

Graduate Seminar in Intercultural Communication¹

Course Description

This seminar gives students the opportunity to step into The Cultural Cognition Project, a collaborative venture led by faculty at the University of Washington, Yale University, and George Washington University. The Project explores the ways in which cultural values shape our attitudes on public policy questions. “Cultural cognition” refers to the tendency of individuals to use their cultural identities shape their beliefs about disputed matters of fact (e.g., whether global warming is a serious threat; whether the death penalty deters murder; whether gun control makes society more safe or less).

This Winter quarter’s Intercultural Communication seminar advances the Cultural Cognition Project by examining how cultural worldviews shape the way we communicate with one another—from interpersonal conversation to public discussions to competing media campaigns. An even more specific aim is to explore the ways in which different communication practices, strategies, and structures could increase the potential for meaningful cross-cultural communication and deliberation.

To examine this question, students will work with various disciplinary approaches, from communication, social psychology, anthropology, environmental science, public affairs, and political science. Final student projects will yield original theory, research, or communication designs. Final projects will be critiqued and evaluated by not only Professor Gastil but also other Project scholars, who will review student work in an end-of-the-quarter mini-symposium.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the quarter, students will be able to:

- engage in an informed discussion about cross-cultural communication, particularly in relation to conceptions derived from Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky’s grid/group theory,
- identify the theoretical and practical implications of cultural theory for cross-cultural communication,
- design better research proposals and/or practical proposals for communication interventions,
- better comprehend the variety of research approaches one can use to study cultural worldviews, and
- appreciate interdisciplinary approaches to the study of culture and communication.

¹ Adapted from Spring 2009 syllabus prepared by John Gastil.

Grading

Grades will be based on five components, listed below.

Participation (10%)

Productive contribution to the class discussion will be evaluated throughout the quarter.

Response Papers (15%; 1 page, single-spaced)

Each of you will write three short graded papers to respond to class readings (plus one ungraded practice paper). These thoughtful reflections on the reading assignments might present a new idea or inspiration, raise a question about something puzzling in a reading, describe a particular application of a concept found in that reading, argue against the claims made in a reading, or make a point about the relationship between ideas in that reading and previous readings. (Due at various dates depending on group assignment.)

Final Paper (40%; 15-20 pages, double-spaced)

Your final paper will do one or more of the following: develop original cultural theory, amend cultural theory, propose concrete cultural research, or develop and justify a novel intervention for cross-cultural communication. The paper will be in a rigorous, scholarly format and style appropriate for academic journal or grant submission. (Due via email March 17, noon.)

Annotated Bibliography (10%; 3 pages, single-spaced)

In preparation for writing your final paper, you will produce an annotated bibliography on scholarship relating to your particular approach to cross-cultural communication. (Due Feb 10.)

Discussion Leadership (10%)

Weeks 7-9 of the quarter, students will assign readings and lead discussion on those readings. These will address the ideas they are developing in their final papers. When it is your turn to lead discussion for a portion of the class, you will be evaluated on the degree to which you (a) help students learn from the materials you provided them, (b) spark lively class discussion, and (c) gain insight into your own topic. You will provide the copy of one article or book chapter by Feb 10, and I will assemble these into a second reading packet.

Symposium Presentation (15%)

At the end of the quarter, we will hold a symposium during which you present your work not only to the class but also a cultural theorist from outside the University of Washington. You will be evaluated on both your ability to present your original ideas effectively and your ability to engage in lively question-and-answer exchanges on your topic.

Schedule

Date	Discussion Topic	Preparation
Week 1	Introduction	
	Goals for the quarter Overview of Cultural Cognition Project	Read paper and syllabus sent via email
Week 2	Origins of cultural theory	
	Discuss Douglas' theory	Do all reading packet essays for this week Ungraded reaction papers from Group A
Week 3	Contemporary applications of cultural theory	
	Discuss how theory is used	Do all reading packet essays for this week Ungraded reaction papers from Group B
Week 4	How cultural theory approaches communication	
	Discuss cultural ways of speaking Discuss final paper topics	Do all reading packet essays for this week Reaction papers from Group A Turn in one-page summary of paper topic
Week 5	Deliberative theory and cultural differences	
	Discuss deliberation and culture Discuss bibliography development	Do all reading packet essays for this week Reaction papers from Group B
Week 6	Political-cultural splits in contemporary American politics	
	Discuss intersection of culture and politics, along with popular notions of political-cultural conflict	Do all reading packet essays for this week Reaction papers from Group A Turn in bibliography and class reading
Week 7	Student-led readings/discussion	
	Discuss 3-4 student-chosen topics	Do readings distributed to class Reaction papers from Group B
Week 8	Student-led readings/discussion	
	Discuss 3-4 student-chosen topics	Do readings distributed to class Reaction papers from Group A
Week 9	Student-led readings/discussion	
	Discuss 3-4 student-chosen topics	Do readings distributed to class Reaction papers from Group B
Week 10	Preparation for symposium	
	Discuss intersections of topics and concrete goals for symposium	Turn in draft presentation outline or slides
Finals Week	Symposium	
	Final class meeting where we present and discuss our work	Send final paper by noon on Mar 17 to jgastil@u.washington.edu

Assigned Readings

Week 1: Introduction

Sent via email: Gastil, J., Braman, D., Kahan, D., & Slovic, P. (2006). *The "Wildavsky Heuristic" and the cultural orientation of mass political opinion*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia, PA.

Week 2: Origins of cultural theory

Gross, J. L., & Rayner, S. (1985). *Measuring culture: A paradigm for the analysis of social organization*. New York: Columbia University Press. (chap 1)

Douglas, M. (1994). *Risk and blame: Essays in cultural theory*. New York: Routledge. (chaps 1-3, 7, 11-12, 15)

Week 3: Contemporary applications of cultural theory

Wildavsky, A. (1991). *The rise of radical egalitarianism*. Washington, DC: American University Press.

Coyle, D. J. (1994). The theory that would be king. In D. J. Coyle & R. J. Ellis (Eds.), *Politics, policy, and culture* (pp. 219-239). Boulder: Westview Press.

Klitgaard, R. (1997). Applying cultural theories to practical problems. In R. J. Ellis & M. Thompson (Eds.), *Culture matters: Essays in honor of Aaron Wildavsky* (pp. 191-202). Boulder: Westview Press.

Kahan, D. M., Braman, D., Gastil, J., & Slovic, P. (2007). Culture and identity-protective cognition: Explaining the white-male effect in risk perception. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 4, 465-505.

Kahan, D. M., Slovic, P., Braman, D., & Gastil, J. 2006. Fear and Democracy: A Cultural Evaluation of Sunstein on Risk. *Harvard Law Review*, 119, 1071-1109.

Week 4: How cultural theory approaches communication

Thompson, M., Ellis, R., & Wildavsky, A. (1990). *Cultural theory*. Boulder: Westview Press. (chapter 15)

Gastil, J., Reedy, J., Braman, D., & Kahan, D. M. (in press). Deliberation across the cultural divide: Assessing the potential for reconciling conflicting cultural orientations to reproductive technology. *George Washington Law Review*, 76.

Kahan, D. M., Braman, D., Slovic, P., Gastil, J., & Cohen, G. (2008). Cultural cognition of nanotechnology risk-benefit perceptions. *Nature Nanotechnology*, 3. Available at <http://www.nature.com/nnano/journal/vaop/ncurrent/pdf/nnano.2008.341.pdf>.

Kahan, D. M., Braman, D., Cohen, G. L., Gastil, J., & Slovic, P. (in press). Who fears the HPV vaccine, who doesn't, and why? An experimental study of the mechanisms of cultural cognition. *Law & Human Behavior*.

Week 5: Deliberative theory and cultural differences

Benhabib, S. (2004). On culture, public reason, and deliberation: Response to Pensky and Peritz. *Constellations*, 11, 291-296.

Gastil, J. (2009, October). *Giving power to public voice: A critical review of alternative means of infusing citizen deliberation with legal authority or influence*. Presentation given at conference on Publics and Emerging Technologies: Cultures, Contexts, and Challenges, Banff, Canada.

McBride, C. (2005). Deliberative democracy and the politics of recognition. *Political Studies*, 53, 497-515.

Festenstein, M. (2005). *Negotiating diversity*. Cambridge: Polity. (chapters 5-6)

Week 6: Political-cultural splits in contemporary American politics

Bishop, B. 2008. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin. (chapters 1, 6, 10)

Brewer, M. D., & Stonecash, J. M. (2007). *Split: Class and cultural divides in American politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (chapters 7-8)

Fiorina, M. P. (2006). *Culture war? The myth of a polarized America*, 2nd ed. New York: Pearson. (chapters 1-2)

Week 7-9: Readings TBD.