



# The Culture Hour

A CASUAL FORUM FOR STUDENT  
INSIGHTS, QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS  
ABOUT CULTURE

## To Kiss or Not To Kiss? That is the question!

Notes from 9/24/2008

### GREETINGS:

To Kiss or Not to Kiss?

To Hug or Not to Hug?

To Shake Hands or not to Shake?

These are some of the questions we need to be able to answer in a split second when greeting others at Park University. I can tell you that, personally, I struggle as I go in and out of different cultures many times within a single day.

I have more than once leaned in to kiss someone on the cheek to have the other person ***not lean in or not reciprocate*** – this is awkward to say the least ☺!! But, it is just part of my life. I know that on any given day, I will go to kiss an American on the cheek in greeting, and it will not always be welcome. It has happened with more than one of my students as well. I try to read the body language in a split second to see if a hug or a kiss is a welcomed greeting, but habit sometimes takes over and before I know it, to my student's embarrassment, I am giving a tall Chinese male a hug ☹.

It's more difficult in a culturally diverse situation like Park. If I were traveling to a specific country, I could read about that culture's greeting and be prepared! But here, at Park, we have to be prepared for ***anything***:

To kiss, to hug, to shake hands – or NOT! You will have to figure it out...in the moment. Good luck!

*Kimberly Connelly, M.A.T.*

*Assistant Director*

*International Student Services*

Park University

8700 NW River Park Dr Box 3

Parkville, MO 64152

816-584-6834

816-505-5443 (Fax)

e-mail: [kimberly.connelly@park.edu](mailto:kimberly.connelly@park.edu)

**TERAH'S COMMENT:**

Dear students,

Last week we discussed about greeting. In today's world in which humans are able to travel far and wide, the first thing that you will have to learn to do right is greeting. Different cultures have different ways of greeting. The most common ways of greeting include the "good old" handshake, hugging, and kissing on the cheeks/lips. Some of these ways are strictly culture specific. For example, hugging and kissing on the cheeks is a preserve for women in an African setting.

However, the current younger generation seems to have disregarded the rule around hugging and kissing, and thus is not uncommon to find opposite genders hugging and kissing on the cheeks. Kissing on the lips would be taking it too far. Hugging and kissing seems to be a normal thing for the younger generation in Africa, between opposite genders. Hugging between two males could be tolerated to some degree, but kissing on the cheeks, leave alone kissing on the lips, is frowned upon in Africa. Females can hug, kiss on the lips/cheeks, and even hold hands.

The most common way of greeting among men in Africa is a handshake, and sometimes the handshake could extend to over a minute (prolonged handshake). Prolonged handshake is common among older men or women. Older men at times shake hands (right hands) while holding on the other person's left shoulder (with the left hand). I suppose this is in lieu of hugging. In some communities, younger people are required to place their left palm on the wrist of their right hand while shaking hands with older people. Other communities require females to kneel down on one knee (usually the right), or bow their head down (from waist up, at approximately 80 degree angle) while greeting elders, usually men. However the latter form of greeting is rare to find nowadays.

The discussion above is just an overview of various ways of greeting in an African setting. Not all forms mentioned above are representative of each and every country of Africa. Some of the ways could be obsolete as of now. I also stand to be corrected, understanding that individual families are also sub-cultures of their own within the larger culture (as pointed out by Kimberly in previous meetings).

For more information about different countries and their language, customs and etiquette, please check it out here: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>