

Intercultural Communication Apprehension in Huntsville

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INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication is unavoidable. However, anticipated interaction with “others” leads to *intercultural communication apprehension* (ICA) – the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people from different groups, especially different cultural or ethnic groups. If we are too anxious about interacting with strangers, we tend to avoid them. As humans, we either need to embrace the benefits of living together as a balanced, diverse community with common goals, or be doomed to a cycle of fear and hostility towards those from other groups. Reducing ICA benefits these goals. Measuring ICA is a logical first step towards reducing ICA and growing more *inter-cultural communication competence* (ICC). This study sought to understand:

- What is the current ICA level for the Huntsville metropolitan area (HSV)?
- How does HSV compare to other areas?
- Is there a relationship with ICA and a person’s demographic characteristics (age, sex, birth country, and English as a first language)?

METHOD

227 adult, U.S. residents participated in an online, anonymous survey in this quantitative study. The sample represented diverse perspectives:

AVERAGE AGE: 32.6 years	16% BORN OUTSIDE U.S.
SEX: 35% males, 64% females, and 1% other	ENGLISH 1ST LANGUAGE: 87% yes – 13% no
RELIGION/FAITH: 63% Christian – 37% other	SEXUAL PREFERENCE: 91% straight – 9% other
ETHNICITY: 65% White, 11% Black/AA, 12% Asian, 5% American Indian/Alaska Native, 3% Hawaiian/PI, and 4% other	
POLITICAL VIEWS: 19% Republicans, 25% Democrats, 30% Independents, 15% had no preference, and 11% selected other options	

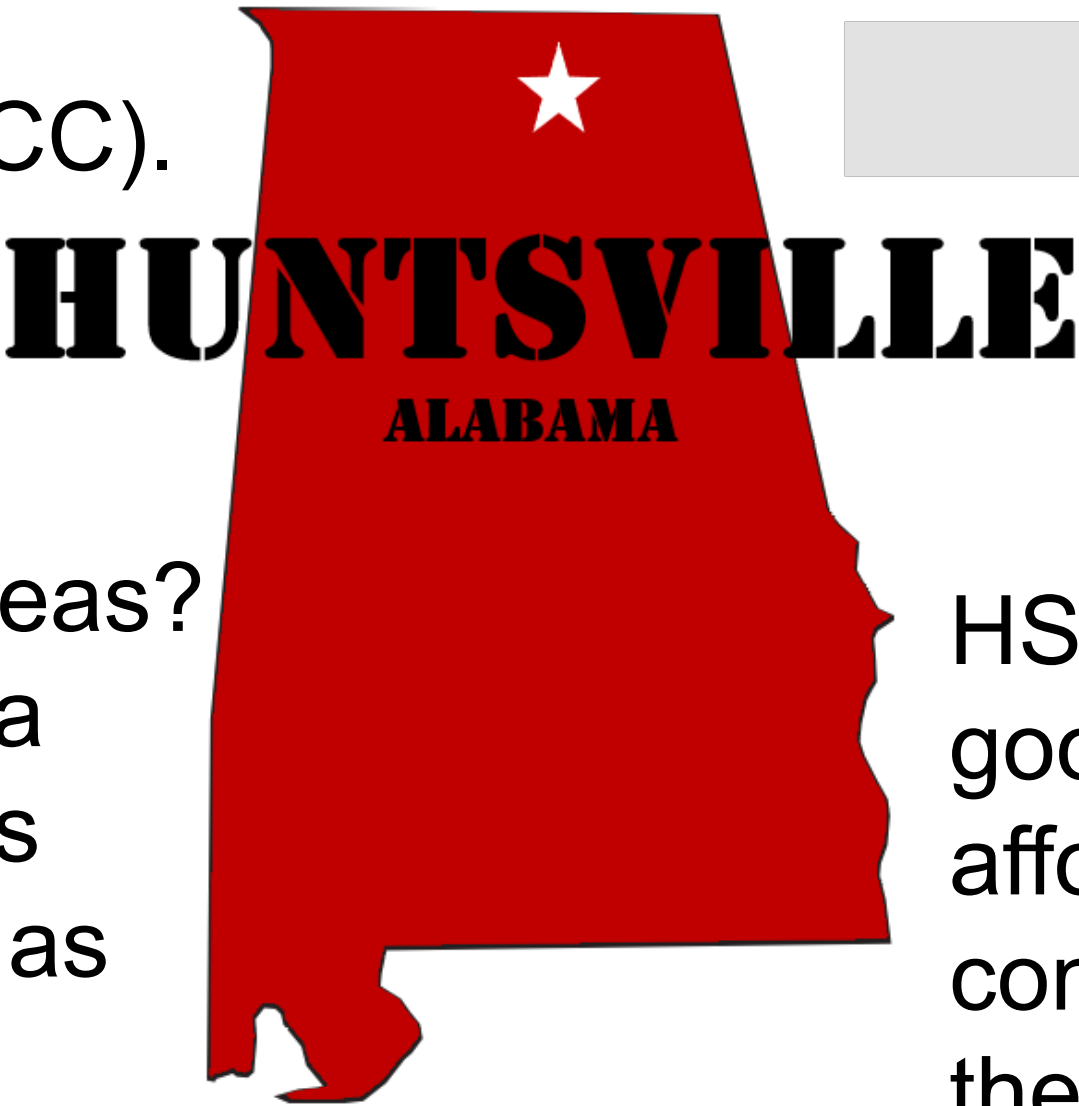
KEY FINDINGS

ICA (n)	LOW 14-31	MED 32-52	HIGH 53-70
HSV (165)	27.2		
OUTSIDE HSV (57)	26.7		
USA (222)	27.1		

Statistical analysis revealed:

- HSV currently has LOW ICA (mean = 27.2).
- HSV’s ICA is comparable to other U.S. areas.
- There are no relationships between ICA and the demographic characteristics tested.

IMPACT



HSV’s workforce is a highly skilled, highly-educated people belonging to a diverse community of industries. HSV is considered to be affordable; its goods and services are some of the most affordable in the state with a low consumer index and cost of living. With these attributes, HSV has positioned itself as a “smart place” for domestic and international business to relocate.

HSV leaders could use the research from this study to understand HSV’s current ICA level, how HSV’s ICA compares to other areas, and which demographic characteristics (if any) are related to higher ICA. With this information, HSV can implement interventions that lower ICA within the community thereby increasing *intercultural communication competence*. Increasing ICC would be a competitive advantage that supports HSV’s economic development goals of attracting new business to the area in addition to growing ICC throughout the United States in general.

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