

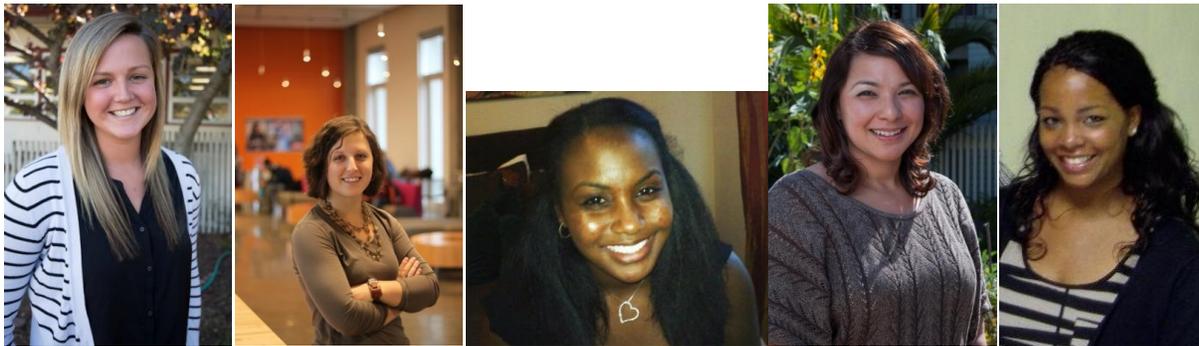
Saudi Arabian Culture: A Training for Peer Mentors

Intercultural Training Workshop

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INTRODUCTION

This workshop will be offered to students at a large state university in Texas. These students will be working as peer mentors and communication partners with incoming Saudi Arabian international students. The students who participate in this workshop will be able to better communicate and assist their international partners in their transition and adaptation process into a new culture. In order to succeed in this process, the students themselves must explore their own culture as well as Saudi Arabian culture.

The purpose of this workshop is to provide students with the knowledge of Saudi Arabian culture as well as the necessary cultural competence to work efficiently in a global world. Culture is so much more than what is on the surface. During this workshop we will delve deeper into the understanding of culture using creative and informative sources. We will conduct lively discussions, play games, and utilize relevant film clips to best convey the importance of cultural competency.

From this workshop, participants will develop skills to better analyze cultural approaches to time, emotion, power, decision-making, verbal communication and non-verbal gestures. Culture significantly impacts our ability to communicate efficiently. Miscommunications whether verbal or non-verbal, commonly occur due to a lack of true understanding and acceptance of cultural practices that don't align with our own cultural norms. Through the leadership of a highly trained professional staff of international advisors to Saudi Arabian exchange students, participants will have gained essential skills to interact with Saudi Arabian students in an insightful and non-judgmental manner.

ACTIVITY ONE: THE LANGUAGE GAME

This activity begins by one presenter asking the class to get out a pen and paper. Then the presenter abruptly begins speaking in a foreign language, preferably a language that most of the audience does not speak or have experience with.

1. The presenter (in the foreign language) asks the group to number their paper from one to five.
2. The presenter then tells them what to write in each line; their name, their age, their hometown, etc., all while speaking in a foreign language.

After this has been completed, the group is asked to reflect on their experience:

1. What was that experience like?
2. Were able to follow along?
3. Did you feel overwhelmed? Confused? Frustrated?

The object of the language game is to help the group of Peer Mentors empathize with the Saudi Arabian students they will soon be working with. It is important to point out after this activity that how they just felt is what many newly arrived students may be feeling.

ACTIVITY TWO: MINEFIELD

Minefield is the next game, and the instructions for setup and game play are below:

PROPS AND SET UP:

Several sections of game ropes, lots of objects of various shape and size, 4 cones and blindfolds. Mark the boundaries of the minefield using two game ropes (or one if it is long enough). Average minefields are amoeba shaped about 2m wide by 8m long. Use 2 cones to mark the entrance and 2 cones to mark the exit (usually a narrow section at either of the long ends). Deposit the objects haphazardly within the boundary ropes; these are the obstacles.

FRAMING/TASK: Each group member must navigate the minefield without sight. Outside group members are encouraged to guide their peers through the minefield.

RULES:

- Each participant may only enter the minefield once
- If a group member touches an obstacle in the minefield (including the boundaries) they become frozen
- To become “un-frozen” the frozen individual must be touched by another person in the minefield
- If two people are connected when an object is touched, both participants are frozen

INDIVIDUAL, GROUP AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:

- No running or jumping while in the minefield or blindfolded
- Keep this activity in the shade on hot days as it has the potential to take a significant amount of time.

VARIATIONS:

- A time limit can be imposed on the group
- A dividing rope can be used to split the minefield in two. Participants who have not completed the minefield can only go up to the divider, and participants who have completed the minefield can only go back to the divider.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

- How comfortable were you being a leader/guide?
- How comfortable were you being lead?
- When have you been in a situation in which you had to lead someone or were lead through something you didn't know much about?
- What helped you through the minefield?
- How can you use what helped you here when it comes to leading someone else?

After a large group discussion, break the group up into pairs in order for them to discuss the relevancy of the activity to their Peer Mentoring program. The debrief of this activity must be thorough in order for the audience to fully connect the ideas to their program.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

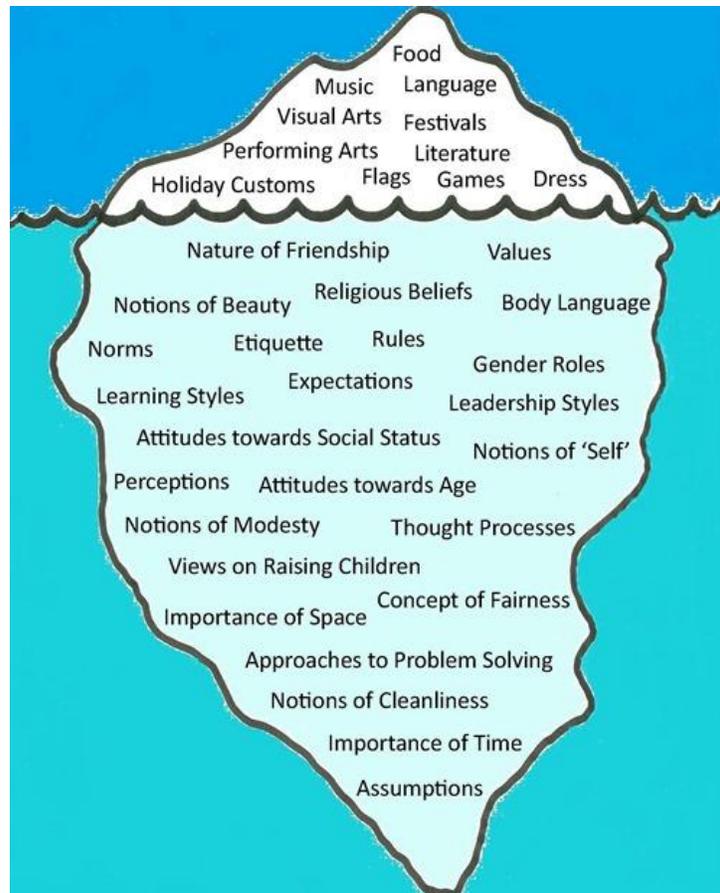
Culture can be thought of as the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and the arts. Culture in other words is a system of knowledge that structures perceptions and shapes behaviors. From the moment we are born we begin to form an identity, a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that begins with the family. Much of our identity and our actions have been taught to us by the outside (school, neighbor, religion, family, etc.). These outside influences stem from particular

cultures, which have their own set of rules and traditions. Today, there is not just one culture that makes up an individual. Culture is multilevel. Political groups, professions, religion, ethnicity and social groups are cultures within themselves which contribute to a person's individual identity.

Culture can also be looked at as something dynamic and active. Through time an individual culture can form a new culture. Interactions with others, migration, climate and even war, can make culture mobile. When one culture moves into another culture, both cultures may experience major challenges to adapt to one another. Understanding another culture can serve as a protective mechanism for an individual who is moving from one culture into another. For most, culture is looked at by its outside attributes. Food, clothes, religion, gender, age and ethnicity are attributes that are visual to the eyes. Culture goes further beyond what the eye can see.

ICEBERG MODEL

Icebergs are pieces of ice found in oceans that range from the size of a car up to the size of a large mountain. To facilitate a discussion, culture can be compared to an Iceberg because only a small portion of the iceberg can be seen above the water. What is visual in culture is greatly influenced by culture aspects below the water for example, religious beliefs influence holiday customs and notions of beauty influence the arts. Understanding how culture works can help someone understand and adjust to a new culture, which is an important concept for our peer mentors.



CROSSING BORDERS DOCUMENTARY:

Crossing Borders is a seventy-minute documentary that follows four Moroccan and four American university students as they travel together through Morocco. The relationships formed through shared experiences contrast sharply with the media-shaped views Americans and Muslims have of each other. The clip chosen from this video was a scene in which the Moroccan students are having a heated discussion about life in Morocco. After the discussion, the American students explain how uncomfortable they felt hearing the Moroccan students deny each other. Debrief for this clip is on cultural interactions. Have students discuss their reactions to the clip and how they would react to a situation similar.

LEWIS MODEL

The Lewis Model of Culture divides cultures into three types:

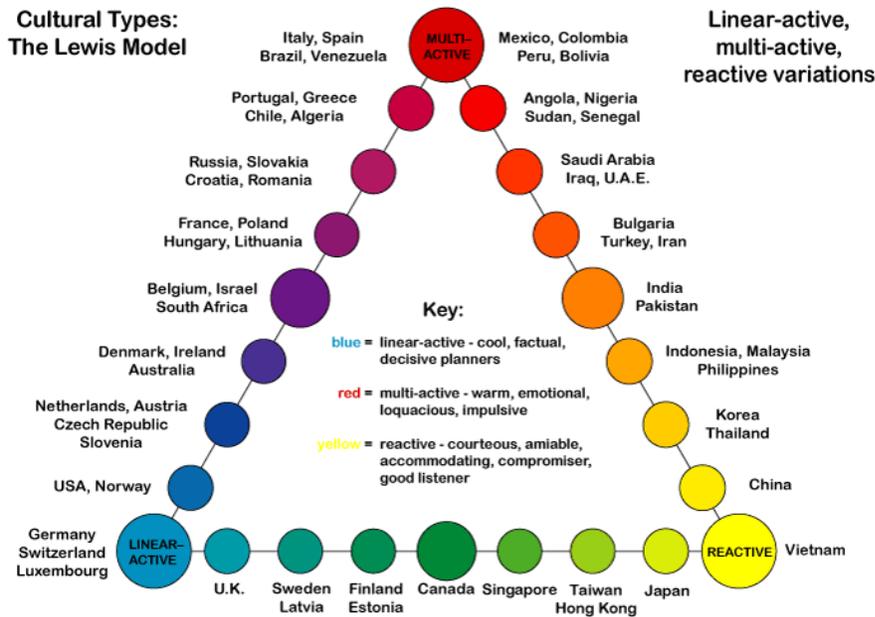
Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Reactive. Linear Active cultures are detail and job oriented, very direct and planners (i.e. Germany). Multi-Active cultures are relationship-oriented cultures that react out of feelings not facts (i.e. Mexico). Reactive cultures are people oriented, very polite and indirect and value in personal contact (i.e. Vietnam).

Linear-Active	Multi-Active	Reactive
Talks half of the time	Talks most of the time	Listens most of the time
Does one thing at the time	Does several things at once	Reacts to partner's action
Plans ahead step by step	Plans grand outline only	Looks at general principles
Polite but direct	Emotional	Polite, indirect
Confronts with logic	Confronts emotionally	Never confronts
Job-oriented	People-oriented	Very people-oriented
Sticks to facts	Feelings before facts	Statements are promises
Result-oriented	Relationship-oriented	Harmony-oriented
Sticks to agenda	Roams back and forth	Often asks for "repeats"
Written word important	Spoken word important	Face-to-face contact important
Restrained body language	Unrestrained body language	Subtle body language

This model will be used to aid in the introduction to culture and the multiple elements of culture in general. After the model has been shown, presenters should ask students to guess where the US falls and where Saudi Arabia falls on the scale.

The presenters should then show the model and where countries fall on the chart. Explain that these are things to keep in mind when working with Saudi students. Saudi students are more general in their planning, very emotional in their decisions and truly value relationships. The training should provide time here for students to discuss other aspects that will be important when working with Saudi students. Next, have students share what they know about Saudi Arabian culture, any beliefs, stereotypes, etc. This is important to identify so that students can be

aware of any pre-conceived ideas they may be holding surrounding Saudi Arabian culture and Saudi students.



SAUDI ARABIAN CULTURE

To introduce the topic of Saudi culture, the presentation will include a Poll Everywhere poll at this point in order to ask the students how they identify themselves; as a member of a community or as an individual. After the above points and discussion, a Poll Everywhere question can be built into the presentation.

After an explanation of culture and cultural aspects through the iceberg and the Lewis Model, the training should move more specifically into Saudi Arabian culture. This will be a brief overview of the foundations of Saudi culture, history, traditions and norms. In this section it is important to point to the following pieces:

- Islam as a foundation of Saudi culture and tradition - Islam is the state religion and the majority of Saudis are practicing Muslims.

- House of Islam and the Uma (Islamic community) - The Islamic community is important to all Muslims, including Saudis. This creates a larger focus on the community instead of the individual.
- Role of Bedouin tribes in Saudi Arabia's history - Tribal history also plays a large role in present day Saudi culture. These historical tribes had to depend on each other in order to survive the harsh environment.
- The role of Wasta (or connections) - Wasta is an important aspect of Arab culture. This refers to the connection or link that a person has with a friend or colleague. Wasta is often used as a method for one to achieve their goals.

An amount of time should be given to the audience for discussion and questions surrounding these elements of culture.

ROLE PLAY: GREETING

One of the most noticeably different aspects of Saudi Arabian culture in comparison to American culture is in greetings. The instructor should first give a poll to see how students most commonly greet each other in the United States. The instructor will then discuss these results by using the students to role-play an introduction between a Saudi and an American. Two volunteer students (a man and a woman) will be given index cards with instructions on the back. The male student will be playing an American and the female student will play a Saudi. The instructions should tell the American student to approach the Saudi student, introduce himself, and hold out his hand to shake hers. The female student should respond by also introducing herself, putting her hand over her heart and politely nodding. The instructor should then explain that in Saudi Arabian culture men and women do not touch unless they are family. The way a woman respectfully declines a handshake is by placing her hand over her heart. The instructor should

then explain that it is common for men to greet each other by kissing on the cheek. Women also greet each other in a similar fashion by hugging and kissing on the cheek. Prior knowledge of Saudi Arabian greetings will eliminate possible uncomfortable encounters in the future.

ROLEPLAY: TIME

The understanding of social differences is important when comparing cultures especially when comprehending the concept of time. This concept is very different for American and Saudi Arabian cultures. To be able to illustrate these differences, the training includes a skit and poll about the concept of time. The poll question asks “Is it important to be on time in your Home Country?” The skit will be used to conceptualize the idea of time for American and Saudi Arabian culture. In the skit, two students (American & Saudi Arabian) set up a meeting time and agree to meet at 1pm. The American student shows up at the exact time of the scheduled meeting. The Saudi Arabian student shows up 20 minutes late for their meeting. The poll and skit are important ways to illustrate the differences of the concept of time between American and Saudi Arabian culture. Most Americans find that being on time for appointments or meetings is customary. Americans find time as segmented into precise units. In the U.S. time is arranged, scheduled and managed. Saudi Arabian culture does not have the same value towards the concept of time. Most Saudis will not be on time to appointments or meetings and sometimes may not even show up altogether. It is important to point out that the lack of concept of time is not because they do not value meeting or appointments. In Saudi Arabia time is viewed as shared and they respect the natural cycle of things. They have a very flexible concept of time and can easily change plans and activities. Time is not an issue in Saudi Arabian Culture.

ROLEPLAY: FRIENDSHIP

Another skit can be used to illustrate the differences in Saudi Arabian and American culture called “Holding Hands”. In this skit presenters call for two male peer mentors to hold hands. The concept of two men holding hands is not customary in U.S. culture unless they are engaged in a romantic relationship. This is not the case in Saudi Arabian culture. This is also illustrated with the image attached in our power point presentation. This image is of former President George Bush and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia holding hands while the Crown Prince was visiting the United States.



Affection among men is common in Arab culture and does not have a sexual connotation. The concept of men holding hands is a way of demonstrating warm affection. It’s a sign of solidarity and kinship. It is also meant to reflect amity, devotion, and equality of status. The fact that former President George Bush and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia were holding hands is also representative of their long friendship and the ties shared between their families. It is important to note that this gesture would not be done with a complete stranger. This skit is important to include in order for our American peer mentors to have a better understanding of the differences in cultural norms.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion our training session was to prepare American peer mentors for working with Saudi Arabian International students who will be studying at a Texan university. This session was designed to help breakdown cultural stereotypes. It was geared to provide our peer mentors with a further understanding of Saudi Arabian culture. There are distinct differences between Saudi Arabian and American cultural norms. The idea of culture is described to be similar to an iceberg. The iceberg model was used to articulate the aspects of culture which are above the surface, otherwise known as the observable behaviors. Yet there are many characteristics of culture that are underneath the surface. The behaviors that are above the surface only account for a small aspect of culture. The aspects of culture below the surface affect the characteristics of culture that are above the surface. Saudi Arabian culture is considered to be a collectivist society. They identify themselves as being part of a group; family is the center of their culture. Americans are more of an individualist society. They identify with themselves, putting their needs as an individual first before the group. The Crossing Borders video was used to demonstrate how Saudi and American cultures differ in small group environments. We used the Lewis Model to articulate these differences in culture. Saudi Arabians will be more direct in expressing their opinions about situations and issues. Their tendency is to express with emotion. While Americans will be polite with their expression of opinions about situations or issues, yet be direct at the same time. Their tendency is to confront situations with logic. The concepts of Uma, House of Islam, Wasta, and tribes are important in Saudi culture. We also included other important aspects of Saudi culture such as greetings, concept time and friendship. Women in Saudi Arabian culture are revered, honored and protected; therefore a woman will not greet a man of a different culture with a hand shake.

Saudis also do not view time as segmented, therefore the concept of time is not arranged or structured. It is common for Saudi Arabian men to hold hands. This is a way to express a strong friendship but also equality of status. Providing our peer mentors with these tools is essential in their comprehension and interaction with the new Saudi Arabian students. Since American and Saudi cultures have several differences, understanding these characteristics will help prevent misunderstandings. This will also be helpful for our peer mentors in assisting the Saudi Arabian students with their acclimation to U.S. culture while studying in the United States.

APPENDIX

*Poll Everywhere:

Polleverywhere.com. This program is a text-to-answer program where participants use their mobile phones to text in an answer to a question. The results can be seen instantly via PowerPoint.