

Students' (and Our!) Intercultural Experiences: A Developmental Perspective

**IGSD Annual Retreat for Advisors
May 8, 2007**





- **Intercultural sensitivity**

The ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences

- **Intercultural competence**

The ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways

(Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003)



Is Intercultural Competence an Expected Learning Outcome at WPI?

- **Undergraduate Learning Outcomes**

- “Graduates will be aware of how their decisions affect and are affected by other individuals separated by time, space, and culture.”

- **IQP Learning Outcomes**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the project’s technical, social and humanistic context.
- Analyze and synthesize results from social, ethical, humanistic, technical or other perspectives, as appropriate.

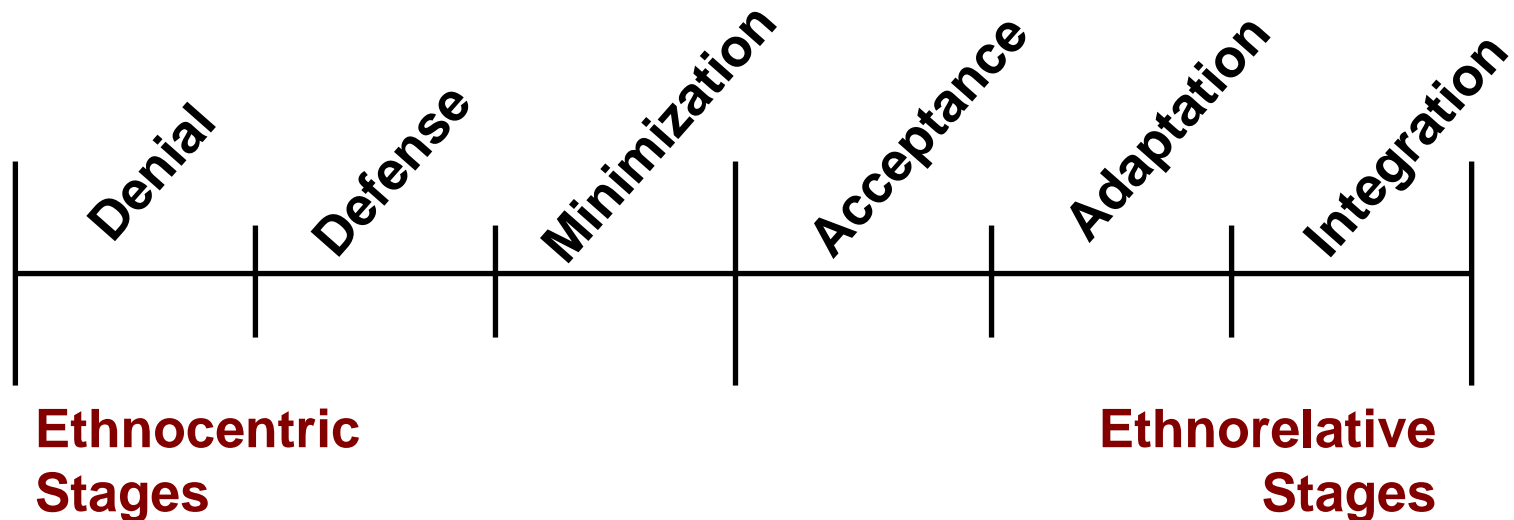
- **Engineering Program Outcomes**

- Demonstrate that graduates have the broad education to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global and societal context

A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

(Milton Bennett, 1993)

Experience of difference





Ethnocentric Stages

I. Denial of Difference

“All big cities are the same– too many cars, McDonalds”

“Since we all speak the same language, there’s no problem.”

II. Defense Against Difference

“When you go to other cultures, it makes you realize how much better the U.S. is.” (Superiority)

“I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people.” (Reversal)

III. Minimization of Difference

“Customs differ, of course, but when you really get to know them they’re pretty much like us, so I can just be myself.”

Examples from Milton J. Bennett publications.



Ethnorelative Stages

IV. Acceptance of Difference

“Sometimes it’s confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my core values.”

V. Adaptation to Difference

“I greet people from my culture and people from my host culture somewhat differently to account for cultural differences in the way respect is communicated.”

VI. Integration of Difference

“Whatever the situation, I can usually look at it from a variety of cultural points of view.”

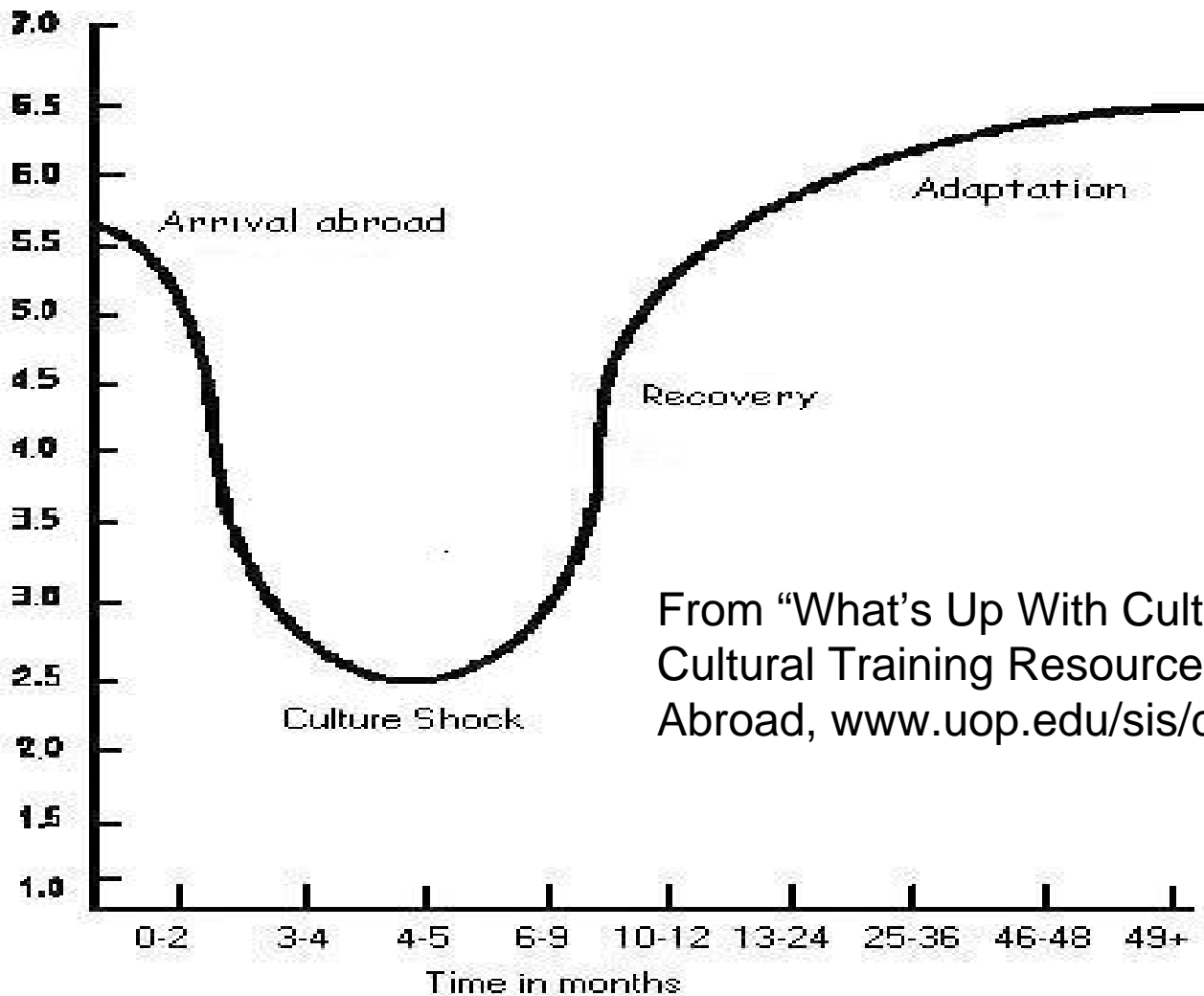


How Hard Can This Be?

- **Appropriate educational strategies differ markedly by stage of development**
- **Declines in intercultural sensitivity are not uncommon, even among semester-long, high quality programs**
- **Desire for the familiar is a coping mechanism that may lead to cultural isolation abroad**



Degree of Adjustment



From "What's Up With Culture?" On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad, www.uop.edu/sis/culture/.



Early Impressions and Implications

- **Most of the pre-departure students I have interviewed are mostly ethnocentric**
- **All are looking forward to experiencing another culture**
- **Almost all have underdeveloped notions of “culture”**
- **Activities intentionally designed to promote intercultural development pre-departure and on-site may be necessary to foster progress. *Should we take the time?***





For study abroad purposes, culture can be most broadly defined as the shared sets of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which are widely held by members of the host culture.