

Intensity Factors Index¹

The Intensity Factors Index is a tool for evaluating the psychological intensity of intercultural environments for your students and for designing intercultural training programs. You can use this index to evaluate your program based on the intensity of the ten cross-cultural stress factors.

Factors	Least Intense ←—————→ Most Intense									
1. Cultural Differences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Ethnocentrism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Cultural Immersion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Cultural Isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Prior Intercultural Experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Expectations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. Visibility/Invisibility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Status	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Power and Control	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Intensity	Score _____									

Your rating is subjective and based on how you would compare your programs internally and externally. Thus, your overall score is useful to you for program planning purposes and not for establishing an objective measurement. Let's look at an example of how a program professional working with a program in London would score the intensity of the program:

Cultural Differences: (*Intensity: 4*) U.S. students will interact with fellow British students. Clearly there is much in common among their cultures, yet there are significant and important differences.

Ethnocentrism: (*Intensity: 5*) The students will be in London, an incredibly cosmopolitan city. Yet many of the participants are from smaller towns and may not have had an opportunity to develop ethnocentric perspectives. As a result, the program falls in the middle of this continuum.

Language: (*Intensity: 2*) Students will have difficulty with idioms and accents, but will share much understanding of the English language, as well.

Cultural Immersion: (*Intensity: 7*) U.S. students will be taking courses directly with British students. Also, almost all of the students choose a homestay option.

Cultural Isolation: (*Intensity: 2*) The U.S. students will have much opportunity to interact as a group of U.S. Americans, as well as with the hosts.

¹ Adapted from Paige (1993).

Prior Intercultural Experience: (*Intensity: 9*) Most students have had little prior experience.

Expectations: (*Intensity: 8*) Because of perceptions of language and cultural similarity, students often have very high expectations of how wonderful it will be to live in a large city and of how well they will adapt to life in London.

Visibility/Invisibility: (*Intensity: 3*) Again, as London is a cosmopolitan city, students of all backgrounds, sexual orientations, religions, etc., will be able to blend in or stand out as they chose. Some challenges may result from being identified as U.S. American precisely when they want to blend in and “go native.”

Status: (*Intensity: 1*) Student status in London and the U.S. is somewhat similar. Thus, the students experience little stress around this intensity factor.

Power and Control: (*Intensity: 3*) The program allows for very limited choice in course selection upon arrival at the host institution. As a result, students can feel frustrated that they are “stuck” in certain classes. Changing homestays can also be quite difficult. Otherwise, students feel quite a bit of control over their daily lives and feel free to explore the city and neighboring countries.

The overall intensity score is 44 of a possible 100. The factors of ethnocentrism, cultural immersion, prior intercultural experience, and expectations contribute to more than 65 percent of this score. Thus, while the overall intensity rating is somewhat low, these four factors need considerable attention throughout the program. For example, focusing on the pre-departure activities of “Understanding Yourself as a Member of a Culture” (p. 69 Students’) may lay an excellent framework for students to understand cultural differences when encountered in the host country. Because students have little prior experience, it will be critical to debrief their actual experiences as they occur. For assistance, utilize the section on “Strategies for Making Cultural Inferences” (p. 107 Students’). Without such opportunities for reflection and debriefing, students may become entrenched in an ethnocentric reading of the culture.

In a program for faculty, the intensity factor of “status” may be the most challenging. For example, if faculty are familiar with having preferential treatment and having a sense of accomplishment in their work, switching to the role of student may be more difficult than crossing a language barrier. Focusing on the appearance of new roles or the subtraction of key roles in the host culture will be of critical importance (see “Discovering Your Cultural Diversity,” p. 39 Students’).