input type="checkbox"/> → HIGH