



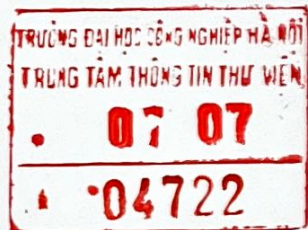
Intercultural Communication for Everyday Life

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WILEY Blackwell

4722

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Preface

Global needs meet an engaged community

There are increased interconnections in the world at large—from international business and education opportunities to domestic and international crises. There is open conflict in Syria, Burma, Somalia, and Colombia, and dormant conflicts, quiet but never quite resolved, in Palestine, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, and many other places. Recent natural disasters of cataclysmic proportions have struck Indonesia (2004), Japan (2011), and Haiti (2012), each demanding forces of collaborating international and domestic workers. Governments work across cultures and across nations (concepts we will treat separately in this book) to fight against the international flow of the drug trade, human trafficking, and other issues. And, at the same time, we have seen great changes within and across societies, from the “Arab Spring” and the overthrow of several totalitarian governments to the renewed debate over same-sex marriage in the United States in 2013.

Grand-scale problems require complex solutions; and these solutions require the synergy of efforts of people with different cultural perspectives. But even if we do not see the connection of global issues to our own lives or ever travel abroad, culture touches our lives. We live in a multicultural, global economy, where, to survive, most large businesses employ, buy, and sell across cultural and national lines. Many of us, regardless of our country of residence, have doctors, teachers, bosses, students, or employees from “cultures” besides our own. With new and interactive media, we might play online games, chat, or develop friendships or romances with people in other lands without leaving our own borders. Besides this, we each live within and are influenced and sometimes constrained by our own cultures. The more we know about our own culture, the more effective we will be where we live, the more we can engage in issues and problems within our own community (which have cultural elements), and the more we will see the strengths and limits of our own culture. As we see these strengths and limits, we will have more likelihood of being able to make choices and change those cultures.

Whether we are discussing world-level crises or community issues, there is a bright spot as we talk about social issues, and that is the rise of involvement of citizens in the public sphere—at least in some ways. Russell Dalton (2009) reports statistics showing that while the younger generation (Gen Y) has a decreased sense of citizen “duty” in terms of things such as following the law without thought, or voting, they have an increased sense of citizen “engagement”, which includes seeking to understand opinions of others, “direct action, and elite-challenging activities” (p. 32). Engagement and duty are both impacted by things such as level of education, racial background, and religiosity. Increasingly, companies are encouraging their employees to participate in the community, and universities are promoting civic and political engagement.

There seems to be a fresh wind in the air as students in secondary schools, colleges, and universities seek to give back to the community. After a post-2005 decline, voluntarism increased to a high-point in 2011 (“Volunteering and Civic Life,” 2012; Volunteering/Community Service, 2010), and service learning opportunities at universities abound. Some have said that one of the characteristics of the up-and-coming generation is a sense of social responsibility, though one study suggests that the Millennial Generation “may not be the caring, socially conscious environmentalists some have portrayed them to be” (Chau, 2012). Instead, they might be focusing more on “money, image, and fame”. Statistics suggest that, at least in terms of volunteering, 16–18 year olds and those aged 25 and older historically volunteer more than the 18–25 set (Volunteering/Community Service, 2010). Students (especially in Western cultures like the United States, where “pragmatism” or “practicality” is a core value) have always wanted to study “what works”—what leads to better message production and consumption, better workplace practices, better relationships. But many students today often also seek ideas to help them engage better with the community. And knowledge of culture is central to such engagement.

Why another intercultural text? (Features of this book)

The need for solutions for community, as well as the growing interest in community engagement, is a driving force for the present book. We have three main goals in writing this text. First, we want to provide responsible knowledge of things cultural. Many introductory textbooks present simple explanations of things for the student new to cultural issues. We believe students are capable of deep thought, so, where possible, we introduce basic ideas, but then challenge students to critical thought about those ideas. Our second goal is for readers to be able to take something practical from the text for their own workplaces, relationships, and schooling, the traditional focus of intercultural studies. But the third goal is to bring an imagination of possibilities for community engagement—civic or political. We want to encourage readers, and ourselves as authors, to find ways to make the knowledge practical for making people’s lives better, to address social issues, to meet the personal needs of people in our lives and in our classrooms. With this in mind, this book has several distinctive features:

- The authors write for introductory readers, with clear definition of terms, but use original frameworks and introduce theories in a way that does not condescend to the reader.
- We treat culture complexly. While we sometimes discuss national cultures, through most of the book we see cultures as distinct from national boundaries. Some cultures cross national boundaries, and a single city might have people of many different cultures within it. There are regional, urban–rural, or other cultural differences within nations; even organizations have cultures.
- We construct a vision of culture that uses examples from around the world as much as possible, seeking to remove some of our own U.S.-centric bias as authors, and we use examples that relate to a variety of types of diversity, including age, sex, race,

religion, and sexual orientation. While these, in and of themselves, do not constitute cultures, they often contain cultural elements, and there are cultural constructions of how a society treats different groups that deserve our attention as engaged citizens.

- As authors with diverse backgrounds—rhetoric, media and African American studies, organizational communication, and intercultural/interpersonal communication—we (re)introduce notions to the study of intercultural communication not present in many books, including large sections on intercultural ethics and chapters on media, rhetoric, and globalization.
- Throughout the book, we promote civic engagement with cues toward individual intercultural effectiveness and giving back to the community in socially relevant ways; we do this throughout the chapters and with discussion questions and engagement activities at the end of each chapter.
- We weave pedagogy throughout the text with student-centered examples, thought (or “text”) boxes, applications, critical thinking questions, a glossary of key terms, and online resources for students and instructors. These online resources include sample syllabi, test questions, glossary terms, power points, and class exercise options.

Focus and direction of this book

With these goals in mind, our text begins with a discussion of the foundations of intercultural communication. In chapter 1, we introduce several reasons why it is important to study intercultural communication, with updated situations and examples of world and community diversity. In chapter 2, we introduce our central concepts of political and civic engagement and discuss the importance and nature of ethical intercultural communication and cultural research. We then turn to different ways to define culture (chapter 3).

The second portion of the book focuses on elements that inform the intercultural communication process, starting with the foundation upon which all communication rests—values, beliefs, and world view (chapter 4). We consider the view we have of ourselves as that relates to the groups to which we belong—identity (chapter 5)—and then look at our attitudes towards those of other identities (chapter 6).

In the third part of our book, we look at the exchange of messages through different channels. We begin with verbal communication—that is, face-to-face communication as it relates to the use of words in interaction (chapter 7). We next consider the various channels of face-to-face communication that do not use words—nonverbal communication (chapter 8). This includes discussion of things such as space, time, touch, eye contact, and gesture. We examine messages given by speakers or in texts to persuade—rhetoric (chapter 9). Finally, we look at aspects of mediated communication, in terms of how we mediate identity and culture (chapter 10).

Our final section contains issues and contexts of intercultural communication, starting with the impacts of globalization, especially on media (chapter 11), then moving to cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural communication competence (chapter 12), intercultural relations, conflict, and negotiation (chapter 13), political communication (chapter 14), and finally the organizational context (chapter 15).

The order is intended to be flexible for the instructor. As we have used drafts of this text in our own teaching, we find that, after the foundational chapters, each chapter stands on its own; we can choose the chapters that best meet our needs, for example, with a special unit on media (or leaving media out), or skipping over the section on personal relationships. We encourage the student reading this preface to start each chapter you read by looking at the objectives at the top of each chapter—those are things that we, the authors, felt were most important as we wrote. Then read the discussion questions at the end. As you read, start with an understanding of the larger structure and bolded terms in the chapter, before you try to learn specific details.

In each area, there are areas for practical applications of culture to work and school, ways in which knowledge of culture will teach us about ourselves and give us more freedom over our choices, and aspects that will allow us to be more effective and engaged citizens in our communities.

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