

2015 NAFSA Conference  
*Developing a Cultural Awareness Curriculum for Study Abroad Students*

Michelle Cole, DNP, RN  
Christina Gunther, M.A.  
Robin Danzak, Ph.D.

Sacred Heart University. Fairfield, Connecticut, USA.

**Resources**

- The Hofstede Centre, tools to visualize cultural differences <http://geert-hofstede.com>
- Film about border crossing, [Which Way Home?](#) ([watch full film online](#))
- Ted talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: [The danger of a single story](#)
- Jose Antonio Vargas' [Define American](#)
- [Facing History and Ourselves](#)
- [Aula Intercultural](#)
- Writing about the self (e.g., [identity chart/map](#))
- Journaling/[blogging](#) (sample blog, Culture Chameleon, Italy) during travel
- Self-portrait [collage](#)
- Photography: my community, my culture (e.g., [NY Times Culture Shot](#))
- Digital story, example, [adapting to a new culture](#).
- Marek Bennett, Nicaragua comics journal, <http://marekbennett.com/nicaragua2014/>

**Sample Reflection Prompts**

Be observant about anything that is different from your daily routine at home. Are breakfast foods different; is there a difference in pace of life; are people friendly or are they reserved? What did you notice about the way people greet others? Did anything strike you emotionally today?

How are your expectations being met?

Are your concerns being realized?

How have you coped with any concerns or fears?

**Returning Home:**

How do you feel about returning home? Will you return with a different view of life/the world around you?

What experiences from your study abroad experience will you incorporate in your life at home?

Will any experiences guide your personal relationships going forward?

Did you discover any strengths in your academic/professional abilities during your experience?

Did you discover any weaknesses in your academic/professional abilities during your experience?

THE HOFSTEDE CENTRE ▼ (/) CERTIFICATIONS (CERTIFICATIONS.HTML)

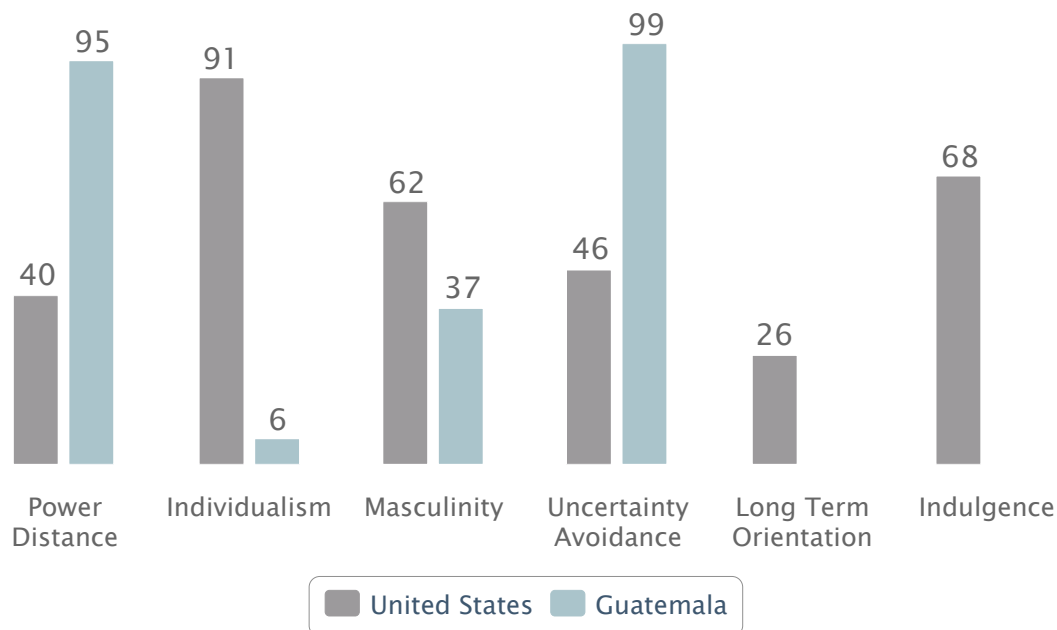
COURSES (COURSES.HTML) CULTURAL DIMENSIONS ▼ (CULTURAL-DIMENSIONS.HTML)

CULTURAL TOOLS ▼ (CULTURAL-TOOLS.HTML) PUBLICATIONS ▼ (PUBLICATIONS.HTML)

Select a Country ▼

Guatemala ▼

## United States in comparison with Guatemala



Compare your personal score on Hofstede's model to a country of your choice — take the [new cultural survey](http://geert-hofstede.com/cultural-survey.html) (<http://geert-hofstede.com/cultural-survey.html>)

# What about the USA?

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If we explore the US culture through the lens of the 6-D Model, we can get a good overview of the deep driving factors of American culture relative to other cultures in our world. By supplying you with this information please realise that culture describes a central tendency in society. Everybody is unique, yet social control ensures that most people will not deviate too much from the norm. Moreover, within every country regional cultural differences exist, also in the States. Americans, however, don't need to go to a cultural briefing before moving to another state successfully.

## Power distance

The fact that everybody is unique implies that we are all unequal. One of the most salient aspects of inequality is the degree of power each person exerts or can exert over other persons; power being defined as the degree to which a person is able to influence other people's ideas and behavior.

This dimension deals with the fact that all individuals in societies are not equal, and it expresses the attitude of the culture toward these power inequalities amongst us. Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. It has to do with the fact that a society's inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders.

## Individualism

The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". In Individualist societies people are only supposed to look after themselves and their direct family. In Collectivist societies people belong to "in groups" that take care of them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

The fairly low score on Power Distance(40) in combination with one of the the most individualistic (91) cultures in the world reflects itself in the following:

- The American premise of "liberty and justice for all." This is evidenced by an explicit emphasis on equal rights in all aspects of American society and government.
- Within American organisations, hierarchy is established for convenience, superiors are accessible and managers rely on individual employees and teams for their expertise.
- Both managers and employees expect to be consulted and information is shared frequently. At the same time, communication is informal, direct and participative to a degree.
- The society is loosely-knit in which the expectation is that people look after themselves and their immediate families only and should not rely (too much) on authorities for support.
- There is also a high degree of geographical mobility in the United States. Americans are the best joiners in the world; however it is often difficult, especially among men, to develop deep friendships.
- Americans are accustomed to doing business or interacting with people they don't know well. Consequently, Americans are not shy about approaching their prospective counterparts in order to obtain or seek information. In the business world, employees are expected to be self-reliant and display initiative. Also, within the exchange-based world of work we see that hiring, promotion and decisions are based on merit or evidence of what one has done or can do.

## Masculinity

A high score (masculine) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the “winner” or “best-in-the-field”. This value system starts in childhood and continues throughout one’s life – both in work and leisure pursuits.

A low score (feminine) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. A feminine society is one where quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable. The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine).

The score of the US on Masculinity is high at 62, and this can be seen in the typical American behavioral patterns. This can be explained by the combination of a high Masculinity drive together with the most individualistic drive in the world. In other words, Americans, so to speak, all show their masculine drive individually. The British, however, have the same culture in this respect. The question, therefore, should be: is the same drive not normally to be seen on the surface? This difference is a reflection of the higher score of the US on Uncertainty Avoidance than of the UK. In other words, in both societies we find the same drive, but Americans show it up-front whereas the British will take you by surprise.

This American combination reflects itself in the following:

- Behavior in school, work, and play are based on the shared values that people should “strive to be the best they can be” and that “the winner takes all”. As a result, Americans will tend to display and talk freely about their “successes” and achievements in life. Being successful per se is not the great motivator in American society, but being able to show one’s success
- Many American assessment systems are based on precise target setting, by which American employees can show how well a job they did.
- There exists a “can-do” mentality which creates a lot of dynamism in the society, as it is believed that there is always the possibility to do things in a better way
- Typically, Americans “live to work” so that they can obtain monetary rewards and as a consequence attain higher status based on how good one can be. Many white collar workers will move to a more fancy neighborhood after each and every substantial promotion.
- It is believed that a certain degree of conflict will bring out the best of people, as it is the goal to be “the winner”. As a consequence, we see a lot of polarisation and court cases. This mentality nowadays undermines the American premise of “liberty and justice for all.” Rising inequality is endangering democracy, because a widening gap among the classes may slowly push Power Distance up and Individualism down.

## Uncertainty avoidance

The dimension Uncertainty Avoidance has to do with the way that a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? This ambiguity brings with it anxiety and different cultures have learnt to deal with this anxiety in different ways. The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these is reflected in the UAI score.

The US scores below average, with a low score of 46, on the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension. . As a consequence, the perceived context in which Americans find themselves will impact their behaviour more than if the culture would have either scored higher or lower. Thus, this cultural pattern reflects itself as follows:

- There is a fair degree of acceptance for new ideas, innovative products and a willingness to try something new or different, whether it pertains to technology, business practices or food. Americans tend to be more tolerant of ideas or opinions from anyone and allow the freedom of expression. At the same time, Americans do not require a lot of rules and are less emotionally expressive than higher-scoring cultures.
- At the same time, 9/11 has created a lot of fear in the American society culminating in the efforts of government to monitor everybody through the NSA and other security organisations

### Long Term Orientation

This dimension describes how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future, and societies prioritise these two existential goals differently. Normative societies who score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, on the other hand, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.

The United States scores normative on the fifth dimension with a low score of 26. This is reflected by the following:

- Americans are prone to analyse new information to check whether it is true. Thus, the culture doesn't make most Americans pragmatic, but this should not be confused with the fact that Americans are very practical, being reflected by the "can-do" mentality mentioned above.
- The polarisation mentioned above is, so to speak, strengthened by the fact that many Americans have very strong ideas about what is "good" and "evil". This may concern issues such as abortion, use of drugs, euthanasia, weapons or the size and rights of the government versus the States and versus citizens.
- The US is the one of the only "Caucasian" countries in the world where, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, visiting church has increased. This increase is also evident in some post-Soviet republics such as Russia.
- American businesses measure their performance on a short-term basis, with profit and loss statements being issued on a quarterly basis. This also drives individuals to strive for quick results within the work place.

### Indulgence

One challenge that confronts humanity, now and in the past, is the degree to which little children are socialised. Without socialisation we do not become "human". This dimension is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. A tendency toward a relatively weak control over their impulses is called "indulgence", whereas a relatively strong control over their urges is called "restraint". Cultures can be described as indulgent or restrained.

The United States scores as an indulgent (68) society on the sixth dimension. This, in combination with a normative score, is reflected by the following contradictory attitudes and behaviour:

- Work hard and play hard.
- The States has waged a war against drugs and is still very busy in doing so, yet drug addiction in the States is higher than in many other wealthy countries.
- It is a prudish society yet even some well-known televangelists appear to be immoral.

Scores of countries marked with an asterisk (\*) are - partially or fully - based on an educated guess derived from data representing similar countries in combination with our practitioner experience. The scores for these country are not derived from proper comparative academic research. For the list of official scores see Geert Hofstede's private website (<http://geerthofstede.eu/research--vsm>).