Cross-cultural User Interface Design in a Global Marketplace: Building Appreciation for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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Abstract
In today's increasingly global environment and with our growing reliance on the internet for communication and commerce, it is important to educate students about the cultural differences in audiences and how these differences relate to rhetorical and design strategies. This paper reports on a cross-cultural design module and Cross-Cultural User Interface (UI) Report implemented in a junior level communication, design, and engineering core course in the Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering in the College of Engineering at the University of Washington. The objectives of this module and report are multifaceted. They concern increasing students' understanding of cross-cultural values related to UI design and human behavior as well as their respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in communication, design, and the engineering workplace. The objectives also concern gaining an understanding of qualitative methods for assessing UIs, formulating results, and using written and oral research report formats. Finally, the objectives concern working effectively in collaborative teams. In the research report, students apply lessons learned in the module to analyze the effectiveness of two website UIs from the same company aimed at two different countries from the perspective of their differing audiences' cultural preferences, behaviors, and values. The students make recommendations for improving UI design to make them more culturally sensitive to their audiences. As students gain an understanding of differences in cross-cultural communication and UI design, they develop an appreciation and sensitivity to the creation of culturally appropriate marketing and advertising materials in our increasingly international marketplace. This assignment can be adapted in many classroom settings in a number of fields that touch on human computer interaction.

Keywords
Cross-cultural design, UI design, Localization, Diversity, Inclusion

Introduction
Today's modern world has enabled tremendous growth in international commerce, research, and education at unprecedented levels. In turn, our increasing reliance on the internet for communication and commerce in the global marketplace increases our dependence on websites developed by agencies and companies around the world. For a global marketing approach to succeed, it must consider the needs of diverse users across multiple countries and their related cultures. For a company's website to be successful in meeting its users' needs [1] - [2], companies often either globalize (creating one website for all users in many countries) or localize (creating different websites for the same company in different countries and cultures—going beyond simple translation). A knowledge of cross-culture communication and related design strategies is important for those seeking to create successful and culturally sensitive user interfaces (UIs) for users in different cultures.

This paper focuses on a course module and a written report in which students evaluate two localized websites produced by one company for their effectiveness in meeting needs of users in

two differing cultures. Students' evaluations are based on cross-cultural dimensions that are measurable and are documented in the literature, e.g., [1] - [8].

The module is introduced through lectures and workshops on topics such as globalization, localization, visual design, color theory, cultural dimensions, intercultural rhetoric, information architecture, interface and interaction design, and a modified approach to content analysis. The module culminates in the Cross-Cultural UI Report.

The module and report described here are part of a required 5-credit junior level communication, design, and engineering core course offered in the Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering in the College of Engineering at the University of Washington. The course uses participatory learning and project-based learning approaches in all assignments. The course counts towards the university's required writing credits. The course leans on many of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a conceptual framework as they pertain to human-centered design and engineering, sustainability, ethics, communication, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The cross-cultural website design module is one of three course modules (user interface design, sustainable and ethical design, and cross-cultural user interface design) that are taught with a goal of creating "changemaking engineers" [9].

The research report assignment described in this paper meets the requirements of ABET criterion 3 (outcomes 1-7) for accreditation of baccalaureate programs, which briefly summarized concerns (1) identifying and solving problems, (2) applying engineering design to produce solutions meeting specific needs, (3) communicating effectively, (4) recognizing ethical and professional responsibilities and considering the impact of engineering solutions, (5) functioning on a team in an inclusive environment, (6) analyzing and interpreting data, and (7) acquiring and applying new knowledge [10].

This paper describes the course module activities that help students succeed in completing the research report, the components of the research report, and grading checklists used by students for creating successful deliverables and by instructors for grading guidance. This paper also describes the assessment of students' reports and student feedback in a reflection assignment. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusions.

The Cross-Cultural Design Module and Cross-Cultural UI Report
This module occurs over three weeks with low-stakes active learning activities and a major graded assignment—the Cross-Cultural UI Report. The low stakes activities seek to prepare students for a successful experience with the graded assignment. The module consists of the following four components:
1. A reading summary of a few peer-reviewed articles on website globalization or localization strategies, articles that have completed analyses similar to the Cross-Cultural UI Report, and an article on content analysis. Students also identify and summarize an article of their own choice as it relates to cross-cultural communication and design. These summaries are followed up on in class discussion.
2. An in-class workshop in which students in teams create a content analysis framework for their own report.

3. Interactive lectures, in which students listen and answer questions offered by the instructor. Students also participate in discussions of 3-4 students/group and report out on cultural dimensions they have read about, websites they have explored, and lived experiences (if they wish).
4. A Cross-Cultural UI Report in which two-person student teams analyze the effectiveness of two websites from the same company, published in two different countries, in meeting their audiences' needs. This report also has an oral presentation component.

In the **Cross-Cultural UI Report**, students apply a modified content analysis and assess cultural dimensions as they pertain to UI features (e.g., content, organization, navigation, verbal rhetoric, tone, design) in two websites that are produced by the same company for two different countries [11] - [12]. Students seek to assess how effective the sites are in meeting their audiences' needs. They write a draft report to the hypothetical Marketing Director of the company website that they chose (this report is not sent out), conduct a peer review of other students' draft reports, revise and finalize their own report, and create and present an oral presentation to their peers.

This report assignment involves active, collaborative, problem-based learning [13]. The report assignment counts for 20 percent of the final grade and is holistically graded with guidance from a 29-item grading checklist divided into four categories: content, organization, design, and style/grammar/punctuation (see Appendix A for this checklist). This checklist guides students while writing their reports, teams during peer reviews, and instructors during grading. For grading purposes, the checklist is used with 25% of the grading weight given to each of the four categories. Students, teaching assistants, and instructors have appreciated the checklist's detailed guidance. Assignments that successfully meet all items receive a 100% grade. Across and within the categories, individual instructors may weight what they deem most important given what they have emphasized in class. A checklist for assessing the oral report is also included (see Appendix B) though the presentation is part of one overall grade. Students must complete the oral presentation in order to receive credit for the written report.

The **objectives** of the report assignment and module are four-fold. Upon completion of this report and module, students should be able to:
I. Increase their understanding of cross-cultural values related to rhetorical and design decisions as they pertain to UI design and human behavior as well as their respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in communication, design, and the engineering workplace.
II. Gain an understanding of how to apply a modified content analysis to analyze website UIs and formulate results.
III. Explain research, methods, findings, interpretations, and decisions in written and oral report formats.
IV. Work effectively in collaborative teams.

The tasks necessary to complete the Cross-Cultural UI Report include the following:
• Identify cross-cultural dimensions and the UI design features to be evaluated in the selected websites by reviewing relevant literature.
• Analyze and evaluate the differences/similarities in website UI features from one company for two different countries using the cultural dimensions identified.

- Using a modified content analysis, categorize and analyze data, and present data in tables or figures.
- Synthesize findings into a coherent report and presentation directed at the hypothetical Marketing Director whose team designed the websites.
- Implement a report format, using effective content selection, organization, document design, and style/grammar/punctuation.
- Become proficient with an oral presentation format.
- Work collaboratively in two person teams and as a collaborative team player during peer review.
- Write an individual reflection concerning students' experiences with the module and report assignment.

Student reports are frequently about 2,000 words and presentations are about 7-8 minutes. Students are given a suggested format for the report and presentation consisting of an introduction with a research question and hypotheses, literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusions and recommendations, and references.

Assessment and Results
To evaluate the success of the Cross-Cultural UI Report and the module, outcomes were qualitatively assessed by analyzing (1) whether the student's reports met the assignment objectives and (2) whether student feedback in their written reflections about the module and report assignment revealed an impact on learning and a relationship to the learning objectives.

Of interest, students were creative in identifying companies that had published two different versions of websites for two different countries, hence two differing cultures. They selected localized websites from a variety of companies and countries: e.g.,

- Baskin-Robbins: South Korea versus U.S.
- Adidas: China versus U.S
- Lays: China versus U.S.
- Nintendo: Sweden versus U.S

- Canon: Japan versus U.S.
- Coca-Cola: China versus U.S.
- GoPro: Russia versus U.S.
- Starbucks: Japan versus U.S.

Students' Reports Meeting Assignment Objectives
Reports were evaluated in terms of how well they met the learning objectives. Students met learning Objective I concerning increasing their understanding of cross-cultural values related to rhetorical and design decisions that pertain to UI design and human behavior as well as respect for DEI in communication, design, and the engineering workplace. Students did an excellent job of locating and interpreting research on cross-cultural dimensions related to communication and design (e.g., [1] - [8]). They identified innumerable sources from which they found research and identified cultural dimensions. They applied these cultural dimensions in their content analyses to analyze the websites' effectiveness in meeting audience needs, interpreting both cultural behavior and UI design from a cross-cultural perspective. A few of the cultural dimensions that student reports focused on are listed next:

- Power distance (high/low)
- Individualism/collectivism
- Uncertainty avoidance (high/low)

- Long term orientation (long/short)
- Time (monochronic/polychronic)
- Context (high/low)

Students also demonstrated Objective I in discussion, conclusions, or recommendation sections. For example, in one report the students start their conclusion section by stating that "Dunkin' Donuts successfully implemented the Hofstede principles of individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation in both the South Korea and United States' websites…. These careful design considerations based on cultural principles reflected the differing experiences in Dunkin' Donuts in both countries." Further demonstration of Objective I occurred in the students' written reflections.

Students successfully met Objective II and gained an understanding of how to apply a modified content analysis to analyze website UIs and formulate results. Their reports revealed that they counted and analyzed a variety of rhetorical and design features of the websites from the perspective of cultural dimensions. Some features that students analyzed are listed next:

- Error messages
- Customer support
- Image to text ratio
- Types/number of featured products
- Textual reference to the future
- Number of deals/promotions
- Screen real estate on sustainability
- Photos and images: details, numbers, types of images
- Number of animations
- Color choice
- Information architecture

Table 1 shows how one student team demonstrated success with Objective II, revealing their understanding of a modified content analysis to help them evaluate uncertainty avoidance—"the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity" [3]. The table shows that the South Korean website for Dunkin' Donuts had more search options, more representative items, and a longer homepage than the U.S. site. Table 1 further reveals that the South Korean website received a considerably higher total score of 63.3 than the U.S. website total score of 30.4. The higher score for South Korea reveals higher uncertainly avoidance (further explained by other students in the next section).

Table 1: Uncertainty Avoidance with United States and South Korea
Dunkin' Donuts' Website (from students' report)

Uncertainty Avoidance	South Korea	United States
Number of search options on homepage	5	1
Number of items represented on website	26	14
Length of page/scrolling	3226 px / 100 ≈ +32.3	1538.03 px / 100 ≈ +15.4
Total score	63.3	30.4

A specific example from one report demonstrates Objective III concerning explaining research, methods, findings, interpretations, and decisions. Analyzing uncertainty avoidance, the students examined cultural models and noted that South Korean culture ranks higher on uncertainty avoidance than U.S. culture [3] (Figure 1), i.e., South Koreans are theoretically more uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The students then suggest that this could explain why the South Korean website has five times more menu items (many in Korean) on the

homepage (Figure 2) than the number of menu items on the U.S. website (Figure 3), which relied on dropdown menus, making users search for more menus.
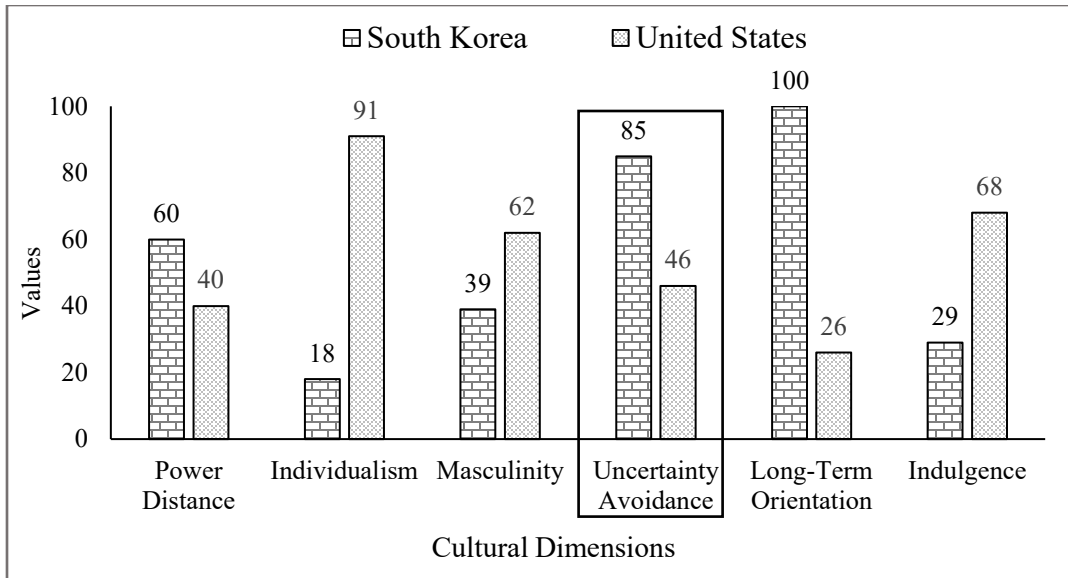

Figure 1. Higher Uncertainty Avoidance for South Korea than U.S. (adapted from [3])

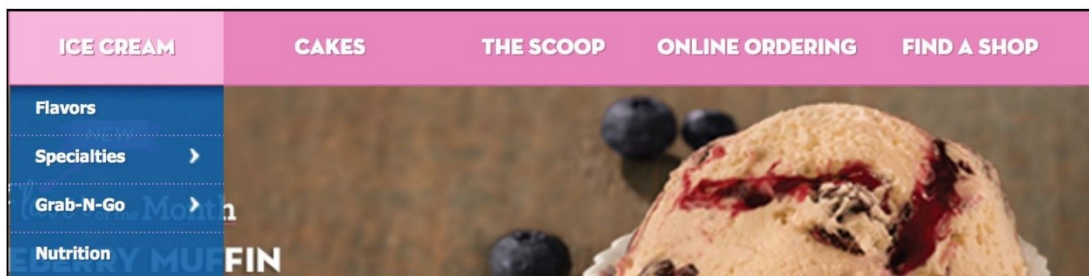Figure 2. Baskin-Robbins' South Korea Menu—Extensive Links

Figure 3. Baskin-Robbins' U.S. Menu—Few Links with Dropdown Menus

Another students' example demonstrating Objective III is shown by students who analyzed the Microsoft websites in the U.S. and China for collectivism versus individualism. The students described how the U.S. scores higher on individualism than China [3] (Figure 4). They noted that more people in images on the Chinese site (Figure 5a) would suggest higher collectivism (hence lower individualism) than fewer people in images on the U.S. site, which would suggest higher individualism (hence lower collectivism) (Figure 5b).
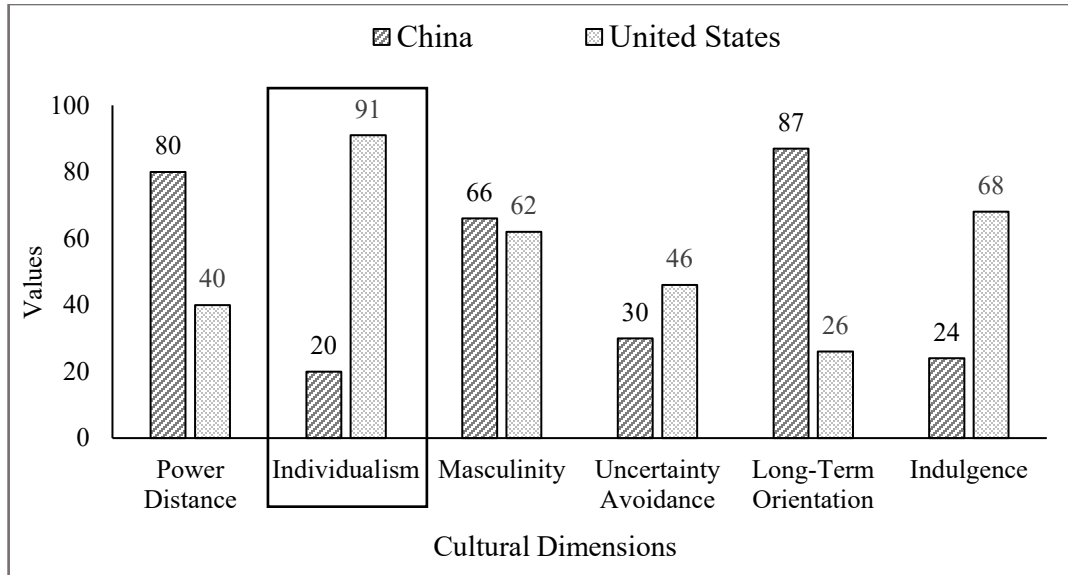

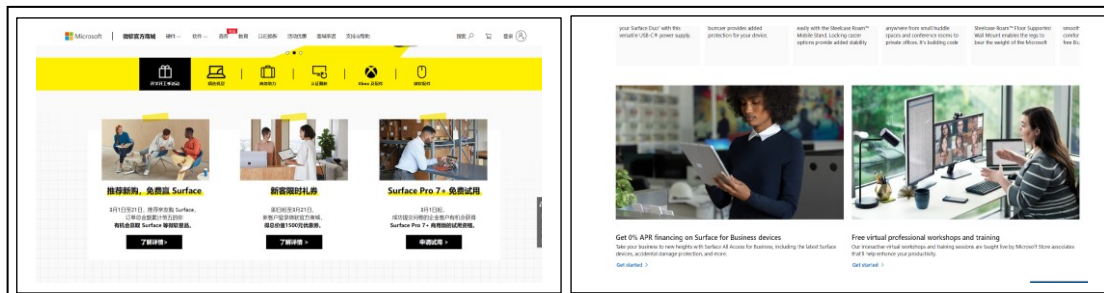Figure 4. Higher Individualism Score for U.S. than China (adapted from [3])

Figure 5a (left). Chinese Website—Multiple People in Images
Figure 5b (right). U.S. Website—Individual People

Students met Objective IV and worked well collaboratively in teams. Students used Google documents to write their drafts and the instructor could monitor progress and individual contributions. Students also worked well with peers during the draft peer reviews.

Students' Written Reflections about the Module and Report Assignment
The qualitative assessment of students' reflections concerned whether student feedback in written reflections revealed an impact on learning and reflected assignment objectives. Students were asked about key take-aways from the cross-cultural unit. Reflections from 32 students in a recent course section were examined; 21 reflections are shared below. All reflections were

positive concerning new learning. The right-hand columns in the Tables 2 and 3 restate the objectives and an X is assigned if the reflection relates to the specific objectives.

The representative sample of reflections reveals that the module and assignment positively influenced students' learning and understanding concerning the impact of culture on human behavior and design, their appreciation of DEI, an understanding of research and reporting, and collaborative work (Objective I). Only two students' reflections (across Tables 2 and 3) mentioned a new understanding of qualitative analysis skills or the results of content analysis (Objective II). Perhaps the reflection prompt was too open-ended (intentionally) so as to encourage students to think about qualitative research skills (i.e., content analysis competency) gained. Regardless of students not mentioning content analysis, students demonstrated strong qualitative research skills in using a modified content analysis to analyze the UIs. Alternatively, the students' enthusiasm shown regarding new knowledge of cultural values, DEI, and design may have dominated their thinking at the time that they wrote their reflections. Other students discussed the value of the skills gained in writing the report and making the presentations (Objective III) and working collaboratively (Objective IV).

One more theme not shown in Tables 2 and 3 concerns a few positive comments related to how this unit would help students in obtaining work and internships. Many students have mentioned this topic. One student said, "This unit will help us be competitive in the job market, because not only can we design and conduct research, but we also understand global marketing and business." Another said, "As someone who is fluent in Korean, I am considering living in Korea as a software engineer, and it is helpful to know the cultural differences in web design to easily adapt to Korean culture." And another said, "the unit was extremely educational for any future role I have, especially if I work for a multi-international company."

Other comments regarding the relationship of the assignment and module to the world-of-work came to the instructor orally regarding how this assignment helped them in securing internship and job prospects. One student told the author: "My recruiter told me I was the only person he had interviewed who could speak to cross-cultural design and teamwork. I got the job! Thank you." From another student, "Alaska Airlines asked me to give a short PowerPoint presentation to our team concerning the cultural dimensions that I had learned about in this assignment."

Table 2: Students' Reflections on the Module and Report Assignment

Sample Comments	Objectives (see 3rd pg. of paper)*			
	I: Cross-Cultural Values, Design, DEI	II: Cont. Analysis	III: Res., Meth., Findings, Interpret., Rept. Format	IV: Collab. Work
The cross-cultural assignment provided an opportunity to take a deeper dive into other cultures, UI design, and marketing.	X			
This unit inspired me to be more aware of differences in culture when designing.	X			
I now look beyond the confines of American user design trends and observe different design choices made around the world.	X			
It gave me a better understanding of diversity, inclusion, internationalization, localization, and branded culture. Working with a partner, I also gained skills in qualitative analysis and research.	X	X	X	X
Different cultures have important different values that influence the content of various websites. I'll be able to apply this knowledge to the interfaces I create.	X			
I must understand the world so I can create better solutions to make a change.	X			
No design standards are universal. Design thinking, heuristics and rules in the United States are often portrayed as the universal standard, but this is not true.	X			
You should never assume that your design or brand image is universal, and should try to be sensitive and accommodate different cultural values into design.	X			
My biggest take away is my new found appreciation for culturally based marketing.	X			
I always thought of technology as the great equalizer where everyone did things the same way regardless of place of origin. Now I see that each designer and programmer can instill their country's culture into their work.	X			
It was valuable to discuss diversity, embrace cultural differences, and engage and learn from each other.	X			X
This assignment taught me to be aware about different cultures and also to do research and make presentations about it which I could potentially present to my seniors to pitch my ideas!	X		X	

Table 2: Students' Reflections on the Module and Report Assignment Cont.

Sample Comments	Objectives (see 3rd pg. of paper)*			
	I: Cross-Cultural Values, Design, DEI	II: Cont. Analysis	III: Res., Meth., Findings, Interpret., Rept. Format	IV: Collab. Work
Many classmates were able to incorporate their knowledge from their own cultures they are familiar with—that was cool to see.	X			
Being able to succinctly present ideas is also an important skill. The presentation component is certainly good practice as is seeing the work of our peers.			X	X
My group only reviewed US and China. I was excited to see other group presentations and learn about different countries! A fun way to end the class, leaving me curious to take new notes the next time I travel.	X			X

Table 3: Students' Reflections Who Noted Their Cross-Cultural Backgrounds

Sample Comments	Objectives (see 3rd pg. of paper)*			
	I: Cross-Cultural Values, Design, DEI, Influences	II: Content Analysis	III: Res., Meth., Findings, Interpretation, Rept. Format	IV: Collaborative Work
I learned about the country differences and how there is a common pattern in the values on one side/region of the world and there are completely separate set of values for the other side of the world. This is interesting because we are all human beings and can think alike but often have different ideologies. This spoke to me because I am Indian and I do realize how both societies and cultures are pretty different.	X		X	

Table 3: Students' Reflections Who Noted Their Cross-Cultural Backgrounds Cont.

I had been familiar with the Hofstede theories but never really thought about its application in design. I was surprised that web design can reflect so many cultural dimensions but it makes so much sense, especially considering I'm from a cross-cultural background myself.	X		X	
People often make fun of Asian websites. My family is from South Korea and Japan. And this assignment helped me feel proud of my heritage and related design standards visible in websites from my families' countries. I appreciated the opportunity to share my cultural knowledge with my team member and with the class.	X			X
I hear my parents and other Latino friends mention how individualistic American culture is compared to our Latino culture, and this unit proved with numbers and statistics how culture translate into websites. This unit allowed me to connect my interest in cultures with the area of study I'm focusing on for my bachelor's degree.	X	X	X	

Discussion

Students demonstrated learning about cross-cultural values, localization, DEI, human values, UI design, research methods, report writing, and collaborative work in their reports and presentations. An analysis of some student reports and reflections reveals that the report and module met the learning objectives. Students increased their understanding of the effect of culture on human behavior and design, successfully analyzing a company's website in two different countries, applying Hofstede and others' cultural dimensions to the analysis of website features. When necessary, students used newly gained knowledge about UI design to suggest audience appropriate UI redesigns. Students gained experience with content analysis of websites, a transferable research skill, and reporting methods and findings in a report format. Students functioned effectively in teams, constructively critiquing the work of others, and shared findings with peers both in class discussions and in oral presentations of their report. Finally, a majority of the reflections called out a newly found respect for DEI and sensitivity to cross-cultural UI design, recognizing the importance of these elements in companies' success in the global marketplace.

Some team members who were international or identified as first or 2nd generation immigrants analyzed websites from their ancestral countries. This brought a richness to the analysis of the cultural dimensions; it also provided space to acknowledge the importance of other cultures, acknowledging the importance of students' multicultural backgrounds. When working with an assignment such as this one, it is important to think about immigration trends in higher education as well as in industry. Close to 30 percent of all students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in 2018 came from immigrant families, an increase of 20 percent since 2000, the largest increase of student numbers in higher education in this time frame [14]. Our future workforce is and will be increasingly diverse and will be impacted by the influence of many cultural backgrounds, especially in the high-tech sector that is reliant on a large number of international workers. Whether this growing diversity in the workforce directly concerns product or UI design or simply better communication in the workplace, it behooves our students to have

an understanding of cross-cultural differences and similarities and how to communicate with and design for diverse audiences.

Conclusions

In conclusion, students learned the importance of localization in design in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). This module and report assignment were effective in helping students understand cross-cultural differences, particularly as related to the creation of information on the global web. Such education is extremely important in today's increasingly global marketplace. Students learned that design is fluid and globalization trends sometimes impact the design choices of other cultures. As companies expand into the global marketplace, they must be sensitive to the cultural and design norms of other cultures. Students' education about other cultures in this unit is important in creating awareness, appreciation, and respect for differing human values and experiences. Respect is the foundation for a collaborative workplace and that includes respect of other culture's practices in UI design. Understanding cultural values and norms helps communicate appreciation for other cultures, as well as for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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Appendix A: Grading Checklist for Cross-Cultural UI Report

Please check your final report against the following checklist and bring a blank copy to class on peer review day.

The **Oral Presentation** grading checklist is shown after this report checklist.

Report Content
_____ Compares and contrasts the same company's website published in two different countries.
_____ Effectively analyzes how culture has affected the content, organization, and design of the two websites.
_____ Assesses the effectiveness of the websites in meeting their audiences' needs.
_____ Clearly states methods, and uses, interprets, and graphically presents data clearly to support assertions made.

_____ Uses examples.
_____ Meets criteria in Assignment Prompt Submission Criteria.

Report Organization
_____ Follows a logical organization.
_____ Uses descriptive headings to reveal the report organization to the reader.
_____ Has an overview at the end of the introduction to announce the main report headings.
_____ Uses topic sentences at paragraph beginnings to highlight the content of paragraphs.
_____ Uses transition sentences between paragraphs and sections as needed.

Document Design
_____ Uses effective report format, including page numbers.
_____ Meets document design guidelines specified in Assignment Prompt Submission Criteria.
_____ Employs descriptive headings and makes them visually distinct from body text, using **more** space before them than after them.
_____ Avoids underlining headings.
_____ Makes effective use of space, color, and fonts.
_____ Uses clearly labeled and logically placed graphics.
       Figures and tables:
       _____ Are clearly labeled.
       _____ Have concrete figure or table numbers and text titles above tables or below figures.
       _____ Are described and referred to in the text before they are inserted.
       _____ Are placed as close as possible to the text that refers to them.

Style, Grammar, & Punctuation
_____ Uses clear and concise sentences.
_____ Uses words precisely that relate to the report's purpose.
_____ Uses words that match the audience's background.
_____ Uses appropriate tone for the company marketing team.
_____ Uses correct grammar.
_____ Uses accurate punctuation.
_____ Uses accurate spelling.
_____ Uses APA or IEEE formatting for in-text citations and reference list.

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Appendix B: Checklist for Assessing Oral Presentation

Introduction
_____ Contains introduction with an inviting hook.
_____ Provides enough background information to orient the audience.
_____ Offers purpose statement and hypothesis regarding anticipated outcomes.
_____ Overviews subtopics to be discussed.

Content
_____ Compares and contrasts the same company's website published in two different countries.
_____ Contains relevant literature review to explain relevant cross-cultural variables.
_____ Introduces web features that were analyzed.
_____ Clearly states methods.
_____ Tallies, interprets, and graphically presents data to support assertions made.
_____ Meets Assignment Prompt Submission Criteria.

Results and Discussion
_____ Announces subtopics and overviews subparts when announcing each new subtopic.
_____ Effectively assesses and interprets how the selected cultural variables relate to the web features chosen for analysis.
_____ Analyzes the effectiveness of the websites in meeting their audiences' needs.
_____ Transitions across subtopics and between subparts.
_____ Uses examples and visuals from the websites.
_____ Interprets relevance of subtopics to overall purpose or thesis.
_____ Presents a clear organization.

Conclusions and Recommendations

_____ Sums up major subsections and reaches a broad conclusion.
_____ Links back to hypothesis and makes any recommendations to the audience concerning any changes needed so that the two websites effectively serve their different audiences.
_____ If website changes are recommended, tone is effective and user research is recommended.

Slides

_____ Readable.
_____ Appropriate detail level.
_____ Contain effective, readable, properly labeled graphics.

Presentation Mode

_____ Presenter is looking at audience.
_____ Presenter is not reading from paper.
_____ Presenter is comfortable with information presented.
_____ Presenter is interested in topic.