ICAB 2010-2012 PORTFOLIO

Christine Brandel
English Department, College of Liberal Arts
Ivy Tech Community College Bloomington

Internationalized Course: ENGL 111 English Composition
• ENGL 111-13, Fall 2011 (22 students)
• ENGL 111-08, Spring 2012 (21 students)

International Learning Outcomes:
• Understands culture within a global and comparative context
• Demonstrates knowledge of global issues, processes, trends, and systems
• Uses knowledge, diverse cultural frames of reference, and alternate perspectives to think critically and solve problems
• Accepts and appreciates cultural differences

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Reflection on My ICAB Experience:

As a dual citizen, I know the limitations of a perspective that refuses to look past one's own national borders. As a community college professor, I know that we live in a world where choices made in one country can affect the professional and personal lives of people in another. This is what motivated me to get involved with the Internationalization Collaborative Across Bloomington.

Participation in ICAB has changed the way I teach my ENGL 111 course in a number of ways. First, it made me "go back to basics," forcing me to think about what my students need to learn in the course, how I can help them learn, and how I can tell if they have learned. After teaching for twenty years, I found some of this process helped me look with fresh eyes at a course I've taught to thousands of students. It was also beneficial to learn about a variety of resources and to hear about other professors' activities and assignments. I was able to adapt some strategies from courses completely unrelated to mine. The most helpful thing I took from my ICAB experience is the reassurance that international learning outcomes are valid and important to consider when designing a course. Classes like mine—which are required by all students (regardless of major) and are generally taken at the beginning of students' college careers—have to appeal to a variety of students' interests, skills, and motivations, as well as cover a variety of skills that students don't always understand they will need to have (in college and beyond). I have always believed that incorporating international learning objectives into the course needn't be seen as "packing in even more" to an already packed course. While it did require some work, it wasn't much more work than I generally put into a course each semester and, of course, it furthered my own knowledge, which is never a bad thing. ICAB strengthened my belief that "going beyond borders" can and should be done in every course.

For me, the international learning objectives actually support many of my course's learning objectives, specifically: apply critical reading and thinking skills to the writing process; develop strategies for making independent, critical evaluations of texts; and research and critically evaluate information. To help my students learn these skills, I've always used a theme for the class; in recent years, my theme has been the state of higher education in America (considering all students have a stake in this topic). Because I have taught in the UK, I was able to share some of my own knowledge and experience of higher education in other countries to give my students a wider perspective. To internationalize the course more "officially," I incorporated a specific assignment (Informative Synthesis #2) to ask students to widen their own perspectives and knowledge on higher education in other countries to give my students a wider perspective. They completed this assignment before they began the course's "big" assignment, the argumentative synthesis essay. My hopes were that having taking the time to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of higher education in other countries might open up their arguments on how to improve US higher education. I believe this happened. Thus, the four international learning objectives I had for the course strengthened the critical reading, thinking, research, and argument skills already built into the course.

Clearly my students learned about the higher education systems in the countries that they researched. However, that really wasn't my goal: my goal was to get them critically thinking about the big picture. Each semester I had students who were unaware that
some countries offer free higher education--they literally had never considered that there may be something different to the American way. But it couldn't stop there: students couldn't just argue "we should have free college, too" without considering what that would mean in terms of higher taxes, attendance rates, even the whole purpose of higher education. Ultimately, it's all about learning how to analyze. I was so impressed by the students who were willing and able to do this. I could see the process happening before my eyes: in the "internationalized" assignment, they learned about higher education in the country of their choice (digging deeply as we had already done with US higher education); they shared, argued, and analyzed what they had learned in class discussions; and then they considered what they had found in their argument essays. A number of students did further research into other countries for their argument essays after hearing about what their classmates had learned. One student started many of her in class comments with the phrase "I know I keep talking about how they do it in China, but..." as she was able to respond to many of the different issues others raised in class. Many students also were able to show appreciation of differences--one student talked in depth about the assumptions she had made before her research. Finally, the process also improved critical thinking skills in terms of how many looked at our own country; rather than assuming that "our" way is "the" way, they became aware of how American culture shapes our institutions and psyches. Of course, not all students succeeded; however, this will be true in any course. I did not see any evidence that the international aspect of the course affected students' interest or capabilities--even students who failed the course commented that they appreciated the topic. Students who struggled struggled with the same issues students always struggle with--weak reading/writing skills; attendance issues; effort and engagement with the course; life outside of class; etc.

After teaching the course in Fall 2011, my first adaptation was to strengthen my support and emphasis of the internationalized assignment. I devoted more class time to discussions (and included two online bonus discussions to the topic) and sought support for more resources. This worked much better for Spring 2012. When I teach this course again in Fall 2012, I intend to make one major change to the assignment: I will (slightly) limit the countries they can choose to research. So far, I've let them choose whichever country they like. This has led to three issues: one, for some students, too much choice means that they do not use the writing process wisely; two, some students struggled with research, particularly in terms of non-English texts (which provided an interesting lesson about access but set the students back in the process); and three, some areas of the world were underrepresented in our research. In Spring 2012, learning about other countries became so collaborative that I would like to encourage that even more by making sure we've got a good variety of countries chosen. Whenever I limit topics, I always allow for some exceptions--if a student has a real interest in researching a topic not on my list, I will allow it, but I think a more specific focus on some countries will be beneficial for the above three reasons. (Additionally, my Department has discussed some new teaching strategies for approaching research and this change will allow me to try them.)

In all honesty, my Spring 2012 ENGL 111 felt like my most successful composition course I've taught in years, and I feel that part of the reason for this is what I have learned and developed through my ICAB experience.