

Help your students develop their intercultural competency skills

No matter what careers they plan to go into, your students will benefit from developing greater self-awareness and a greater capacity for understanding others. UNESCO describes “learning to live together (being able to understand cultural Others)” as one of the four pillars of education.¹ You can help students do this by building intercultural competency goals into your class that will increase their awareness and understanding of other cultures, develop their critical thinking, and develop an appreciation for other points of view. Here are some tips:

- Think about yourself as a cultural being. How has your background shaped who you are, your values and beliefs? Knowing yourself is the first step to understanding others as cultural beings. How can you help your students to develop this self-awareness?
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own cultural and disciplinary identities. In your discipline, what does intercultural learning mean? What are the benefits and challenges?
- Help students learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Encourage them to ask respectful questions when they don’t understand that demonstrate their willingness to learn about a new culture. Learning how to embrace ambiguity is a critical skill in developing one’s intercultural competence. Help them understand that everyone commits errors when learning about a new culture, but they should do their best to be self-aware, learn from their mistakes and apologize if they’ve offended someone. Avoid stereotypes and recognize the limitations of generalizations (and help your students learn to do the same).
- Provide opportunities and incentives (such as extra credit) for students to attend lectures on current political and social issues or participate in cultural workshops. They can find events happening on campus by [subscribing to the Global Awareness Program weekly newsletter](#).
- Require students to integrate ideas or information from various sources (including primary sources that feature a different cultural perspective) or construct concepts from ideas learned in different courses, synthesize and organize ideas, and connect class readings with out-of-class experiences.
- The [Mindful Reflection Protocol](#) is a useful tool to help with intercultural communication. We often respond to unfamiliar situations by projecting our judgments onto what we think is happening. By first observing and withholding our reactions, we stay in the moment.
 - **Describe:** What is the person doing or saying?
 - **Interpret or Analyze:** Why is this happening?
 - **Evaluate:** How do I feel about it?

Further Reading

Dimitrov, N., & Haque, A. (2016). Intercultural teaching competence: a multidisciplinary model for instructor reflection. *Intercultural Education*. <https://bit.ly/ICCteaching>

Sanderson, G. (2008). A foundation for the internationalization of the academic self. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 23:3. <https://bit.ly/ICCacademicself>

¹ International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (1996), pp. 22-24.