Exploring Culture and Respectful Community Engagement
What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of culture?

https://pollev.com/MIALEHMAN10
“Culture refers to values, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, customs, learning styles, communication styles, history/historical interpretations, achievements/accomplishments, technology, the arts, literature, etc., --the sum total of what a particular group of people has created together, share, and transmit.” [R. Michael Paige, Professor of International and Intercultural Communication, Center for Applied Research on Language Acquisition. University of Minnesota]
The Cultural Iceberg

Observable vs. “Underwater” Elements of Culture

- Fine arts
- Literature
- Drama
- Classical music
- Popular music
- Folk-dancing
- Games
- Cooking
- Dress

Notions of modesty
Conception of beauty
Ideals governing child raising
Rules of descent
Cosmosology
Relationship to animals
Patterns of superior/subordinate relations
Definition of sin
Courtship practices
Conception of justice
Incentives to work
Notions of leadership
Tempo of work
Patterns of group decision-making
Conception of cleanliness
Attitudes to the dependent
Theory of disease
Approaches to problem solving
Conception of status mobility
Eye behaviour
Roles in relation to status by age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, etc.
Definition of insanity
Nature of friendship
Conception of “self”
Patterns of visual perception
Body language
Facial expressions
Notions about logic and validity
Patterns of handling emotions
Conversational patterns in various social contexts
Conception of past and future
Ordering of time
Preference for competition or co-operation
Social interaction rate
Notions of adolescence
Arrangement of physical space
Etc.
Culture Shock

**Host country**

1. Everything is new, interesting and exciting.
2. Differences become apparent and irritating. Problems occur and frustration sets in.
3. You may feel homesick, depressed or helpless.
4. You work your way through culture shock and begin to adapt to your host culture.
5. You see your host country as your new home.

**Home**

6. You are excited about returning home.
7. You may feel frustrated, angry or lonely because friends and family don’t understand what you experienced and how you changed.
8. You readjust to life at home.
9. You integrate what you learned and experienced abroad into your new life.

Based on Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn & Gallahorn (1963)
Symptoms of Culture Shock

- Easily angered
- Irritable
- Frustration with the unfamiliar
- Unexplainable stress or sadness
- Depression
- Stomach ache or headache
- Excessive sleepiness
- Boredom
- Unwarranted criticisms of host culture
- Feeling isolated or alone
- Lack of motivation
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Extreme homesickness

Symptoms not going away or worsening? Reach out for support!
Overcoming Culture Shock

- Realize that what you’re going through is **normal** and **temporary** and it is okay to ask for help
- **Gain a deeper understanding** of the host culture by reading and observing
- Keep an **open mind, be flexible**, and focus on what you can **control**
- Write it down – record your thoughts and frustrations in a **journal** or **blog**
- **Take care of yourself** – eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep!
What would you do?

You have been abroad in Peru for 2 weeks. You will be staying for the whole summer and are starting to feel a bit lonely and homesick. You aren’t getting along with your local roommate, can’t figure out where to buy fresh produce, and have been having trouble with the Wi-Fi in your dorm.

❖ What stage of culture shock might you be experiencing?
❖ What support systems can you access to help you through this time?
❖ What actions can you take to help change your situation?
Building Resilience

Resilient Traveling
Managing Stress & Enhancing Your Experience Abroad

Resilience is the ability to adapt or rebound quickly from change, illness, stress, adversity or bad fortune.

- **Loneliness**
  - You're not alone in feeling lonely. See how Jaron found connection.
  - Related Skills: Deep Breathing, Cognitive Defusion, Reflection

- **Culture Shock**
  - Adapting to the unfamiliar and uncomfortable. See how Sarah adjusted while abroad.
  - Related Skills: Mindfulness, Reflection, Values-Based Action

- **Group Conflict**
  - When your in-group is on the outs. See how Janelle navigated group differences.
  - Related Skills: Reflection, Assertiveness, Values-Based Action

- **Personal Struggles**
  - Unexpected obstacles arise—see how Mira overcame a challenging experience.
  - Related Skills: Mindfulness, Cognitive Defusion, Reflection

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Social Identity and Your International Experience

• Defining “social identities”

• Your social identities are a big factor in the way you experience the world, interpret different cultures, and interact with other people.

• Sometimes, these identities are obvious to others and sometimes they aren’t. Some may be assigned to you and others may be self-claimed.
Let’s Examine Our Identities

1. List **5-6 identities** that are currently most salient or meaningful to you.
2. Depending on the saliency of the identity, place it closer or further away from the “core” of your atom.
3. Social Identities to consider (See handout for descriptions!):
   a. Gender
   b. Sex
   c. Race
   d. Ethnicity
   e. Sexual Orientation
   f. Socio-Economic Status
   g. Age
   h. Ability
   i. Citizenship
   j. Body Size
   k. Religion/Faith/ Meaning
Perceptions of Nationality Abroad

• You might be faced with lots of questions while you’re abroad regarding your country’s current political situation and/or foreign policy with your host nation.

• Always emphasize that your opinions are just that...yours! Do not try to convince people to see things differently or strongly insert your opinion unless you have built a relationship with that person/group.

• Be aware that sometimes things might get a little heated. If you feel uncomfortable, end the conversation as nicely as possible and leave the area - remember that your safety is the most important thing!
U.S. Politics Abroad

If you’re not someone who closely follows politics, take time before you go to catch-up and continue to keep track of current events while you’re abroad. Also, review U.S. foreign policy and history as it pertains to your host country/countries.

Rather not talk about politics? Pivot the conversation - you have the right to say you don’t want to talk about something.

Remember challenging yourself can be very positive and engaging in political discussions while abroad could be very enlightening and educational!
Social identities: Resources

• When traveling abroad it’s important to think about your social identity and how much of it you want your co-workers or new friends to know about. In some countries, there may be laws or customs we don’t have in the U.S. or in your home country. Be mindful of these things and above all be safe.

• The Spectrum Center has resources for students on being LGBTQ abroad, including websites such as EqualDex, that have information about local norms and laws.

• Diversity Abroad is a great resource for students who come from underrepresented backgrounds.

• We are always here to talk through specific questions or concerns you might have about traveling to a specific region.
Community Engagement Basics

Practice Cultural Humility

Humility vs Competency
It is okay to not be the expert
Don’t be afraid to ask questions and observe locals around you

Understanding Different Perspectives

Pure communication is impossible
Most communication is subconscious
We see what we expect to see & we do not see what we don’t expect to see
We all perceive things differently (What do you see in this picture?)
Tips for Relationship Building in Your Host Community

1. Spend time getting to know your local classmates or project counterparts - outside of the classroom or workplace!

2. Attend local community events to learn more about the host culture

3. If you will be staying with a host family or local students, make it a point to regularly spend time with them.

4. Don’t let your language skills (or lack thereof!) stop you from striking up a conversation
Avoiding the “Savior Complex”

Additional Resources:
- Barbie Savior Instagram Account
- NPR: Volunteering Abroad? Read This Before you Post that Selfie
- Radi-Aid + Barbie Savior: How to Communicate to the World
Ethical Photography & Social Media Guide

checklist
before you post on social media:

- Ask yourself: “What is my intention with sharing this post?”
- Gain informed consent from the person in the picture and/or the caretaker. If you can’t explain why you are taking photo, find a translator.
- Know the name and background of the people portrayed.
- Offer the person in the photo a copy.
- Avoid sweeping and simplified generalizations, include informative text with names, place, etc.
- Be respectful of different cultures and traditions.
- Ask yourself: “Would I have appreciated to be portrayed in the same manner?”
- Avoid sensitive, vulnerable situations and locations such as hospitals and health clinics.
- Don’t portray yourself as the hero in the story conveyed.
- Challenge the perceptions, bring down stereotypes.

https://www.radiaid.com/social-media-guide/#checklist
Additional Ethical Photography & Social Media Considerations

- Limit time spent on your phone - experience rather than document!
- Think before taking a selfie - an interesting Instagram photo is not worth putting yourself in a dangerous situation!
- When considering pictures or comments to post, be mindful that your social media footprint will linger well beyond your trip
- Be mindful of your use of location-tagging - is it safe?
- Are you putting other people in danger by including them in photos at certain events (for example: political events)?

http://fortune.com/2015/09/30/selfies-banned-tourists/
Community Engagement Online Course

- FREE to U-M students through Michigan Online
Thank you!

Questions?

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