

Culture Bump

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SIT

What was the bump about? When and how did it occur?

My culture bump was the difference between my expectations for the organization of the Spanish intensive language program here in January, and the administration's actual organization of the course.

Back in November, I emailed Susan Madrigan to find out what level class I should join. I received an email copy of hers to Sharon Brooks telling Sharon that she should help me.

Hi Sharon, Below is an email from a student who wants information about the intensives. I thought you might be able to help him. Thanks, Susan

I spoke with Sharon directly to find out what the levels meant; i.e., how much knowledge of the language was expected in each level. This is what I received:

Hi France, Attached you will find the info on our language classes for Intensives and Spring II semester. You can register via webadvisor or go to the registrar's office and manually register for the course. Thanks, Sharon Brooks

I had repeatedly asked - by telephone - what I was expected to know to join level 2000. I was repeatedly told I would have to ask the instructor, but received a "round robin" about that as the registrar didn't seem to know who my instructor would be. -

Describe your behaviors and feelings. What cultural values do they represent?

I was not happy. I would have preferred to have some idea of what I was expected to know, since I had mapped out two weeks in my life for this course. My feelings and expectations

represent cultural privilege. They represent not having to compromise on quality of education - or of anything else. They could be called elitist. I do not want the approbrium that that term receives in this USA culture. I do not think it deserves that receipt, but I accept it.

What were the other person's behaviors and feelings? What were behaviors that you expected from him/her based on your own cultural values? What were the expectations that the other person had of you based on his or her cultural values? How did his/her actions reflect his/her cultural values?

All language groups met in one room to get their classroom assignments. The administrator who headed the meeting appeared unsure about her allocations of the rooms for each class. When I arrived, I learned that everyone in the Spanish course - no matter their level - would be in the same class. I had expected a modicum of explanation. I felt the administrator was socially inept. I may be wrong, but she seemed to have no comprehension of any possibility that students might not have been happy about the single class. Perhaps she was culturally unaware; perhaps she just did not care. I could have surmised any number of personality traits, but they would all have been guesses, as I had no idea what her thoughts or values were. She may have had an unpleasant work environment. Her position may have engendered a great deal of stress.

Nonetheless, I would have expected some acknowledgement and/or explanation of the change in class organization. I can surmise that she had to work within limitations of financial and academic constraints. However, since there were two instructors, I could not see any financial pressure determining class size. Certainly, I could not attribute any academic advantage to putting us in one class.

I felt that an intensive course would enable me to increase my knowledge as much as possible. Not that I would not learn *anything* in the class as it stood, but I expected to learn much more than a beginner would. That I would be in a class with absolute beginners made me feel that I would be twiddling my thumbs and studying on my own: activities I can do perfectly well by myself without commuting to school five days a week.

I really had no idea what the administrator thought or felt, nor did I care. I had no recourse with regard to my own position, other than to go home. Overall, this is why I assess the situation as having been handled with little professionalism.

I always treat people with politeness, no matter what I think. Therefore, I never attribute behavior by an administrator to be directed at me, personally. Even if I am mistaken, and it is directed at me, I do not acknowledge that.

What was the source of this bump?

The source was the difference between my expectations and the reality of the situation.

What did you learn about yourself from this bump?

The two instructors for Spanish seemed a little non-plussed. They, themselves, appeared surprised at the amalgamation of levels. Each had expected to teach a separate class.

The class was about 75% rank beginning level, 15% high beginner, and 10% low intermediate. One other student was at about my level. We discussed asking for a separate class. I did speak with both instructors and both seemed willing to split the class if we really wanted it done. There were a couple of others who were talented enough to stretch themselves to our level.

Ultimately, my classmate and I decided not to ask for the separation. The ambiance was too positive. We decided, with suggestions from the teachers, to have them give us more

advanced homework and to spend time with us in class to point out more advanced usages and interpretations of the language. The instructors and the class had similar cultural values, as we were all well educated and socially sophisticated enough to understand each other's outlook and intellectual and emotional proclivities.

I learned that I had become a more patient person than I had been before this experience, and that I could be calm enough to work out a solution satisfactory enough for both myself, and others.

How will this learning impact you in the future?

Firstly, it has increased my cynicism of administrative practice and intellect. From now on, I will expect even less from others.

Secondly, I know that I have the ability to withhold my negative emotions enough to be able to proactively solve conflicts. This is a growth spurt for me, as I can be quite self-centered - Copernicus notwithstanding!