

**PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**in partnership with the Gap Year Association (GYA)**

**COMM 215: Introduction to Intercultural Communication - Building Effective Cross-Cultural Communication Skills**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**CREDITS: 4 quarter-credits – Continuous Enrollment Course**

Students who plan to use this course to fulfill specific requirements should discuss transfer options and obtain written approval from a counselor or study abroad advisor at their own college/university PRIOR to enrolling in this course.

**PREREQUISITES:**

There are NO prerequisites for this course.

**METHOD OF INSTRUCTION:**

This course is a field-based self-study. The course instructor will correspond with the student and provide written feedback on course assignments via email and other remote communication.

**INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD:**

PSU has approved the following Instructors of Record, one of whom will be assigned to you (typically two+ weeks prior to the beginning of your program):

- Britt Basel, MS - [brittbasel@ecothropic.com](mailto:brittbasel@ecothropic.com)
  - Dianna Hahn, MA - [dianna@gapyearassociation.org](mailto:dianna@gapyearassociation.org)
  - Alexander Papouchis, MS - [alexpapouchis@gmail.com](mailto:alexpapouchis@gmail.com)
  - Cam Sylvester, MA – [ccamsylvester@gmail.com](mailto:ccamsylvester@gmail.com)
- Office: 503-206-7336  
[www.gapyearassociation.org](http://www.gapyearassociation.org)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course will provide hands-on learning opportunities for undergraduate students who participate in study-away experiences. It offers students the chance to learn outside of the classroom while building intercultural competencies through global learning and community-based participation. Through immersive experiences and service learning engagements, this course will help students develop stronger communication skills with individuals from a variety of different backgrounds, including (but not limited to): socio-economic, racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious lived experiences.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS:**

- **Environment of Respect:** Disagreement and diversity of opinions are encouraged. You will be challenged to think critically about the impact of cultural differences, which may emerge in concepts of gender, race, the roles environment has in business and market development, socioeconomic status, physical and cognitive ability, sexuality, and other forms of diversity. You are encouraged to ask difficult questions and engage in discussion and critical reflection. Please be respectful of others, listen, and try to understand differences.
- **Experiential Learning:** In this course, learning is an experiential process in which you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences throughout the term. The richness of the course will depend on the questions, insights, and active participation that you bring.
- **Personal Responsibility:** You are expected to engage fully in the coursework and take action if you need help. Please communicate any concerns about assignments, deadlines, or course activities to your Instructor of Record.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please adhere to university policies. Take special note of policies regarding plagiarism and course withdrawal. Each student is expected to prepare their own assignments, and any assignments submitted should be the sole work of the student. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information, will not be tolerated. PSU's Code of Student Conduct may be found at <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-code-student-conduct-and-responsibility>

## STUDENT OUTCOMES:

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Begin to effectively communicate with individuals with different native languages, lived experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, racial backgrounds, and cultural norms, etc.
- Begin to develop a deepened understanding of cultural values different from their own
- Understand methods of improving intercultural communication through practical applications
- Explore the dynamics of power structures in different contexts
- Analyze how communication methods differ among cultures
- Identify challenges that arise from cultural differences in communication norms, and explore ways of creatively addressing those challenges
- Acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase intercultural competence

## CONTACT HOURS, EXCURSIONS, AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

A total of 40 contact hours will be facilitated. These hours will come in the forms of:

- Homestays
- Volunteering with local service-learning projects, nonprofits, etc.
- Interviews with local community members
- Participation in local cultural events
- Excursions to local museums, monuments, historically significant sites, etc.
- Cross-cultural correspondence and education
- Deep immersion in new culture through accommodation, events, ceremonies, festivals, shared meals, holidays/celebrations, etc.

## ASSIGNMENTS

**REQUIRED HOURS:** You must complete 40 contact hours as described above. The Gap Year Association will provide verification of hours.

**DAILY JOURNAL:** The journal requirement is an important component of your grade for this course. It will count for 30% of your final grade. Elements that make a strong journal include self-reflection and evidence of critical thinking.

*\*If you are enrolled in multiple courses, you are only required to maintain one journal for all courses\**

Journals should be **handwritten and legible**, as handwritten reflections tend to be deeper and more insightful than those maintained digitally. Additionally, many programs have limitations to device usage in different locations; as such, a typed version may not be an option.

Journals will be graded as follows:

- **Self-reflection (20%):** Ask yourself critical questions about the experience you are having. How is this different from what you expected? What personal challenges are you experiencing? How are you learning and growing from this experience?
- **Reflection about your location and host culture (20%):** What is similar to and/or different from your home culture/environment? What is unique about this place/location? How is your day-to-day experience and learning in the host culture challenging or validating your worldviews?
- **Sharing reflections on group dynamics (20%):** What lessons can you take away from the experience you are having with your cohort? How are you developing or changing within the group?
- **Reflection on specific course themes (20%):** Review the student outcomes from the courses you are registered for. In your journal entries, speak directly about your inquiry and learning related to those course themes.
- **Quality & Consistency (20%):** Journaling every day or every few days with focus on the above elements will lead to higher quality journals and a better overall journal grade.

**REQUIRED READING:** You must read at least **ONE** book from the Recommended Reading list and demonstrate knowledge learned and/or perspectives expressed (with [MLA](#) or [APA](#) citations) in your FINAL REPORT.

A **FINAL REPORT** of insights gained from your study-away experience is required in order to complete the course. **Our expectation is that the paper you submit will reflect college-level writing.** Your report should be 8-10 pages in length. Reports must be typed (double spaced) with a cover page that includes your name, the academic quarter (e.g. fall 2021), the name of the program you attended, and the course number.

**Submit a comprehensive analytical paper reflecting on the time you spent immersed within another culture. From your experience, compare and contrast communication nuances between cultures. What are some core similarities and differences you observed and experienced in the ways people communicated, compared to that of your home culture? Expand on different means by which communication occurs: informal vs. formal settings, verbal vs. non-verbal, written communication, visual communication, etc. In your paper, spend time reflecting on the ways in which language influences culture and intercultural communication.**

Consider exploring the following as write your analysis:

- What is cross-cultural awareness?
- Why does cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication matter?
- When were able to communicate effectively? When was your communication ineffective? How did you overcome this?
- Describe differences in power structures across cultures you have engaged with.
- Reflect on your initial interactions with a new culture. In what ways did your communication change over time? How would you anticipate these interactions to change further in future interactions should they occur?

**Final Report will be graded as follows:**

- Analysis of cross-cultural communication - 20%
- Compare/contrast similarities and differences between cultural groups - 20%
- Exploration of why cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence matter - 20%
- Explanation of different methods of communication (verbal vs. non-verbal, etc.) - 10%
- Clarity and organization of ideas - 10%
- Grammar and punctuation - 10%
- Ability to demonstrate knowledge from the required readings - 10%

#### **DEADLINES & SUBMISSIONS:**

All course requirements must be submitted by:

- Fall Semester: January 20th
- Spring Semester: June 20th

#### **SUBMITTING JOURNALS & FINAL REPORTS:**

- **Journals:** Once complete, please capture legible images/scans of your handwritten journal and submit as **ONE COMPLETE** document via email/shared drive to your instructor. Instructors reserve the right to refuse your journal submission if it is not legible. Some tips for quality submission when photographing or scanning your journal:
  - Ensure adequate light
  - Use equal camera height/distance if taking photos of journal
  - Turn OFF the flash
  - Pay attention to shadows and reflections
  - Ensure the entire page is captured and sections are not cut off (even margins)!
- **Final report:** Please email or share your final report with your Instructor of Record

#### **COURSE EVALUATION:**

- **Daily Journal** (30% of total course grade): Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to, clearly presented ideas and observations, creative thought, and relevant concepts.
- **Final Paper** (70% of total course grade): Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to, appropriate grammar and verb use, format, content relevance, organization, analysis, originality,

and summarization skills.

- **Required Readings:** This is a requirement for successful completion of this class and 10% of your paper grade depends on your referencing examples and lessons learned. Citations are required.
- **Required Hours:** The Gap Year Association will provide verification of these hours.
- **Grading:** This course is graded with letter grades A - F. See more details about PSU's grading system [here](#).

## **READING LIST**

**Students must read and cite at least ONE book in the final assignment. The following books have been approved for this course. Any other books not on this list must first be approved by your Instructor of Record.**

### **ALL REGIONS:**

*Beyond Culture*, by Edward T. Hall

Hall presents concepts that are crucial for understanding cultural differences while exploring broad concepts and describing how they are all interrelated.

*Crossing Boundaries*, by Aziz Abu Sarah

Through sharing inspiring, funny, and surprising stories of the author's experiences around the world, this book is an exploration of how to heal our world from stereotypes, prejudice, and ignorance through travel. The author is a Palestinian peace activist, National Geographic Explorer, and TED fellow who has dedicated his life to bringing people together.

*Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*, by Michael H. Agar

Through his anecdotal experiences, Agar coins the term "languaculture" to define how interrelated and embedded language is to culture and vice versa taking you on a fun and enlightening journey.

*Seeing Culture Everywhere: From Genocide to Consumer Habits*, by Joanna Breidenback and Pal Nyiri

Cultural differences are used to explain much of what is occurring in modern society and much of what we see on the news.

*So, How Long Have You Been Native?: Life as an Alaska Native Tour Guide*, by Alexis C. Bunten

An informative, first-hand account of the cultural tourism industry in Alaska. Bunten takes us on a journey as a summer tour employee in native Alaska and questions of who gets to "sell" culture.

*The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business*, by Erin Meyer

A practical guide to working effectively and sensitively in a cross-cultural situation.

*The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, by Kwame Anthony Appiah

Explores the nature and history of identities that bind us challenging us to think about who and what we are.

*The Silent Language*, by Edward T. Hall

"According to Dr. Hall, the concepts of space and time are tools with which all human beings may transmit messages. A leading American anthropologist, Hall analyzes the many ways in which people "talk" to one another without the use of words."