



Final Project: Cultural Immersion

Cultural Competence is an essential aspect of counselor training. In order to begin to understand a culture, it is essential to have sustained interaction with the culture. For the final project for this course, each student will be responsible for actively investigating multicultural issues in the “real world,” by gradually immersing in a culture different from their own. The immersion project will involve experiential learning about other cultures. The intent is to increase your knowledge and sensitivity to other cultures.

In order to complete this project successfully, you will need to work on it throughout the entire course. As part of the project, each of you will select a culture different from your own and participate in at least three distinct cultural immersion experiences/observations within that culture. The idea is to gradually immerse into the different culture over the course of the term. You may use the list of suggestions below to guide your immersion process or you can devise some ideas of your own. It is essential that each experience is qualitatively different from that of your own culture and that the experiences gradually become more involved directly with the culture of choice.

1. The activities you select must include active involvement in the culture/activity. In other words, you may “observe” the culture but you may not limit the activity to passive observation. Make sure that each activity involves interaction with members of the culture, either through active participation in the activity itself or through conversations with members of the culture. Of course your third activity, the personal dialogue, already requires your active participation.
2. Submit a written narrative of your immersion activities. The paper will be 8-10 pages long (typed, double-spaced, 12 point font), This paper must include the following elements:
 - **Identification and Description of Population:** This section must clearly identify the population you will be studying, how this population is different from you, and what your perceptions of this group are at this point in life. The description of differences should include both the obvious (visible differences, etc.) and the not so obvious (religious beliefs, sexual orientation, etc.). Please state all the differences you can identify. Your perceptions of this group should include information such as what you were told about this group as you were growing up, any beliefs/perceptions/assumptions you have about this group, what your sources of information about this group have been in the past, and why you have an interest in this group. In this section, you must make a case for how this person is different from you and why this experience will be challenging for you.
 - **Observation:** You will need to complete at least two observational activities of the group you have chosen to study. Examples and suggestions of observational activities are listed below. If you are having trouble finding an observational activity, it may be helpful to contact a group related to this population and gather information about their upcoming activities. Please note: You are required to do this experience without inviting along a



member of your family or regular social group. The purpose is to challenge yourself to have appropriate interaction with a different culture.

- **Personal Dialogue:** You will need to gather information about the lived experience of a person from your selected population. You will gather this information through a dialogue with someone from your selected population. This assignment is called a dialogue rather than an interview because it is not simply a one-sided gathering of information. The dialogue should be a two-sided conversation that results in the exchange of information about cultural experience. This dialogue can happen over time or in a one-time sitting, but you must decide which way you will do it for this assignment. A list of questions that should help to guide your dialogue is included in this document.
- **Create a presentation of your immersion experience and include it as part of your submission.** Demonstrate your interaction on at least 3 levels: from a distance, from immediate proximity, from total immersion. You are encouraged to be creative with PowerPoint or presentation software of your choice. Include pictures, music, art, clothing, or any appropriate medium that will help you share your cultural experience with your fellow students. The idea is for you to create something that gives the viewer a firsthand view of the cultural experience as vividly as possible. If you video, record, or take pictures be sure you get a signed release to use them for class. The release form is included in the course resources.

Suggested activities for the observation component of your immersion project:

- Attend worship services (e.g., a Black church, a synagogue, a mosque)
- Visit an art gallery, museum, or historical site (e.g., Indian Temple Mound Museum)
- Attend a music or dance presentation (e.g., African American dance, Japanese tea ceremony)
- Visit a gay bar, pride event, or gay/lesbian/bisexual organization meeting (e.g., Gay Pride Parade, Gay Straight Alliance, Community Cultural Events)
- Visit a mission or shelter
- Visit a cultural organization or association (e.g., NAACP, Image de Pensacola, National Organization for Women, Pensacola Jewish Federation)
- Attend a cultural food festival
- Spend some hours in the local Department of Health waiting room
- Attend a culturally specific play or community event

IMMERSION DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

The following are questions that can be used to guide your cultural dialogue. While you will want to obtain information about all of these questions, keep in mind that it should be more of a *dialogue* than an interview.

Suggested Cultural Immersion Questions:

1. Describe a typical family composition within your culture (size, relationships among relatives).



2. What are the authority structure and the roles of family members in this culture?
3. What is the nature of male/female relationships within this culture?
4. How are the elderly perceived?
5. What are the attitudes toward marriage and family life?
6. How are children viewed in this culture? Their roles?
7. What are the common attitudes toward work and career? Is there a pattern to career choices?
8. What are prevalent attitudes toward education?
9. What role does religion play in the culture?
10. What are the intergenerational issues of families in this culture?
11. Discuss adjustments to living in the U.S. and differences for 1st, 2nd and subsequent generations.
12. What are the cultural strengths for coping and adjusting in the past? In the present?
13. How are conflicts and disagreements resolved between members of the culture?
14. What other cultural groups are least & most respected? Why?
15. What thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and/or values are most important to this culture?
16. What historical dates, beliefs, attitudes are most important in this culture?
17. Are bi-ethnic, biracial, bi-religious marriages/partnerships common? How are such relationships viewed?
18. Is there another culture that they always seem to have difficult with? What is the nature of the difficulty?
19. Are there ways this culture is discriminated against? What ways? Have they had such experiences?
20. How does this culture group define success?

Questions about the individual with respect to their own culture:

1. How do you align with the traditions and expectations of your culture?
2. Are there cultural expectations you would rather do without?
3. What are the strengths in your culture that you would not give up?

Questions adapted, in part from: McGrath, J.A. & Axelson, P. (1993). *Assessing Awareness & Developing Knowledge: Foundations for Skills in a Multicultural Society*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

GUIDE TO IMMERSION PAPER

This **8-10 page paper** will be a culmination of what you have experienced and learned throughout the time spent on this project. Be sure to include the following elements:

1. **Identification and Description of Population:** This section must clearly identify the population you will be studying and should be 1-2 pages long. Discuss how this population is different from you, and what your perceptions of this group are at this point in life. The description of differences should include both the obvious (visible differences, etc.) and the not so obvious (religious beliefs, sexual orientation, etc.). Please state all the differences you can identify. Your perceptions of this group should



include information such as what you were told about this group as you were growing up, any beliefs/perceptions/assumptions you have about this group, what your sources of information about this group have been in the past, and why you have an interest in this group. In this section, you must make a case for how this person is different from you and why this experience will be challenging for you.

2. **Reflection on your Immersion Observations:** This section should be 2-3 pages long, no more. What observational activities did you complete? Reflect on your experience and what insight it gave you into your selected population.

Suggested questions:

- Discuss some of your impressions of this culture.
- How do you think your cultural background influenced what you observed?
- What did you notice about the types of social roles between and amongst people (age, gender, etc.)?
- How were interactions between people organized, and what “rules” dictated the interactions?
- What surprised you in what you learned about this person/people group and about yourself?
- Is there anything from this experience you wish was part of your own culture?

3. **Reflection on your Immersion Dialogue:** This section should be 2-3 pages long, no more. How did you carry out your immersion dialogue? Reflect on your experience and what insight it gave you into your selected population.

Suggested questions:

- How did you feel during the dialogue (nervous, comfortable, etc.)?
- How did the preconceived notions you identified in your proposal impact your interactions with this person?
- How did this dialogue impact or influence your future interactions with people from this group?
- How did this experience change or contribute to your growth?
- How were you similar or different from this person?
- How was what you observed different from what you experienced during your dialogue with the person from the population you are studying?

4. **Reaction and Critical Analysis of your experience:** This section should be 2-3 pages. This section of the paper should incorporate your reflections, experiences, what you learned about the group, what you learned about yourself, and how your perceptions of this group have changed over time. You should incorporate any research that you have done about counseling this population into this section of the paper.

Several areas to address in this section:

- Description of the group
- Values/Belief Orientations



- Social Interactions (relationships within and between groups)
 - Religious/Spiritual Beliefs
 - Roles and Expectations
 - Language and Communication (verbal and nonverbal)
 - Perceptions of the world
 - Methods of ensuring conformity
 - Methods of conflict resolution
 - Group personality
 - What is most important to achieve (in a lifetime)
 - Unique behaviors and their meaning
 - Historical events of critical importance in this cultural group
 - Critical information relevant to understanding this culture
 - Key ideas and behaviors that would help someone relate to this culture
 - How this culture is similar and/or dissimilar to your own
 - What you learned about yourself through this process
5. **Powerpoint** This 1-2 paragraph section should include a description of the information or artifacts you selected for the presentation. You can be creative here. Consider including pictures, famous quotes, symbols, links to music or videos, etc along with other types of information relevant to your immersion experience and the culture. Reflect on the experience and any reactions you experienced. Think about how others might react to the information you presented. What about this information was important to share? Be sure to upload the presentation along with your paper.