



The Culture Hour

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

CULTURE BUMPS

When encountering individuals from a culture other than our own, we are inevitably faced with situations that are confusing, upsetting, embarrassing or even offensive. These situations are called "**CULTURE BUMPS**" because two cultures have "bumped" into each other...the exchange has not been smooth nor comfortable.

How should you handle situations like this?

- **Understand that body language and all non-verbal communication are not universal.** Body language and non-verbal communication is **culturally dependent**. We may not understand a situation because the signals and signs from the other individual have completely different, even opposite meanings, from our culture.
- **DO NOT REACT WITH ANGER.** Even though your initial reaction may be anger, control your emotions.
- **Try to give the person "the benefit of the doubt" and suspend judgment.** Tell yourself that the person didn't MEAN to offend, embarrass or upset you.
- **Ask for clarification.** Ask the person what he or she means. Tell him that you are confused or offended -- give the person a chance to explain or apologize.
- **Observe.** Watch people in similar situations - see what they do, what they say etc.
- **Remember intention is everything.** Realize that something may ALWAYS offend you, but that doesn't mean that the people in the other culture are *intending* to offend you. Don't hold it against the culture - intention is what is most important in communication and relationships.
- **Avoid categorizing people.** Try not to think or say statements like "All Americans are rude." This just fosters anger and resentment in you towards another culture and inhibits your ability to openly communicate in future interactions. These type of judgments and attitudes will only harm and limit your experiences with people from other cultures.