

Walking the Talk: Communicating Across Cultural Difference

January Term, January 6-8, 2012

Meadville Lombard Theological School
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Instructors:

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Course Description

This weekend, skills-based course provides an opportunity for seminarians and social justice workers to identify and improve their ability to communicate across various cultural orientations. “Communicating across cultures,” in this context, is the act of understanding the assumptions, values and preferences of another human being, and with that knowledge, construct acts of communication that builds bridges of understanding and integrity. This course assumes that *every* act of communication – even within similar cultural groups – is a cross-cultural encounter. The course will be highly experiential and emotionally intensive, giving learners multiple opportunities for real-time engagement with difficult expressions of cultural conflict. Come ready to work! Academic credit: .5

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Locate personal and group patterns of thought and behavior that thwart cross-cultural communication
- Expand capacity and competency in multicultural communication
- Identify ways in which “UU culture” complicates communicating outside the UU worldview
- Demonstrate ability to communicate effectively in high-stress situations
- Understand the core principles of multicultural communication
- Identify specific areas for continued growth and improvement

Pre-course required text, films and analysis

1. Read and watch:

Patterson, Kerry. et al. (2002). Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking with the stakes are high. *[Annotation: Students typically love this text for both its accessibility and also its portability, meaning, the lessons and skill-building of “crucial conversations” can be applied to a wide array of situations and experiences. Think of an unsuccessful conversation you’ve had in your own life as you read the text. This will be the main framework for post-class conversation project.]*

Gladwell, Malcolm. (2005). Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking. *[Annotation: Gladwell is a master at taking a slice of human experience and peeling back its layers of meaning. This text asks you to think about the way to perceive “realities” and, also, the role of power-dynamics in those experiences. Enjoy the literary ride!]*

Bordas, Juana (2007). Soul, Salsa and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age. *[Annotation: Bordas asks us to explore what she perceives as “cultural patterns” of three racial/ethnic groups: African Americans, Latinos/as and Native Americans. From that, she theorizes how those traits might inform our shared work in a multicultural world. Some readers find that a process of “codifying” cultural patterns of any group to be narrow and incomplete (e.g., “Whites are like ‘this,’” or “Asians tend to like ‘that’”). Valid observation! For our purposes, place that critique aside. Please read the text and think about how your own racial socialization differs from the patterns Bordas describes, and consider how you would communicate with someone who uses a different standard for making meaning.]*

Sue, Daryl Wing (2010). Microaggressions in Everyday life (PDF in LiveText). *[Annotation: Based on years of research, Psychologist Daryl Sue and his team of graduate students provide an updates way of understanding “how racism” works in our current context. For many of us, when we think of “racism” we think of hateful words or acts. Sue describes an equally violent and disturbing pattern of well-intentioned language and behaviors that serve to, once again, divide the human family.]*

Films

- Crash (2004). Lion’s Gate Entertainment. (2 hours)
- Akeelah and the Bee (2006). Lion’s Gate Entertainment. (2 hours)
- 12 Angry Men (1957). Blockbuster Movie Rentals (2 hours)

2. Journaling Exercise: *What's in Your Suitcase?*

In the text, *Crucial Conversations* (starts on page 56) complete the self-test that measures the way in which you typically respond to a cross-cultural conflict.

Write a short journal entry (no more than 500 words) that describes your personal patterns of communication. It might be useful to think of real-life examples as a way to unpack your behaviors. Post your journal entry in LiveText.

January Learning Schedule

Friday evening. 6:00-9:00 pm

- Community dinner and formation of a learning community. Bring enough food to share with 3-4 people
- Overview of the principles of cross-cultural communication. Begin the work

Saturday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

- Workshop I explores conditions and competencies necessary for cross/multicultural communication
- Workshop II begins building multicultural communication skills and competencies

Sunday, Noon-5

- Workshop III: Role plays and cross-cultural simulations
- Workshop IV: Preparation for post-course assignment, due by May 1, 2012

Post-Course Assignment

You will not be able to complete this assignment until after our week together is completed in January. You will be asked to conduct a “crucial conversation” in two parts, posting your outcome and personal learnings in LiveText. *Format and expectations for your summative essay will be provided during the January course.*

Also prepare a personal reflection on the difference between a “pastoral conversation” and a “crucial conversation.” Are they always different? Where might they intersect? What different awarenesses and skills must you bring to each?