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### Intercultural Competence in the United States

Current demographic trends indicate a record peak in U.S. Asian and Hispanic population. (U.S. Department of Education 9) By 2016, that meant 57.8 million Hispanics and 18 million Asians were living in the United States. (U.S. Department of Education 9) This unique growth in Hispanic and Asian populations will create unique challenges in intercultural interaction. “This attention to cross-cultural communication differences is understandable given the importance of multicultural sensitivity in a world of increasing diversity and globalization.” (Schwartz 1) The individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance of Asians, Hispanics, and Whites provide a relatively stable ground with which to make general predictions on how increase in Asian and Hispanic populations will affect society. (Choy 50) While not necessarily found in all members of a culture, these “cultural factors can be viewed as preferences that are strongly embedded in individuals because of the highly social nature of humans and their strong need to fit into social groups” (Choy 50; Parrish & Linder-VanBerschoot 4) The strongly embedded preferences of individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance do not just stay within an ethnic group however; their effects reach deep into our society’s educational system and economy demanding a change in general intercultural competence.

**America's educational system** revolves around the student. (Choy 49) The student is responsible for making personal inquiry into unfamiliar concepts. (50) The student is expected to communicate directly to the instructor. (49) The student is encouraged to probe beyond his or her indoctrination of a subject and express it in personal thought patterns. (50) "Student-centered learning" and similar phrases appropriately describe the seal of individualism clearly evident in America's educational system.

In contrast to that hedonistic quality, collectivism bonds members with deep affinity for survival. (52) Hence, "from the Asian students' perspective, it is improper to speak up if not spoken to directly by the teacher." (51) If educators desire to quickly determine the competence of their Asian students, they typically must employ alternative methods to the class discussion of everyday American education. (51) Concurringly, Hispanic social penetration to the point of openly asking questions is culturally encouraged only following development of a relationship. (Schwartz 5) Both of these cultures' values stand in contrast with the more individualistic spirit of White Americans that encourages open questions. (Choy 51)

The gulf separating Asian and Hispanic students' expectations from those delivered in American education can easily create a sense of unpredictability in the classroom – assessed by uncertainty avoidance: "the extent to which individuals are made to feel insecure in a situation that they consider ... unpredictable." (Choy 53) This cultural factor, however, expresses more than simply the way those of one culture often feel about a matter; uncertainty avoidance creates real world effects in the educational

system. For instance, students who expect rigid rubrics and precise learning objectives indicating high uncertainty avoidance are routinely found among Asians and Hispanics. (Choy 51; Schwartz 5) While standing both these ethnicities in contrast to White Americans, the combination of uncertainty avoidance with collectivism to varying degrees leads to unique outcomes in education.

White Americans generally have lower uncertainty avoidance coupled with a stronger sense of individualism than do Asians and Hispanics. (Jeong and Acock 226-227) Of those two, Hispanics demonstrate the strongest sense of uncertainty avoidance. *Educational Review* reported an average increase in reading and math standardized test scores associated with these cultural factors by 15 additional points in Asians than Hispanics attending American schools. (234) This seems to indicate that higher uncertainty avoidance does not promote excellence in student-centered learning. Given that and a variety of other complicated cultural factors, in 2017, Asians reported the highest degree-granting institution enrollment rates, followed by Whites, and closely followed by Hispanics. (U.S. Department of Education 90) Similar trends are observed in other educational achievements such as associate, bachelor, and higher-level degrees earned where 52% of Asians have bachelor or higher-level degrees compared to the 58% of Whites who do not even have any degrees and only 34% who have 4 years or more. (127) Hispanics show the lowest 4 year or more degree completion rates at 14%. The only violation to the trend of Asians leading Whites leading Hispanics in education is high school completion rates where over 50% more Asians than Whites fail to complete high school. (130-131) In general though, these educational trends lay

the foundation for macroeconomic analysis of the effects of growing populations of these ethnic groups.

**The United States economy** is driven by money. (Hubbard and O'Brien ch.18) After accounting for foreign transactions, any increase in wages earned by workers corresponds to an increase in money consumed contributing to an overall growth in the economy. (ch.11) Thus, an increase in population of an ethnic group that generally earns higher wages means a faster growing economy. Likewise, the opposite is true. The U.S. Department of Education reports that those with higher education generally earned more income. (U.S. Department of Education 136) Given educational achievement by ethnicity, one would expect Asians to make more income than Whites who make more than Hispanics, and the U.S. Department of Education confirms this in reporting a mean income of \$49,500 for Asians, \$42,900 for Whites, and \$30,000 for Hispanics. (136-139) This data shows that an increase *en ceteris paribus* a growing Asian population will correspond to a faster growing economy while a growing Hispanic population will mean the opposite. Since the Hispanic population currently overshadows significant growth in the Asian population, but at the same time, the Asian population is growing only slightly slower, it seems reasonable to conclude that the change in the increase in the United State's mean GDP will decrease indefinitely in the next decade.

However, economists are not the only ones interested in money and growing ethnic populations. Advertisers, seeking to make profit, will likely increase their effort to target Hispanics who may soon become the majority ethnicity. For instance, more advertisements will likely be in Spanish; more Hispanic people will appear in these

advertisements; and an increasing respect will be featured in these advertisements.

Since Asians currently only compose 6% of the United State's population, it is unlikely to expect to see any significant increase in Asian advertising. (U.S. Department of Education 9)

The trends observed in Asian and Hispanic populations in America furnish ample support for positive predictions of corresponding effect on the educational and economic scene. However, a purely analytical view of population trends does not capture the normative, emotional dimension of population change. In contrast to the ease of examining United States long-term demographic effects, experiencing these effects will call for a new level of intercultural competence for all – Asians, Hispanics, and Whites.

**Intercultural competence** expresses a person's effectiveness to meet cultural norms. It is a quality that encompasses, not simply one's speech nor emotions, but one's pattern of behavior. Beyond merely expressing competence or capability to interact with those of one's own culture, *intercultural* competence demands similar capability of interaction across those of different cultures.

Intercultural competence is fittingly an essential prerequisite to harmonizing the growing Hispanic and Asian populations with the United States. For instance, examining the individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance of Hispanics, Whites, and Asians showed an incompatibility with many traditional American teaching methods and collectivist cultures. Inviting individual members of a class to ask questions where they are unsure about a topic, does less to encourage

Hispanic and Asian students to learn than Whites. (Choy 51; Schwartz 5) If any progress is to be made in this regard, a greater number of teaching methods must be designed to appeal to the class as a group. Likewise, in economics, the growing number of lower mean income earning Hispanics sends troubling messages to the growth of America's economy. Attacking this problem from its root, education, seems to offer the greatest long-term solution. However, improving the general intercultural competence of Americans manifests its greatest impact in improving overall quality of life. The extent to which an individual can engage in socialization with those of another culture, really defines how comfortable they will adapt to the inevitable changes to society. (Schwartz 1) "Therefore, whether an individual from one cultural background will be inclined to [communicate] to an individual from another cultural background has implications not only for international relations on the whole, but also for individual mental health." Hispanics, Whites, Asians – all cultures – are better equipped to make their way in society when endowed that vital quality. (Schwartz 1) Yes, intercultural competence is becoming more valuable than ever before.

The author of this paper learned much in researching this paper and is very appreciative for being challenged to consider intercultural developments. From not understanding the distinction between race and ethnicity to now recognizing common dimensions of cultural intercultural relationships, the author has opened his eyes to a world of cultural rules and biases. He is now in a better position to melt away other's prejudices after personally examining the academic journals (which he noted to present information entirely confounding prejudiced literature and rumors). The honest

challenges that Hispanic and Asian population growth do bring to the United States deserve the same merit of those that White population growth creates. These challenges are too great for any human to overcome. Therefore, with deepest sincerity, this author commits himself to fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship and promoting the common good. He will lend neither ear nor mind to the prejudiced lies common in everyday life at school and work, and especially, in the door to door preaching work of Jehovah's Witnesses, the author will find greater enrichment in initiating interaction and personally speaking to those from and who speak the language of Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Vietnam, and other countries, publicly expressing the impartiality of his international religion that directs a preaching work in 943 languages. ([www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org))

Exciting new demographic changes will soon dramatize the cultural differences of Asians, Hispanics, and Whites in the United States. This will demand new modes of collectivist targeted education if a corresponding increase in Hispanic mean income and sustained long-term economic growth are to be seen. However, more than a select group of educators or economists will be involved in these changes. Intercultural competence calls upon every American to examine and refine the way he or she interacts with those of other ethnicities. It is our social responsibility.

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