

# Difference between vietnamese culture and american culture

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Coming to America is personally a turning point in my life. I, a Vietnamese international student who had always dreamt of studying in America, decided to gather all my courage to step on the air plane to America on my own and started my promisingly eventful journey in this totally foreign land. Months before my departure, I already imagined how my life would be in America, and I was confident about my adaptability as I had spent four years living abroad in Singapore but anxious about the much more immense diversity in America at the same time.

As more than three weeks have past since I first arrived in America, I gradually learn that the real experience is way different from what I have imagined and expected. I would rather call it a “ positively challenging experience” as I am exposed to a completely foreign culture and challenged to adapt myself to it but the learning process of this new culture has greatly excited me. At the beginning, I inevitably experienced a certain amount of cultural shock, given the vast difference between Vietnamese culture and American culture.

Cultural shock is a state of anxiety that results from cross-cultural misunderstanding. One incident that gave rise to my cultural shock happened when people I hardly know acted too friendly towards me according to Vietnamese culture’s standard by hugging me without asking for my permission or at least signalling their offer of hugs by body language. At first, I was a little irritated because it appeared to me as an intrusion of personal space and that the person is a little too physical.

However, as I started to observe and practice cultural relativism which is the concept of trying to understand the meaning of another's culture under the insider's view, not from my own view, I soon learnt that it is merely the way Americans commonly greet others and show their friendliness. As I am well-aware of the importance of cultural relativity in a foreign place, the cultural shock has not been bad compared to what some of my fellow Vietnamese international students experience in other colleges, such as serious depression.

Something about America that I am personally fond of and greatly impressed by is the wide acceptance of cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism is the principle that people of different races, regions and political beliefs can live together peacefully in the same society. This principle can be reflected by the positive attitude people have towards a great variety of looks and styles. People dress up and present themselves in such a tremendous diversity that I have been hardly ever able to exactly point out considerable similarities in a small group of people.

It seems that Americans both tacitly and explicitly value individuality and acceptance of a great diversity of looks and styles. According to my observation, in general, they hardly make comments on someone's look, style or give any kind of body expression of hostility towards people of different styles. Probably, under the surface, some amount of negative feelings may exist but outwardly, they generally express tolerance towards diversity. It is exciting to learn about Saint Mary's College as a microculture of American culture in general.

A microculture is a system of cultural knowledge characteristics of a subgroup within a larger society. It is an explicit culture that students can address their professors by first name solely, which initially seemed informal to me because back in Vietnam, we address our teachers and older people in general by My, Mrs or Professor etc followed by their first names. It came as a surprise to me as an informant who is my advisor let me know that most of the teachers and staffs in Saint Mary's College prefer being addressed by their first names.

This accompanied by the way students and professors converse shows informality and a large degree of equality between students and teachers in comparison with the rigid formality between those in Vietnam. Students are free to challenge their professors by raising questions and giving negative feedbacks, or to have friendly conversations and behaviors towards their professors. Besides, students are informal in the way they dress for classes.

There has been few times I noticed some people wearing sleeping pants to classes and I was a little shocked because students do often dress at least in smart casual attire when going to classes back in Vietnam. Gradually, I have infomalized my attire to a small extent when I go to classes here. This action of mine can be a part of a process called enculturation which is the process of adapting to a specific culture. Another cultural artifact of Saint Mary's College , or American colleges in general, is parties. I have learnt from my American friends who are my informants that parties is an essential part of college life.

These social events happening on campus residence halls usually involve the consumption of alcohols and they take place so regularly to the point of almost everyday in the town houses of Saint Mary's College campus, where juniors and seniors stay. They are often of legal age to buy and consume alcoholic drinks, and these parties sometimes involve not only them but also freshmen and sophomores. These parties take place basically for people to have fun by getting drunk and interacting with other people. Personally I find this foreign for two reasons.

Firstly, this trend rarely happens in college campuses in Vietnam whereas it is considered a college culture in America. Secondly, I am personally not that fond of drinking and I do not really get so much fun out of getting drunk. One of my friends told me that " One of the traits you get out of college in America is the ability to drink by having gone to parties. " In my opinion, I learn about and appreciate the existence of this cultural behavior , and might want to participate in it few times in order to appreciate this culture from the point of view of an insider, not to embrace this cultural behavior.

It has been such a short period of time since I first started experiencing Saint Mary's College culture and American culture in general, and there have already been a lot of cultural artifacts and behaviors that I encountered. During at least four years ahead in college, I expect to discover tons of other cultural artifacts and behaviors, given the immense size of America and its vast diversity in many aspects such as races, languages and beliefs. This must be a really challenging and exciting journey of discovery and learning; however, it is one worth-taking journey.