

The Integrating Global & Cross-Cultural Dimensions into Teaching Project

Faculty Guide #1: *Teaching Major Global Issues or Developments*

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I. Background

Teaching 'globally' is a popular thing to do, but the overuse of the term is generating confusion. As part of the new Brandeis Assessment initiative and the Office of Global Affairs, a group of faculty and administrators set out to create some frameworks for teaching globally at Brandeis. With the permission of other faculty members, we decided to do this by gauging current efforts and examining course syllabi and assignments.

We came up with four broad goals, which we believe every student – no matter what major – should aspire to achieve if they are to succeed in a rapidly changing century. *Not all students will likely be able to demonstrate all of these goals, and each course or co-curricular program may contribute in different ways to the overall knowledge. Some courses may in fact have no relation.* However, we believe that by the time they graduate and take requirements and electives, *most* of our students should be able to demonstrate:

- a. A significant knowledge of the history, traditions, languages, and contemporary dimensions of one or more cultures besides the student's culture of origin.
- b. An understanding of how issues of culture and cultural difference have shaped the intellectual foundations and the scholarly practice of the student's chosen field(s) of study.
- c. A significant knowledge of the cross-cultural dimensions of at least one major international or global issue or development, historical or contemporary (such as endemic poverty, literary modernism, imperialism, or business ethics).
- d. The ability to communicate effectively and respectfully with others in new cultural contexts, and to work in cross-cultural teams to solve problems creatively.

This guide will provide some useful examples of goal “c”, knowledge of major global issues or developments, drawn from existing faculty teaching practices. We hope it will be useful when designing or modifying courses within a number of different disciplines.

II. Methodology - How We Gathered Teaching Practices

The Office of Global Affairs conducted an internal research project in 2010-11, asking all faculty members to send in examples of syllabi and course assignments related to goal c, and then writing to individual faculty members to follow up. We received examples from 30 different courses representing 12 different departments/programs in the humanities, social sciences, and creative arts.¹ All of the examples included in the appendix are re-printed here with permission.

III. Overall Observations to Consider When Designing and Adapting Courses

These observations were drawn from examining the 30 different courses we reviewed.

- **Culture, as an intellectual and historical concept, is difficult to define and teach, especially in disciplines where it is not a dominant paradigm.**
 - Should your definition of culture or cross-cultural analysis be made explicit to students, or explored directly during the course? Or is it more implicit, varied, and intentionally un-defined?
 - Some courses, such as History 61A: Cultures in Conflict, make direct links between global issues and cultural foundations. Others use a number of intellectual lens (be it social, political, cultural, or otherwise) to approach the texts, while some present a combination of the two approaches.
- **In higher education, we sometimes make the distinction between the “global” and “cross-cultural.”**
 - “Global studies” is usually meant to be a contemporary broadening of international relations or political science, while “cross-cultural” (or “multicultural”) tends to cover domestic, ethnic, and racial issues associated with the formation of individual identities and groups, especially the interactions *between* individuals or groups.
 - Some of the most innovative teaching and research at Brandeis (and elsewhere) are being done at the intersection of these two terms, and have been happening for many years. But the exploration is not always made explicit.
 - The courses and requirements of the International & Global Studies (IGS) program reflect some of that blended approach, but the interdisciplinary nature of other programs shows up in many departments and courses, as well.

¹ The sciences are not represented here, both because no faculty member from the sciences responded to the inquiry, and because we could not identify a course that would match well with teaching global issues. However some of the introductory or science-in-society courses could be further analyzed.

- For example, Psychology 131a (Child Development Across Cultures) incorporates methods of both psychology and anthropology, getting at both the internal and external dynamics of culture.
- **Some courses are destined to tackle cross-cultural comparison by design**
 - For example, the two courses mentioned above are clearly about culture and about the interactions between cultures – the course title, learning objectives, and readings reflect that focus.
 - On the other hand, adapting other existing courses – especially those in traditional fields that do not usually address culture directly – is more difficult, if even desired.
 - We hope that by using single assignments and pedagogical tools that might be adaptable, faculty members might experiment with cross-cultural dimensions of their topic in small but important ways. This would not require an entire course re-design. Some of those pedagogical tools are explained below.
- **In designing assignments, many of our faculty members give students the freedom to choose a framework for analyzing a problem or development related to the course.**
 - This framework might be historical, political, sociological, etc.
 - If desired, and with a relatively small amount of effort, students might be given the option to pursue a cross-cultural analysis of a given problem or development.
 - Such an option may allow students to draw creatively upon outside sources or personal experiences (if approved by the faculty member).

IV. Common Practices

We identified four common pedagogical practices/tools, which will be further illustrated via the examples in the appendix.

- **Text and Cultural Product Comparisons**
 - The most common practice among the courses/assignments we reviewed.
 - Allow for varying interpretations of the same event or development by analyzing primary source texts or cultural productions (artwork, architecture, films, etc.) from diverse origins.
 - Useful for covering breadth as well as depth of understanding of a global issue, as well as for gaining qualitative understanding of macro-level processes.
 - History 186b: A Global History of the Vietnam Wars uses a memoir written by a Vietnamese-American to compare to texts of U.S. political and military origin.
 - Anthropology 119a: Conquest, Resistance, and Cultural Transformation in Mexico and Central America asks students to write three separate papers drawing on primary source texts and independent research, asking students to relate local, specific transformations to larger global and cultural change through the sweep of history.

- Primary sources – memoirs, letters, diaries, news clippings, architectural sites, and music – are often best for such comparisons, but not exclusively. They may seem isolated or un-related if not integrated with the central concepts of the course.
 - English 167a: Decolonizing Fictions emphasizes well-known colonial and post-colonial literature as part of a process of global literary production, and asks students to compare two pieces of literature from the course.
- Other courses care less about direct comparison and more about the flow of knowledge production.
 - Music 3b: Introduction to World Music asks students to follow local musical traditions as they become re-interpreted for use on the global market
 - Fine Arts 182b: Politics of Public Space asks students to investigate the hidden political and social histories behind architectural design.
- **Mock Debates or Role-Playing**
 - Allow students to not only learn about but *imagine and live* in another’s shoes.
 - Usually involves setting up a class debate where students are grouped in teams, with each team adopting the stance of a particular country or culture and arguing on its behalf.
 - For example, in Environmental Studies 18b: International Environmental Conflict and Collaboration, students undertake a UN “negotiations exercise” on environmental policy, representing different countries. Politics 172b: International Political Economy features a similar set of debates.
 - It might be interesting to pair such debates with other teaching practices detailed here, such as meta narratives or text comparisons. Otherwise mock debates might risk reinforcing certain norms that do not consider culture as a variable or dimension of the issue.
- **Meta-Narratives and Personal Stories**
 - Broadly cover any exercise that involves the incorporation of students’ (and others’) personal narratives and stories as part of the “texts” of the course.
 - The most effective usage seems to go beyond the simple creation of a narrative, and allow students to simultaneously build and reflect upon the narrative, making extensive use of literary and social science techniques methods such as oral history, ethnography, and [Portraiture](#).
 - For example, in Comparative Literature 165a: Reading, Writing, and Reading Across Cultures, students create a “personal literacy story” that involves re-constructing a memory that played a role in the students’ literary development, and examine the role of culture in that process.
 - In the weekly seminar for Pax 89: Internship in Peace, Conflict, and Coexistence *Studies*, students construct an essay for publication that integrates their personal experience during a summer internship with texts and knowledge from prior course work.
 - Although we did not receive an example of this, another usage might be to incorporate the stories and narratives of international students and recently

returned study abroad students. This technique can also make extensive use of the LATTE discussion feature, allowing narratives to be constructed and reflected upon over time.

- **Ethnographic Observations**

- Similar to meta-narratives, the ethnographic method is most used in anthropology. But portions of it might be used in any discipline/course that incorporates qualitative research and understanding.
- Useful especially for getting students out into communities and into practice with direct research.
- In Psychology 131a: Child Development Across Cultures, students undertake a family observation and report, analyzing child-rearing practices and family structures within a culture outside of their own, “native” culture.

Of course, these four common practices are not an exhaustive list of options. Many courses we examined asked students to demonstrate cross-cultural understanding of issues simply by using the traditional essay. The key, however, seems to be both a **comparative and intellectually-grounded approach – most essays ask students to compare an issue from the perspective of at least two different societies/cultures. At the same time, they are asked to analyze ONE, consistent theoretical framework or stick to one time period or one of the course themes.**

Appendix A:

Examples from Assignments and Course Design

Example 1

Psychology 131A: Child Development Across Cultures

Mick Watson

Overview: The nature of child development is a major issue in psychology but also of course many fields, from sociology to anthropology to education and history. It is a global issue by definition, and one that is especially important given the rise of diverse populations in the coming years. Mick Watson's syllabus states that "we often talk about the importance of culture in child development and discuss some cultural differences that have been found in the research literature, but rarely do students delve into a comparison of two cultures to the extent that they can look critically at how different cultures actually *come to shape* development. For this reason, in this course, two main cultures within the United States will be studied in detail: mainstream, European American culture and Navajo culture. Studies from other cultures will also be used to further understanding. To sharpen these comparisons and keep the discussions within some logistically feasible delineation, we will focus on family influences on child development." (Psych 131 Syllabus, Spring 2010).

Learning Objectives: The course is described as an "advanced seminar," is Writing Intensive, and fulfills the Psych Research Requirement. Learning objectives move sequentially and cover a lot of territory, including extensive use of anthropological frameworks. Students first learn about core theories of child development across cultures and how culture influences development, evaluating supposed differences between "individualist" and "collectivist" cultures. Students then examine the specific case of Navajo culture in comparison to European American culture, and analyze how children negotiate two cultures and how this "biculturalism" influences development. Finally, this allows students to hypothesize and theorize more broadly on a "general process" of how culture influences development (Psych 131 Syllabus, Spring 2010).

Readings: Students read 30 books and articles that cover general psychology, child development, cognitive psychology, and anthropology/ethnography, including specific ethnographic works on the Navajo cultures.

Exemplary Assignment: The following is an excerpt from Mick Watson's instructions for the "Family Observation Paper" Assignment, which students have to complete about mid-way through the course. This assignment falls under our common practice category of "Ethnographic Observations" and allows students to integrate knowledge from the course with an original qualitative research project.

Guidelines for Writing the Family Observation Paper, PSYC 131a

1. Consider this paper to be a research report; however, in this particular research report, you are reporting on an observation/interview of a single case: one family (from a different culture than your own).
2. As in any research, there should be some comparison (or control) group. In this study, what you have experienced in your own culture (i.e., the culture which most influenced you as you were growing up) can be the comparison group. Thus, you can write about the similarities and differences between the two cultures.
3. You will need to find a family that agrees to allow you to observe them in their home or some naturalistic setting or interview them (or both). In some cases, you may need to do your interviewing with some in the family via telephone, rather than in person. Most students find some friend and his or her parents or some family they know. You should definitely get permission from the people you interview or observe after telling them what you are doing and why. Mention that you will not use any real names or personal identification of the family in your report, so you will keep the personal information confidential. Also mention that they may see your final report if they want to.
4. Pick a specific question to ask about the culture and family you are observing and then try to answer that question. This answer is what you are trying to teach your reader. The question should focus on how culture might influence child development, with this particular family being an illustration. Here are some sample questions you may use (or you may choose another):
 - a. How do childrearing values and practices in (this culture) affect normal child development (compared to childrearing values and practices in my culture)?
 - b. How do the relationships in extended families in this culture change the way children are reared (compared to the effect of the relationships in my culture)?
 - c. How did this family handle acculturation into the European American culture when they first came to the U.S., and how did this change affect the children's development?
 - d. How do discipline standards and techniques differ between this culture and my own, and what are the different outcomes?
 - e. Is there an underlying connection between religion and cultural practices in this culture, and how do these values and connections affect how children are reared and the goals that the parents have for their children?
 - f. Are certain personality traits and behavioral styles in children valued more in this culture than in my own?
 - g. How collectivist and individualist is this culture and what difference does it seem to make in child rearing relative to my own culture?

5. Clarity and logical organization matter. So does the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Therefore, proof read! Revise! Re-write!
6. You may use active voice using the first person (e.g., “I found that...”); however, use first person sparingly. Active voice in the first person (e.g., “I think that....”) is better than passive voice in the third person (e.g., “It is the opinion of the author that....”).

Excerpt from an Example Paper:

In this brief example, a student decided to the development of bicultural identity and child-rearing, using the texts from the course as well as interviews with an Indian-American family. The family has two young girls, both first-generation Americans.

“For these young girls being bicultural is perceived as normal and seems to have nothing but a positive impact on their development. This is largely due to their school environment and the influence of their parents' attitudes and teachings. The primary concern for Agrata is making the girls feel American and always emphasizing that they belong to this country, while incorporating into their lives certain aspects of their Indian culture like language and religion. While their own religious holidays and traditions are emphasized in the home, Agrata and her husband also attempt to package the nonreligious aspects of American holidays to their daughters, like lighting a tree for Christmas. Due to the multicultural nature of their preschool, a majority of the students speak a second language in their home, therefore the girls understand that a certain group of families in America speak a language other than English at home with their families. The girls also enjoy looking at a map to find the native countries of their friends' parents. Agrata discreetly teaches morals to her daughters through Indian mythological stories. These stories introduce the girls to the Kings, Queens, and other central characters in the Indian culture while testing to see if their moral character is developing. Instead of telling her daughters the moral of these stories, as is often done in American storybooks, Agrata follows the stories with questions like 'do you think this is right/wrong' or 'would you tell your mom about this'.

How this type of assignment might be translated to another course: Ethnographic observations may not need to be as detailed and intensive as presented in this example. They might be more modest and still accomplish the job of teaching students to consider the issues of cultural perspectives in knowledge production. In a political science or economics course, for instance, students could interview Waltham residents to gauge their particular views on a policy. This might be especially useful among immigrant and transnational communities that may have come in direct contact with a policy or have a unique understanding of it. Obviously, effort would need to be made to ensure ethical standards and sound methodological practices. If actually getting students to do interviews is too cumbersome or undesirable, it might be possible to use existing data (published qualitative interviews or oral histories) to analyze some of the same issues.

Example 2*Fine Arts 182b: Politics of Public Space*

Talinn Grigor

Overview: The rise of public architectural and social spaces is a defining feature of modern life. Expositions, museums, buildings, parks, and other spaces were designed not only for leisure and the cataloging of human experience, but also as political events. This course “examines the politics of public space in varied regions of the world starting from Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt in 1798 to mega-projects in the oil rich Gulf states to the dystopias of Second Life and Abu Ghraib.” It places each project in its social-historical context in ways in which the project was not always defined or understood when it was built, thus explicitly confronting issues of culture. (Fall 2010 Syllabus)

Readings/Materials: Students examine a range of readings on the politics of knowledge, from classics (Said’s *Orientalism*) to more recent works. They also analyze a set of films, architectural spaces, and designs.

Exemplary Assignment. Prof. Grigor makes use of a wide variety of assignment styles, encouraging traditional reflection through a final paper, visual analysis via a “case study” of a particular event/project, and visual construction through the group-led creation of a small “model” design that uses some of the themes of the course.

In the case study assignment, “student teams are to present to the class the history and design concepts of specific buildings from the list provided below by the instructor. These will include telling examples of various public spaces and will serve as case studies to closely examine and analyze the readings of that Friday discussion session.” (Fall 2010 Syllabus)

Excerpt from a Case Study: This student team examined the International Expositions in Paris 1851 and London 1889, using the readings (especially *Orientalism*) to navigate the politics of construction and interpretation of those events. Here are some excerpts from the Powerpoint presentation:

The Great Exhibition of the Works Of Industry of All Nations

- 1851 London
- 1st Worlds Fair
- Crystal Palace
 - In Hyde Park
 - Symbol of and showcase of 'Progress'
 - Virtuoso use of the new technologies of iron and plate glass
 - Filled with examples of technological advances
 - Idea of progress fundamental to the 'civilizing' intentions of the middle class



Organization of Expositions

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• East<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Outside– Picturesque– Art, Craft, purposefully pre-industrial– History perceived to be fixed and unchanging | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• West<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Inside– Didactic– Most modern industrial technologies– Dynamic, constantly progressing |
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Appendix B:

Pedagogical Challenges and Questions

We thought it might also be useful to sketch out, in this second appendix, some possible pedagogical and intellectual challenges raised from our examination of the courses and by the special nature of the learning goal. “Teaching Global Issues” is -- by itself -- not a shift in thinking from previous decades or paradigms. But “Teaching Global Issues Globally” is a different matter and calls into question controversial issues of culture, relativism, and perspective.

When looking at course learning goals or course tweaking or design, it might be useful to consider the following categories and questions that deal with the definition and meaning of culture. Answering these questions internally – as well as perhaps posing some of them to students – might be a helpful exercise.

Obviously, this is not the place to discuss the various meanings and interpretations of the concept of “culture” – such a discussion could take up a book or many volumes. Still, perhaps the questions and categories below might help you address some common challenges, and explore these dimensions in their own research and teaching.

Definition of Culture – How is culture defined within the course? From what perspective or disciplinary framework is it defined? Is the definition of culture explicit or implicit, and is that important to the success of the course? Can it be defined and knowable, or is there always a part of culture that is rooted in the fabric of social life? Can one speak of “culture” as *defined culturally* – that is, could the concept itself have different roots in different cultural and social histories? Culture as a concept may have a special place in American society (especially as a tool of inclusion or exclusion), but the concept of culture itself may be understood differently across the world.

History, Meaning, and Scope of Culture – Related to the above, but much broader, is the relative *meaning* of culture. To what extent has culture framed and shaped the way we think, live, create, govern, etc.? Is culture merely arts, literature, and cultural productions, or underlying mindsets and conditioned understandings? Or some kind of middle way? To what extent is culture a concept that can be understood historically as a product of “the West,” and now involves many different perspectives and traditions? To what extent, then, has culture shaped the production and dissemination of knowledge? Is a discussion of *meaning and scope of culture* important to students’ understanding of a particular global development?

Location of Culture – How do we research and “locate” culture, to adopt Homi Bhabha’s phrasing? Is culture rooted in specific places, countries, societies, regions, as a fixed element? Or is it a much more fluid, dynamic, and multi-faceted concept that changes and fluctuates over time, and represents itself in a far more hybrid way across multiple societies and even within societies? Can we still talk about an American, African, Navajo, or small-town culture? Can culture be “located” within individuals as opposed to groups, and “mapped” via tools of social and cognitive psychology?

Is it still useful to talk about cultures that are individualist versus collectivist? The classic scientific theories of culture, coming from the work of Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Claude Levi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz, Geert Hofstede, and others, usually talk about cultures in binary-like patterns – individualist vs. collectivist, masculine vs. feminine, indulgence vs. restraint, etc. These concepts, now challenged by later research and thinking, are still commonplace in an amazing variety of academic and professional settings, including many trainings of professionals in the workforce and students going abroad. Are these concepts still useful, and what competing frameworks and challenges might be offered? Are they explored during the course?

How does the course treat the concept of “cultural relativism”? The concept of “cultural relativism”, whereby (at the extreme) all human actions are judged by the rules of their cultural origins, is another idea borrowed from anthropology and now fiercely debated. How does the course treat this idea, how is it explicit or implicit, and how do students demonstrate their knowledge of the concept?