

Cultural Challenges in the Camosun Classroom

Multilingual Student Support (MSS)

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CONTENTS

- GOALS
- CULTURE INTRODUCTION
- THINK ABOUT YOUR CLASSES
- FOUR CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN THE CLASSROOM
 - DISCUSSIONS
 - ACADEMIC HONESTY
 - GROUP WORK
 - PRESENTATIONS
- CONCLUSION



GOALS

You will:

- Look through a cultural lens at common class activities and assignments
- Hear some tips for dealing with cultural challenges in the classroom



- Focus on Intercultural Competence, which means effectively communicating across cultures and “mediating between perspectives”
(Byram et al., 2001, p. 5)

INTRODUCTION - Culture

- Culture is a “mode of being,” guiding our perspectives, actions, and communication (Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007, p. 137)
- Culture is always changing & individuals differ
- People are mostly unaware of their cultural behaviours: just ‘normal’
- Classrooms are a place where culture shows itself clearly

Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1980, Chao & Pardy, n.d.)

Individualism	Collectivism
Low Power Distance	High Power Distance

Ideas about TIME (e.g., Chao & Pardy, n.d.)

Monochrony	Polychrony
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Single time

Fluid time

THINK ABOUT YOUR CLASSES

ASK YOURSELF:

1. Are Camosun classes similar or different to what you expected?
2. What are some challenges for you in your Camosun classes?
3. What's something you enjoy about your Camosun classes so far?



(1) CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Read the situation. Try to understand both sides.

An instructor doesn't understand why some international students don't contribute to whole-class discussions, even though those students always come to class and get good test scores. The instructor reminds them that 'participation' is 10% of their grade.



(1) CLASS DISCUSSIONS - Cultural Challenges

Students from many cultures...

- Are used to lecture-based classes (just listen & take notes)
- Avoid asking questions (you might look stupid; suggests instructor was not clear)
- Aren't used to unstructured discussions; hard to keep up
- Don't get cultural references

Cultural Reference

- Individualism
 - Expressing own ideas
 - Taking initiative
- Low Power Distance
 - Instructors downplay status difference with students

(1) CLASS DISCUSSIONS - Some Tips

- Ask questions before/after class, or go to instructor's office hours
- Prepare well for class (do pre-reading)
- Practice sharing opinions/discussing in small study groups
- Show engagement in other ways = active listening



(2) ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty means acting truthfully and ethically in your academic work. It includes plagiarism: using others' ideas in your work without acknowledging them

Read the situation. Try to understand both sides.

An instructor notices that some international students' writing doesn't have citations. When the instructor tells them that they may get a "zero" for the assignment, the students are shocked and don't seem to understand the problem.



(2) ACADEMIC HONESTY - Cultural Challenges

Students from many cultures...

- Don't have experience including other sources in their writing (citing, quoting, paraphrasing, writing a reference list)
- Value memorization of wisdom rather than translating into student's words
- View important wisdom as shared, not individual property
- Feel it's important to help their friends at all times, including with assignments and during tests

Cultural Reference

- Individualism
 - Copyright: authors' ownership of their work
 - Originality: writing your own ideas about the topic

(2) ACADEMIC HONESTY - Some Tips

- Learn more at Camosun Library's student guide on [Academic Integrity](#)
- Take Camosun's [Academic Integrity Course](#) on D2L
- Need help with citations? Make an appointment at Camosun's [Writing Centre](#)
- Double-check assignment guidelines on D2L and/or ask instructor (Group? Individual?)



(3) GROUP WORK

Read the situation. Try to understand both sides.

An instructor announces that a major assignment will be a group project. Some of the international students look unhappy. The instructor is surprised because he sees so many advantages with working in groups.



(3) GROUP WORK - Cultural Challenges

Students from many cultures...

- Don't have experience doing group projects
- Struggle to keep up with group discussions
- Worry that they won't be treated as equals
- Worry that their contributions aren't good enough

Cultural Reference

- Individualism
 - Groups but work is divided and members work independently
 - Instructors want to see group and individual contributions

(3) GROUP WORK - Some Tips

- Focus on the PROCESS as well as the product
 - Teamwork, communication, problem solving, responsibility are all skills that businesses look for
- ‘Break the ice’ with team members: small talk, find commonalities, identify interests/strengths
- Make a ‘contract’ with mini deadlines, schedules, how to deal with conflicts
- Read Camosun's ['Group Work' guide](#) and get help from [Camosun's Learning Specialist](#)



(4) PRESENTATIONS

Read the situation. Try to understand both sides.

An international student started her presentation by apologizing for her poor English. Afterwards, the instructor told her that was not a great opening. She seemed surprised.



(4) PRESENTATIONS - Cultural Challenges

Students from many cultures...

- Don't have experience giving presentations as an assessment
- Worry that they won't be understood or won't be able to answer audience questions

Culture Reference

- Time
 - Listener-focused: foreground key points, engaging, don't go over time
- Individualism
 - Expressing ideas & opinions
 - Project confidence (body position, eye contact, dress)

(4) PRESENTATIONS - Some tips

- Practice! Increases confidence, fluency
 - Use recordings
- Time rehearsals (not too short/long)
- Plan with audience in mind (Who? What do they know? What's interesting/useful for them?)
- Get feedback from friends/classmates/your MSS
- Don't forget body language (eye contact (don't read), body position, planned gestures, dynamic intonation)



Conclusion

- Classrooms are places where cultural values show themselves strongly: teaching methods, communication between teacher and students, and types of assessments
- Workplace preparation: expressing yourself in a group, working as a team, and giving presentations are key professional skills
- Be open-minded about different teaching styles: you are learning culture while also learning course content
- The challenge is real: reach out for help from classmates, instructors, the Writing Centre, counselors, and your MSS

Camosun Resources

- Camosun's Library [Guide for Academic Integrity](#)
- Camosun's one-hour [Academic Integrity Course](#) - earn a badge that your instructors can see on D2L

- Writing Centre and Learning Skills

<https://camosun.ca/services/academic-supports/help-centres/writing-centre-learning-skills>

- Student Counseling

<https://camosun.ca/services/health-and-wellness/counselling-centre>

- Multilingual Support Specialist (MSS) for your school

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