

## SEVEN CROSS-CULTURAL LESSONS

In his book *Cross-Cultural Dialogues : 74 Brief Encounters With Cultural Difference*, author Craig Storti highlights the following seven lessons:

1. Don't assume sameness.
2. What you think of as normal or human behavior may only be cultural.
3. Familiar behaviors may have different meanings.
4. Don't assume that what you meant is what was understood.
5. Don't assume that what you understood is what was meant.
6. You don't have to like or accept "different" behavior, but you should try to understand where it comes from.
7. Most people do behave rationally; you just have to discover the rationale.

# U.S. ACADEMIC LIFE

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Source: *Beyond Language: Cross Cultural Communication*, Levine, Deena R. and Adelman, Mara B., Prentice Hall, 1993.

## U.S. CLASSROOM CULTURE

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**Active class participation is acceptable.** In many courses, professors even expect the students to ask questions and use critical reasoning. It is seen as part of the learning process. Complete silence may be viewed as a lack of interest or preparation. Be ready to ask questions when preparing for the class, jot down a couple of questions that you might ask. Some courses will even include a discussion session where students are expected to participate in an open discussion on a particular topic.

**Taking initiative.** In some courses, you may be asked to do most of the work yourself and the professor may have only a managerial role, as in the case of graduate seminar courses. It is common for teachers to serve as a guide in the student's learning. Students pursuing advanced degrees are particularly encouraged to critique theories, formulate models and interact with the professor.

**Diverse teaching styles.** The teaching style of the professor can determine the amount of student participation in each class. Some instructors prefer a more formal style of lecture with a possible question and answer period at the end. Others prefer a more conversational style and encourage interaction throughout the class. In general, instructors who are confident and experienced are comfortable with students who disagree. When expressing your views in class, be ready to defend your ideas.

**Hands-on involvement.** Classes can sometimes have a practical as well as a theoretical component. Lectures account for the theoretical, and workshops, labs, or study/work groups take care of the practical. Instruction in science and mathematics tends to be of a more formal lecture style, but *applied* courses or even *theoretical* courses, can include *hands-on projects* that actively involve the students.

**Responsibility & self-motivation.** Students are expected to be motivated to learn for the sake of learning, not just to receive the highest grade. Therefore, when a reading is assigned, a professor expects the student to do it on his or her own. Anything you are assigned, even if it is not covered in class, might appear on your exams. Keep in mind that in the U.S., courses are not designed simply for students to pass exams. It is expected that you will attend every class because of self-motivation.

**Informality.** Equality is a main value in the U.S., and although students are subordinate to professors in the U.S., it may not be readily apparent. The relationship may appear to be more casual. Informal behavior on the part of a professor does not indicate a weak or poor relationship with his or her students. Some instructors are very relaxed in their behavior with students. Walking around the classroom, sitting next to the students, drinking coffee, or sitting on the table are common manifestations of this egalitarian American attitude. Use of first names is also common between professors and students. If your academic adviser or professor asks you to call him or her by the first name, then you may feel perfectly comfortable in doing so. Otherwise it is best to use the last name (for both male and female professors) as in, "Excuse me Professor Smith, may I talk to you about something?"

**Student - Professor relationships.** Professors may have a social relationship with students outside of the classroom. They may go for coffee together, or have other kinds of social outings. However, it is still expected that students will be respectful of the student-professor relationship within the classroom and will continue to meet all deadlines, do all homework, and attend all classes. Extra help or attention in no way signifies that a professor will treat the student differently when evaluating homework, papers or tests of any kind. Also, American professors generally do not mix work with social time. If you become friendly with your instructor, be ready to interact more formally when in more professional student-professor context - such as in the professor's office or in the classroom with other students.

**American students.** American students may behave towards professors in ways that seem disrespectful. In class they may look sleepy or sit in very relaxed positions, eat food, be inattentive, or even noisy. American professors may not appreciate this behavior, but it is often tolerated because of the American concept of individual expression. Respect for the professor is often shown in subtle ways, by choice of vocabulary or tone of voice for example.

**Ask if you don't understand.** If a student is confused about something in the class, it is expected that he or she will ask the professor before or after class. If the issue requires a longer conversation, the student may make an appointment to see the professor during office hours. In U.S. academic culture, there is no shame associated with not understanding something in the course, even if it has been presented in a class lecture. Professors respect students who work hard towards fully understanding the material, so don't wait until just before the exam to seek clarification. Ask as soon as you realize that you don't completely understand the material.

*I did sense a very different atmosphere from the first time I stepped into a classroom, both in the way of how the teacher conducted the class and how the students reacted to it. The openness really fascinated me. And especially later on, when I started to realize how the openness helps American students (in general) have more confidence in themselves than the students in Taiwan do. . . . I still remember how shocked I was when I noticed the teacher's encouragement and welcome to all kinds of questions and feedback during the classes. . . . In the beginning it scared me a lot. In my country, usually only those who know a lot would dare to have a long discussion with the teacher during the class; and those people are very rare. . . . However, as time went on and my listening skills got better, I found that not all of the conversations were that inspiring or interesting, and not all of the active students have good grades. I figured out that the students here just simply feel free to speak up and they are not afraid of saying something wrong because they know the teachers encourage individual thinking and respect their ideas and responses no matter what. I think this is a very good thing. . . . American education teaches the students that there is always more than one answer to a question and the one that suits you the best is the right one for you, and you are responsible for finding it out yourself.*

- Graduate student from Taiwan



#### WRITING SUPPORT AT YALE

The Yale College Writing Center supports writers and writing teachers through the resources on their website, free tutoring for undergraduates at the Center and in the residential colleges, and through periodic workshops on writing and teaching techniques. For details go to: [www.yale.edu/writing](http://www.yale.edu/writing)

Graduate Writing Tutors are available by appointment to work with graduate students on their writing. For more information about writing support in the graduate school, go to [www.yale.edu/graduateschool/studentLife/writing.html](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/studentLife/writing.html) or email the Graduate Writing Consultant, [elena.kallestinova@yale.edu](mailto:elena.kallestinova@yale.edu)

#### SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AT YALE

The Graduate Teaching Center provides a wide array of teaching enhancement services to teaching fellows and anyone else teaching at Yale. The GTC courses and workshops for *Teaching Fellows* rely heavily on a peer-led model of teaching development, so nearly all of the courses are led or assisted by graduate students who are trained at the GTC as teaching consultants. For more information go to: [www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching)

## KEYS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Adapted from: *University of Iowa's Handbook for Foreign Students and Scholars 1997-1998*, pgs. 84 -85

**Have reasonable expectations.** There may be a period of adjustment when you first arrive, and you may not do your best work during the first semester. As you become accustomed to the system, and your English improves, your grades will improve.

**Select courses wisely.** Do not take more courses than are necessary or than you can reasonably handle just to finish your degree faster. Consult carefully with your academic adviser and/or students who are familiar with the course, and choose a balance between demanding and less demanding subjects. If you take too many courses you will get discouraged and perform poorly. It may be better to *drop* (officially know as "*withdraw from*") a course you are having trouble with than it is to get a failing grade. **Note of caution:** You must take a *full-time* course load except in certain special cases. Always consult with an OISS adviser **BEFORE** dropping any courses.

**Understand what is expected.** In other countries teachers may expect students to memorize large quantities of information to know the facts and the views of the scholars and experts. In the U.S. there is an emphasis on being able to think for oneself by bringing together information from many sources and mixing it together in new ways. In other words, Americans generally view the educational process as being active and productive rather than simply the accumulation of knowledge.

**Develop reasoning skills.** In order to develop and defend a position on any subject, it is necessary to be well informed. Open-mindedness is also important in order to understand differing viewpoints and in evaluating the credibility and quality of sources and arguments. Always be questioning and experiment with ideas and designs.

**Have good study habits.** Keep a daily calendar and plan your time wisely. In your study schedule, make sure you keep track of when homework, papers, and projects are due and when exams will be given. You will probably have a lot of reading to do and it is important to keep up with it. Learn to prioritize (and always make time for regular meals, sleep and recreation as well).

**Talk with your teachers and ask questions.** Teachers want to get to know their students, and expect them to interact.

**Avoid Procrastination.** Don't wait to begin working

hard. If you don't start on the first day of classes, you may get behind and have poor overall performance. Keep up with your reading assignments in particular.

**Maintain and Understand Goals.** Keep your G.P.A. (grade point average) as high as possible by treating each class as important. Be consistent and disciplined in your study habits for all classes, not just the ones you like or feel are important.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

Source: *Beyond Language: Cross Cultural Communication*, Levine, Deena R. and Adelman, Mara B., Prentice Hall, 1993.

Trust is an important part of American education, and universities operate by the *honor system*. Everyone is expected to be honest in all areas of his or her academic work. Any violation of this trust can have serious consequences, from failure of a paper, exam or course, to having the violation permanently a part of the student's record to suspension or expulsion from the university. Cheating or plagiarism of any sort is not tolerated in American universities.

**Plagiarism** is submitting other people's work as your own. If you use words written by others, it is important to include a proper citation of the source. If you are planning to publish an article or a book, sometimes you may have to get permission to use the materials. Make sure you are familiar with the correct way to cite sources. Always check with your academic adviser or professor if you are unsure about how and what to cite.

**Cheating** is when you have someone else write your papers, or take-home exams, or you get answers from others during exams. In more collective cultures, students will often work together on homework assignments or papers, where in the U.S. it is expected that each student will do his or her own work. It is also important not to supply another student with work or answers when he or she should be doing his or her own work. Otherwise you could be accused of aiding dishonesty which is considered a violation of the 'honor system'.

Finally, it is important to never give any false information in official documents. In the U.S. falsification of any official documents is a serious offense.

## YOUR ACADEMIC ADVISER

### YOUR UNDERGRADUATE ADVISERS

Undergraduates have a number of advisers that serve both academic and campus life support. Because of the often dual roles of undergraduate advisers, it is impos-



### ON-LINE WRITING SUPPORT

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University is a useful website for writers

[owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)

*Yale University is an academic community dedicated to the advancement of learning. Its members freely associate themselves with the University and in doing so affirm their commitment to a philosophy of tolerance and respect for all members of the community. They pledge to help sustain the intellectual integrity of the University and to uphold its standards of honesty, free expression, and inquiry. They are expected to abide by the regulations of the University.....*

- Graduate School Bulletin, page 455 or [www.yale.edu/graduateschool/academics/policies.html](http://www.yale.edu/graduateschool/academics/policies.html)

Like the Graduate School each school at Yale has its own rules of conduct and discipline.

**Yale College** students will find this information at [www.yale.edu/yale-college/publications/uregs/index.html](http://www.yale.edu/yale-college/publications/uregs/index.html).

Students in other schools should make certain to refer to their school bulletin for information on academic regulations and codes of conduct.

*Honesty is the best policy*

- American saying

sible to discuss one without addressing the other.

Undergraduates will want to get to know their **residential college dean**. The dean is crucial to so many aspects of an undergraduate's college career. He or she also will not seek you out, but is accessible should you need to talk. The dean oversees freshman counseling and faculty advising, and is there to provide support in personal and academic matters. For problems with a specific course, the dean can help you work through it, even talking with your professor if necessary. The dean is also in charge of rooming draws, and handles rooming problems, excuses for missed classes, and more. Consult the dean especially if you find you have any serious problems affecting your life at Yale.

In your freshman year, your **freshman counselor** will be the adviser you consult the most, and play an important role in helping you to get comfortable with life at Yale. Freshman counselors are seniors from your individual college who live in freshman housing along with the freshman class. They've been there before and are well situated to guide you through rough waters as well as provide the information and encouragement you may need. They provide less formal support and advice in personal and academic matters than you will receive from the dean or your academic adviser. They are simply there if you need them, and are not there to discipline you or enforce rules.

One of the formal roles of the freshman counselor is to approve and sign your course schedule, along with your dean and freshman adviser. Freshman counselors also arrange "blue-booking" get-togethers in your first week at Yale (intended to help you choose courses). They are on-call Thursday through Saturday nights, and will take care of you if you become ill or need assistance. Finally, your freshman counselor will not seek you out, or interfere in your life, so don't wait for him or her to come to you. Go when you need advice or help with anything.

Undergraduate students are assigned a **freshman faculty adviser** before coming to Yale. Your freshman adviser will be a faculty member affiliated with your college who is there to review and approve your course schedule. You will see your freshman adviser at least three times, at an introductory dinner, and to approve your schedule each semester. For guidance in course selection, and more in-depth attention, your freshman counselor is the person to consult, and will direct you to the dean if necessary. See the *Yale Freshman Handbook* for a more detailed description of the role of the freshman adviser.

At the end of your freshman year, you will choose an adviser. It is helpful if you know what your major is going to be because eventually you will need to choose an adviser from the department of your major. Shop-

ping around during the 'shopping period' is very helpful for comparing the styles of different professors. You will want to take advantage of this two-week period at the beginning of each semester where you can attend courses freely without being registered. 'Shopping' will be helpful in deciding on courses and may spark an interest in a field never before considered as a major; attend courses within your intended major, or within areas of interest.

Read the suggestions below, which have been given by Yale graduate students, for other considerations in choosing your adviser. Remember that the adviser you eventually choose from the department of your major will be one of the two people who read and evaluate your senior essay. While aimed towards graduate students, you will also find some helpful suggestions on maintaining a good relationship with your adviser.

## YOUR GRADUATE ADVISER

For graduate and professional students, the role of the adviser is somewhat different, and the details about when you have to choose your adviser and how to change advisers vary from department to department. Generally, your adviser not only helps guide you in choosing your courses, but also oversees your graduate work. If you are pursuing a Ph.D., he or she will supervise your research, serve on your various evaluation committees, and approve your dissertation topic. Here is some helpful information and advice given by international graduate students at Yale:

**Choosing your adviser.** Your department will offer a 'shopping period', which can last up to two years, before you choose your adviser. This will vary from department to department.

**Talk with experienced students and observe classes.** Get a sense of the working styles and personalities of the professors whom you are considering to be your adviser. As one student said, "It's like a small marriage. You want to gather as much information as possible before you choose."

**Arrange a meeting with a prospective adviser.** Prepare your ideas, and arrange a meeting to discuss your study plans with a prospective adviser. This will help you understand the viability of a possible long-term relationship.

**Be flexible.** Don't discount the possibility of choosing an adviser who seems to have research interests that don't match your own. It could still be a good fit. Professors (and especially senior faculty) have broad knowledge in their chosen field.

**Take initiative.** Your adviser is usually very busy, and

*I guess your adviser is the key person of your life [in graduate school] at Yale.*

- Graduate Student from China

*I have a friend [an international student] who had a very good relationship with her adviser at the beginning, but as time went on, she felt it became harder and harder to manage the relationship with her adviser. One reason is that my friend after having read an interesting article or gotten a good idea, always liked to report her ideas to her adviser. At first, her adviser liked her quick thinking and enthusiasm, but became more and more impatient with my friend's lack of skills or experience with developing a realistic project. The worst thing is that this adviser keeps turning down my friend's ideas, which makes her very upset. My point is that there are some "do's and don'ts" we should first know about on how to work with American professors.*

- Student from China

**MORE ACADEMIC ADVICE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS**

**Read in advance.** If you know what the lecture will be about, pre-read the material. This way you will be familiar with the language and concepts to be covered. Preparation will significantly improve your comprehension.

**Review.** Go over your notes as soon as the class is over. Fill in any information that is missing, and make sure everything makes sense while it is still fresh in your mind. If you think you missed something, ask a classmate at the next class or ask the professor.

**Develop good note-taking skills.** Most professors will lecture on the most important points of the course. Good notes can help you immensely in studying for your exams. You may wish to record the lectures on a small recording device. *Never tape the lecture without prior permission from the instructor.*

**Plan your study time.** For every hour of class time, *undergraduate* students can estimate about two hours of study, and *graduate* students can estimate about three hours for every hour of class time.

**Get help immediately if necessary.** If you find yourself feeling too pressured by assignments, and you are unable to keep up, you should discuss your problem with your professor, teaching assistant or academic adviser. **Don't wait to talk to someone if you are having academic problems.**

**Sit in the front of the class.** It will help you focus on the lecture, and it sends a non-verbal message to the instructor that you are motivated and interested.

will most likely not come to you to ask how you are doing. You should be proactive in your work, and take the opportunity to talk with your adviser whenever possible. He or she wants to help you with your academic problems. It is important to ask questions if you feel you need answers in order to proceed with your work.

**Don't be too needy.** Keep a certain level of independence in your work. Don't ask questions about everything. Work to answer what you can on your own, and make sure that when you do approach your adviser with questions, you have thought them out carefully. In developing a good relationship, it will take time to understand the exact balance between autonomy and dependence.

**Keep track of deadlines.** Don't expect your adviser to remind you of deadlines for papers, exams or any aspect of your work. You are expected to take responsibility and ask questions if you are unclear about when something is due.

**Take charge, and don't be afraid to disagree.** Be responsible for your own studies. "Self-activation" is the way one graduate student described it. In the U.S. there is an emphasis on thinking for oneself, not on memorizing facts. Show that you are thinking by not being afraid to argue or criticize (as long as you can justify your position with facts and reason).

**Always prepare for meetings.** Prepare and write out your ideas before meeting with your adviser. You should make sure you can clearly explain your ideas. Be ready to justify and defend everything.

**Gifts don't mean special treatment.** A gift for your adviser is a warm gesture, and a nice symbol of appreciation. However, a gift does not mean special treatment. As informal as Americans can seem, it is said, "Never mix business with pleasure." Giving gifts or becoming friendly with your adviser outside of an academic setting does not mean that you will be afforded any extra considerations.

**Informality.** Your adviser may insist that you call him or her by the first name. This is usual in American culture and does not signify a close personal relationship. Even within a professional or academic setting the use of first names between subordinates and their superiors is normal. If you are uncertain as to whether or not to call your adviser by his or her first name, it is better to err on the side of formality and address your adviser as "Professor So-and-so (insert last name)", and only use first names when instructed to. You can also ask, "How do you prefer to be called?" if you are uncertain.

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**Cumulative exam** - An exam that covers all the material in the course from the beginning to the time of the exam.

**Essay exam** - An exam you have to write long (1 page or more) answers for. The questions generally have a comprehension (i.e. What facts do you know?) and an opinion part (What do you think about the facts as you know them?). You are often asked to consider both parts but write one complete essay.

**Fill-in-the-blanks** - Describes a type of test or exercise where you have to complete sentences or information by writing the answers in blanks. Sometimes described as 'completion' exercises.

**Final exam** - The last exam in the semester. It is very important as it is normally used to assess your progress for the entire semester and should count for a substantial percentage of your total grade. The content and format of the exam are decided by the instructor.

**G.P.A. - Grade Point Average** - An average of all your course grades. A=4.0, B=3.0, C=2.0, D=1.09, and F=0.0

**Grading on a curve** - Grades are based on a normal distribution curve.

**Handout** - Is printed information your teacher gives you in class. Generally an 8½" X 11" copy or printout.

**Incomplete** - A grade that is given when you have not completed all of your work. It is always pre-arranged with your professor, and will automatically become a failing grade if all incomplete work is not completed within a prearranged timeframe.

**Independent project** — An individual research or study project which has been approved by the faculty member who has agreed to supervise the project. All courses of investigation must be pre-approved.

**Internship** - To be working in your field in a learning/practice capacity. Often internships are unpaid.

**Matching** - A type of exercise or exam where you have to find the elements that match or complement one another as in matching a word with a definition.

**Mid-term** - An important exam approximately halfway through the semester that normally accounts for a high proportion of your grade. It often covers all the material studied from the beginning of the semester. Its content and format is decided by the instructor.

**Multiple choice** - A type of test or academic exercise where you have to choose the correct answer out of three to five possibilities.

**Open-book** - An 'open-book test' is when you may refer to your text and often your notes as well during an exam.

**Pass/fail** - A non-letter grade which relieves the student of the pressure to receive the highest grade possible in the class.

**Prerequisite** - A course that must be taken before another course.



### HELPFUL BOOKS ON ACADEMIC ISSUES IN THE US

Badke, William B.; *Beyond the Answer Sheet: Academic Success for International Students*. iUniverse, Inc. Lincoln, NE 2003. [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com)

Sarkisian, Ellen; *Teaching American Students: A Guide for International Faculty and Teaching Assistants in College and Universities*. Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. 1990, 1997, 2000 and 2006 [bokcenter.harvard.edu](http://bokcenter.harvard.edu)

**Quiz** - A short test to assess specific points of progress. Usually counts for a small percentage of your final grade.

**Seminar** - Generally refers when a group of people meet to study or discuss something with an expert.

**Short answer** - This is a test format where you have to write short answers to questions - usually one or two sentences.

**Special Investigation** - An individual research or study project which has been approved by the faculty member who has agreed to supervise the project. All courses of investigation must be pre-approved, and an abstract will be submitted to the director of graduate studies for approval.

**Supplementary textbook** - Not a required text book, but it is recommended that you read it to enhance your studies in that course.

**Syllabus** - This is a plan for the course that generally includes information on how and when to best reach the instructor, grading structure, and general information about tests, policies, etc.

**Take-home test** - A test that you write at home. It is given to you on the 'honor system' which means that it is expected that you will treat it like a test and do your own work. You may of course refer to other sources in the writing of the test

**Teaching fellow or teaching assistant** - This is a graduate student who assists a professor in a particular course. The role of the teaching assistant can vary depending upon the department- from grading papers and leading discussion sections to actually lecturing. Check with your department for details.

**Term Paper** - A final paper which is usually researched. It should demonstrate the assimilation of everything you have studied from the beginning of the semester.

**Withdrawal** - The process of dropping a course from your schedule. You receive no letter grade, and a withdrawal does not affect your G.P.A.

**Workshop** - A group meeting for the purpose of learning something through active involvement.

## SELECTED RESOURCES

*Researching a Topic in Four Easy Steps* - [www.library.yale.edu/instruction/topic.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/instruction/topic.html)

*Style Manuals and Guides to Citing OnLine Documents*  
- [resources.library.yale.edu/online/viewassets.asp?whatcaseedit=Style\\_Manuals](http://resources.library.yale.edu/online/viewassets.asp?whatcaseedit=Style_Manuals)

*Creating Bibliographies and Managing Citations* - [www.library.yale.edu/cite/](http://www.library.yale.edu/cite/)

The Yale University Library offers a number of workshops and self-guided tutorials on academic research. [www.library.yale.edu/instruction](http://www.library.yale.edu/instruction)

*Academic Integrity - MIT Website*  
[web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/originalwork.html](http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/originalwork.html)