



Cultural Awareness and Global Citizenship

U.S. high school graduates will: sell to the world; buy from the world; work for international companies; manage employees from other cultures and countries; collaborate with people all over the world in joint ventures; compete with people on the other side of the world for jobs and markets; and tackle global problems, such as AIDS, avian flu, pollution, and disaster recovery.

—Vivien Stewart, Vice President for Education at the Asia Society

In this text, you'll explore answers to these questions:

- ▶ What is cultural awareness?
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- ▶ How can I build cultural competence?
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- ▶ What is global citizenship?
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- ▶ How can I take action as a global citizen?
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STATUS CHECK

How prepared am I to be a culturally aware global citizen?

For each statement, circle the number that best describes how often it applies to you.

1 = never 2 = seldom 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always

1. I can define <i>culture</i> and <i>citizenship</i> .	1 2 3 4 5
2. I understand the different cultures that affect my growth and development.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I live, work, or study with people from different cultures.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I am able to push past my initial assumptions about people.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I speak or understand at least one language besides English.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I am comfortable communicating with diverse people.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I use technology as a means to connect with and understand people from different cultures.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I am aware of how my daily life depends on products and services from all over the globe.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I keep the needs of others in mind as I make personal choices.	1 2 3 4 5
10. I feel responsible for making things better in my corner of the world.	1 2 3 4 5

Each of the topics in these statements is covered in this text. Note those statements for which you circled a 3 or lower. Skim this text to see where those topics appear, and pay special attention to them as you read, learn, and apply new strategies.

STUDENT Profiles

Mariela, a first-generation student who is Hispanic and grew up in a suburban area of Arizona, decided to spend one year of school in China through a study abroad program available at her school. She studied in Shanghai and also spent time in rural areas with a Chinese friend she met through the program. Every setting she experienced—the abject poverty of the rural areas, the intensity of the densely populated city—was unlike anything she had ever seen in her life.

Mariela found most of the people she met to be open, friendly, and extremely diligent and hard-working. She learned from her friend's parents that their experience growing up in Shanghai without cars was vastly different from how the city is now, with so many cars that pollution is a major issue. It brought to mind her grandparents' experience growing up

in Guatemala, and how their choice to come to the United States brought them more of both good things (education, technology) and problematic things (pollution, processed foods). She began to think she might want to pursue a career in urban management, or perhaps environmental management.

Raj was raised in Mombasa, India, and came to the United States for college at the age of sixteen. Once in school, he noticed many students who seemed uninterested in their coursework or disconnected from their purpose in school. This amazed him, as he had grown up in a poor family of migrant workers who took education seriously, had earned a scholarship for outstanding research in science, and highly valued the opportunity to study at the college level. At first he did not make time for fun outside of his coursework, distanced himself from other students, and did not often make use of resources offered by his school.

Over the next couple of years, Raj realized that there were positive and negative aspects to both his

way of being in school and the culture more common to American students. He found a better balance of schoolwork and fun by getting a part-time job and developing a circle of close friends. Becoming more comfortable with the language helped—he had studied English since first grade, but using it every day increased his fluency to a level he could not have imagined. He planned to major in education and communications, keeping in mind his goal of returning to India to start an organization to help improve poor children's access to good education.

Technology has changed how people live and work, creating a world where people and companies interact and work with others all over the world. As

new technologies come into use, the rate of change will only continue to accelerate. Think about these two students and their experiences in light of the new global connections. What have they learned about themselves and the world, and how have they changed? How do you think you might change if you studied for a year in China or went to college in India? What would be challenging for you, and what would energize you? What would you learn about yourself? Our goal is to help you open your mind to new experiences, showing you that appreciating and cooperating with people of all different races, religions, ethnic origins, cultures, economic and life circumstances, and values is essential in the interconnected modern world.

What is cultural awareness?

Every human being belongs to, and identifies with, many cultures. Everywhere you go, you encounter culture—sometimes one in which you feel at home, sometimes one that is completely unfamiliar and even confusing or disturbing to you. Your family has a culture, your school has a culture, your workplace has a culture, and the community in which you live has a culture.

Why do you need to be aware of culture? Culture informs every human action and communication. **For people to communicate and accomplish goals together in any setting, they need to understand and adapt to one another's cultures.** A lone-ranger type worker in an office culture marked by teamwork, for example, might be put off by how often he is dragged into projects, not understanding how the team structure helps this company get things done. A student visiting a friend whose family seems to fight all the time might be intimidated by the atmosphere, not having any idea that in that family's culture, talking that way is a functional form of communication.

Whether you commute, live on campus, or take courses online, college is a time of encountering all kinds of cultures. You are exposed to new cultures through the material you study and through the instructors, students, and other people with whom you interact. The key to getting the most education out of every moment in class and out is to be open to learning about, and from, other cultures. You have an amazing opportunity waiting for you—an opportunity that cultural awareness can help you embrace.

Defining culture

Cultural awareness starts with defining what *culture* is. Think about this definition below:

Culture, *noun*. The pattern of attitudes, social customs, and beliefs that characterizes a group of people, transmitted through language, material objects, and institutions.



One way to crystallize this definition is to reduce it to these two questions:

1. How do people from this culture **see** things?
2. How do people from this culture **act**?

Perceptions and actions together communicate the values and beliefs that make up a culture. Ask these two questions of any culture you want to investigate, and the answers will give you a basic picture of what that culture is about.

When you think of culture, the first things that come to mind are likely ethnic and racial groups, religions, and countries. However, any group can have a culture. Consider these examples of distinct cultures:

- ▶ people living in a particular neighborhood, town, or city (the culture of Tampa, Florida)
- ▶ families dealing with a particular medical issue (the culture of autism)
- ▶ employees of a particular company (the culture of Google)
- ▶ people who work a certain type of job (the culture of public elementary education)

Take a closer look at one of these cultures using the definition you just read. For example, teachers at public elementary schools are likely to share a positive attitude toward public education, have similar customs about how they interact with students in the classroom, and share particular beliefs about what children can learn in a school setting. They use language specific to their knowledge as educators, pass on rituals (both in-classroom and among teachers), and value particular objects (gifts from special students).

There can even be subcultures within a group. For example, the culture of the teachers at a school in rural Oklahoma may differ radically from the culture of the teachers at a school in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, even though both groups belong to the culture of elementary school teachers and will have some cultural characteristics in common.

Four levels of cultural awareness¹

Now that you have a broader understanding of culture, you might conclude that cultural awareness is simply an awareness of cultures. If so, you would be partially correct. Cultural awareness includes, but moves beyond, being aware of different cultures.

Becoming culturally aware is a journey. Business and culture experts Stephanie Quappe and Giovanna Cantatore discuss four levels of cultural awareness at which people operate (see Key 1).

More advanced levels of cultural awareness involve an acceptance of other cultures that enables you to value, and benefit from, what those cultures bring to individual situations. The highest level, although not always reached, is where new cultures can be born out of the interaction of the cultures of all participants.



THE FOUR LEVELS OF CULTURAL AWARENESS



My way is the only way



I know their way, but my way is better



My way and their way



Our way

1. **My way is the only way.** At this first level, people only know about their own culture, and don't even know that there are other ways to live.
2. **I know their way, but my way is better.** The second level brings an awareness of other ways of doing things, but people at the second level believe that their way is always superior to anyone else's.
3. **My way and their way.** At the third level, people are able to both understand and value other ways of being, seeing what other cultures have to offer and not automatically assuming that their way is best. They are able to look at a situation and decide which choice will benefit that situation, regardless of the culture from which that choice emerges.
4. **Our way.** This fourth, most advanced level makes possible the creation of a new culture. In this level, a group of people from different cultures working toward a goal together can interact in ways that create new language, meanings, and perspectives unique to the situation.

Although these levels are on a continuum, not everyone moves through all of them. Some people stay at one level for life. Some people grow up in a family that operates at the third or fourth level and never experience the previous levels. Depending on family values and life experience, different people may currently operate at any one of the four levels, and therefore will have more or less of a journey to take toward cultural awareness.

Wherever your starting point, how do you increase your cultural awareness? The first step, and a necessary one for those who need to move out of the “my way is the only way” level, is to understand who you are as a cultural being.

Know your culture first

Begin your investigation of culture by becoming more aware of your own culture. How do you *see* things? How do you *act*? Think first about the obvious or visible, and then look beyond it to the invisible. Another way to think it through is to first identify how you are like others around you, and then pinpoint the ways you differ.

Most people belong to a wide array of cultures. For example, someone could be part of a Korean-American family, attend Catholic church, be involved in hospital culture in work as a pediatric nurse, live in an urban setting, have conservative political views, and be an avid knitter—six cultures right there, and there are likely even more (see Key 2).

In your investigation, consider the following:

- ▶ **Race and ethnic origin.** These can also be distinct cultures. For example, someone who identifies as a member of the Asian race can be ethnically Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, and so on.
- ▶ **Country of residence, origin, or both.** If your family has lived in the same country for generations, your country of residence and origin may be the same. However, many people live in one country but are part of a family that originally came from another country, and such people often display elements of both cultures. For example, a resident of Chicago whose parents grew up in Egypt may feel connected to both Egyptian and U.S. culture; a child of a German-American mother and an African-American father may have a value system that displays elements of both European-American and African-American cultures.
- ▶ **Generation.** Various generations can have distinct cultures. The values, beliefs, and practices common to Baby Boomers born in the late 1950s differ from those common to so-called Millennials born around the year 2000.
- ▶ **Religion.** Most religions have a defined set of beliefs and values that you will likely adopt if you are a practicing member. Many religions, of course, share certain values in common.
- ▶ **Local culture.** The group of people who live in your city or town, your neighborhood, or even on your street or in your apartment building can develop particular customs that they value and practice together.



EACH PERSON IS PART OF MANY CULTURES



► **Political views.** Where you stand on political issues is often connected with a particular set of values and beliefs.

► **Workplace.** Both your job or career in general and your specific place of work have their own culture. Employees in marketing share a culture, for example, but a marketing manager at Macy's and a marketing manager at Nike may experience widely different workplace cultures.

► **Lifestyle.** Your sexual orientation, family and marital status, and other lifestyle characteristics make you a member of distinct cultures that inform your day-to-day actions.

► **Immediate family.** Families often have their own culture, often consisting of a mash-up among all of the different cultures to which the family belongs. To identify your family culture, think about your unique customs, your particular beliefs, even the special terminology that families develop and use over time (nicknames, catch phrases, inside jokes).

► **Academia.** In addition to the distinct cultures of individual institutions, higher education has a culture of its own. The ways in which this culture differs from high

school culture can pose a challenge for students making the transition. This culture includes:

- ▶ The expectation that you will learn independently, taking responsibility for keeping a schedule, attending course meetings, completing assignments, reading, and studying
- ▶ A faster pace and an increased workload
- ▶ More challenging, higher-level work
- ▶ More out-of-class time to manage
- ▶ The need to think critically and move beyond straight recall of information

What can you gain from a careful look at your own culture? First of all, you will develop a broader understanding of cultures and how they affect your beliefs and actions. Secondly, you will be more able to see the variety of cultures around you. The next step to becoming more culturally aware is to explore those cultures that you encounter.

Explore other cultures

One look around you in a crowd, one lunch with co-workers or fellow students, one hour of surfing the Internet will show you that there are many other ways of being outside of your own. Knowing about other cultures is the gateway to understanding, accepting, and valuing those cultures. There are many ways to get to know the different sets of values and beliefs that exist beyond your own culture. Here are a few:

▶ **Consider family members.** Even within your own family, which often shares a culture, you will find other cultures that are unfamiliar to you. Perhaps a sibling moved to a completely different part of the country or the world; maybe a parent remarried someone from a different race or country; a cousin might have converted to a different religion or might identify with a different sexual orientation than your own.

▶ **Go local.** Within most neighborhood and school circles you can find a wide array of cultures—different professions, languages, interests, ethnicities, and so on. Visit unfamiliar places, eat in unfamiliar restaurants, and go to unfamiliar events.

▶ **Read and view.** Books, newspapers, online articles, movies, television, and other media can introduce you to almost any culture in the world.

▶ **Learn from friends.** Open your mind to learning about the cultures of your friends. Ask them about their traditions. Notice their values and customs. Eat something unfamiliar that a friend likes to cook, or read something new that a friend recommends.

Be receptive and respectful

Being receptive to new cultures and maintaining an attitude that all cultures are worthy of respect are the next ingredients in your progression toward cultural awareness. Even if you spend a period of time at Level 2—“I know their way but my way is better”—what you’ve learned about other cultures gives you the raw material with which to move ahead to Level 3—“My way and their way”—where you can place cultures on an even playing field.

Being receptive literally means being *able to receive*. Therefore, it requires an openness and a willingness to receive information about other ways of being. It can be challenging to resist our human tendency to shut the mental door against unfamiliar ideas and practices. However, that mental door is the gateway to successful interaction with others, because accepting and valuing others depends on your ability to learn about them.

Being respectful depends on being receptive. Although it is possible to respect people you know nothing about simply because they are human, the deeper respect that fuels successful relationships has its roots in knowledge.

Developing cultural awareness is an ongoing process. First of all, cultures will continue to emerge and change. Secondly, throughout your life you will continue to encounter new cultures as you meet people, go places, change jobs, move into different stages of life, and have new experiences. Here are two keys to being receptive and respectful:

1. Assume differences. It's human to look for the similarities in people you meet. Make the effort to assume that there are differences as well—and look for them. Even as you search for common ground with a study partner, for example, notice that he has a different native language and that he dresses, takes notes, and interacts with the instructor differently than you do.

2. Avoid judgments. When you find those differences, stop short of judgment. Accept the reality of those differences. Know, for example, that the way your study partner dresses, speaks, takes notes, and asks questions is not better or worse than yours—just different. Of course, different ways of being might be better for one person and not a good choice for another—but whether a choice is good or bad for one person does not change that the choice has value and deserves respect.

The value of cultural awareness

Why be culturally aware? Understanding the benefit of cultural awareness comes down to understanding how much your success depends on others. You will interact with cultures visible and invisible in school, at work, and in your personal life. The more aware and accepting you are of these cultures, the more effectively you will:

- ▶ Communicate with others
- ▶ Achieve goals on work teams with others
- ▶ Solve life's problems with others
- ▶ Find and use products and help from people around you

You can make these things happen by putting cultural awareness into practice. You might refer to cultural awareness in action as *cultural competence*.

How can you build cultural competence?

Diversity refers to the differences among people and among groups that people are a part of. As with culture, some differences are visible, such as gender, skin color, age, and physical characteristics; others are less visible but no less significant, such as education, marital and parental status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and thinking and learning styles. Some differences, like religion, are visible in some situations (such as with people who dress or wear their hair a certain way in accordance with religious law), but not in others (such as with people whose religion has no visible identifier). It is the incredible diversity among people that makes understanding, tolerance, and competence necessary.

As all people do, you have your own personal diversity. This encompasses all of the visible elements of who you are in addition to invisible elements such as your personality traits, learning and working styles, natural talents, interests, and challenges.

When you with all your differences encounter others with all their differences, it takes cultural competence to interact effectively in order to achieve goals. Having *cultural competence* means understanding and appreciating the differences among people and adjusting behavior in ways that enhance relationships and communication. Keep in mind: *Developing cultural competence does not require you to go against your principles, and it does not mean that you have to agree with everyone.* The effort to understand and work with others should not result in changing who you are. In fact, your exploration of other cultures and ideas may reinforce your understanding of what you believe and why. It can also lead to an adjustment or enhancement of those beliefs from what you've learned.

Consider this story: A pizza addict who ate pizza nearly every single day took a trip to an area in India where no pizza was available. For two weeks, he ate the food cooked by the family with whom he stayed. Once back home, he was thrilled to eat pizza again, but also began to incorporate other foods into his diet, even coming up with an Indian-style