Cross-Cultural Issues

Class Activity/Assignment

Assign a question or two below to each of the students in your group or course. Ask them to research the concept or theme of the question and prepare a short presentation to share with the full group. These short presentations could be done during one session or spread throughout the quarter.

Use as discussion starters and opportunities to dive further into exploring cultural norms and values, as well as differences among the culture you will be visiting and your own culture.

Sample Questions:

- What are the conventional rules of politeness and decency? (e.g., how do you greet a stranger the first time you meet?)

- What are the rules of body language? (e.g., how far do people stand from one another when talking?; do they make eye contact?; what gestures are considered rude?)

- What is appropriate regarding dress? (e.g., are bared arms or legs considered improper, for either men or women?)

- What are assumptions about cross-gender behavior? (e.g., is it appropriate to shake hands with someone of the opposite gender?)

- What are assumptions about treatment of elders? (e.g., are there distinct ways of greeting someone older than you and someone younger?)

- What are attitudes towards time? (e.g., is punctuality expected?)

- How are decisions typically made? (e.g., do individuals make decisions on their own, or only after consultation with associates or the family?; who typically makes decisions in a family?)

- What emotions is it appropriate to express in public? How are they expressed?

- How do you call for attention in a store or restaurant? Is waiting in line expected?

- How do you express disagreement? Is it expressed openly? Is frankness valued more than saving face, or vice versa?

- Are there particular cultural blunders to avoid? (e.g., eating with the left hand or removing your shoes before entering a home)

(Questions adapted from The Humanitarian Companion, John H. Ehrenriech)