

Cultural Differences: Mainstream American Culture and Hispanic/Latino Culture Compared

Often, we do not examine our own cultural values and assumptions until we are exposed to another culture. In order to provide the best service, we need to become more self-aware *and* more sensitive to our culturally and ethnically diverse users.

In the chart below, review the differences between the views of “mainstream” American culture and Hispanic/Latino culture. Without being culturally aware, can you see how misunderstanding and miscommunication could easily occur in the Library setting?

Cultural Aspects	Mainstream American Culture	Hispanic/Latino Culture
Sense of Personal Space	Arm’s length is polite	Closer than arm’s length
Formality of Address	Uses informal “you” for all relationships	Has both a formal and a familiar form of “you”
Greetings	A solid handshake	A gentler handshake, hug, or kiss on the cheek
Eye Contact	Direct eye contact is a sign of respect, honesty and attention	Averting one’s eyes shows respect for an elder or a person of authority
Communication Method	Direct communication is preferred (say what you mean and mean what you say)	Indirect communication (if it is upsetting, don’t say it. Yes can mean maybe or even no depending on the circumstance)
Time	Time is limited and finite so one must fit one’s needs to deadlines and schedules	Time is relative, expanding and contracting. There is always time, human needs are more important, deadlines can be changed
The Concept of Family	Nuclear family, children encouraged to be independent	Extended family including neighbors & friends, independence can be viewed as disloyal
Orientation	Focus on the individual, independence, personal fulfillment	Focus on core group(s), looking out for others, achieving group harmony
Authority & Social Organization	All people are equal, authority can be challenged	Power is centralized, defer to authority
Control	Individuals have control, problems should be “fixed” and change is good	Individuals have little control over destiny, adapt to problems, change disrupts harmony
Learning	Interactive, experiential, drawing one’s own conclusions	Instructor guides students in a formal manner, dependent on written materials