Attributes of Cultural Context Frameworks

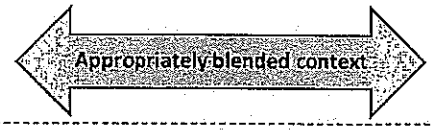
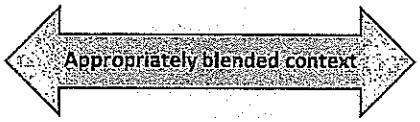
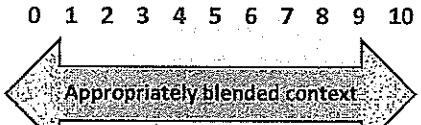
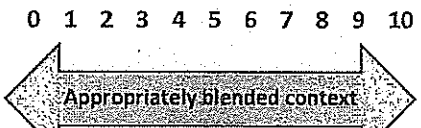
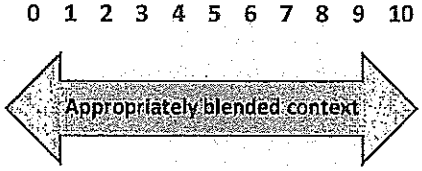
A broad range of approaches to knowing and doing are present in your classroom, department, and university. In fact, you will begin to see these context differences throughout our social/cultural systems. These differences are represented as Cultural Context Frameworks or *Context Diversity.* We present attributes that articulate the spectrum of approaches as a binary below; however, some people operate fluidly across this spectrum given the needs of the task at hand (Multicontextual). Each individual may have a preference for one side of the spectrum or the other, or somewhere in between, but many successful individuals have become Multicontextual because have learned to know when, where, and how to operate appropriately across the spectrum depending on the situation.

The different approaches presented in this table have been shown to be culturally-based. Because academic culture tends to value primarily the attributes on the left side of this spectrum, people who approach the world from the right side are at best forced to work outside their preferred mode and at worst told their approach to understanding the world is wrong and needs to conform to the "right" way of doing things. This connects to racialized and gender inclusion issues since underrepresented minorities and women tend to approach knowing and doing from the right side of this spectrum; however, this is a general tendency and CANNOT be used to stereotype individuals. Importantly, these different approaches exist in your academic environment, so it is important to at least become aware of these variations if not attempt to introduce them to students and colleagues. By broadening values in teaching and departmental/institution activities (e.g., tenure process, curriculum) to encompass the entire spectrum will create an inclusive environment for all, and it will **attract** a wider range of people and help everyone **thrive** in this environment.

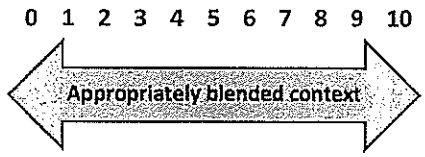
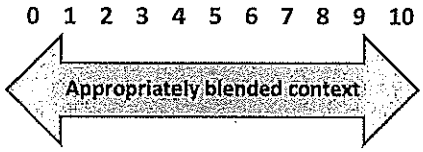
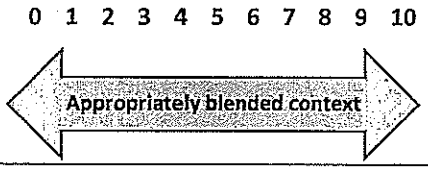
This table is an abridged version based on original work by Hall, E. T. (1959). *The Silent Language*, Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, and revised by Ibarra (2001; *Beyond Affirmative Action: Reframing the Context of Higher Education.* University of Wisconsin Press, Chávez and Longerbeam (2016; *Teaching Across Cultural Strengths: A Guide to Balancing Integrated and Individuated Cultural Frameworks in College Teaching*. Stylus Press), and Weissmann et al. (2019, The Multicontext path to redefining how we access and think about diversity, equity, and inclusion in STEM. *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 67:4, 320-329, doi: 10.1080/10899995.2019.1620527).

PLEASE NOTE: This table represents a starting point and provides examples of how cultural context varies in the population. It is a training tool for use in learning attributes of cultural context. Features, such as bicognition, are not fully expressed in this table, and that also plays an important role in how we operate in the academic system. Please do not cite this as a reference, but instead see references by Ibarra (2001), Weissmann et al. (2019), and Chávez and Longerbeam (2016), listed above. For more information, please contact Gary Weissmann (weissman@unm.edu) or Roberto Ibarra (raibarra@unm.edu).

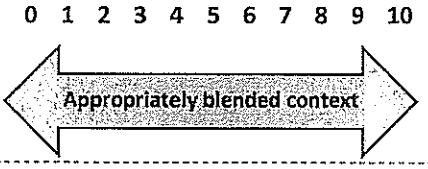
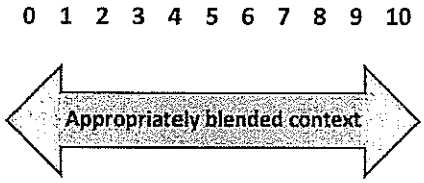
One-on-One Interactions

L-Context	Multicontext / Fluid	R - Context
Low Use of nonverbal signals. Messages rely more on words than nonverbal cues. Body language is less highly developed with little attempt to synchronize with words.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**High use of nonverbal signals.** Voice tone, facial expression, gesture, and eye expression all carry significant parts of a conversation. Body language is highly developed and synchronized with words.
Communication is Direct. May appear to be blunt, even rude, in their directness. Spell things out exactly and value being specific. Getting to the main point quickly is highly valued.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Communication is indirect.** Avoid getting to the main point of discussions quickly and talk around them to avoid being pushy. Embellish discussions and expect others to gather the main ideas from the context provided.
Messages are literal. Communication is a way of exchanging information, ideas, and opinions but is not intended to unify (identify or associate) culturally with others. Conversations reflect the occasion, but only one linguistic code is used.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Messages are an art form.** Communication is a form of engaging another person, a unifying cultural activity that may include bilingual code switching (beginning or ending sentences or conversations in two languages).
Long-term interpersonal feedback Avoid interfering with or intervening in others' lives. Take colleagues' mood shifts for granted, attributing them to personal problems that should be ignored.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Short-term interpersonal feedback** Constant checking on emotional status of others is important for group morale. Generally are attuned to slight mood changes among friends and colleagues.
Disagreement is depersonalized. Withdraw from conflict and get on with the task. Depersonalize disagreement with a "tough it out" rather than "talk it out" approach. Defuse confrontation by quiet separation. Force means a communication breakdown.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Disagreement is personalized.** Sensitive to conflict and criticism expressed by another's verbal and nonverbal communication. Must resolve conflict before work can progress. Use a "talk it out" approach to defuse confrontation and unpleasantness, especially at work. Force means communication.

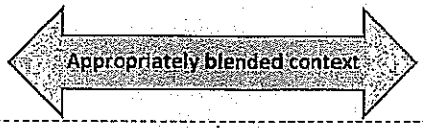
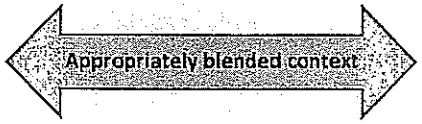
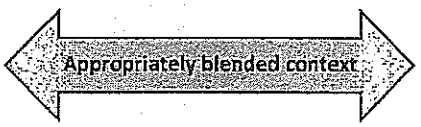
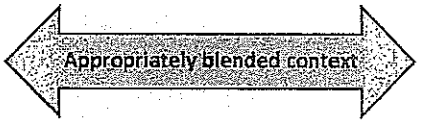
Territory and Space Use

L-Context	Multicontext / Fluid	R - Context
Space has more boundaries. Need more distance for interaction with little if any touching or contact during conversation. Personal space is compartmentalized, individualized, and private.		**Space is more communal.** More comfortable interacting within close social distances, and constant non-intimate touching during conversation is normal. Personal space is shared, and involvement with others is encouraged.
Privacy is more important. Concerned about not disturbing others and following social rules of privacy and consideration.		**Privacy is less important.** Involved with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) and have few concerns about privacy.
Personal property is shared less. Tend to show great respect for private property. Seldom or reluctantly borrow or lend things.		**Personal property is shared more.** Respect private property but tend to borrow and lend things often and easily. My home is your home.

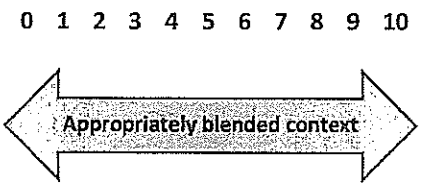
Information Sharing and Use

L-Context	Multicontext / Fluid	R - Context
Information does not flow freely. Data are highly focused and compartmentalized. Make relatively low use of personal information networks. Information is power.		**Information spreads rapidly.** Information moves as if it has a life of its own. Make relatively significant use of multiple personal information networks.
Information can be separated from context. Can separate information from the context it comes from (e.g., study a plant characteristics but not the ecosystem it resides in).		**Information without context is meaningless.** Prefer information in context; otherwise, it is unreliable (e.g., studying a plant characteristics without knowledge of the ecosystem it resides in is has little meaning or confused meaning).

The Purpose and Process of Learning

L-Context	Multicontext / Fluid	R - Context
Purpose focuses on the individual. Knowledge and individual competence used to move forward toward goals and the betterment of humanity.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Purpose of learning focuses on the community.** Wisdom used for betterment of the lives of those with whom we are connected – family, tribe, and community, sometimes the global community.
Knowledge is obtained by linear-logical reasoning. A rational step-by-step model of analysis yields information. Reality is elemental, fragmented, compartmentalized and thus easier to isolate for analysis.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Knowledge is obtained by a gestalt model.** Facts are perceived as complete units (gestalts) embedded in the context of situations or experiences; they can be recalled as wholes, and they are not easily separated for analysis. Things are interconnected, synthesized, and global.
Analytical thinking is important. Prefer an inductive reasoning process, to go from the specific to the general. Focus on compiling details. Have difficulty translating their thinking process into symbols so that comprehensive thinkers can easily understand it.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Comprehensive (systems) thinking is important.** Prefer deductive reasoning, to go from general to specific. Use expanded thinking ("big picture" actions, ideas, and/or complex forms). Have few problems translating their thinking processes symbolically (nonverbally) for others to understand.
Learn best by following directions. Assemble or combine facts according to rules they memorize. Things are spelled out with explicit explanations even in an apprenticeship model. Theoretical and philosophical problems are treated as real.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Learn best by demonstration.** Learn by hands-on methods: observing and mimicking others, practicing it mentally and physically, demonstrating it to others, and by apprenticeship. Real life problems are as important as theoretical and philosophical ones.
Learning is oriented toward individuals. Prefer to approach tasks and learning individually. Tend to work and learn apart from others. Teamwork means individuals are assigned tasks to accomplish.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Learning is group oriented.** Prefer to work in groups to learn and solve problems. Some groups prefer constant talking (interacting) in proximity when working or learning.
Creative learning process is externalized. Prefer to learn or create complex knowledge like mathematics externally—with the aid of pens, paper, books, computers, and so on. The learning process is highly visible and accessible for others to evaluate and correct. Externalized creative processes help to speed up change, but they may be slower and less productive than internalized processes.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Creative learning process is internalized.** May be capable of learning or creating complex knowledge like mathematics or music in their heads rather than by using learning extensions like pen and paper. The creative learning process is comprehensive, and integrating complex ideas can happen all at once. Internalized creative processes are less visible for others to evaluate and correct, but they are much faster and more productive than externalized process.

Academic System Values

L-Context	Multicontext / Fluid	R - Context
Theoretical and quantified thinking is emphasized. Value examining ideas rather than broad comprehension of real-world applications. Linear thinking is ultra-specific and inhibits a broad mutual understanding of multilayered events. Thinking uses words and math to communicate.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Applied and qualitative thinking is valued.** Value application of knowledge in real world events. Interconnected thinking fosters creativity and broad comprehension of multilayered events. Often uses stories or illustrations to express complex concepts.
Academic/teaching style is technical. Style is individual, less interactive, and teacher oriented. Research interests include people or communities, but focus on theoretical and philosophical problems. Writing style uses fewer pronouns.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Academic/teaching style is personal.** Style is more open, interactive, and student oriented. Research interests are directed to real-life problems with people and the community. Writing style tends toward more use of personal pronouns.
Approaches rely on Linnaean-style taxonomies. Taxonomies favor linear analysis that classifies living things mainly for information retrieval. Taxonomic systems emphasize the processes of collecting specific information more than its integration into usable, intelligible patterns.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Approaches include folk-style taxonomies.** Taxonomies function beyond information retrieval to communicate *about* the living things being classified with those who already know culturally significant properties of the things being discussed. The intent is to integrate the information collected with contextual thinking to open new areas for research.
Low-context disciplinary culture. May favor fields that tend to conduct analysis with methods that often eliminate context (separate information from context). Research analysis usually deals with large numbers of quantitative and easily measured variables; results are more deterministic and context is less important. New research projects are directed toward strongly projected predetermined outcomes.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Contexted disciplinary culture.** May favor disciplines that are more directly involved with contextual thinking and research about livings systems and people. Research analysis is more qualitative and probabilistic and requires attention to variables in which cultural context is important. New research projects are clear about the direction and methods of analysis, but projected outcomes are less predetermined and more open-ended and flexible.
Disciplinary divisions are logical and necessary. Disciplinary expertise is valued, and students learn best by taking disciplinary-based classes.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 	**Disciplinary divisions are arbitrary and limit understanding of natural systems.** Though disciplinary expertise may be helpful, it may limit understanding of the system. Broader, non-disciplinary approaches (or multi-disciplinary approaches) are needed to address natural systems.

Name: _____

CONTEXTURAL RELATIONSHIP WORKSHEET – R. IBARRA

(LC)		(HC)	
M O **Low use of nonverbal signals** Words are most important; Less attuned to body language to communicate	M O	**High use of nonverbal signals** such as body language through voice, expression and gestures.	M O
M O **Communication is direct** Get to the main point quickly, spell things out exactly. May appear to be blunt, or even rude.	M O	**Communication is indirect** Avoid getting to the main point quickly. People get main ideas from context.	M O
M O **Sparse Interpersonal feedback** Avoid interfering with others' lives. Mood shifts attributed to personal problems are often ignored.	M O	**Frequent interpersonal feedback.** Constant checking on emotional status is important for group morale. Attuned to slight mood changes among friends and colleagues.	M O
M O **Disagreement is depersonalized.** Tend to withdraw from conflict and get on with task. Can defuse confrontation by quiet separation.	M O	**Disagreement is personalized.** Sensitive to conflict and criticism. Defuse confrontation and unpleasantness. Prefer to resolve conflict before work can progress.	M O
M O **Personal commitment to people is low.** Relationships start and end quickly.	M O	**Personal commitment to people is high.** Relationships depend on trust and build slowly.	M O
M O **Task orientation.** Things get done when everyone follows policies and procedures and pays attention to goals. People are not as important as completing the job.	M O	**Process orientation.** Getting things done depends on relationships and attention to group process. Courtesy and kindness are more important than completing a job.	M O
M O **Time is a commodity** to be spent, saved, carved out, lost and made up. Emphasis on promptness, speed, schedules, and efficiency. Time is money. Change happens fast.	M O	**Time is process** and part of nature; it belongs to everyone. Emphasis on people and completion of transactions, even if it takes longer than originally predicted. Change happens slowly because things are rooted in the past. Deadlines are goals to be achieved if possible.	M O
M O **Synchrony is not important** Tempo of life is faster and individualized. Body movements are not synchronized.	M O	**Synchrony is important** Tempo of life can be slower and aligned with others around you. Absence of synchrony at work may cause stress and tension.	M O
M O **Culture can be changed**, put on or taken off. Change means discarding old ways for new. Expect others to be willing to reshape culture.	M O	**Culture is ingrained** and integral to everything. Change means integrating new and old ways. Seldom expect others to reshape their culture.	M O
M O **Privacy is important** with concern about disturbing others.	M O	**Privacy is less important** in involvement with family, friends, close business associates	M O
M O **Analytical and linear thinking**	M O	**Holistic, symbolic and systems thinking**	M O
M O **Examination of ideas is valued**	M O	**Application of knowledge is valued**	M O
M O **Information can be separated from context.**	M O	**Information without context is meaningless.**	M O
M O **Professions/Fields** Emphasize quantitative, measurable variables often disengaged from people. Compartmentalized approaches are preferred (disciplinary approaches)	M O	**Professions/Fields** Analysis is more qualitative and requires attention to variables of cultural context. Often involve living systems and people or interconnected concepts (e.g., interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary systems approaches).	M O

Source: Adapted from the work of Edward T. Hall (1959-1993) and Edward T. Hall and Mildred R. Hall (1990) and Roberto Ibarra, *Beyond Affirmative Action: Reframing the Context of Higher Education* (2001)
Adapted from Ibis Consulting Group product.