Peter Nemes  
INTL-I 205 International Communication and Arts  

Department of International Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington  
Enrollment set at 40 (41 students finished)  
Taught: Spring 2014  

World Regions: cases studies from all around the world, including Meso-America, Middle East, East Asia  

Global Learning Goals  
I want my students to understand both the complexities of cultural and artistic practices around the world and how in a globally connected world cultures and identities are communicated.  

Global Learning Outcomes  
1. Students are able to interpret aspects of other cultures and artistic practices with greater sophistication and accuracy.  
2. Students are able to communicate their own culture with greater knowledge and awareness.  
3. Students are able to dissect the constructed nature of identity from multiple perspectives, and they are more comfortable with complexity and ambiguity.
The “International Communication and Arts” course is a core course within the Department of International Studies, an entry point to one of the specialized tracks within the International Studies major and at once a popular option amongst non-majors to fulfill certain credit requirements (World Culture, S&H). During the last four years teaching at Indiana University, this is the course that I have taught the most, and it already underwent several rounds of adjustments, including a fairly substantial change that resulted in the integration of new material and a change of the course number and name (from “INTL-I 201 Culture and the Arts: International Perspectives” to the current one). Since the course is by definition international in its content I focused during my time as an ICAB fellow on rethinking the Global Learning Goal and the Global Learning Outcomes and adjusting the assessments so that they truly corresponds to the GLOs. This seemingly small adjustment meant a profound change in the overall course. It allowed me to reflect on the goal of the course, and I was able to incorporate this reflection into daily tasks, lectures and presentations. An ostensibly minor change in the conscious understanding of the overall goals of the course and of the different pathways that lead to those goals resulted in an overall rise in the quality of my teaching.

The most important actual change in the course came from the restructuring of the final research assignment. Previous to ICAB assessment in I205 included short reading reflection papers (these were later changed to group assignments), a research paper and a final exam. The research paper was broken down into several parts; it included a topic statement, a proposal, an annotated bibliography, and the final paper. Breaking down the writing of the final paper into parts allowed for the research process to be better developed and of overall higher quality: students were forced to start writing early on in the semester and an emphasis on the careful selection of sources and documentation allowed for the proper development of research skills. After rethinking the GLOs I realized that while I want to keep the research paper as the main individual assignment, it could be improved. Instead of having students only write about a freely chosen cultural or artistic practice outside of their culture I have broken up the assignment into three parts. First, they pick and write a somewhat shorter research paper about a cultural or artistic practice of their choice. The second part is a reflection paper that explores a similar artistic or cultural practice within the culture that they grew up in. What is important, however, is that they don’t know what the second part of the research project entails until they actually submitted the first part. This way, they have to really think about a similar cultural practice
within their own culture, no matter what they originally explored in a different culture (also, they will not pick the foreign practice with a native practice in mind). The goal is to find a practice that has a similar position within the culture they know best. The third part is a 5 minute presentation in front of the class, showcasing both the research and the reflection part. The restructuring of the main assignment allows the students to consciously think about how culture is constructed and performed and through the presentation students are required to communicate their own culture with greater knowledge and awareness (this is one the GLOs). Ultimately, the rethinking of the main assignment based on the newly formed GLOs enabled a more direct assessment of the learning goals.

This class is focused on culture, what culture means for the formation of identities and how these identities are communicated. The dynamics that determine the formation and communication of identities is in part based on the dynamics of the Self and the Other. Structuring the research project into two parts allowed for a very clear engagement with this. The ultimate goal, of course, is for student to realize how misleading the concept of the Other can be, how their own cultural practices are just variations of those performed within other cultures.

I can honestly say that the restructured major research project became a very effective form of assessment for measuring the success of the GLOs. The presentations clearly showed that they were able to think about cultural practices within the context of cultures they are not initially familiar with and connect these back to the culture they know. Further, because the presentation involved talking to an audience aided by PowerPoint, it allowed for an experiencing of the direct communicative process that is also part of the creation of cultures. I have submitted successful examples of the research projects (part I: research paper, part II: reflection paper, part III: presentation) to show how this looked in practice.

The course also includes three field trips: to the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, the IU Art Museum and the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center. These allow students to experience the institutional forms of preserving and representing cultures; working with the educational curators of the museums I was able to build into the curriculum an experience that teaches about the mediated forms of cultural representation. The last iteration of teaching I205 (informed by ICAB) included a field trip to the IU Art Museum that used a guided assignment for reading cultural artifacts. This is another way how the new GLOs enhanced teaching.
At this moment I don’t think it would be necessary to further modify the course in order to improve student learning. The current version is based around GLOs that clearly identify objectives of student learning and the readings, in-class work, short assignments and research project allow for a good assessment of these GLOs. I could imagine changing some readings and further developing in-class guided discussion sessions that would enhance the understanding of students, but overall I am quite confident that the class achieves what it set up to do.