Fitting In AND Being Yourself;
Learning New Ways to Honor and Respect
Cultures can be as small as each of your classes or as big as Eastern (or Western) Civilization.
We all live in many different “cultures”

- “The culture” of our family
- “The culture” of our friends
- “The culture” of our high school
- “The culture” of our college
- “The culture” of our place of work
- “The culture” of public places.
• We move through these different cultures all the time and put on different behaviors and practices to *fit in*. Fitting in helps us achieve our goals.
New Cultures are Interesting & Exciting

But they are also difficult to enter. Humans are creatures of habit and when much is new and we can’t rely on our habits, we experience cognitive overload.
• If you’re seen as a member, people will be willing to help you.

• If you’re not seen as a member, people will (at best) ignore you.

Now happily-
(a) There are often many different ways to fit in
(b) No one has to fit in entirely--

But “when in Rome do as the Romans do” is good advice: when in an SIS program find ways to do as SIS students do.
A metaphor for “fitting in”

• If fitting in just means using a different practice from your cultural repertoire*— it is like putting on appropriate clothes for the occasion, you’re not changing yourself, you’re changing your practices to fit a (new) occasion.

*Repertoire: all that you can choose from to do— a musical repertoire is all the pieces you know how to play.
New Ways to Honor and Respect
Evaluating Different Practices

- Taking off or leaving on shoes
- Holding hands (socialization)
- Who holds doors?
- Questioning the teacher
Two cultures may want to respect/honor a person the same role...

• Yet they may have very different ways of showing respect.
  – Classroom respect for professors
  – Respect for readers (when you write)
Demonstrating Knowledge

• School/Education is all about demonstrating what you have learned, isn’t it?

• Different educational cultures ask you to demonstrate knowledge in different ways.

– Our earlier example: questioning the teacher
Demonstrating Knowledge in the U.S.

- Show you can use a class topic to solve a problem
- Relate the class topic to another topic
- Recognize other points of view, yet persuade your audience of your point of view
- Listen to a lecture and take notes so that later you can explain how to use the lecture.
Why A Student Failed Her Comp.*

- A bilingual student who had most of her education in another country. She had lived in the U.S. for many years and spoke English well. This was not a language problem.

*Comp* = Comprehensive Exam; a final examination to show you have comprehensive (thorough) knowledge of your major.
What the student was asked to do:

- The comp question: explain the essential principles of communicative language teaching and show how you apply these principles in a lesson you have taught.
What the student did:

- Reproduced from memory a class handout with 95% accuracy

- Adequately summarized a lesson she had created for her methodology class (her instructor had praised this lesson)
Yet She Failed Her Comp. Why?
Two Reasons—No. 1

- Rote reproduction of what you read is not considered proof that you understand the IDEAS in your reading.

- You need to give specific examples of applying the principles and relate them to your personal experience.
Describing her good lesson was part of the task, but the student didn’t explicitly explain how the lesson represented communicative principles.

For example she needed to write phrases like, "This part of the lesson corresponds to the XYZ communicative principle because...”
Now, we worked with this student and she passed her comp the next time...

- But her good study practices from her school back home did not lead her to success.

- So, when we enter a new educational culture we must observe, listen, and adopt new educational practices so that we can demonstrate the hard studying that we’ve done in an appropriate way.
Some Tips for Success at AU

1. Work ahead *(remember you are competing with U.S. students who have spoken English all their lives and who have probably spent much of their lives in U.S. schools)*

   - This means practicing good time management.
2. Think strategically

- I don’t know now to solve this problem but I must solve this problem.
- What are some ways I could solve the problem?
- Which of these ways should give most possibility of success?

A problem for domestic (i.e., American) students as well as international students
3. Let people know “up front” that you may be having problems.

- If you come to people with a problem before it becomes serious, people will respect you for being responsible.

- If you wait and the problem happens, people will think that you didn’t care about doing well—that you’re not serious.

“up front” = early on and directly; very honestly
4. Expect and Accept Imperfection

- You can’t learn without making mistakes.

- You’re working through a second language and a second culture—do you really think you’re superman/superwoman?

- Sometimes if you don’t do well, you can ask if you might be able to try again.
Be Direct; Take Initiative....BUT

- Be polite in other ways

(a) Use modality: “could/might,” “I think/it may be,” “do you suppose?”

(b) Sure “softeners”: “possibly,” “a little,” “fairly,” “usually,” “moderate”

This is called, “hedging.”
5. Give Yourself Time to Rest

• It is extremely tiring to work through another language

• It is extremely tiring when many of your old successful habits don’t work
THANKS!