

Cross-Cultural Interaction and Relationships at USD: A Guide for Interacting Across Cultures

by

**USD Office for Diversity, Native American Studies
and the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusiveness**

Attending a college or university provides students an opportunity to meet people from around the U.S. and world. Learning about individuals who represent different groups can add significantly and positively to your USD experience. The University of South Dakota is no different than many institutions of higher education in that students who enroll will encounter people from different backgrounds including race/ethnicity; sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, veteran-status, religion, age and socio-economic status. Moreover, students, faculty and staff come to the university from different countries, states and regions of the world.

Interacting across cultures with diverse individuals can be enlightening and educational, yet also difficult. Language, culture, worldviews, customs and traditions often become barriers that prevent people from developing cross-cultural relationships. The following are suggestions for easing the process and assisting in interacting across differences.

1. Go out of your way to interact with as many students, staff and faculty as you can, in particular with those who are different than you. These interactions and dialogues will expand your experiences with and knowledge about individuals and their different cultures and backgrounds.
2. There are many diverse student groups at USD that hopefully you will consider interacting with or joining such as the Latino Student Association, Tiospaye: Native American Student Council, Spectrum: the Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Union of African American Students, Asian American Student Association, Association for the Advancement of Women's Rights, International Students Club, African Student Association, Muslim Student Association and many other important and beneficial student associations. Educational research has demonstrated that involvement in college student groups tends to result in higher rates of graduation, leadership development, social consciousness, cross-cultural relationships, increased open-mindedness and a whole host of positive educational outcomes.

In addition to joining the student groups whose members share your identity, consider joining other groups and activities to maximize your cross-cultural and intergroup interactions.

3. Communication across diverse groups is a learned skill that will be helpful throughout your life. Learning to effectively communicate, resolve conflicts and solve problems in culturally diverse environments can be both extremely challenging and rewarding.

Thus, when interacting:

- a. Be patient with your fellow students and ask that they be patient with you as you try to learn about each other's backgrounds and cultures or when you study and discuss controversial and complex topics.
- b. In talking to someone who comes from a different background, try to ask questions in a respectful manner and at an appropriate time.
- c. No matter how curious you are about someone's physical characteristics or personal appearance such as hair texture, color of skin, jewelry or clothing, do not touch that individual unless you are given permission.
- d. Allow each other to make mistakes as you develop your cross-cultural communication skills.
- e. Grant each other "redos" and use mistakes and unintentional insensitivities as learning moments.
- f. Some of the skills that will maximize learning and decrease cross-cultural misunderstandings are active listening, empathy, entering the worldview of another group and perspective-taking.
- g. If you are the person being asked about your cultural background, be patient with the people who are doing the asking. In many cases, the other person does not know and is simply trying to learn.
- h. Keep your assumptions and stereotypes in check. Don't assume. Ask questions. Make efforts to get to know someone and what's important to them. Try not to make assumptions about a person's identity or background. Often, these assumptions are based on damaging stereotypes and can inhibit people from forming trusting effective and authentic relationships.

The USD Office for Diversity sponsors a variety of initiatives designed to create intergroup interaction between different groups. The Voices of Discovery Intergroup Dialogue Program and the Multicultural Leadership Retreat for the 21st Century are two such programs offered to USD students. For additional information, please contact Dr. Jesús Treviño, Associate Vice-President for Diversity (Jesus.Trevino@usd.edu). For information about Native American Studies, contact Elise Boxer (Elise.Boxer@usd.edu) or David Posthumus (David.Posthumus@usd.edu). The President's Council on Diversity and Inclusiveness is chaired by Beth Boyd (Beth.Boyd@usd.edu) and Jerry Yutzrenka (Gerald.Yutzrenka@usd.edu).