Design is pervasive throughout human civilization, and there are opportunities to expose students to these cultures while exploring the range of design possibilities.

Art is naturally a globalized discipline, with the history of art extending over boundaries of time and nationality. Yet the teaching of design skills in a class such as ARTS 102, 2-Dimensional Design is usually devoid of cultural and historic reference, at least in the typical Bauhaus model of teaching, which is how I was taught. The Bauhaus was founded in 1883 in Austria and was revolutionary in art education and theory in its time. It unified all the arts and crafts, with the aim of producing art and design that would be relevant and useful in the modern world. Since the expansion of art departments in higher education in the 20th century (starting with the post WWII GI Bill and continuing today) most 2-D design classes have been taught with a Eurocentric emphasis on the principles and ideas developed by the Bauhaus designers and artists of Austria. The curriculum commenced with a preliminary course that immersed the students in the study of materials, color theory, and formal relationships in preparation for more specialized studies that is the root of many of the exercises and projects typical of a 2-D design class in America today. These methods of teaching are certainly valuable and are well designed to deliver and teach the principles and elements of art and aesthetics. At the same time it is removed from the real political and social world.

I am interested in Islamic geometric design, and thought it would be a way to introduce a connection between a culture and its design with its ideology and philosophy. Using simple tools (a compass and a straight edge) students can create variations on the limitless possibilities of the endless patterns of Islamic art. Students will look at and analysis the designs and look at historic use of the elements. As Islamic design embodies the philosophies of the culture and religion, students will learn about these as well as design.

Students will learn how the elements (value, line, shape, texture, color) and principles (harmony, contrast, variety, rhythm, repetition, balance, unity, emphasis, proportion) of design are used in Islamic design to illustrate and embody the philosophy and belief of the religion and culture. They will also learn professional practices as they learnt to work with the limitations of space, materials, and the needs of a particular client. The scenario for the project is that the students will be members of a guild of craftspeople in the court of Sultan Mehmed in 1450’s Byzantine Constantinople, now Istanbul, Turkey. Students will pick a design element (textiles, tiles, wood work, stone work, carpets, etc.) and design for a specific space in the Sultan’s Topkapi Palace. They will create a presentation and deliver it to the class as well as members of the community who are versed in Islamic faith and philosophy.

This is an opportunity as well to give students a basic understanding of Islam, important in this moment of cultural tension, In Indiana many students have not been exposed to other cultures and religions, this is a good opportunity to introduce them to a people and culture that is
perhaps out of their normal range of interactions. As I have not taught this class before so I cannot write about how this will change my teaching. I did add a major course learning objective which will become a standard part of Ivy Tech’s objectives for this class: Explain design from a cultural viewpoint. This is very different from the existing objectives that don’t go beyond design principles and elements.

I found it interesting to learn that backwards course design is how art is taught. It has helped me understand my own methods and put them into context with other disciplines. Having this deeper understanding will help me design future projects and goals for the students. Participating in ICAB helped me broaden my understanding of globalization and the ways it can be incorporated in education, and how to create curriculums that with the goal to produce global citizens.

Students will learn how the elements (value, line, shape, texture, color) and principles (harmony, contrast, variety, rhythm, repetition, balance, unity, emphasis, proportion) of design are used in Islamic design to illustrate and embody the philosophy and belief of the religion and culture.

One thing that has helped me in my teaching is this: I was hesitant at one point about my project because I dive deep into research and I realized that I am far from an expert in Islamic thought. I was feeling that I would not be able to present it to the students. At that point Hilary Kahn said to me “You don’t have to be the expert in order to get the point across”. This allowed me to relax and remember that a good teacher is learning along with the students.