



VCU

Global Education Office

Expectations of Professionalism in the Cultural Ambassadors Program

WHY?

The Cultural Ambassadors Program offers you an opportunity to connect with future professionals around the world. We therefore suggest that you engage in ways that will create positive impressions. Below are some FAQs that may be helpful as you consider this global engagement opportunity.

HOW? FAQs

I am not sure about my schedule for the rest of the semester. What should I do?

You should assess your commitments (perhaps by putting in a calendar all assignments, class meeting times and blocks times to finish assignments) before signing up. If you are not confident that you can keep your commitment, please wait before signing up until you are ready. While there is the possibility of some opportunities being full if you wait too long, if you sign up and don't show up, you may be damaging relationships that could be useful for your future. Also, you may be excluded from future opportunities for multiple no-shows or withdrawals.

Will these opportunities be face-to-face or virtual?

The modality will depend on a number of factors and it is anticipated that there will be BOTH face to face and virtual options. If opportunities are in person, [VCU protocol for safe engagement](#) will be expected by all participants.

What are the Zoom expectations if the opportunities are virtual?



- Working Audio and Video for the entire duration of the Cultural Ambassadors engagement period
- Ensuring a clearly identified name on Zoom meetings as you will need to be identified for attendance purposes and/or entry into the course via the waiting room. Please use your first name or preferred name for privacy reasons.
- If you need to take care of personal business during class time, please respect the Cultural Ambassadors learning environment by doing so only during times in which other members of the conversation do not expect your participation. You can write a short message in the chat to let others know that you need to step away momentarily and then turn off your video and audio.
- Extended periods of “absence” during Cultural Ambassadors engagement periods may affect your attendance and/or participation grades as others are relying on your presence.

Active participation and self-motivation are expectations of all participants in Cultural Conversations. While we recognize and respect that not all individuals speak up in groups to the same extent, we encourage students to engage in the following types of participation.

Contributing participation is the foundation of a good discourse. Contributing members offer their own ideas and thoughts that are relevant to the topic.

Responsive participation consists of providing feedback and debate/argument in response to ideas and comments in the discourse. Responsive participation may be supportive or critical, either of these is acceptable and useful. It is not necessary to agree with a speaker. **It is, however, necessary to be respectful** and not to be caustic or derisive. People hold differing opinions on some issues and a strong discussion respects the voice of all views.

Communicate any personal situations that may affect your participation/attendance professionally with Audrey Short, Global Engagement Co-curricular Coordinator, aeshort@vcu.edu.

Do you have any suggestions for handling controversial topics?

Realizing the challenges inherent in discussing controversial topics, we recommend the **following guidelines for facilitating a respectful learning environment.**

1. Assume that we ALL have a genuine intent to learn, challenge oneself and be challenged
2. Reflect on one’s own learning and communication patterns as well as those of others.
3. Allow for various personality types and learning styles
 - a. If you can be dominant (e.g. a talker), include the quieter students by asking for their opinions.
 - b. If you learn best by watching images, bring in news stories in image format.
4. Try to be aware of sensitivities that are human by communicating politely even in disagreement



5. Be mindful of
 - a. Staying present, including in discomfort and defensiveness
 - b. Knowing that intent and impact may be very different
 - c. Focusing on dialogue, not debate (i.e. winning from exploring and learning another perspective, not from solidifying one's own)
 - d. Being hurt and hurting others with your words
 - e. Being open to the vulnerability of expressing hurt and listening to others' feelings
 - f. Using "I" statements expressing one's perspective as opposed to "you" statements which may be interpreted as accusatory
6. So that participation is aligned with the learning outcomes of the course
 - a. Participate actively by being prepared with homework assignments
 - b. Check VCU email and announcements on your class BlackBoard daily
 - c. Use electronic devices for class specific educational purposes only
 - d. Take care of personal business outside of class, (e.g. if you have a need to text someone, please step outside of the classroom to communicate so as not to distract others)
7. Communicate special needs, situations, and/or questions in a timely manner

For more on how to discuss controversial topics and from which items above were modified, please see:

<https://provost.vcu.edu/media/provostdevelopment/pdfs/ManagingcontroversialclassroomtopicsAug17.pdf>

How can I best prepare to contribute to the global engagement opportunities?

Each English Language Program faculty or staff member will have their own way of integrating Cultural Ambassadors into their activities or classes. Guidance will be given but if you need more assistance, please reach out and ask. What may be obvious to some may require clarifications for others and we welcome thoughtful questions to maximize student learning and interaction.

How will attendance be handled?

As with other commitments, it is expected that you show up to what you signed up for. You will confirm your attendance by filling out a short form at the end of each hour: <https://tinyurl.com/VCUCCReflect> Confirmation of attendance must take place on the day you attended and the form will record a timestamp.

If you are using Cultural Conversations to get credit in your individual program of study, please send yourself a response to your reflection so that you have a record of what you wrote (in case you need to write a larger reflection for a class, for example.) Administrators of the Cultural Conversations program do not have the bandwidth to send students past reports of what the students themselves have written.



Attendance can also be monitored using Zoom features but the use of those metrics are reserved for situations in which there may be a discrepancy in attendance reporting.

If you need to cancel, please do so in advance with a professional cancellation. Please follow [these guidelines to write a professional cancellation email](#) (or follow this link <https://tinyurl.com/CancelProfessionally>)

Who should I contact if I have questions about the Cultural Ambassadors program?

Audrey Short
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