

Managing Cultural Differences
22 INTB 530 801
CoB Study Abroad
Nantes, France – Summer 2009

Resident CoB faculty: June 15, 2008 – July 3, 2009
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July 4, 2008 – July 24, 2008
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Term of course: June 15 - July 24, 2008

UC connector course: Managing Cultural Differences
22 INTB 530

Course Overview:

This course seeks to help students develop a deeper understanding of cultural differences and their potential impact on social and business relations. Broadly defined, culture denotes values and understandings shared by a group of people (e.g., based on their socialization into a team, organization, profession, nation, etc.). Cultural differences may range from shocking to subtle variations in people's assumptions, expectations, norms, attitudes and behaviors.

This special section of Managing Cultural Differences is designed to help you to make the most of your experience in Europe while you are enrolled in the Audencia L'Ecole de Management summer school program. We will work to prepare you to deal with the cultural differences that you will observe and experience, and provide a forum for deeper understanding of French culture in particular. Even if you are not officially enrolled in the course (there are a few of you like that), you must participate in all the activities designed to prepare you to be successful in the program. Yes, that means you must read the book and take the test, as well as participate in the group presentations.

We will meet four times during the spring quarter to discuss required preparatory readings, report on team assignments and plan for our weeks in Nantes. Once we all arrive in Nantes, we will meet weekly as a group (yes, even if you are not officially registered in the course) to discuss what you have seen, heard and learned about cultural differences.

Course Format:

This is an experiential course. The format focuses on helping students (as future managers/professionals) learn how to learn from experience, and become more proactive and purposeful learners. For example, consider use of the term “culture shock.” When managers visit or move to a different country, they often note feeling “very foreign” or “out-of-place” – unsure of what others expect, what is appropriate/inappropriate, what are common work practices, etc. To be successful, managers must learn very quickly, becoming sensitive to potential differences, coming to understand and respect the culture, and managing cultural differences effectively.

Grades:

The grades for the course will be based on the following:

1. **Participation** (15%) Attendance and involvement are expected within all class sessions and team meetings in both the UC class sessions and at Audencia.
2. **Preparatory presentation** (15%) 2-3 person teams will research specific topics about Nantes, France, and the European Union, and present their findings to the class during the last meeting in May.

3. **Test on reading** (*Culture Shock: France*) (20%)

4. **Individual cultural reflections** (20%)

You will complete a series of five (5) journal entries to be turned in to the instructor each Thursday before the regular class session (see breakdown below). These will be expected for the first 5 weeks of the Nantes course. Kolb’s Learning Cycle serves as the framework for your journal entries. Each entry should be 1-2 pages long and include four general components (although the style and length of entries may vary considerably). You will be graded based on the quality of your entries (i.e., thoughtful, well-written). **IT IS ESSENTIALS THAT YOU FOLLOW THE FORMAT BELOW FOR YOUR REFLECTIVE ESSAYS.**

Experience: What cultural clues did you experience? Describe what happened. This component of your journal requires *cultural sensitivity*. Thoughtfully and objectively observe and describe the related cultural clue(s) – e.g., stories, language, symbols, rites/rituals, norms, attitudes, etc., experienced during company or store tours, classes, casual conversations, shopping trips, etc.

As an example in France, hypothetically, would be that you see lots of people with dogs in settings where you would not see them in the US: restaurants, stores, trains, etc. You also see dog droppings on the sidewalk (people don’t pick-up after their dogs). This would be the observation of a particular behavioral norm.

Reflection: What cultural differences do these clues suggest? Why do you think this difference exists (e.g., what value does it have for the individual/ group)? Look at the

experience from the “local” perspective. Remember, cultures develop and persist because they serve a *purpose*.

What does this observation about French people and dogs suggest about cultural differences between France and the US? Norms about sanitation? Values about the place of pets in family and everyday life? Individualism? Importance of rules? Try to put yourself in the position of a French person with respect to these behaviors.

Theory: Based on your experience and reflection, what do you think you “know” now? Develop your own or borrow (e.g., from studies, classes, etc.) a theory that explains the cultural difference. For example: Americans are motivated first and foremost by money. Explain...

Following through with the dog example, you could attempt to develop a theory about what fundamental cultural factors (differences) explain French people’s behaviors (or the differences between their behavior and that of Americans). For example, the French may tend to be very independent in many ways and although they have many rules, the French typically view violating rules as their right. Hence, they think nothing of taking dogs places where most Americans never would... You could bring theory about culture (e.g., Hofstede) into this discussion.

Experimentation: How would you find out if your “theory” is right? How could you test your theory? How might you feel more confident that this was not an idiosyncratic event and that your theory is not oversimplification or stereotype? *There are several possibilities here. You could interview French and American people asking about attitudes towards dogs. You could attempt the typical French behaviors in the US and evaluate the responses. You could borrow a dog and attempt some of the typical behaviors while in France. The idea is to see whether your initial observation was typical or idiosyncratic.*

Summary/Implications: How might understanding this difference affect your social interactions with people from this culture? How would you use this learning to manage cultural differences more effectively? *Here again there are lots of possibilities. You could discuss the implications on your expectations; how you would use this information in coaching potential expatriate employees to prepare them for work in France; or you could discuss business implications. In this example, you might use this information to develop a business strategy for pet related products or services.*

Breakdown of Entries: There are five experiences that you must journal: business, social, group and self **plus** a fifth selection. These categories seek to help you examine cultural differences at multiple levels.

1. **Business** – One of your entries should examine a cultural difference explicitly relevant to doing business in France (e.g., using clues from store or company visits, lectures, etc.).
2. **Social** – One of your entries should examine how the French culture differs from your own (e.g., using clues from museum visits, interactions with French students, shopping, etc.).

3. **Group** – One entry should examine the different cultures represented by our own study abroad group (e.g., using clues from tram and train rides, daily interactions, etc.).
 4. **Self** – One entry should focus on yourself. How have your experiences in France affected your understanding of your own cultural makeup?
 5. For your fifth entry, you may choose any of the above categories.
5. **Final Reflection Paper** (30%) This paper should be based on the weekly papers that you completed while in Europe. After you return to the U.S., you will go back and read your 5 short papers, select 2-3 most important themes or ideas, and write a reflective essay that attempts to synthesize what you have learned about cultural differences, their sources, their complexities, their consequences, and how they affect you. This paper should be 8-10 pages long, 12 point font and double-spaced.

Your assignments should be uploaded to Blackboard via the Safe Assign system which will be located under the Assignments tab. Journals are due by 6:00 PM every Wednesday and your final paper will be due by 6:00PM on August 15, 2009. This system will check your paper for plagiarism using web-based application software. Evidence of plagiarism may result in you failing the course. If you are not certain what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the following website: http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/plagiarism_test.html

SPRING QUARTER SESSIONS:

Session 1 Wednesday, May 6, 4:30 – 5:30PM

Getting Organized

Overview of this course

Assign preparatory topics to teams

Lecture: What is culture?

Session 2 Wednesday, May 13, 4:30 – 5:30PM

Teams present on assigned topics

Session 3 Wednesday, May 27, 4:30 – 5:30PM

Adjustment to a new culture

Preparation Reading:

CultureShock! A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette – France

By Sally Adamson Taylor

(found at Amazon.com and most bookstores in the travel section).

Discussion and test on *CultureShock*

Session 4 Wednesday, June 3, 4:30 – 5:30PM

Pre-departure orientation by UC International

Managing Cultural Differences

Dr. Ana Sierra Leonard

As part of your preparation for the summer program in Nantes, you will need to try to understand as much as you can about the places that you will be visiting. Below are several topics that we want you to research, summarize and present to the class during our final sessions. You should be able to prepare a short written report for distribution to the class as well as present a short (15 minutes) oral report with powerpoint.

Topics:

1. **What is the European Union and what is it up to?**
What is the EU all about and why is it important to us in the U.S.? What are its current challenges?
2. **Overview of politics in France: Who is in charge?**
What are the current hot political issues? What role does France play in the EU and global politics? What is the history of French-U.S. relations?
3. **Major French firms and U.S. firms with French partners**
Many businesses in France are world class companies. Find them and describe their distinctive features, markets and competencies.
4. **The French educational system**
How do these people get to be so smart? What is primary and secondary education like? How does college and university admission work in France? What is special about the French business schools (ESC's)?
5. **Top Tourist destinations in Europe**
What are the "best" places to visit while in Nantes? Why? What destinations are realistic for a long weekend trip and which ones are not? Where to European students like to go? What costs can one expect? Include Brussels as one of your destinations.
6. **What should we know about Nantes?**
What are the historical and cultural places to visit in Nantes? What is it famous for? What can I do if I do not want to travel every weekend?
7. **What it is like to live with French families**
What should you know about life in a French family? What is the typical daily schedule? What will really irritate them, and what would they like about you? What will you do about the language barrier?