UNDERGRADUATE COURSE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This course gives students the opportunity to step into the Cultural Cognition Project, a collaborative venture led by faculty at Yale University, George Washington University, and the University of Washington. 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 quarter’s Intercultural Communication course advances the Cultural Cognition Project by examining the contours of the different cultural orientations and how those worldviews shape the way we express ourselves and 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 these subjects, students will read a variety of scholarly work from communication, social psychology, anthropology, environmental science, public affairs, and political science, and students will also immerse themselves in the different expressive worlds of these distinct cultural orientations. Final student presentations will share students’ principal insights and ideas.

Learning Objectives

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

- engage in an informed discussion about different cultural orientations and cross-cultural communication, specifically 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,
- understand the variety of research approaches one can use to study cultural worldviews and communication generally, and
- gain a better understanding of the complexities, challenges, and rewards of a large-scale scholarly program of social scientific research.

Assignments and Grading

- Two exams will include short answer and short essay questions that test your ability to understand key cultural concepts and theories and apply that knowledge. The first exam is worth 20% of your grade, and the second is worth 30%.
- Two group projects will require you to (1) make a presentation on a particular kind of cultural orientation and (2) explore the challenges of cross-cultural communication. You and your fellow group members will be graded based on the quality of the in-class presentation and the group materials you produce. The first project is worth 15% of your grade, and the second is worth 30%.
- I will also take overall class participation into consideration when setting final grades. You should attend every one of the scheduled classes unless an emergency (or illness, see below) prevents you from doing so. Participation is worth 5% of your grade.

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1 Adapted from Autumn 2009 syllabus prepared by John Gastil.
Course Schedule  
(see specific Reading Packet readings below)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week/Day</th>
<th>Topic/Task in class</th>
<th>Readings Due</th>
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<td><strong>Weeks 1-2: Introduction to Cultural Theory</strong></td>
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| Oct 1    | Goals for the quarter  
Overview of Cultural Cognition  
Project |  |
| Oct 6    | Discuss Mary Douglas’ theory  
Discuss Oct 8 assignment | Gross & Rayner, “Measuring culture”  
Coyle, “The theory that would be king”  
Wildavsky, *The rise of radical egalitarianism* |
| Oct 8    | Compare cultural artifacts brought to class  
Discuss first group project | Douglas, *Risk and blame* |
| **Weeks 3-5: How Culture Shapes Attitudes, Thinking, and Judgment** |
| Oct 13   | Shaping public attitudes | Wildavsky, “Choosing preferences…”  
Gastil et al., “The Wildavsky heuristic…”  
Kahan et al., “Culture and identity-protective…” |
| Oct 15   | Cultural judgment | Kahan and Braman, “More statistics…”  
Kahan et al., “Who fears the HPV vaccine?”  
Kahan et al., “Whose eyes…?” |
| Oct 20   | Project group meetings (held at location of students’ choice) |  |
| Oct 22   | Project presentations 1 |  |
| Oct 27   | Exam 1  
Discuss second group project |  |
| **Week 5-9: Politics, Conflict, and Deliberation** |
| Oct 29   | Project group meetings (held at location of students’ choice) | Thompson et al, *Cultural theory* |
| Nov 3    | Deliberation and culture (cont.) | Karmasin, “Towards a meta ethics…”  
Stenvoll, “Norwegian politics of abortion…” |
| Nov 5    | Political-cultural divides | Fiorina et al., *Culture war?*  
Bishop, *The Big Sort* |
| Nov 10   | Bridging the divides | Gastil et al., “Ending polarization”  
Gastil et al., “Deliberation across the cultural…”  
Kahan et al., “…risks and benefits of nanotech” |
| Nov 12   | Project group meetings (held at location of students’ choice) |  |
| Nov 17   | Trust and cross-cultural deliberation | Festenstein, “Negotiating diversity” |
| Nov 19   | Culture diversity and political theory (In-class project meeting time) | Deveaux, “A deliberative approach” |
| Nov 24   | An Australian perspective | Dryzek and Niemeyer, “Reconciling pluralism…”  
Dodds & Ankeny, “Regulation of hESC research…” |
| **Week 10: Project Presentations and Conclusion** |
| Dec 1    | Project presentations 2A |  |
| Dec 3    | Project presentations 2B |  |
| Dec 8    | In-class exam review session |  |
| Dec 10   | Exam 2 |  |
Packet Reading List in Order (by Date)

Oct 6

Oct 8

Oct 13

Oct 15

Oct 29

Nov 3


**Nov 5**


**Nov 10**


**Nov 17**


**Nov 19**


**Nov 24**


Reading/Study Questions for Exam 1


1. What is the meaning of “grid” and “group”? What are the four “prototype” combinations thereof?
2. Do people “need” a grid/group orientation? What purpose does it serve them?


1. What are “hermits”? Do you think they exist?
2. Is there variation within the four cultural quadrants?
3. When assessing risks and making policy choices, do we take anything into account besides our cultural orientation?


1. Which of the four cultural quadrants does Wildavsky choose to ignore? Why?
2. What purposes do our cultural orientations serve? What are the drawbacks, if any, of relying on them to make judgments and form preferences?
3. What are the “heuristics” Wildavsky speaks of, and how do they relate to culture?


1. Why do people with different cultural orientations emphasize different risks and dangers?
2. What impact does cultural orientation have on “rational” behavior in “markets”?
3. Given what Douglas says about culture, do you think we should be cultural relativists or moral absolutists? What are the pros and cons of each position/

1. Describe the two-dimensional culture typology used in this article. How do the authors measure people’s cultural orientations?
2. How do these authors hypothesize that cultural orientations shape attitudes? Are they right?
3. Does a person need high levels of political knowledge to use their cultural orientations to guide them on policy questions? Why, or why not?


1. What is the “White male effect”? Does cultural theory fully explain this effect?
2. What is the interplay of race, sex, and culture on perceived abortion risks and gun risks.


1. If there were a new, powerful study on gun violence, would it be likely to change many people’s minds about gun rights/gun control? Why, or why not?
2. What is a “rational weigher,” and who—if anybody—acts like one?
3. Why would people use an issue to “express” their cultural orientation? What is an “expressive debate”?


1. Describe the different experimental conditions and their effects on HPV risk-benefit perceptions (see Figure 4)? Are the authors’ hypotheses about communication and cross-cultural communication supported?
2. What are the practical implications of this study?


1. How do people of different cultural orientations view the Scott v. Harris video differently?
2. What is the legal significance of the authors’ study of the Scott v. Harris video?
Quick Culture Quiz for Day 1 of class

Answer on scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

**Hierarchy-Egalitarianism**

A. Discrimination against minorities is still a very serious problem in our society.

E. Our society would be better off if the distribution of wealth was more equal.

K. We live in a sexist society that is fundamentally set up to discriminate against women.

D. It seems like the criminals and welfare cheats get all the breaks, while the average citizen picks up the tab.

F. We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.

J. Nowadays it seems like there is just as much discrimination against whites as there is against blacks.

**Individualism-Solidarism**

B. People who are successful in business have a right to enjoy their wealth as they see fit.

C. Government regulations are almost always a waste of everyone’s time and money.

H. Too many people today expect society to do things for them that they should be doing for themselves.

G. Sometimes government needs to make laws that keep people from hurting themselves.

I. It’s society's responsibility to make sure everyone's basic needs are met.

L. The government should do more to advance society's goals, even if that means limiting the freedom and choices of individuals.

Each student calculates his/her scores:

- **Dimension 1 (hierarch):** Add D, F, and J together; then subtract A, E, and K.
- **Dimension 2 (solidarist):** Add G, I, and L together; then subtract B, C, and H.

Then plot the students in the class on a cultural grid.
Group Project #1 - Presentation describing a cultural orientation
Prepare an in-class presentation that clearly illustrates one of the four cultural orientations discussed in class. The ten-minute presentation should:

- draw on research on cultural theory, such as the readings in the reading packet but also including others beyond that limited number. Provide an annotated bibliography with your presentation that includes at least four scholarly sources.
- illustrate the views and communication practices common to this cultural orientation using cultural artifacts, such as movies, music, fiction, nonfiction, famous people, etc.
- encourage the audience to come to understand the virtues—and the pitfalls—of adopting that particular cultural orientation

Group Project #2 - Understanding and meeting the challenge of inter-cultural communication
For this second project, each group will develop an in-class presentation that does one (or more) of the following: (a) describes or dramatizes the challenges of intercultural communication, (b) proposes a way to improve intercultural communication, and/or (c) actively seeks to stimulate effective cross-cultural communication during the presentation period.

Each group will have thirty minutes maximum for their presentation, which should not go fewer than twenty minutes. In preparing this presentation, your group will:

- draw on research on cultural theory, such as the readings in the reading packet but also including others beyond that limited number. Your group will provide an annotated bibliography with your presentation that includes at least twenty sources, including ten scholarly sources. No more than five of your twenty sources may be from the reading packet.
- provide a set of slides or a summary outline of the presentation, which should draw on the research you conducted (though “draws on” simply means influenced by; you don’t necessarily have to have slides that list names and dates of researchers, though that can be fine, too).
- Make the in-class presentation interactive, such that in some way or another actively involves the class, even if only briefly.