



**Assessing (Inter)Cultural  
(Communication)  
Learning: Outcomes  
Indicators, Methods, Uses**

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## Alternatives in assessment

- ❖ Generating evidence by gathering meaningful data.
- ❖ Assessments come in a variety of forms, offering methodological alternatives to FL educators.
- ❖ According to Robert Mislevy, an assessment is “a particular kind of narrative...an evidentiary argument about aspects of what students know and can do, based on a handful of things they have said, done, or made”.
- ❖ One major challenge for FL educators is to know which narrative, among the variety of available assessment alternatives, to choose in telling a particular story about their students.

Sample outcome statement: Graduates will view themselves as agents for promoting understanding and dialogue between the Islamic World and the West, with the ability to articulate cultural differences between the two particularly in regard to politeness and interpersonal relations, and to interpret current Middle Eastern events from a variety of viewpoints, explaining how others view those events.

*What methods are available for assessing this outcome in college FL programs?*

*What's the \_\_\_\_\_ way to assess it in college FL programs?*

List all of the assessment types you can think of:	Rank the assessments, then justify which is _____.



## Contextualizing ‘culture’ in college FL education: Who is interested and why?

- ❖ **Value of FL education:** cultural knowledge, interacting in & across cultures, tolerance & appreciation of diversity (Norris, 2006)
- ❖ **Language-culture nexus:** language expresses, embodies, symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998)
- ❖ **Evolving notions of cultural competence:** from “*Brötchen to Gretchen*” to transnational plurilingualism and pluriculturalism (Risager, 2006, 2007)

→ Consider your foreign language program, students, and institutional milieu:

<i>Who has a stake in culture?</i>	<i>What do they mean by culture?</i>	<i>Why are they interested?</i>
<b>Students</b>		
<b>Faculty</b>		
<b>University committees</b> (e.g., General Education)		
<b>Potential employers</b>		
<b>Others?</b>		

- ❖ **Challenges of assessing culture:** “Despite a vast body of literature devoted to the teaching of culture, there is, however, no agreement on how culture can or should be defined operationally in the context of FL learning in terms of concrete instructional objectives, and there is still less consensus on whether or how it should be formally assessed. Indeed, despite all the claims about the importance of cultural content and culture learning in the language classroom, the profession has no tradition of assessing cultural understanding in the context of language instruction, either at the pre-collegiate or collegiate level.” (Schulz, 2007, p. 10).

“It is the simplification of competencies to what can be ‘objectively’ tested which has a detrimental effect: the learning of trivial facts, the reduction of subtle understanding to generalizations and stereotypes, the lack of attention to interaction and engagement because these are not tested.” (Byram, 1997, p. 111).



## Situating and defining cultural learning before we try to assess it

- ❖ So, different assessments can tell us distinct stories (and more or less) about student learning, and depending on our audience, we may be interested in narrating cultural learning in diverse ways.
- ❖ An important starting point is to decide which story to tell: What do we mean by cultural learning?
- ❖ Of course, what we mean will be related to what others mean (otherwise, we risk being meaningless!).
- ❖ Fantini (2006) lists the following examples of what people mean when they talk about culture as the object of learning:

transcultural communication	international communication	ethnorelativity
cross-cultural communication	intercultural interaction	biculturalism
cross-cultural awareness	intercultural sensitivity	multiculturalism
global competitive intelligence	intercultural cooperation	plurilingualism/pluriculturalism
global competence	cultural sensitivity	effective inter-group communication
cross-cultural adaptation	cultural competence	?
international competence	communicative competence	?

→ Which of the above signify features of your program’s understanding of cultural learning? (circle)

→ What other watchwords for cultural learning might you want to add from your context? (fill in)

- ❖ Following are a few sample definitions for culture as the target of learning:

\_\_\_\_\_ “a complex of abilities needed to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (p. 12, emphasis in original).

\_\_\_\_\_ “in a person’s cultural competence, the various cultures (national, regional, social) to which that person has gained access do not simply co-exist side by side; they are compared, contrasted and actively interact to produce an enriched, integrated pluricultural competence, of which plurilingual competence is one component” (p. 6).

\_\_\_\_\_ “culture is generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products—both tangible and intangible—of a society” (p. 43).

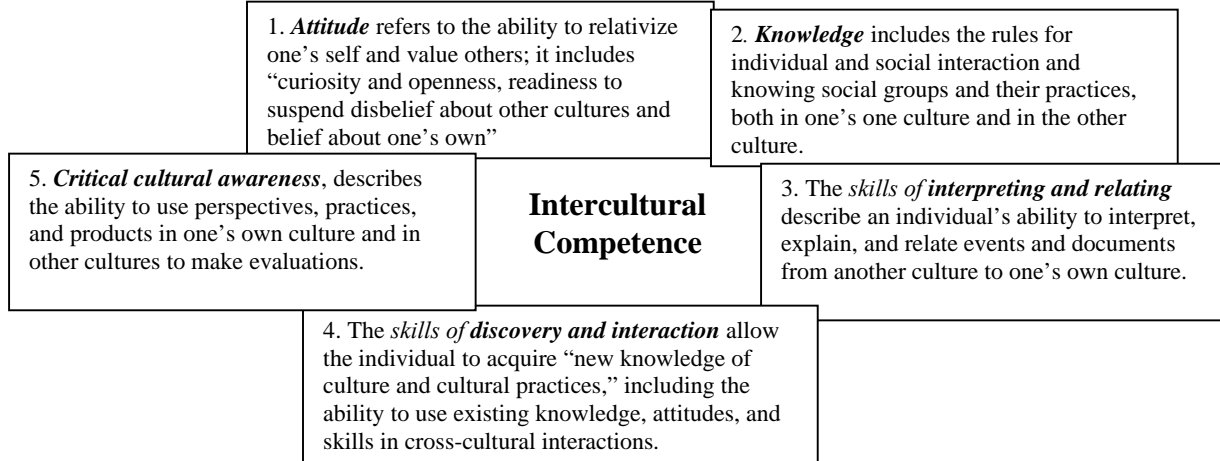
\_\_\_\_\_ “intercultural sensitivity is the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences”; “intercultural competence is the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways” (p. 422).

→ How would you define cultural learning in your program?

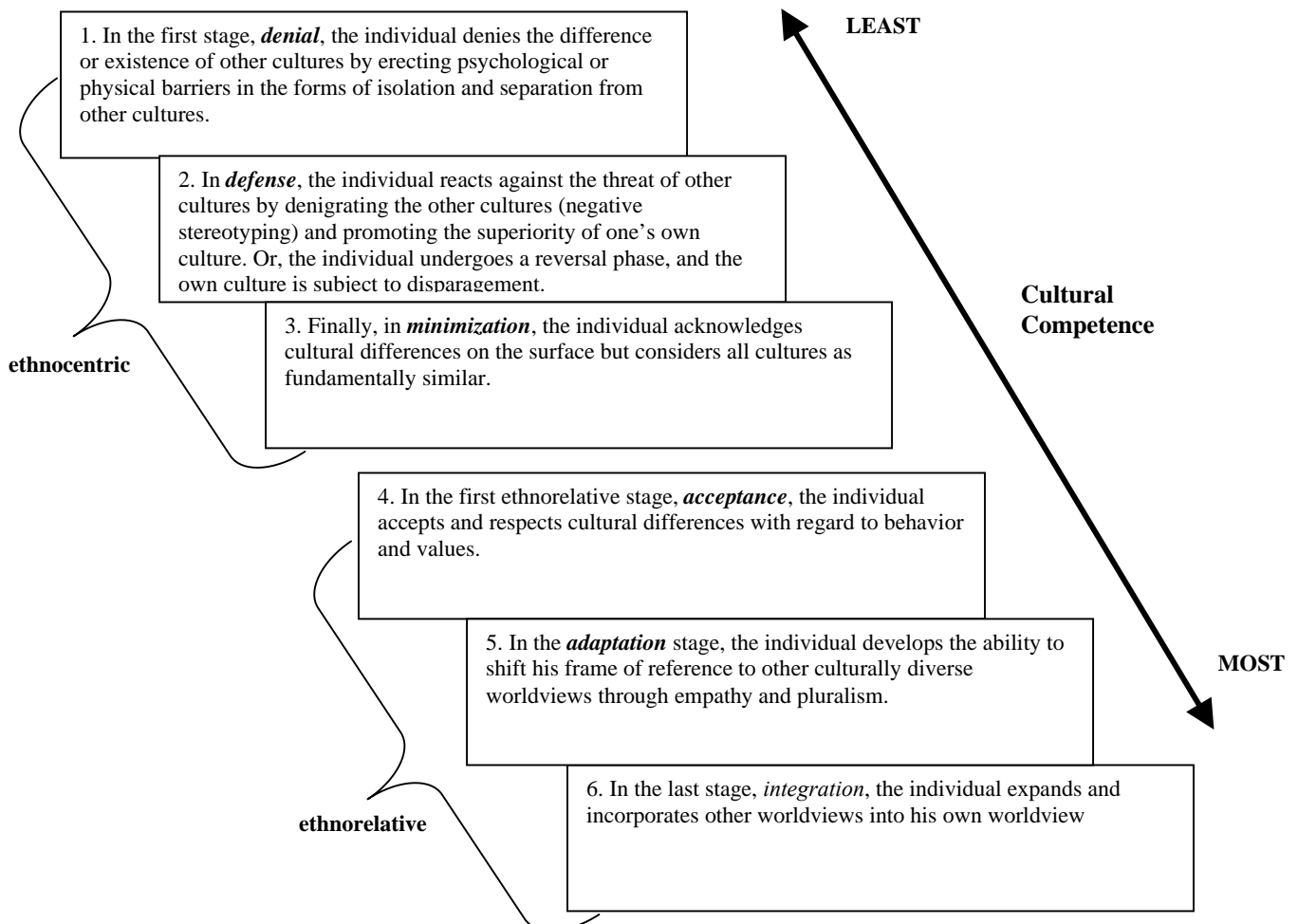


## Approaches to defining cultural learning: Theoretical constructs

### Example 1 Byram (1997): *Multidimensional Model of Intercultural Competence*



### Example 2 Bennett (1993): *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)*



# Approaches to defining cultural learning: Professional standards

## Example 1



National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996)  
*Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

“The term culture is generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products—both tangible and intangible—of a society.” (p. 42)

**Standard 2.1:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

**Example outcomes:**

- Students interact in a variety of cultural contexts that reflect both peer-group and adult activities within the culture studied, using the appropriate verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Students identify, examine, and discuss connections between cultural perspectives and socially approved behavioral patterns.

**Standard 2.2:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

**Example outcomes:**

- Students experience, discuss, and analyze expressive products of the culture, including selections from various literary genres and the fine arts.
- Students identify, discuss, and analyze such intangible products of the target culture as social, economic, and political institutions, and explore relationships among these institutions and the perspectives of the culture.

**Example 2** *American Council on Education, Center for International Initiatives:* “The American Council on Education (ACE) recognizes that global perspectives are critical to solving contemporary problems, ensuring academic excellence, and preparing a world-class workforce.” International Learning Outcomes:

<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Attitudes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understands culture within a global and comparative context (i.e., the student recognizes that own culture is one of many diverse cultures and that alternate perceptions and behaviors may be based in cultural differences).</li> <li>- Demonstrates knowledge of global issues, processes, trends, and systems (e.g., economic and political interdependency among nations).</li> <li>- Demonstrates knowledge of other cultures (beliefs, values, perspectives, practices, products).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uses knowledge, diverse cultural frames of reference, and alternate perspectives to think critically and solve problems.</li> <li>- Communicates and connects with people in other language communities in a range of settings for a variety of purposes, developing skills in each of the four modalities</li> <li>- Uses foreign language skills and/or knowledge of other cultures to extend access to information, experiences, and understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appreciates the language, art, religion, philosophy, and material culture of different cultures.</li> <li>- Accepts cultural differences and tolerates cultural ambiguity.</li> <li>- Demonstrates an ongoing willingness to seek out international or intercultural opportunities.</li> </ul>



## From outcomes to indicators: What do we mean by cultural learning?

- ❖ What among all of these (and other) possibilities are we teaching? What types of cultural learning are our students engaging in, and to what end?
- ❖ What does their learning ‘look like’? How can we know that they are learning what we teach?

<i>Student learning outcomes</i>	<i>Indicators of student learning</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted changes (or achievements) in students’ knowledge, abilities, dispositions, wisdom, etc.</li> <li>• Not what we deliver, rather what students get out of it and what they can do as a result of it.</li> <li>• Communicates about the value of courses, requirements, degree programs.</li> <li>• Covers complete set of competencies, not just those easily ‘measured’.</li> <li>• Basis for teaching and learning, not just assessment. (see Norris, 2006)</li> </ul> <p>→ Draft a few priority cultural learning outcomes for your program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observable signs of learning (things learners or others do, make, say about outcomes).</li> <li>• One outcome may call for multiple indicators.</li> <li>• Differentially meaningful to particular audiences.</li> <li>• May be linked to degrees of outcome ability or achievement (how much, how well, etc.).</li> <li>• As with all signs, indicators are themselves imbued with cultural significance.</li> <li>• Should be relevant, informative, acceptable. (see Mackay, et al., 1998)</li> </ul> <p>→ Exchange SLOs; what observable phenomena might indicate each type of cultural learning?</p>

- ❖ Important to state learning outcomes prior to thinking about assessment (though the two are iteratively related)—avoid jumping the gun to what is ‘easily measured’.



**A few examples of cultural learning outcomes and indicators**

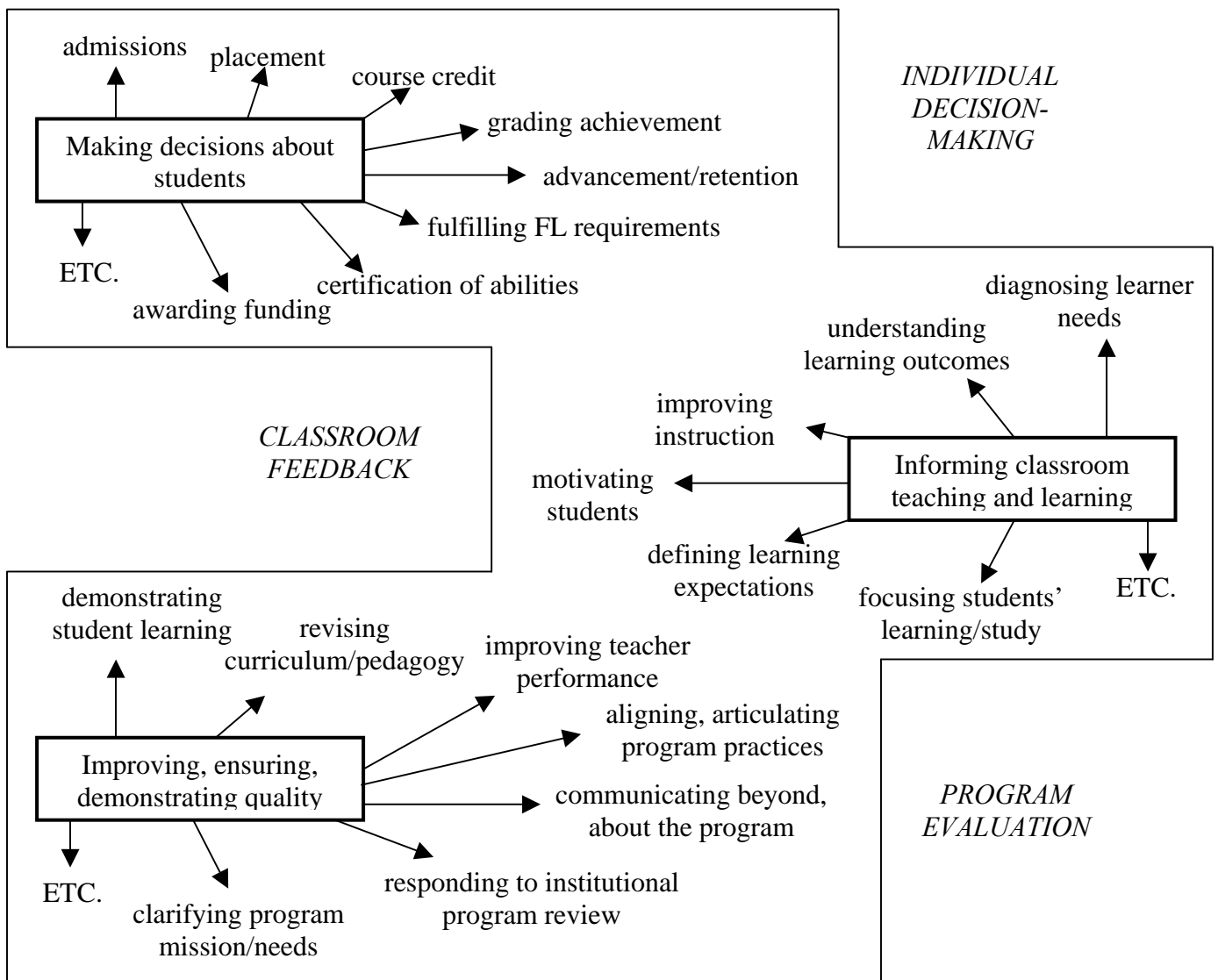
<i>Student learning outcomes</i>	<i>Indicators of student learning</i>
<p><b><u>BYU, Japanese Major</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interpret and present Japanese language and culture to others in a manner that will promote mutual understanding and respect for peoples of the world.</li> <li>2. Analyze and discuss salient aspects of Japanese thought and their effect on language, behavioral patterns, and interpersonal relationships.</li> <li>3. Analyze and discuss Japanese literary genres, works, and authors in their social, historical, and religious contexts.</li> <li>5. Converse and act in Japanese in linguistically, socially, and culturally appropriate ways on a broad variety of topics in a wide range of settings.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Student reflections</li> <li>→ Student target-language products in writing and speaking</li> <li>→ Collections of student performances over time</li> <li>→ Students' own analyses of development</li> <li>→ Faculty analyses of student work over time</li> <li>→ Observations of students interacting in Japanese</li> <li>→ Student performance on knowledge and proficiency tests</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Kapi'olani Community College</u></b></p> <p>Internationalization core competencies</p> <p><i>Skill 2.</i> Uses foreign language skills and/or knowledge of other cultures to extend his/her access to information, experiences, and understanding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using foreign language skills to locate and use resources (e.g., foreign language texts) in various disciplines.</li> <li>• Using foreign language and cultural knowledge gathered from a fluent/native speaker.</li> <li>• Using foreign language skills and knowledge of other cultures in experiential learning (e.g., service-learning, internships, study abroad).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Research reports (written and spoken) based on target culture/language resources</li> <li>→ Recordings of interactions with target culture speakers</li> <li>→ Student self-analysis of outcomes of interactions</li> <li>→ Participation figures for target culture experiences</li> <li>→ Student reflection on skills/knowledge development via cultural experiences</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>University of Arizona, German Major</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Identify, describe and discuss key historical, cultural, and literary milestones in the development of German speaking countries, including minority voices and issues.</li> <li>5. Enjoy critical engagement with the target culture.</li> <li>6. Question how the larger context shapes individual expression both in the present and the past.</li> <li>7. Accept challenges to explore ideas and ways of knowing that are outside of their own paradigm of individual and cultural understanding.</li> <li>8. Contribute to a culturally diverse global community.</li> <li>9. Seek interaction with people of another culture.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Student reflections</li> <li>→ Student self-assessments</li> <li>→ Patterns of participation in cultural events, at home and abroad</li> <li>→ Extended student research and writing</li> <li>→ Summative experience preceding graduation</li> <li>→ Group interactions, discussions with peers</li> <li>→ Post-graduation professional and academic pursuits</li> <li>→ Other/external observation</li> </ul>

→ What are the key challenges presented by cultural learning outcomes and their indicators?



## Assessment of cultural learning: Systematic understanding for particular purposes

- ❖ Assessment provides a way of systematically looking at student learning through the consistent elicitation, observation, and interpretation of indicators; assessment turns indicators into evidence.
- ❖ Additionally, according to Hill and Perry (1994), “How we go about assessing...depends crucially on why we are doing so. Our reasons for assessing students are manifold...” (p. 254).
- ❖ We assess for a lot of different reasons, and assessment occurs in FL programs at different levels.
- ❖ Just as narratives are expressed to particular audiences for particular purposes, so too should assessments be designed in terms of how/why particular audiences will understand and use them.



## Assessing cultural learning: Linking methods to interpretations and uses

- ❖ Useful assessment → Does it tell us what we need to know? → Can we trust it? → Is it feasible? → Does its use promote student learning?

<b>Assessment Method</b>	<b>What does it tell you?</b>	<b>What doesn't it tell you?</b>	<b>How might you use it?</b>	<b>Comments:</b>
<u>Standardized assessment</u>  Self- or other-rating on multiple items reflecting constructs of intercultural competence. Generally a questionnaire format using likert scales.				
<u>Local questionnaire</u>  Students respond to closed or open-ended items that query specific features of cultural learning related to course or program outcomes.				
<u>Intercultural rubric</u>  Rubric provides descriptors for 10 intercultural characteristics at 4 proficiency levels, from "novice" to "advanced".				
<u>Scenarios</u>  Students read short texts about intercultural situations (individual, social, professional) and answer questions – multiple choice as well as open-ended – on how they would respond.				

Assessment Method	What does it tell you?	What doesn't it tell you?	How might you use it?	Comments:
<p><u>Student journals/diaries</u></p> <p>Students write (in L1 or L2) regular, dated entries in response to focused topics or questions over the course of learning (e.g., during study abroad sojourns). Prompts encourage personalized observation, analysis, evaluation.</p>				
<p><u>Course-embedded projects/tasks</u></p> <p>Students engage in interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication tasks on cultural phenomena, involving research and interaction. Ratings based on task accomplishment expectations and standards.</p>				
<p><u>Portfolios</u></p> <p>Students compile exemplars of their cultural analyses in writing, speaking, and other activities over a course, experience, or degree. They also assess their own cultural development through reflective narratives and presentations.</p>				
<p><u>Other assessments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Alumni surveys</li> <li>• Engagement statistics</li> <li>• Blogs, web sites</li> <li>• Pre-post questionnaires</li> <li>• ?</li> </ul>				

**Next Steps:** Which of the above assessment methods might help to inform the kinds of interpretations you want to make about cultural learning in your courses and programs? How might they be adapted? Which might meet the demands for decisions and actions that need to be taken?

 **A framework for assessing cultural learning outcomes**

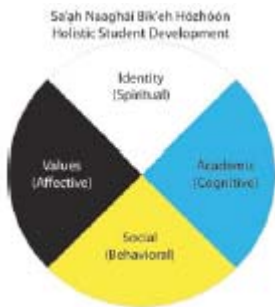
- ❖ A standard framework for the assessment of student learning outcomes can help to systematize and regulate the process. Key here is that assessments are (a) based on clear and valued outcomes (not vice versa), (b) linked to the locus and level of learning (and therefore providing of improvement-oriented feedback), and (c) procedurally specific (in terms of who does what, when). Assessments should be evaluated for these qualities, and ultimately for their impact on the overall student learning process.

<i>Student learning outcome</i>	<i>Where/when is it learned?</i> Course, experience, degree levels	<i>Indicators?</i> Observable phenomena linked to learning	<i>Assessment data collection?</i> Methods for observing indicators	<i>Assessment analyses?</i> How/when are interpretations made about learning	<i>Assessment use?</i> How/when are findings reported and used, by whom	<i>Evaluating assessments?</i> Feasible, trustworthy, useful



## Some final thoughts on assessing cultural learning in college FL programs

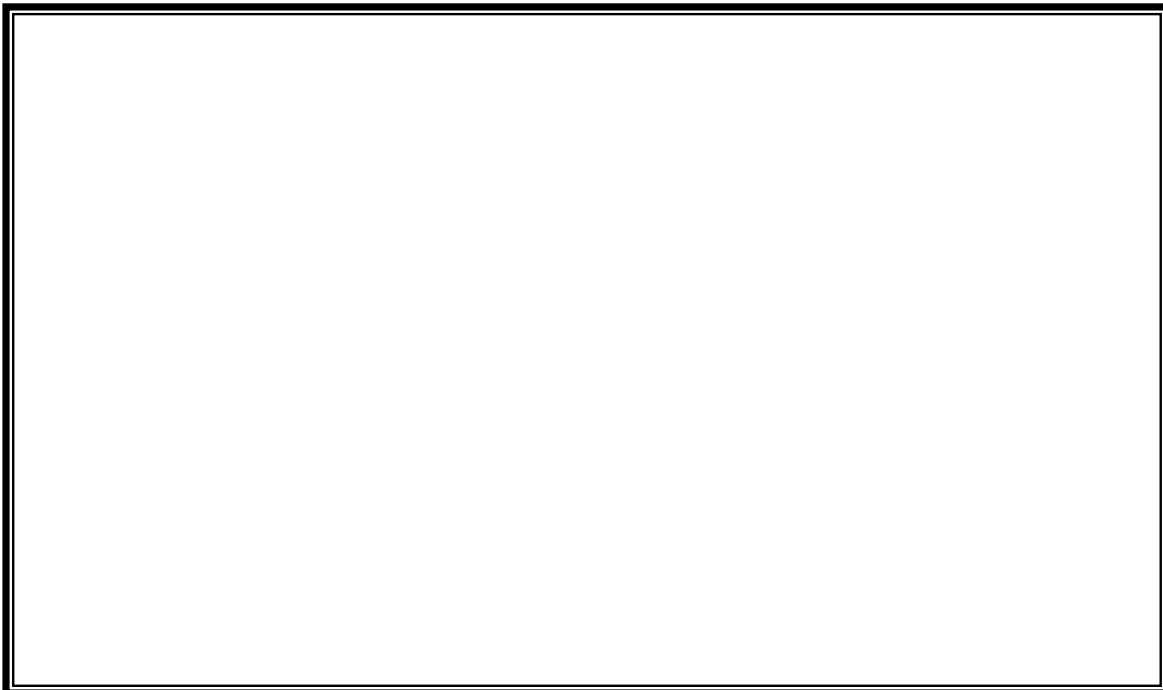
- ❖ What do we mean by cultural learning? → What role does it play in our courses, degree programs, institutions? → What do/should our students get out of learning it? → How can assessment processes contribute to understanding and improving cultural learning?
- ❖ N.B.<sup>1</sup> Standardized assessments of intercultural competence are easily incorporated into outcomes assessment practices (if you have the \$); however, they may or may not reflect the values of your program, but they will influence the teaching and learning that occurs.
- ❖ N.B.<sup>2</sup> Locally developed assessments offer course- and program-relevant insights with respect to your expectations and your students; however, they may be subject to internal biases; consider multiple methods for triangulation and other ways of ‘checking’ the interpretations made in local assessments.
- ❖ Assessment itself is a culturally laden practice and learning about the target culture might involve learning about assessment from the point of view of the target culture; consider incorporating culturally indigenous practices as mechanisms for learning and assessing.



“...assessment needs to be expanded from the cognitive area to the affective, behavioral, and Diné identity to truly measure whether Diné College students experience *Sa'qh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón*...must address both western-based and Diné-based assessment to answer student learning and effective teaching.”

Diné College (2008): *Comprehensive visit self-study report*.

→ Final thoughts on assessing cultural learning: What will you do next?



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## **Web sites related to cultural learning**

### *Organizations with a focus on cultural learning*

- American Council on Education  
<http://www.acenet.edu>
- Intercultural Competence Assessment Project  
<http://www.incaproject.org>
- Forum on Study Abroad  
<http://www.forumea.org>
- Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition  
<http://www.carla.umn.edu/culture/initiatives.html>

See many open-access articles on culture and study abroad in *Frontiers Journal*: <http://www.frontiersjournal.com>

### *Commercial Tools for Intercultural Assessment*

- Intercultural Development Inventory  
[http://www.hammerconsulting.org/product\\_idi.php](http://www.hammerconsulting.org/product_idi.php)
- Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory  
<http://www.creativeorgdesign.com/ccai.htm>