

ASU instructor shares importance of intercultural communication with health students around the world

By Charles Najera, ASU News
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Health care providers need not just medical training to understand the body, but intercultural awareness as well, to better understand where a patient is coming from.

The latter was the focus of four recent workshops that [Susana Valenzuela](#), instructional faculty at the [Hugh Downs School of Human Communication](#), taught in collaboration with Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara (UAG) as part of ASU's [Global Academic Initiatives](#) in partnership with the [ASU Cintana Alliance](#) network.

Since 2021, Valenzuela has taught students in Costa Rica, the Philippines, India and Mexico as part of the ASU Cintana Alliance, which connects ASU with a global community of forward-thinking institutions. These multi-tiered partnerships support joint teaching, student exchange and dual-degree opportunities.

The recent sessions at UAG reached more than 2,600 students in a single lecture and nearly 4,000 overall, marking the largest participation for Valenzuela's sessions to date. Conducted entirely in English, the sessions focused on workplace communication, empathy and intercultural understanding, and were attended by students preparing for careers in medicine and health care.

"These students are going to be surgeons, lawyers and entrepreneurs," Valenzuela said. "They are Mexico's next generation of professionals, and I took that responsibility very seriously."

To ensure students remained engaged, Valenzuela adapted her teaching to honor cultural differences while maintaining the academic rigor expected at ASU. Drawing on her background in intercultural communication and her love of languages, she worked closely with faculty at each institution to align examples, materials and tone to the unique needs of each audience.

“Each country, and even each region, has its own norms,” she explained. “It’s not just about translating language. It’s about understanding how people communicate, what professionalism looks like in different contexts, and making the material meaningful no matter where students are logging in from.”

Although she occasionally lectures late at night to accommodate students’ schedules in India, Valenzuela says the engagement and feedback make it all worthwhile. Satisfaction surveys from students have been overwhelmingly positive, with many requesting longer sessions and more opportunities for connection.

This summer, Valenzuela was recognized with a Professor of Impact award for her contributions in the classroom. Based on student nominations, the honor praised her mentorship and the way she motivates students to overcome challenges.

“I was floored to read what my student wrote. It reminded me why I do this work,” she said.

Valenzuela hopes to see these global collaborations expand and gain visibility.

“Programs like these show that communication isn’t just an academic concept. It’s a real-world skill that can empower students globally. My goal is to help students think critically about communication, not just do it better. I want them to reflect on how we connect with others — across borders, cultures and beliefs. I’m proud to represent ASU in this work, and I hope we continue growing these opportunities.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



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Susana Valenzuela