

PUBA 667: Special Topics

Intercultural Challenges in the Public Sector

Spring 2007

Times: Mondays 6-8:30

Location: Saunders 637

Graduate students from all programs are welcome to enroll: Please contact Jeffrey Ady at jadv@hawaii.edu if an enrollment override code is needed.

Text: Harris & Moran, *Managing Cultural Differences*. 6ed. Available for purchase in the PUBA office during business hours. Call 956-8260 for more information.

Background

Planning, problem-solving and crisis response action among national governments, regional and global transgovernmental agencies, NGOs and private-sector actors all involve working with others from various cultural backgrounds. This cross-cultural work often presents unique challenges: Approaches toward defining problems, managing, leading, making decisions, differ from culture to culture—often to the degree where progress toward objectives can be impeded.

Challenges of this nature to work across cultural boundaries have received much attention as they have impacted private sector endeavors. And many of the cross-cultural problems experienced in global business apply to public sector work. In addition, public sector work crossing cultural boundaries produces its own set of problems. This course focuses on how these problems manifest as people work on regional and global projects and problems of compelling public interest.

Objective

I intend *Intercultural Challenges in the Public Sector* to engage participants in a review of an array of general challenges facing those who are at work in the public sector at the global level.

This course works from three assumptions:

1. Public action crossing cultural boundaries, like other organized interaction across cultures, can be impeded by cultural divergence in critical areas of structural context, interaction patterns, established procedures, and organizational goals. But knowledge of these manifestations of cultural divergence can be combined with cross-cultural interventions in order to bring actors within an intercultural public action evolution to a degree of convergence necessary to complete that evolution.

2. Analysis, training and support interventions will be crucial to public and hybrid organization strategies toward, and responses to, disaster, diplomatic and other crises crossing national and regional borders.
3. Interventions ranging from situational assessment to various types of training and in-crisis support will empower public, NP/NGO, private, and intergovernmental actors in crisis circumstances to work more effectively together in virtual and on-the-ground intercultural and international task relationships to address their goals more quickly and effectively.

Course Format

Intercultural Challenges in the Public Sector follows a seminar-type format:

- We will devote significant time to the discussion of concepts and pragmatics. Reference materials for our discussions will include assigned readings from the Harris and Moran text, and suggested background reading from various online journals, papers and other electronic resources.
- We will also make extensive use of case studies. We will conduct case analyses to strengthen concept and strategy application; we will also author case studies to sharpen our understanding of contextual factors in successful public work across cultures. A related methodology is area studies [see below].
- Numerous activities and structured experiences will create awareness, sharpen analytical and diagnostic skills, and stimulate advanced reflection on the concepts and strategies we discuss.

Assignments and Evaluation

Evaluation in this graduate seminar will be both formative and summative in nature; it will focus on your involvement and the learning you exhibit in our processes. I will continually assess your participation and performance in our proceedings and provide feedback as appropriate in order to help you maximize your gains from this course. I will assign a letter grade at the end of the term.

I expect excellent participation and performance from everyone in this course. Participation in our discussions should be both consistent and well-informed. Stay current on the assigned readings and participate on the basis of the perspectives we use. The approach toward teamwork and course projects should be both positive and proactive.

The major assignments and their evaluation logics are:

Discussion. Everyone will profit from your playing an active role in our weekly discussions. I therefore expect you to stay current on our readings for each session, including readings from the *MCD* text as well as other materials I will make available.

As important, I expect you to participate meaningfully in our discourse both in terms of quantity and quality of contribution to our conversations from week to week. My evaluation of your participation in our class discussion will constitute 25% of the course total, *i.e.*, 100 of 400 possible points.

Case Studies.

Team-based evaluation of cases in public sector work across cultures will be an important component of this course. These cases will include studies of successful and not-so-successful evolutions. Team-based case study authoring and analysis will figure significantly in our progress through the course. It can be said that *expertise* is *the ability to bring analytical and prescriptive power to bear on a specific case*, and much of my effort in this course will be devoted to developing your expertise regarding situations of intercultural task interaction.

The *function* of a case study is to (1) illustrate selected problems and principles according to a theoretical framework through a narrative and (2) stimulate critical and analytical thinking on the case vis-à-vis assessment and/or possible intervention. The *value* of a case study is found in its ability to present us with a fairly realistic [though general] situation to which we apply our theoretical and practical expertise.

You will work in small teams to author case studies in order to work with problems and principles of public and task interaction across cultures. Cases may be authored along with, or independently of, the “area studies” we conduct that examine ways in which selected people groups define and experience task and public interaction.

As a group we will appraise each case study; teams will respond to our appraisals of their cases with follow-up submissions of their cases that reflect our feedback.

I will devote time in our sessions to training you on case study development.

My evaluation of your case study work will constitute 25% of the course total, *i.e.*, 100 of 400 possible points.

Case Analyses.

As a group we will be working with the case studies authored by our teams, to (1) critically appraise each case study and to (2) analyze each case study on its own merits. In other words, you will not only *author* case studies, but you will also *appraise* and *respond* to them. In this way our learning and expertise building will be recursive and not just one-shot or one-way.

My evaluation of your case analysis work will constitute 25% of the course total, *i.e.*, 100 of 400 possible points.

Area Studies.

The Harris & Moran text is known for its survey of culture groups' orientations toward organized activity. A good number of monographs and journal articles provide excellent profiles on general orientations and specific manifestations of cultures as they relate to public work. We will take advantage of this information by examining different major culture groups' approaches to work [and, when possible, work in the public sector]. Area Studies examine ways in which selected people groups, and clusters of groups, define and experience task and public interaction.

You will undertake and present at least one Area Study, depending on the number of course participants, during the term, in small teams.

My evaluation of your area study work will constitute 25% of the course total, *i.e.*, 100 of 400 possible points.

Course Schedule: Subject to Revision, Naturally

Date	Topics/Activities	Readings
Jan 8	Overview; Glossary Work: Public Action; Culture; Divergence; Convergence.	
Jan 15	Holiday: Martin Luther King Jr. Day	
Jan 22	Dimensions of Convergence & Divergence; Intractability; Case Study Training.	
Jan 29	Case Study Training.	
Feb 5	Case Study Training.	
Feb 12	Interventions; Case Study Training	
Feb 19	Holiday: Presidents' Day	
Feb 26		
Mar 5		
Mar 12	Interventions; Case Studies and Analyses.	
Mar 19	Interventions; Case Studies and Analyses.	
Mar 26-30	Spring recess	
Apr 2	Area Studies; Case Studies and Analyses.	
Apr 9	Area Studies; Case Studies and Analyses.	
Apr 16	Area Studies; Case Studies and Analyses.	
Apr 23	Area Studies; Case Studies and Analyses.	
Apr 30	Last day of class	