

**COM 391: Topics in Verbal, Intercultural, or Gender Communication:  
Intercultural Communication and Technology  
Distance Learning Format**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This bilingual seminar considers three central themes: **Culture**, **communication**, and **technology**. Deepening your understanding of these three topics will help you live and work more effectively in our increasingly interconnected world.

- **Culture** is the system of values that shapes how we view the world. It is essential that we understand our own culture before we take on the challenge of understanding other people's value systems.
- **Communication** can be difficult to achieve with people from our own culture, and *intercultural* communication presents even greater challenges as we interact with people who have different values, beliefs, and experiences.
- **Technology** continues to provide us with new ways to communicate across distance (e.g. cell phones, computer forums, and video conferencing), but these new options often pose their own challenges to our communication efforts.

This course presents you with two unique challenges. The first is the mix of traditional face-to-face (FTF) and online teaching, learning, and discussion modes. Some class sessions will be held FTF when I visit JCMU, and other times you will access streaming video lectures for independent learning. Similarly, some class discussions will be held asynchronously on a text-based computer conferencing system, while other discussions will take place in real-time using text chat and/or video conferencing. You will have an opportunity to interact with Japanese students as much as possible during the semester in all of these communication modes.

The second challenge is the bilingual video lectures. The video-taped lectures were originally FTF lectures presented to students at Waseda University. Nearly all of these students are native Japanese speakers so the lectures were presented in both English (to promote their language ability) and Japanese (to make sure they followed the course content). As intensive Japanese language students, it is hoped these bilingual lectures will help you improve your Japanese-language ability while you absorb the English-language content.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To foster the understanding, critique, analysis, and integration of the major theory and research of intercultural communication.
2. To encourage the application of theory and research to improve the students' intercultural communication abilities in everyday situations.
3. To provide students with opportunities to practice intercultural communication in several communication

modes with Japanese students: Face-to-face, text messaging, and video conferencing.

**CLASS MEETINGS:** As stated above, this course will be taught in a hybrid format, utilizing several different communication modes. The relative success or limitations of these methods will be incorporated into our discussions.

- **Face-to-face classes:** September and December, dates and times TBA. The beginning and end of the course will include intensive face-to-face (FTF) sessions with the instructor and Japanese students (as possible).
- **Online discussions:** When we are unable to meet FTF, class discussions will take place using a online discussion system (BBS), email, or video conference. These sessions will include Japanese students as often as possible. Your active participation in these online discussion is required and makes up an important part of the participation portion of your final grade (see Grading section for details).
- **Streaming video lectures:** You will have access to online video-taped lectures on various topics related to intercultural communication. You should be able to access these lectures anytime it is convenient for you, although you will need to view the lectures, participate in class discussions, and complete any homework within the time allotted.

#### READINGS:

- Gudykunst, W.B. and Nishida, T. (1994). Bridging Japanese/North American Differences (Communicating Effectively in Multicultural Contexts). Sage Publications.
- A course pack containing various readings will be provided.

#### GRADING

TASK	POSSIBLE POINTS	PERCENT OF GRADE
First Exam	100	25%
Second Exam	100	25%
Final Paper / Presentation	100	25%
Class Participation	100	25%
	400	100%

**EXAMS:** A major portion of your course assessment will be two exams and one paper/project. Exams will cover the reading assignments, handouts, lectures, and class discussions (both FTF and online). Exams will consist mostly of short answer and short essay items. *No make-up exams will be given prior to or after a missed exam, regardless of the reason for the missed exam.*

**FINAL PAPER & PRESENTATION:** All students will complete a medium-length paper which they will present to the class. You will identify and investigate a topic related to the course content. You will write up your findings in a medium-length paper of approximately 10-15 pages. Additional details of this paper will be announced later in the semester.

Most students will follow a conventional term paper pattern, for instance, 1) select a topic covered during the course readings or discussions, 2) investigate that topic using traditional (e.g. newspapers, journals, and books) or online resources, and 3) write a standard term paper. In order to be accepted for full credit, the paper must be (a) typed or

word-processed using a standard paper format, and (b) submitted by the due date (TBA). Papers received after the due date will receive a one-grade deduction per day at the instructor's discretion.

However, you may elect to complete a different project format with the instructor's approval. For instance, you may choose to complete a short study (e.g. questionnaire or participant observation) and write up your findings in a traditional paper format. Examples of this kind of project include an American student of mine who wrote about her study of the Japanese flute, and a Japanese student of mine who interviewed American exchange students about their use of communication technologies while living abroad. Projects like this can be interesting, but can also present unique difficulties (e.g. too few people return your questionnaire) so you should think carefully before committing to this kind of project.

Another, less common, format was used by another former student. Dan Laursen was a student in my "Japanese Culture and Society" course at JCMU and he created a Web page chronicling his experiences in Japan: [www.daninjapan.com](http://www.daninjapan.com). Because a simple online diary (we didn't have the word "blog" in 1999...) didn't provide enough analysis to qualify as a term project, Dan included a section on his site where he reflected on his experiences and on what he learned ([www.daninjapan.com/learn/index.html](http://www.daninjapan.com/learn/index.html)).

Communication technology has improved since Dan did his project, and new projects might include an interactive blog with contributions from people from different cultures, an online annotated bibliography on some aspect of intercultural communication that could act as a resource for others interested in that topic, or any number of other possibilities. If you are willing to do the work, I am (usually) willing to accept it in lieu of a conventional paper. *Talk to me before you begin work on an alternative term project.*

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Your active involvement in this class is essential in both FTF and especially online formats. While attending all FTF classes can be challenging for some students, making time to view online lectures and participate in online discussions can all-too-quickly overwhelm unsuspecting students. Your best strategy is to participate in daily short sessions rather than trying to make up an entire week's work in one sitting. Students are also expected to complete the assigned reading and view the online lectures *prior to* class sessions and online discussions so they will be prepared to fully participate.

**ASSISTANCE:** Any reasonably difficult college course will present its students with challenging content and ideas. In addition to these standard challenges, this class uses a variety of communication modes that may be new to many students. While we may benefit greatly from these new technologies and methods, we may also experience many problems along the way. I may not always be aware of the difficulties or challenges you face, either with the content or the communication methods. *It is up to you to tell me when you are having problems with the content or the technology.* I will do everything possible to assist you. My office telephone is listed above and is best between the hours of 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM. I am almost always online (mornings, evenings, and weekends) so email may be the best way to reach me when you have an urgent problem. For standard, non-urgent problems, use the BBS as a way to get advice from me or the other students.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** Academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating on exams, claiming someone else's work or ideas as your own) is a serious offense. All work that you submit in this class must be completed independently. Each student is responsible for being familiar with MSU's policies on academic dishonesty. Any student engaging in academic dishonesty in this course will receive a "0.0" for their final course grade.

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

SESSION*	TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS
Session 1: FTF Date TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course overview</li> <li>• Introduction to communication tools (especially BBS and video conference systems) we will use this semester.</li> <li>• Sharing our intercultural communication experiences.</li> <li>• Homework: Post your self introduction in the computer conference.</li> </ul>
Session 2: FTF Date TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intercultural communication foundations: Cultural trait worksheets.</li> <li>• This session will be held jointly with students from Waseda University.</li> <li>• Continue this discussion online, sharing what your small group talked about.</li> </ul>
Session 3: FTF Date TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extended exchange with Japanese students.</li> <li>• Develop at least one discussion question to ask the visiting Japanese students about, for instance, challenges they face communicating in English, intercultural communication experiences, etc. They will have developed similar questions to ask you. Summarize their responses online and include your impressions of these encounters.</li> </ul>
Session 4: FTF Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary</li> <li>• Exam #1</li> <li>• Online discussion: Transitioning to the online format.</li> <li>• Submit paper proposal.</li> </ul>
Session 5: Online Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to American culture (streaming video session titles TBA)</li> <li>• Reading: Gudykunst, Chapter 1</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> <li>• Revise paper proposal. Students whose proposals have been accepted should begin work ASAP.</li> </ul>
Session 6: Online Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Japanese culture (streaming video session titles TBA)</li> <li>• Reading: Gudykunst, Chapter 2</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> </ul>
Session 7: Online Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the study of culture, emphasis on U.S. and Japanese cultural traits (streaming video session titles TBA)</li> <li>• Reading: Gudykunst, Chapter 3</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> </ul>
Session 8: Online Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to communication theories (streaming video session titles TBA)</li> <li>• Reading: Gudykunst, Chapter 4</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> <li>• Submit paper update.</li> </ul>
Session 9: Online Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to intercultural communication (streaming video session titles TBA)</li> <li>• Reading: Gudykunst, Chapter 6</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> </ul>
Session 10: Online Dates TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. and Japanese communication styles and intercultural communication (streaming video session titles TBA)</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> </ul>

<p>Session 11: Online Dates TBA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to communication technologies</li> <li>• Reading: Ito, “A new set of social rules for a newly wireless society”</li> <li>• Reading: Japan Media Review: The keitai log.</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> </ul>
<p>Session 12: Online Dates TBA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication technology use in the U.S. and Japan</li> <li>• Reading: Pew Internet &amp; American Life Project: “The Internet goes to college”</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> <li>• Submit paper update.</li> </ul>
<p>Session 13: Online Dates TBA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender and communication technologies</li> <li>• Reading: Ono &amp; Zavodny: Gender differences in information technology use: A U.S.-Japan comparison.</li> <li>• Discussion: TBA</li> </ul>
<p>Session 14: FTF Dates TBA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary</li> <li>• Exam #2</li> <li>• Discussion: Final paper/presentation consultations.</li> </ul>
<p>Session 15: FTF Dates TBA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper presentations.</li> <li>• Class evaluation.</li> </ul>

\* Note that each class session is approximately three hours in length. Some sessions will be held FTF so the time is easy to calculate. Other sessions will combine viewing streaming video lectures (usually 60 to 90 minutes each) and online discussions and may be more difficult to calculate, but it is up to each student to fully participate. If you're unsure how much time you've participated in the online sessions, it is better to stay on longer rather than shorter.