

# PREFACE

The second edition of *Cultures in Contrast* is designed for students who are entering college or university life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It provides challenging readings and comprehension questions in every unit, accompanied by updated suggested films and additional readings. A new unit on binge drinking has been added to recognize one of the most serious problems on college campuses today. The textbook offers these students a means for analyzing and evaluating the complex social and moral issues that young adults throughout the world have to deal with. It encourages the development of the requisite coping skills and opens the door to a free-spirited discussion of various ways of looking at the world. As students examine their own cultures and compare them with others, culture shock and cultural conflict may be lessened, and enjoyment of cultural differences may be strengthened.

In particular, international students in the United States face the challenges of understanding and integrating new customs and values into their own lives while maintaining their own cultural traditions and identities. Although we all have core values that reflect the culture to which we belong, when living in a foreign culture, we may begin to question these values. As Madeline E. Ehrman says in *Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties*:

There may be aspects of the new culture that conflict with important values the students hold. In particular, for ESL students in the U.S., acceptance of American culture may (to them) imply rejection of their culture of origin. It is a sad fact that it often takes a high level of sophistication and maturity to see differences among people as opportunities, not threats.<sup>1</sup>

*Cultures in Contrast* provides a forum to examine and clarify these differences. Such an examination may make it easier for international students living in the United States to feel comfortable and function successfully in the current moral and social climate while remaining loyal to their cultural values and traditions.

Today, more than ever, students on college campuses are expected to have a sensitivity to and respect for diversity as well as a heightened awareness of individual rights and responsibilities. This text attempts to prepare students for this academic environment. In each unit, students move from a general exploration of their beliefs to an analysis of a case study, a discussion of readings, and finally a specific choice of a coping strategy for a hypothetical dilemma. The case studies and readings, while providing various perspectives on life in the United States, are also meant to

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<sup>1</sup>Madeline E. Ehrman, *Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 172.

strengthen students' cultural self-awareness. The anthropologist Edward T. Hall writes: "One of the most effective ways to learn about oneself is by taking seriously the culture of others. It forces you to pay attention to those details of life which differentiate them from you."<sup>2</sup>

The units begin with a question about the major issue each unit presents, followed by an exploration activity in which students are asked to assess their personal and cultural beliefs. Next they read a case study, discuss the questions, and write a case study report, usually as a group activity. The case is a realistic scenario that requires the students to sort out the ethical possibilities within the context of their own experiences, traditions, and cultures. The discussion questions serve as a guideline to writing the report and establish the non-judgmental environment necessary for a lively comparison and contrast of ethics, values, and beliefs. (An example of a case study report is provided in Appendix D.)

Interactive tasks, including two role-play scenarios, expand on the case study, and a vocabulary task reinforces both vocabulary acquisition and major concepts from the case. Following these activities are related readings from a journal or a newspaper and comprehension questions on the readings. In the unit's closing activity, students choose the strategy they prefer for coping with a difficult situation. Finally, specific films, articles, and book chapters are listed for those who wish to expand their knowledge of the topic. Through the process of reading, discussion, analysis, writing, and role playing, students will enrich their understanding of today's global society while at the same time they are sharpening their academic English skills.

The overall goals of *Cultures in Contrast* are to increase linguistic competence and to improve intercultural communication skills. The specific objectives are:

1. to develop students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills through discussion and analysis of current issues
2. to facilitate students' social and academic adjustment to a new culture
3. to present students with a multiplicity of viewpoints on social ethics
4. to encourage students to clarify their own values and ethics
5. to help students acquire coping strategies for dealing with ethical dilemmas
6. to discourage misunderstandings due to cultural differences, stereotyping, and prejudice.

Finally, since this is a book about culture, it would be helpful to define this term. Most anthropologists do not agree on an exact definition, but according to Margaret Mead:

*Culture* means human culture, the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation. A *culture* is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a

<sup>2</sup>Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 32.

certain society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of a certain area, or of a certain period of time.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, cultures are dynamic. They undergo growth, development, and change, which makes an analysis of cultural behavior and values challenging. Also, there is a great diversity of values, beliefs, and traditions within any one culture. Every generalization has many exceptions, and especially within the multi-cultural U.S. society, a broad continuum of attitudes and opinions exists. For these reasons, the case studies and readings do not present a falsely uniform picture of American values, attitudes, or ethics but recreate the ambiguity that characterizes much of human behavior.

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret Mead, *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples* (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1937), 17–18.