

Module 1

University Foundation Study

Academic Culture

Introduction

The transition between secondary and higher education can be a time of upheaval. You will need to learn about the customs and expectations of your new college or university. In addition, you will need to work alongside other students and academics from a wide range of backgrounds. This module will help you to understand the academic culture that exists in higher education in the US, as well as touching on cross-cultural communication.

Unit 1 defines academic culture and checks understanding of key concepts. Unit 2 facilitates discussion of common problems associated with the transition to higher education. Unit 3 attempts to challenge any unrealistic expectations you may have about higher education. Unit 4 examines common communication problems and will help you to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings in an academic environment. Unit 5 focuses on time management, which is an important value in North American culture, and it will help you use your time more efficiently. Finally, Unit 6 asks you to examine what teaching and learning really means to you and your teachers.

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At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- understand key terminology and concepts relating to academic culture

Task 1 Defining academic culture

When we go overseas to live and work, we have to get used to the new culture we have entered. For example:

Seeing people eat with their hands may surprise you.



If you are a student, you will also have to get used to the academic culture of the institution in which you are studying.

1.1 Read and complete this definition of academic culture using some of the words in the box. Compare your completed definition with a partner's.

attitudes
rules

~~beliefs~~
philosophy

culture
study

regulations
thinking

research
values

Academic culture refers to the ^a *beliefs*, values and ^b _____ that exist in higher education institutions, particularly universities. Such a ^c _____ exists alongside the culture of the rest of the country. Academic culture includes, among other things, the rules and ^d _____ for appropriate behavior on the part of teacher and student, and the ^e _____ that underlies teaching and learning at this level. It is also about the beliefs held by those working within such an institution, such as belief in original ^f _____ and critical ^g _____.

1.2 Use the words in the box to discuss the differences between the learning culture where you were previously with that of the institution you are currently attending.

Task 2 Important words in academic culture

2.1 What do you think is happening in the three photographs?



2.2 Match the terms (a–i) with the definitions (1–9). Check your answers with other students.

a. Continuing education

b. Undergraduate

c. Academic advisor

d. Professor

e. Seminar

f. Core course

g. Social Sciences

h. Plagiarism

i. Formative assessment

1. A student-focused class with two-way dialogue involving students.

2. The person who plans and delivers a course to students, and grades their work.

3. The use of other people's ideas or research without appropriate acknowledgment.

4. An academic staff member assigned to students for support and guidance.

5. Coursework that provides feedback and helps students do well in summatively assessed coursework and exams at a later date; it is not a given grade.

6. Courses of study or training, usually not at university, that some people take after they have left high school.

7. A compulsory course essential to your degree.

8. The study of people in society, which includes Political Science, Economics, Anthropology, etc.

9. The first level of study after leaving high school, usually lasting four years.

2.3 Complete the sentences with the correct word from the pair of words supplied.

- a. ~~class~~ / seminar

The class was very crowded, so it was difficult to hear everything.

- b. professor / graduate assistant

Xavier stayed on at university after finishing his MA and worked as a _____ while studying for a PhD.

- c. research / plagiarism

It is tempting to copy things straight from the Internet, but _____ is absolutely forbidden.

- d. professor / academic advisor

If you have a problem choosing your courses, you should make an appointment to discuss it with your _____.

- e. formative assessment / summative assessment

This course uses _____. The grades will count towards your final degree.

- f. higher education / continuing education

My mother left school at 16 without many qualifications, but she went back into _____ in her 20s to do a Photography course.

- g. core course / elective course

Jens has decided to take a(n) _____ in Spanish as well as his other subjects. He doesn't need the extra credits, but he wants to go to Spain in the summer.

- h. Humanities / Social Sciences

Anna is a _____ graduate. She has a degree in English and Drama.

- i. undergraduate / graduate

Leon worked in Australia for a year after he finished his bachelor's degree. Now he has gone back to university to get a(n) _____ degree.

2.4 You have now worked with the following nine pairs of words. Discuss with a partner or in small groups the differences between them.

- a. *class / seminar*
- b. *professor / graduate assistant*
- c. *research / plagiarism*
- d. *professor / academic advisor*
- e. *formative assessment / summative assessment*
- f. *higher education / continuing education*
- g. *core course / elective course*
- h. *Humanities / Social Sciences*
- i. *undergraduate / graduate*

Reflect

Write a short essay comparing and contrasting the higher education academic culture in your country and in North America.