Culturally Inclusive Excellence:
From Awareness to Cultural Agility

Cultural diversity is an integral part of UVM. It is included in Our Common Ground, the President’s Diversity Statement, the Inclusive Excellence framework, and the University’s Mission and Vision statements. At the Division level, it is a practical and flexible tool which educates and empowers individuals from different cultural backgrounds to be respectful of cultural differences and to successfully leverage diverse ways of thinking, communicating and working.

Why are we having this dialogue? We are having this dialogue to better understand cultural differences and to learn how to effectively and appropriately engage UVM’s culturally diverse populations. When appreciated and fully engaged, cultural diversity provides benefits that increase success by bringing forward new ideas, fresh perspectives, and insightful viewpoints. However, when ignored or stifled, it brings problems which hinder UVM’s ability to succeed. Adapting to a new environment or supporting an employee or a student from a different cultural background can evoke uncertainty and anxiety. We are having this dialogue to support you as you face these cognitive and emotional challenges.

The Center for Cultural Pluralism supports you in your inter-cultural journey. The training series offered by the Center for Cultural Pluralism is based on the Inter-Cultural Competence Model* and is comprised of four components: awareness, attitude, knowledge and skills. Comprehensively designed, this series takes participants on a cross-cultural learning journey from understanding core concepts of culture to reconciling cultural differences to examining the complexities of global identities. These sessions are designed to enable the participants to work more effectively across cultures without ignoring or losing their own cultural selves by learning how to recognize and effectively employ specific cultural codes. Our goal is to walk with you through various stages of inter-cultural competence from awareness and understanding to appreciation to acceptance and, finally, to adaptation where cultural dexterity becomes a way of life embedded in a fabric of UVM community. Our goal is to enhance your capacity to work effectively across cultures by learning how to integrate both knowledge and skills into a culturally appropriate behavior.

What we know. (1) What gets measured gets done, and what gets rewarded gets repeated. Measuring the impact of these trainings and evaluating the results is critical. (2) Quantitative measures of factors such as productivity, turnover, retention and demographic representation are vital. (3) Qualitative measures such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups—looking at the quality of cross-cultural interactions with the goal of improved teamwork that ultimately contributes to students’ success—also provide valuable information. (4) An organization knows it is truly inclusive when it no longer has to make cultural identity or any other diversity characteristic a stand-alone topic because it has become part of all operations, taking into account that human identities are often intersectional and always multidimensional.

Who would benefit from this training series? University faculty who teach international students; administrators who lead change; supervisors who support employees from different cultural backgrounds; staff and frontline personnel; UVM faculty and employees who have relocated to the U.S. and are adjusting to a local culture. It would also greatly benefit anyone who is interested in learning how to hold multiple perspectives while making sense out of this complex world.
Fostering Cultural Agility Series.
Component One. Same-Same but Different

Human beings have always engaged in a prejudgment labeling process based on stereotypes about all kinds of otherness sowing discord and drawing lines of separation. However, there are ways to manage our immediate unconscious assumptions and reactions better. Component One is designed to create an awareness about our own cultural lenses as well as perspectives of people from other culture(s) who often break the group-think mold by offering unique insights. They do so because in a process of problem-solving and communication they use different cultural codes.

This session introduces global cultural diversity by inviting participants to make sense out of the unfamiliar. In the process, participants gain better understanding of cultural differences and learn how to benefit from inter-cultural encounters while allowing important cognitive and emotional realizations to surface. For some participants who are mono-cultural (born and raised in a single cultural environment), this will be a time of dawning awareness of something different and possibly intriguing, interesting, strange and, perhaps, annoying. For those with prior cross-cultural exposure, this will be an opportunity to deepen their understanding and appreciation of why people do things differently.

Session duration: 3 hours
Level: introductory
Pre-requisites: none
Cohort: No less than 15, no more than 70. Can be taken as a single stand-alone session without taking Components 2, 3, and 4.
Format: interactive semi-lecture introducing basic concepts blended with exercises, short video, and discussions. Q & A.

Fostering Cultural Agility Series.
Component Two. Attitude: Why Don’t You Adapt to Me?

Being aware of our cultural differences, people – both those who are born and raised in the U.S. and those who have relocated to the U.S. for various reasons at various points of their lives – may experience a certain degree of resentment. The central question of this emotional challenge lies in asking ourselves (and, perhaps, our trusted others) why do I have to adapt to this new environment? What’s wrong with things being the way they were before this new employee or student joined our group? What’s wrong with me being just the way I am - from whichever country I may be coming from? Why won’t he/she/they adapt to me? It would be so much easier to avoid all kinds of misunderstandings/conflicts if they just accepted my cultural ways! That simple!

In the end, people wish well for themselves and for others. We create this safe space to give voice to your rational reasoning and to deeply listen to possible emotional difficulties associated with finding yourself in a culturally different, unfamiliar and, therefore, challenging environment.

Session duration: 3 hours
Level: intermediate
Pre-requisites: completed Component One
Cohort: no less than 15, no more than 25
Format: sharing-dialogue, videos, exercises and discussion. Q & A.
Aware of cross-cultural differences and having worked through our reasoning and emotions, we now need to be equipped with knowledge about *my ways vs. different other ways*. After all, I may be ready and willing to change my behavior to be more accommodating, welcoming or simply inter-culturally effective but how do I recognize and categorize different cultural codes? How do I know what a specific code represents and how it plays out in communication in a way that is different from what I am used to and what I consider the norm? What are the underlying cultural and social norms which form and cement these cultural codes?

Without this knowledge, it is impossible to achieve the *dexterity across cultures* we are aiming for.

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**Fostering Cultural Agility Series.**

**Component Three. Knowledge that Empowers.**

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### Session duration: 3 hours

**Level:** upper intermediate

**Pre-requisites:** completed Components One and Two

**Cohort:** no less than 15, no more than 25

**Format:** semi-lecture introducing concepts, frameworks, examples; videos, exercises and discussion. Q & A.

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By now, we may be very knowledgeable about how to work across cultures, yet when it comes to actual *behaving* according to what we have learned about other cultural codes, it isn’t easy. Why? Because as we try to act and communicate according to what is acceptable in that other culture, to us it feels unnatural. It feels like we are losing our own cultural identity. The only way out of it is through it: we walk with you as you master the skills of the inter-cultural chameleon. The chameleon is truly amazing: this animal adapts to new environments easily, quickly and effectively without shedding or losing its own skin. What we are aiming at in this session is how to adopt an effective and culturally appropriate behavior *without losing your own cultural self*. In other words, in this session we are learning how to find the middle ground between the *zone of inter-cultural appropriateness* and your *zone of cultural and psychological comfort*.

Categorized as a *single* Component Four, skills building may require more than one session because for many of us it takes more time and a wider variety of exercises to master the skills. In addition, while certain skills are basic (as in *survival skills*), other skills are more advanced and require more time to be processed and practiced.

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### Session duration: 3 hours minimum. Often times, additional sessions of varying lengths are needed.

**Level:** advanced

**Pre-requisites:** completed Components One, Two and Three

**Cohort:** no less than 15, no more than 25

**Format:** videos, hands-on practice exercises and discussion. Q & A.

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