

Foundations of Cross-Cultural Education

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY College of Education and Human Development 3 Graduate Credits

Course Number: GMU EDU 500

Dates and Time: Thursdays, August 30–Dec. 12
4:30-7:30 p.m. (No class Nov. 22)

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Course Purpose and Intended Audience

The purpose of this course is to address the increasing needs in Prince William County Schools (PWCS) for educators and others to better understand and work more effectively with the changing global populations in the local school community. This course will focus especially on students and their families whose cultures, religious beliefs, and social structures are rooted in non-Western origins. Implications for new paradigms of thinking include: issues of basic cultural assumptions and expectations; social values, norms, and family structures; models of educational backgrounds; understanding cross-cultural communication; learning basic concepts of the world's religious communities; and other factors related to educating youth in today's global classrooms.

This course is designed to examine important aspects of cultures around the world and to recognize how these shape human thought and behavior. Course participants will come to better understand and reflect upon their own cultural and educational perspectives while comparing and contrasting these with others. Likewise, the impact of culture reflected in teaching and learning styles, assessment tools, school climate, and home-school expectations will also be addressed.

Cross-cultural education seeks to foster cultural pluralism within the classroom, school, and community to assure equity among all learners. Further, it seeks to equip all youth with the skills they need to better understand and assimilate among the many groups in which they find themselves. Co-equal to this is the need for all students to become more knowledgeable about interdependence and issues that cross cultures and are essential to addressing the world's global challenges and opportunities..

This course is not intended as an 'add-on' to the already overload of existing educational expectations. It is rather to build important cultural information into the school experience that takes into account what educators need to know beyond traditional praxis. Class members will work together to address the current and future needs of PWCS as they move forward in planning and preparing all students for living and working in a diverse global and interdependent world.

Course Description

This course provides insight into the nature of “culture” and how people of various traditions perceive and interact with others differently. Particular emphasis will be given as to how this information relates to school practices, policies, and school climate, as well as to the teaching and assessment of students. Implications of the multiplicity of cultures in our schools, along with new approaches for parental and community involvement, will be explored.

Course topics include: issues of changing global demographics; approaches for understanding the nature of “culture” and its implications; similarities and differences in cultural beliefs, values, and traditions; overviews of the world’s major religions; styles of verbal and non-verbal cross-cultural communication; and studies of selected cultural groups including Latin American; East Asian; South Asian (Indian); Central Asian (Pakistani and Afghan), Iranian; and African.

This course content draws from lectures, handouts, referenced materials, film clips, news media, interviews, and recommended books and films as well as interactions with other PWCS members of this class. Class attendance and participation are essential components of this course and are important criteria for grading (see below).

Course Objectives

1. Expand an awareness of the wide range of cultures in PWCS and better understand how “culture” impacts learning as well as school climate and the social and affective development of all students;
2. Acquire a general knowledge base about selected cultural and religious groups and develop a system for organizing and expanding this information;
3. Develop skills in recognizing and responding to differences among cultural groups and begin to apply these insights in working with students, parents, and colleagues, as well as with other members of the school community;
4. Utilize opportunities for interacting with other professionals to better understand trends, strategies, and problem-solving ideas on cross-cultural issues across grade levels and professional roles throughout PWCS; and
5. Demonstrate a process of cultural learning which begins with an *inward journey* of better understanding one’s own culture, an *outward journey* of learning about other cultural groups around the world, and an *upward journey* of recognizing the world as a planet of people who have come to accommodate similar basic needs and aspirations in different cultural ways.

Course Format

Class sessions will consist of lectures and other presentation modes of course topics; interactive group assignments; sharing of relevant news items, journal responses, and interviews; discussions of assigned books and films; and addressing matters of interest raised by class members. Attention will also be given to sharing effective strategies across grade levels, as well as to fostering positive home-school-community partnerships.

Class members are expected to commit out-of-class hours for study and research as appropriate for graduate level courses at GMU. This includes: reading all handouts and assigned materials between classes; scanning news media for culturally relevant information; completing short written exercises and interviews; reading/viewing selected books and films; writing journal responses; creating a personal retrieval file (notebook) of class materials; and completing a core content and final take-home exam. Course evaluations will be conducted at the last class meeting.

Course Requirements and Criteria for Grading

1. Attend class sessions and participate in activities and discussions; bring news items and personal ideas and inquiries to the class' attention; read assigned materials and view selected films between class sessions (20% of grade);
2. Write a minimum of four journal responses to two books and two films from the "Recommended Reading List" and "Recommended Movies List" attached to this syllabus. Each journal response should be about 2-3 pages double-spaced and reflect the class member's own personal reflections. Responses will be due on Sessions 4, 6, 8, and 10 of this course (30% of grade);
3. Complete a final examination consisting of an in-class group activity and a take-home essay written from two selected questions in a list of course topics. Essay questions will be handed out on Session 12 and are due on Session 14 (20% of grade)
4. Submit a class-sharing project about a case study. You need to share copies with the instructor and each class member. This project must follow a format similar to case studies shared in class and based on information gathered during this course. It should probably be 4-6 typed pages in length (double-spaced) . Case Studies must be submitted on Session 11 and will be shared (informally) during the last two class sessions (30% of grade).

Schedule of Classes

Session #1

Welcome! So Glad You Are Here!

Course Overview, Structure, and Getting to Know You

- Course design, objectives, and criteria for grading
- Personal introductions
- Small group warm-up activity

Changing Demographics: A World in Transition

- Local
- National
- Global (Implications for educators)

What Is “Culture?”

- Cultural “roots” and “branches”
- The hidden dimensions of culture
- “Windows and Mirrors” in our schools and offices

Implications for educators

Session #2

Cultures of “the West” and “the Rest!”

A World of Views

- Seven important questions
- The “*I-self*” and the “*We-self*”
- What drives *your* destiny?
- It’s about “*Time!*”
- “*Challenge*” or “*Opportunity?*”

Cultural Cues and Miscues

- Letting go of basic assumptions (“The Calf Path”)
- Cross-cultural communication (“How’s *that* again?”)
- Cultural views of educating children

Implications for educators

Session #3

Cultural Transitioning

- Importance of immigration status
- Stages of acculturation

Values Americans Live By (Robert Kohls)

- The Parable
- Values Americans live by
- Observations of Foreign Visitors

Film discussion: “*Real Women Have Curves*” or “*The Namesake*”

Implications for educators

Session #4

Cultural Paradigms: “The Americas”

- “Will the *real* American please stand up?”
- Native Americans
- Understanding “Hispanic” and “Latino” cultures
- More than “*Tacos on Tuesdays!*”

Latino American Students in the Classroom

- Language and culture
- Regional, political, and ethnic backgrounds

Book/Film Journal #1 Due

Implications for educators

Session #5

Cultural Paradigms: “The Americas” (continued)

- Family values and relationships
- Parenting and child-rearing practices
- Teaching and learning styles

Assessment and Testing of Latino Students

Diversity and Learning: Putting the Puzzle Together

Interview sharing and implications for educators

Session #6

Overview of the World’s Major Religions

- Oral and written traditions
- Comparisons of Eastern and Western religions
- Religion, spirituality, and cultural worldviews

Worldviews of East Asian Cultures

- Confucianism – “Wisdom of the Head”
- Taoism – “Wisdom of the Heart”
- Buddhism – “Wisdom of the Feet”

“Feng shui” in the classroom!

Book/film Journal #2 Due

Implications for educators

Session #7

Cultural Paradigms: East Asian Cultures (continued)

- Family values and relationships
- Parenting and child-rearing practices
- Teaching and learning styles
- Values of education in East Asian cultures

Diversity in East Asian Cultures

- Understanding Chinese cultures
- Understanding Korean cultures

Interview sharing and implications for educators

Session #8

Cultural Paradigms: India and Hindu Cultures

- Ancient wisdoms and views of the universe
- Basic concepts of Hinduism
- Other religions in India: Sikhs, Jains, Muslims, and others

Worldviews of Hindu Cultures

- Family values and relationships
- Parenting and child-rearing practices
- Teaching and learning styles

Book/film Journal #3 Due

Implications for educators

Session #9

Cultural Paradigms: Pakistan and Afghanistan

- The creation of Pakistan – geography and politics
- Afghanistan – ancient cultures of tribal societies

Worldviews and Traditions of Tribal Cultures

- Extended family values and relationships
- Parenting and child-rearing practices
- Teaching and learning styles

Impact of War and Politics in the Region

Film discussion: “Kite Runner” or “Color of Paradise”

Implications for educators

Session #10

Overview of Western Religions and Worldviews

- Children of Abraham
- Judaism and Christianity
- Understanding Islam

Cultural Paradigms: Who Are the Persians?

- Roots in ancient histories
- From “Persians” to “Iranians”
- Families and child-rearing practices

Book/film Journal #4 Due

Implications for educators

Session #11

Cultural Paradigms: Africans and African Cultures

- Cultures of North Africa
- Overview of sub-Saharan Africa

Worldviews and Traditions of sub-Saharan Africa

- A continent of kingdoms and countries
- Diversity, politics, and religions
- Family systems and child-rearing practices
- African and African-American students in the classroom

Project-sharing Idea Due

Interview sharing and implications for educators

Session #12 **Special Topics and Course Reflections**

- Models for teaching in a global classroom
- Assessment and placement of students in classes
- Revisiting “parent involvement” and the role of “community”
- Families with special needs (refugees, undocumented residents)
- Working with culturally diverse staffs
- The multiplicity of cultures in our schools
- Preparing ALL students for living in a global, interdependent world
- ... and more!

Begin Resource Notebook Checks

Group Activity: Core Content Final Exam

Final Exam Essay Questions Handed Out

Session #13 **Begin Class-sharing Projects**

Continue Resource Notebook Checks

Continue Special Topics

Session #14 **Continue Class-Sharing Projects**

Final Exam Core Content and Final Essay Questions Due

GMU Course Evaluations

Class Closure

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