

Class meets T/Th 3:30-5:00
Room 14E-310
Office Hours: M 11-12; Th 5-6

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Course Description

If we look at the spread of information, ideas, capital, media, cultural artifacts—or people—we can see that the boundaries and borders that have historically separated one country or one group from another have become increasingly permeable. MIT's student body reflects this trend; in AY2017-2018, domestic students come from all 50 states and three territories. International students come from 116 countries or territories outside of the U.S.

Communicating Across Cultures is designed to help you meet the challenges of living in a world in which you will interact with people who may not be like you in fundamental ways. Its overarching goals are to foster sensitivity to intercultural communication differences and to provide you with the knowledge and skills to interact successfully, and empathically, with people from cultures other than your own. To accomplish these goals, we will study artists, writers, and scholars from a range of disciplines who examine intercultural communication; we will also analyze and practice intercultural communication in various contexts. In-class discussions and activities will concern national and ethnic cultural norms, as well as some of the communication differences among disciplinary and major institutional cultures—e.g., the military, the academy, the corporation, the church, the medical establishment.

Throughout the semester, you will also have the opportunity to practice, receive timely feedback, and develop your communication skills within a stimulating and supportive environment.

Course Objectives

By May, you should be able to:

1. *Describe the role of communication in culture.* From different perspectives, philosophers, anthropologists, linguists, and communication experts have examined the role of communication in creating and maintaining culture. We will begin the course by looking at this fundamental connection between culture and communication.
2. *Recognize cultural variables.* Cultures provide answers to the following kinds of questions in different ways. Is change positive or negative? What is the nature of authority? Is *doing* important or is *being* important? How do we define success? Since we won't be able to study every culture, we will develop ways of thinking about and identifying cultural variables that appear through communication. The goal is to give you a framework that will enable you to analyze and understand the cultures that most interest you and with which you will have contact.
3. *Recognize some of the communication norms, rituals, and taboos of your and other cultures.* Through a series of case studies in the second half of the course, you will have the opportunity to learn about some specific communication practices in many countries, regions, and organizations. If some members of the class are familiar with these countries, we hope they will become "informants" to add to our knowledge.

4. *Identify barriers to intercultural communication and adjustment to other cultures.* We will work to identify those communication behaviors that can interfere with effective intercultural communication. We will also discuss the stages people go through as they adjust to other cultures and ways to minimize culture shock.
5. *Practice communication activities as they would be done in other cultures.* After exploring how speaking, listening, and communicating nonverbally differ from culture to culture, we will look at how speech functions--such as persuading, motivating, constructing an argument, problem solving, decision making, negotiating, and resolving conflicts--vary. In-class exercises will give you the chance to practice these kinds of communication skills as they are “performed” in other countries.
6. *Describe how cultural norms manifest themselves in the communication patterns within different professional settings.* In teams, you will look more closely at strategies for intercultural communication within different contexts of business, education, health care, diplomacy, and the arts, and present your research results in presentations.
7. *Be more sensitive to (1) your own cultural contexts (micro- and macro-) and their impact on how you communicate, (2) ethical issues in communicating across cultures, and (3) ways to successfully communicate with people from different cultures.*

Etiquette & Expectations of 21G.019

This subject is conducted as a seminar/workshop: that is, it is highly interactive, with class time devoted to discussion, exercises, and student nano-presentations. The participants and materials in 21G.019 deserve our full attention. Much of the success of the course—as well as the benefit you will derive from it—depend on your own constructive participation. Because active listening requires effort, smart phones and laptops are not welcome except when their use is explicitly invited for in-class research.

Failure to meet the course expectations will be interpreted as a lack of commitment to the subject and to the 21G.019 community, and will have a negative impact on your grade.

Required Materials

1. Course Workbook (CW). Available from Copy Tech, Room 11-004.
2. Gonick, Larry. *Cartoon History of the Universe III: From the Rise of Arabia to the Renaissance*. Available in the Hayden Library and at the Tech Coop.
3. A folder with pockets, or a thin binder, to hold handouts and store weekly reading responses.
4. Class readings on the course Stellar website, arranged according to week/topic.

Recommended On-line Resources

1. *Country Insights: Canada's Center for Intercultural Learning*:
http://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-apercus_pays/countryinsights-apercus.aspx?lang=eng
2. *If it were my home* (comparisons between the US and other countries in the world):
www.ifitweremyhome.com/
3. On-line discussion site: www.parlio.com
4. *Pew Global Attitudes Project*: www.PewGlobal.org
5. *World Values Survey*: www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp
6. The **Writing and Communication Center (E18-233)** offers *free* one-on-one **professional** advice from published writers and experienced college teachers.

- To register with the Center's online scheduler and to make appointments, go to <https://mit.mywconline.com/index.php>.
- To access the Center's many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communications-center/>. The Center's core hours are **Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.**; evening hours vary by semester—check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours.

Recommended Reading (Available in the Hayden Library and at the Tech Coop).

Shaules, J. 2010. *Beginner's Guide to the Deep Culture Experience: Beneath the Surface*. Boston, Hall, Edward T. MA: Intercultural Press. (Available in Hayden Library and Coop)

More recommendations

Deutscher, Guy. *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*. Deutscher argues that language is an artifact of culture.

Grosjean, Francois. *Bilingual: Life and Reality*. Grosjean presents bilingualism as a way of "navigating the complexities of life." To explore the many features of bilingualism, he draws on a wide variety of sources beyond his personal experience, such as research articles, memoirs, and interviews.

Hall, E. *The Hidden Dimension* and *The Silent Language*. Two classics in intercultural communication look at differences in people's use of space and nonverbal communication, respectively.

Molinsky, Andy. *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt your Behavior across Cultures without Losing Yourself in the Process*.

Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand*. This is a sociolinguist's book for the layperson on the differences between men's and women's communication styles.

Assignments and Grades

The in-class discussion topics and activities are designed to achieve three goals: (1) to allow you to work with the main themes of the course and to delve more deeply into those ideas and cultures you find particularly interesting; (2) to encourage you to explore your own cultural communication style; and (3) to provide you with the opportunity to learn firsthand about different communication styles and to try out different styles and techniques. In addition to your active, informed engagement in each class session, and your short, written responses, you will complete *seven* distinct, graded assignments. Details about these assignments are available in the Course Workbook (CW) and on the course Stellar site. Your reading responses and notes on class discussions should provide a useful foundation for these assignments. Those who interact with course materials and activities thoughtfully, and keep good records, will find themselves well prepared to fulfill the requirements for an A in 21G.019.

Attendance & Participation

In 21G.219, the term *participation* means regular and constructive contributions to class conversations and activities that are grounded in familiarity with the course schedule, materials and goals. It is impossible to participate unless you are present in class, you prepare for each class session, and your assignments are completed on time. Those who fail to do so **will not** receive an A for the course.

More than three unexplained absences will result in a final grade reduction of one letter grade. (If an emergency necessitates your absence, you must contact me in advance and provide credible evidence where possible.)

Criteria for grading

Your grade will be determined according to the following breakdown, for a total of 100 points.

Assignment	Tentative due date	Points
Attendance, preparedness & participation	All semester	10
Short response exercises	All semester	10
Cultural self-assessment paper	Th 3/1	10
Film analysis memo (Peer workshop)	Th 3/15	15
Analytical brief	T 4/10	5
Team project dossier: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal draft (peer Workshop) • Annotated bibliography • Final Proposal • Presentation outline • Copy of slides 	Th 3/22: draft proposal & biblio. W 4/18 noon: final drafts + outline 5/1 or 5/3 rehearsal	20
Team presentation: Group	Th 5/08 or Th 5/0	15
Team presentation: Individual	Th 5/08 or Th 5/10	5
Final learning-assessment memo	T 5/17	10

Class #1.

21G.019 provides students with a foundation to explore the following and related questions within their disciplinary contexts: E.g., comparative linguistics, international business, political science, history, literature, rhetoric and communication, education, or popular culture. You may find that you want to continue your study of culture in future semesters from the perspective of a particular discipline.

What is a nation? How are national identities forged?

What is history? What *actually* happened? What we are *told* happened? What do people *believe* happened?

What is the role of history in shaping communication norms?

How do the concepts of freedom and government express themselves across cultures?

What does the term " diversity " mean in different cultures?

What communication channels are best for promoting understanding across cultures?

What is the role of language in shaping perceptions of the world?

How do different cultural values and perceptions of the world shape language?

Does the global dominance of English mean that we're losing knowledge?

How do educational institutions shape perceptions of the world?

How does a particular TV show that is popular with a specific demographic reflect the viewers' micro-culture?

What does a country's (or a region 's) response to natural disasters tell us about its culture?

How should public universities accommodate freedom of expression for those who dissent from the institutional values?

What impact does political satire have on awareness of current events in different cultures?

What role does culture play in attitudes toward big data and privacy?

Could the "Me too" movement be a corrective to a universal problem?