



V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y

INTL 591 Cultural Competence for Working Professionals

Course syllabus

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Course description

This course is designed for anyone concerned about the effectiveness of people working and living in multicultural societies. Learners will find this course valuable at several levels. First, the course provides an intellectual framework and a solid theoretical base for understanding and interpreting various cultures. Second, the course bridges theory and practice through a series of hands-on exercises, simulations, stories and real-world examples. Third, the many exercises and simulations in this course involve all three learning realms (cognitive, affective and behavioral), thus optimizing the learners' skill development necessary for effective intercultural communication. In addition, the course's approach and structure allows learners to obtain insights into their own ways of thinking and acting when they deal with people from other cultures.

Course objectives and outcomes

Upon completing this course, students will:

- Be more aware of various beliefs, values, norms and social practices.
- Learn a bias-free way of describing cultural differences.
- Be able to assess their knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for effective intercultural communication.
- Learn how to manage stress in intercultural interactions.
- Expand their range of verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors appropriate for interactions in multicultural environments.
- Be able to recognize an intercultural conflict and manage intercultural conflicts more effectively.
- Be more aware of the adaptation process (experienced by all immigrants in the U.S) and its consequences in communication.
- Be able to recognize the stages of culture shock and deal with the cultural adjustment issues more effectively.
- Be equipped with specific tools for improving their cultural competence.

Major Topics in Suggested Sequence

Major Topic I: Communication and Culture

- Nature of Communication
- Notion of Culture
- Communication Competence

Major Topic II: Explaining Cultural Differences

- Cultural Patterns: Beliefs, Values, Norms and Social Practices
- Hofstede's Cultural Taxonomy
- Communication Styles Across Cultures
- Cultural Variations in Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Major Topic III: Interpersonal Relationships Across Cultures

- Uncertainty and Anxiety in Intercultural Interactions
- The Concepts of Face, Facework and Self-disclosure
- Gender/Sex Roles, Norms and Expectations Across Cultures
- Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

Major Topic IV: Constructive Intercultural Conflict Management

- The Nature and Characteristics of Intercultural Conflict
- Constructive vs. Destructive Conflict Management
- Operational Skills for Conflict Management

Major Topic V: Identity Transformation and Transcultural Competence

- Intercultural Adaptation: Culture Shock
- Criteria and Models of Transcultural Competence
- Specific Tools for Improving Cultural Competence

Course Activities and Approach to Learning

This highly interactive and participatory course employs the adult learning model. Course experiences will include lectures, group discussions and activities, intercultural simulations and games, case studies and more. All course activities are designed for application to adult learners' everyday encounters with individuals from other cultures.

Course Texts and Materials

All the instructional materials, including exercises, simulations and games, will be provided in the class. No prior knowledge of the above mentioned concepts is necessary.

Course assignments and grading

Pre-test/Post-test (50 points)

All the participants will be given a pre-test at the beginning of the course to determine their level of knowledge and understanding of cultural competence in intercultural

communication. At the end of the course, all the participants will complete a post-test. An accuracy of 70 percent on the post-test is needed to earn a “pass” grade for the content part of the course.

Group Presentation (50 points)

This assignment is a group presentation to the class on a culture of your choice. Course participants will be divided into groups of five to six and will be required to simulate an intercultural experience. The task is to research a specific aspect of the selected culture, create a cultural display and share that information with the rest of the class. Each group will have about 20 to 30 minutes to present their findings.

Attendance and Participation (50 points)

Course attendance and participation is essential for your success! More than any other course, this one requires your active participation in all course activities and discussions. Participation points are a part of your grade. You can only accrue participation points for the time when you are present in class and participate in classroom activities

Independent Study Component (50 points)

Participants should select one of the following two options for a follow-up independent component of the course:

1. Write a five to eight page paper demonstrating how you have implemented what you learned in the summer in your place of work (this option is recommended for teachers).
2. Write a five to eight page paper – literature review – that summarizes your research on the culture you have chosen.

Final grades will be based on the total number of points earned in the course. Letter grades will be assigned according to the following standard scale:

A= 90-100 percent
B=80-89 percent
C=70-79 percent
D=69-60 percent
F=59 percent