Definitions

Culture: refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups.

Cultural Competence: The integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific and congruent behaviors, attitudes, policies, and practices used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes.

Cultural Pluralism: Recognition of the contribution of each group to the common civilization. It encourages the maintenance and development of different life styles, languages and convictions. It is a commitment to deal cooperatively with common concerns. It strives to create the conditions of harmony and respect within a culturally diverse society.

Improving Cultural Capacity: Authentic multicultural understanding results from honestly recognizing and confronting the sociopolitical realities that impact the lived experiences of all people. Becoming aware of one’s own biases as well as recognizing sociopolitical issues such as oppression, racism, power and privilege, function as initial strategies that naturally lead into the cultural competence sequence. Source: Stith-Williams, V. & Haynes, P. (2007). A resource manual for developing cultural competence.

Cultural Competence: The Next Step

Why is it important? Cultural competency provides an effective avenue in closing the disparities gap between communities. It’s the way people can come together and talk about concerns without cultural differences hindering the conversation, but enhancing it. Quite simply, programs and services that are respectful of and responsive to the cultural beliefs, practices and norms of diverse individuals can help bring about positive outcomes.

The Four Major Components to Cultural Competence:

1. **Awareness**: It is important to examine diversity-related values and beliefs in order to recognize any deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes that can create barriers for learning and personal development. Many of us have blind spots when it comes to our beliefs and values; diversity education can be useful for uncovering them.
2. **Attitude**: Values and beliefs impact cross-cultural effectiveness because they convey the extent to which we are open to differing views and opinions. The stronger we feel about our beliefs and values, the more likely we will react emotionally when they collide with cultural differences. For example, people of color and white Americans tend to have different values and beliefs about diversity and equality; the differences are, in part, the result of uniquely different exposure to oppression and discrimination.
3. **Knowledge**: The more knowledge we have about people of different cultures, the more likely we are able to avoid stepping on cross-cultural toes. Knowing how culture impacts problem solving, managing people, asking for help, etc. can keep us connected in cross-cultural interactions.
4. **Skills**: One can have the “right” attitude, considerable self-awareness, and a lot of knowledge about cultural differences, yet still lack the ability to effectively manage differences. If we have not learned skills or have had little opportunity to practice, our knowledge and awareness are insufficient to avoid and manage cross-cultural landmines. Adapted from Pedersen’s Conceptual Framework for Developing Cultural and Cross-Cultural Competence (1994).
Cultural competence enables people to work more effectively in culturally diverse environments.

Cultural Competence offers:

For Groups & Organizations:

- A culturally diverse staff that reflects the communities served
- Culturally appropriate and sensitized trainings that are more inclusive
- Service and practices that are reflected consistently and in culturally specific & responsive settings
- Inclusive policies and procedures
- Fairness in retention, recognition, & promotion
- Affinity groups

Cultural competence reduces inequities in promotion, retention, service delivery, and organizational risks. Increasing cultural competence supports a productive, collegial workplace, which provides both opportunities for deepening dialogue and a more competitive, innovative environment.

For Individuals:

- Individuals who have a broader and deeper cultural knowledge base
- Increased cross-cultural skills including knowledge about cross-cultural differences & communication norms
- An ability to recover from inevitable cultural collisions
- Inclusive decision-making
- Diversity management skills
- Inclusive beliefs and values
- Awareness of personal biases and impacts
- Leadership commitment

Recognizing and Responding to Power and Privilege as a Form of Cultural Competency

Cultural competency also examines the function of power and powerlessness when individuals from different racial and cultural groups interact. Members of dominant cultural groups wield power, both individually and institutionally, and influence both as members of an esteemed group and as authority figures. In striking contrast, those from subordinated groups may feel powerless, vulnerable, or devalued. Ethical practice requires that individuals remain cognizant of power dynamics both in the micro and macro levels and work to consciously eliminate the arrangements that jeopardize student learning (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Power is a sociopolitical process that effects change and wields influence over others, especially in a manner that diminishes one’s own sense of personhood (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Privilege grants a set of benefits and system rewards to one group while simultaneously excluding other groups from accessing these advantages (McIntosh, 1989).

For more information about building personal capacity or for more resources, contact Leslie Wong, Center for Multicultural Affairs, or via email at Leslie.Wong@colorado.edu

Educators have a responsibility toward ethical practice that can be achieved by engaging in an:

**Ethic of Critique**
- Identifying systemic problems in structures

**Ethic of Justice**
- Rectifying structural inequalities

**Ethic of Care**
- Rectifying structural inequalities with compassion & an obligation toward the proper education of all