Undergraduate Turkish Students in the U.S.

Istanbul Technical University Dual Degree Program

U.S.-Turkish Cultural Dynamics

**Types of Universities**

- Most Turkish UB students attended higher ranked private or state universities in the western part of Turkey.
- State Universities
  - Number of universities: 120-150
  - Student enrollment - 10,000-30,000
  - Tuition - $200-300 per semester
  - Curriculum - traditional
- Private universities
  - Recent concept, established in 1990’s
  - Number of universities: 40
  - Student enrollment - typically 2,000-3,000
  - Tuition - $15,000-20,000 per year
  - Faculty - U.S. Ph.D. degrees
  - Modeled after U.S. universities
    - Curriculum includes General Education requirements
    - Policies regarding cheating

**Agenda**

- Turkish Educational System
  - Types of Universities
  - Learning Environment
  - Relations with Professors
  - Teaching and Learning Styles
  - Academic Integrity
  - Navigating University Bureaucracy
  - Residence Halls & Social Life
## Learning Environment
- Class size – 100+ students
- Class attendance – not recorded
  - Students tend to attend review sessions, but not lectures
  - Students can come and go during lecture
    - Turkish students in U.S. may be surprised by class attendance requirements.
- Libraries – not well-equipped
  - Students are not accustomed to using libraries or doing own research
- Study lounges – preferred study location

## Relations with Professors
- Turkish professors – not very approachable
- Turkish students – show deference and respect when interacting with professors
  - Use polite language
  - Never eat or drink in class
  - Avoid chewing gum in professors’ presence

## Assignments & Testing
- Assignments – definitely fewer than in U.S.
- Presentations – rarely required
- Exams
  - Final exam – 60-70% of final grade
  - Mid-term exam – 30-40% of final grade
  - First national exam – taken after eight years of study

## Teaching and Learning Styles
- Teaching is lecture-based.
- Students listen and take notes.
- Learning mainly involves memorization.
- There are few projects and papers.
  - Turkish students in U.S. may be surprised when assigned projects or papers.
- Discussions are rare and, when attempted, not very successful.

## Learning Style
- Learning is more mechanical.
  - Students have mentality of “save the day”.
  - Focus is on doing what they need to do today and not worrying about tomorrow.
    - Ex. “If I solve this problem, I can complete the assignment. To do that, I can just borrow a friend’s homework.”
  - Students don’t understand that knowledge is cumulative and they need to learn / understand something for tomorrow’s assignments.
  - Students don’t perceive learning as being a goal or its own (or even a) reward.

## Learning Style
- Studying is more communal.
  - Students never hesitate to ask another student for notes or assignments.
  - If anyone refuses to share, s/he will be a social outcast.
  - Attitude is: “I can pass. You can pass. I don’t mind if you pass using my notes.”
    - Ex. Banu gave another student her notes—and then found them on sale at Kinko’s!
  - But, they might refuse to share with a student who never does any work.
Academic Integrity
- Cheating is more common than in the U.S.
  - Cheating techniques include:
    - writing notes on hands, an eraser, small pieces of paper, etc.
    - talking during an exam
      - Ex. “Teacher, could you please explain Question #17?” Student calls out: “Oh, that question is easy”. (“Easy” means that the answer is A.)
    - Students are not familiar with plagiarism or citation requirements.

- It is impossible to cheat on the National Higher Education Entrance Exam.
  - High security and surveillance
  - Randomized exam seating
  - Exam booklets with different question orders

- However, once students are in the university, they tend to cheat on exams and assignments when:
  - the assignment does not count much towards their final grade in the class.
  - they think they will not get caught or penalized.
  - they see it as the last chance to pass the course.

- The tolerance for and tendency to cheat may differ according to:
  - Major
    - Ex. Turnitin software used to detect plagiarism in Computer Science department
    - Ex. Business management students collaborated on homework assignments.
  - Class size
    - Cheating occurs more frequently in crowded classes
  - The lecturer’s attitude

- If caught, cheaters will be disciplined.
  - They may even be suspended from the school.
  - But, they are unlikely to get caught.
  - The professor may or may not tell the Chair, who may or may not tell the Dean, etc.
  - The incident gets lost in the system.
  - Administrators also don’t want to hurt students or the department’s reputation.

- In the U.S., Turkish students will be less inclined to cheat.
  - They don’t have a well-defined community.
  - They don’t know other students’ background or quality of notes.
  - It takes time to establish another student’s willingness to share notes and confirm that s/he is a good note taker.
  - They are told that cheating in the U.S. is taken more seriously.
Navigating University Bureaucracy

- **State universities**
  - Customer service is worse because:
    - employees have jobs for life
    - there is no appraisal system
  - Service there is characterized by rigid procedures and delays.

- **Private universities**
  - Customer service is better because:
    - students pay for their studies so are customers.
    - employees can be fired.

**Ways of accomplishing tasks**

- Asking for favors based on personal relationship
  - Ex. Huseyin applied to ERASMUS and then wanted to change the university. He couldn't, but his friend did because he "knew the girl".
  - Ex. It took Melis four days of standing in line to get a driver's license "because she didn't know anyone".

- Turkish students might expect help (favors) from Turkish faculty.
  - Ex. A TUrki student was always asking for extensions on assignments. She also always spoke to him in Turkish despite the fact that he only spoke English with her.
  - Ex. A student who was failing a Turkish TA's class said to her, "How are we going to do this?"

- Asking to see a supervisor

**Types of Turkish Residence Halls**

- **Private university residence halls**
  - Similar to U.S. residence halls

- **Public university residence halls**
  - Public residence halls
  - "Better" residence halls
  - "Super dorms"
Types of Turkish Residence Halls

- **Public residence halls**
  - Very inexpensive (e.g. $50 per month)
  - Segregated by gender
  - 3-8 students per room
  - Room furnished w/ bunk beds and closets
  - Shared bathrooms and study halls for all students on floor
  - 11:00 p.m. curfew
  - Nightly (e.g. midnight) room checks to be sure each student is in room (so it's clear the student needs the housing).

- **“Better” Residence Halls**
  - More expensive (approx. $300 per month)
  - Suites w/ four students, bathroom and kitchen
  - Not segregated by gender
  - No curfew
  - No nightly room checks

- **“Super dorms”**
  - Extremely expensive (approx. $500 per month)
  - Suites w/ 2-3 students
  - Single rooms and private bathrooms
  - Shared living room and kitchen
  - Not segregated by gender
  - No curfew
  - No nightly room checks

Social Life in Turkish Universities

- Campuses are lively most of the day.
  - Students sit outside between classes, talk to friends, read, play games, etc.
- Cafeterias provide a gathering place.
  - Students eat with their friends, hang out, watch football, enjoy snacks, etc.
- Campuses have many social and cultural events, which are well attended.
- Since campuses are safe at night, students also walk around after midnight.
- At night, residence halls become the place for socializing.

- Universities improve the local economy and social life of the city.
- In most big cities, university students participate greatly in the cultural life.
Undergraduate Turkish Students in the U.S.
Melis Kural, Master's Student, Sociology

Undergraduate Life: Making American Friends
- Learned how to initiate conversations
  - Example
    - A: "So what do you think of this class?"
    - B: "OMG! I took BIO in freshman year. It was so hard."
    - A: "We could have a study group."
- Made lots of friends in study group meetings
- Thought classmates might not have time to explain things to her
- Learned that everyone has strengths and weaknesses.

Undergraduate Life: Making American Friends
- Understanding how Americans express emotions
  - Wasn't sure how to express emotions in the U.S.
  - Ex. Americans say "ohhhh" a lot, but Turkish express themselves by touching.

Undergraduate Life: Making American Friends
- Learned to share her culture
  - If you tell others about your culture, people will understand you—or at least try to understand you.
  - People will also share things about their culture.
  - Key point: Don't wait for someone to approach you. Make the first move. Say hi.

Undergraduate Life: Making American Friends
- Confusion about English
  - Example
    - Americans say "sorry" a lot—and in strange ways
      - (Walked into a restroom) Woman washing her hands said, "Sorry."
      - (Someone touched her accidentally) "I'm sorry."
      - A: "I wasn't able to get a ticket."
      - B: "I'm sorry."
    - "I'm sorry you're sick. Get well soon."
    - A: "I'm sorry."
    - B: "Don't say 'sorry'."
    - A: "I'm sorry I said sorry."
  - Although "ohhh" and "sorry" seem like small things, they can create awkward moments.
Insights into U.S. Culture

- Americans share personal information with strangers
  - Ex. On many occasions, a random person came up to her and talked for half an hour. She felt very confused afterwards.
- Americans need their own space
  - Ex. Melis’ roommate did not talk to her at all during midterm week. Melis was really offended, but learned not to take things personally.
- Americans do their own thing.
  - Ex. Melis would wash her roommate’s dishes when washing her own, but her roommate never did the same.
- Americans don’t put their families first.
  - Ex. If her sorority sister’s mother called during a sorority meeting, the sister would tell her she couldn’t talk.

Undergraduate Life: Residence Halls

- Programs & Activities
  - Ex. Hot Chocolate Night, costume parties, Grey’s Anatomy Night
    - Participated when her schedule permitted
  - Met lots of people this way
  - American holidays
    - Thanksgiving, Halloween, Easter and Christmas - new to her
    - Gave small little gifts (e.g. Hershey’s chocolates) to friends and neighbors
    - Made lots of friends that way

Undergraduate Life: Greek Life

- Sororities
  - Don’t exist in Turkey. Joined sorority in U.S.
  - Sisters were nice to first and only Turkish sorority sister
  - Hard to understand sorority activities (e.g. rush)
  - Sisters spent more time on sorority activities than school work
  - Felt that health and school come first so participated only when she had time.

Undergraduate Life: Greek Life

- Sororities
  - Sisters got into arguments
  - Did not get into fights because it was only a social activity

Istanbul Technical University Dual Degree Program

Beril Darcan, M.S. Student, Environmental Engineering
How Students Join the DDP Program

- Take the national university entrance exam
- Complete university preference form according to their score
- Have necessary financial resources
  - $5,000 – preparatory course
  - $8,000 – academic year at ITU
  
  Note: The ITU DDP program is more expensive than "regular" ITU programs, but less than private universities in Turkey.

How ITU DDP Students Come to UB

- Take the TOEFL and ITU's English proficiency exam
  - If they don’t pass, spend a year studying English before their freshman year
- DDP students spend their freshman and junior years at ITU, and sophomore and senior years at UB.

ITU DDP Learning Environment

- DDP classes are separate from other ITU classes.
- DDP class size is typically:
  - 20-25 - environmental engineering majors
  - 40-50 - civil engineering majors
  - Class size decreases as the students progress in the program.
- Instruction is supposed to be in English.
  - But, students can ask questions in Turkish.
  - Some professors make an “agreement” with the students to use Turkish in class.

Assignments and Exams

- Fewer assignments and projects at ITU
- Final exam is usually 70% of grade while midterm is usually 30%
- Presentations are rarely required
  - If presentations are in English, students may make fun of their classmates.
- Assignments are usually on paper so DDP students are not used to:
  - My UB or UB Learns checking their email for announcements

ITU DDP Student Profile

- Some DDP students did not choose to be in the DDP program.
  - They may have no idea about civil or environmental engineering.
  - Their parents may have forced them to join the program (e.g. to work later in their father’s construction company)
- Most DDP students have never been away from their families or traveled alone to a new country.
- Some students are more hardworking and responsible than others.

ITU DDP Student Profile

- Since DDP students are separated from other students at ITU, they feel special and may expect a lot of attention from UB and UB professors.
- Since some Turkish parents are overprotective, DDP students may be used to their parents doing everything for them.
  - It can be a shock to live in another country and do everything by themselves.
  - Attending meetings and orientations
  - Paying bills
Problems ITU DDP Students May Have in Buffalo

- Having high expectations of Buffalo (e.g., like New York City)
- Being afraid of speaking English when they first arrive
- Being homesick and not being able to focus on school
- Experiencing freedom for the first time
- Becoming bored so they go downtown at night and skip their morning classes (or start sleeping during the day and living at night)

Group Dynamics Among DDP Students

In their sophomore year, DDP students
- fly to the U.S. together
- live in the same apartment
- eat together
- go/don’t go to class together
- work on their assignments together
- Spending so much time together may cause problems and lead to the formation of new, smaller groups.

Academic Integrity

- Cheating is more tolerated at ITU than UB. One student will do the homework. Others will make copies of it and distribute it to the class.
- Since assignments, projects, and solutions manuals from previous cohorts are available, DDP students may use those (and be surprised when they get a “0”).
- Since they usually live in the same apartment, they may work on their homework together (and not realize they are getting the same wrong answer).

Problems ITU DDP Students May Have in Buffalo

- Being afraid of asking professors or TA’s questions and going to office hours (since they are not used to having these resources)
- Having problems working on group projects with U.S. students since they are not used to it
- Feeling like they don’t belong anywhere and losing friends (due to going back and forth)
- Having to sell their belongings (e.g., car) and buy new ones when they go back and forth

Group Dynamics Among DDP Students

UB employees may:
- see Turkish students sitting in clusters of groups that don’t talk to each other
- experience a student asking to be in a separate group for a class project
- Depending on what happens in the sophomore year, a student may choose to:
  - hang out with his/her Turkish friends
  - start making new friends
  - spend time alone

Group Dynamics Among DDP Students

A student may be excluded from the Turkish group if he/she chooses to:
- make American friends
- do his/her assignments alone
- not speak Turkish all the time
Academic Integrity

- Students may think Wikipedia is a reliable source for projects, and copy and paste from websites.
- Some students are experienced cheaters so may organize their friends for cheating on a midterm or final.

U.S.-Turkish Cultural Dynamics

Ersoy Erdemir, Ph.D. student, Foreign Language Education

Power Dynamics in Turkish Universities

- Power dynamics between Turkish students and university employees are overt.
  - Turkish university employees project an authoritarian image.
  - Their image is serious, uptight and inflexible.
  - Since they have job security, they don’t care about students’ satisfaction with their service.
  - They don’t even bother to be polite to students or conceal their annoyance with them. They will scold students who make mistakes.

Power Dynamics in Turkish Universities

- Students’ communications with university employees will determine the completion or delay of the service being provided.
  - If students are very casual or assertive, the employee might delay—or not provide—the service.
  - If a student argues with an employee, s/he could receive a warning or even be expelled.

Power Dynamics in Turkish Universities

- Students are careful to show respect for the employee’s higher status.
  - They usually try to be polite, nice, formal and unassertive.
  - They use formal language. They are careful not to talk to them as they would to friends.
  - Students respect employees’ age and authority irrespective of gender.

Power Dynamics in the U.S. Context

- Turkish students do not perceive U.S. employees to be at a higher status than students.
- Since U.S. employees seem friendly, polite and easily approachable, Turkish students might:
  - feel that their request can be expedited or given priority.
  - behave in a more informal or casual way.
  - feel entitled to have the employee do what they want.
  - become more assertive if the service is delayed.
Friendship in Turkey
- Friendships are not short term or based on benefits or gains.
- They tend to be genuine and sincere.
- Friends take care of each other, protect and console each other.
- Friends take ownership of their friend's problems, and do all they can to help the person emotionally and practically.
- If someone is your friend in Turkey, it is taken for granted that you will remain friends forever.

Friendship in the U.S. Context
- Turkish students have difficulty making friends with American students.
- They perceive Americans as not attaching deep or emotional value to friendship.
- They may perceive Americans as having "fake friendships" when:
  - they find they cannot build a strong, deep and sincere rapport with them.
  - an American whom they considered to be a friend does not talk to them after class or greet them when passing by.

Friendship in the U.S. Context
- American students seem to be:
  - busy and in a hurry
  - competitive
  - not willing to share as Turkish friends do
- Turkish students conclude that being individualistic, competitive and independent is valued in U.S. culture.
  - In contrast, togetherness, sharing and sincere interactions and deep, lasting friendships are valued in Turkish culture.

Personal Space
- Turkish culture is a "touching culture".
- Unless people are newly met, physical intimacy while communicating is considered appropriate.
  - Ex. Both men and women shake hands and kiss each other on both cheeks when they meet. They also link arms and put their arm across one another's shoulder.
  - Ex. Touching someone's shoulder, arm or back during communication is a sign of sincerity, and being with and understanding the person.

Personal Space
- Turkish men avoid shaking American men's hands or making any physical contact with them because:
  - they don't want to make them uncomfortable
  - they don't want them to think they are gay.
- Turkish men adapt to U.S. culture by rejecting other Turkish men's handshakes. They compensate by not being as intimate as they would be in Turkey.

Personal Space
- Being physically close to someone while communicating is desirable as it is a sign of sincerity.
- No one would step back to regain personal space.
- Since the U.S. is not a "touching culture", Turkish students feel that Americans, especially men, are cold and insincere in their relations with them.
Greetings

- It is really rude not to greet people in Turkey.
- When you run into a friend or acquaintance, you stop and take the time to chat.
- You never say "Hi, how are you?" and keep walking.
- If you ignore someone because you are very busy, that could negatively affect your relationship.
  - Instead, you should say, "Hi, I'm really busy on my project." or "Hey, how are you? I'm working on X."