

SOCI121 – IC Proposal

Check here if you agree to submit an Intercultural Course Proposal True

Effective catalog term:

Department:

Course Number:

Course title (official title for catalog):

Abbreviated title for class schedule (26 characters or less)

How many credits is this course worth?

When you click submit, a copy of your submission will be automatically emailed to you. Please include your full email address here:

Please enter your department chair's email here:

Today's Date:

Instructor(s):

Is this a NEW course?

Semester and year this course will first be offered:

every term

annually (Fall)

Frequency course will be offered: annually (Spring)

alternate years (fill in terms below)

if offered in alternate years - terms to be offered:

Will assignment of current faculty cover this course?

Cost and brief description of needed additions to library/media resources:	None
Cost and brief description of needed additional computer software and/or hardware:	None
Cost and brief description of needed additional equipment and/or instrumentation:	None
Unusual classroom or space needs for this course, if any:	None
List all other Common Curriculum designations applied for and received:	Social Science (applied for course by Jessy O'Reilly)
List all other Common Curriculum designations applied for but not yet received:	
Are there any prerequisites for this course?	No
If YES, please list all prerequisites:	
What key area(s) of another culture will students understand as a result of this course (for example, historical, economic, political, artistic)?	Anthropology is a holistic and comparative study of human diversity and culture. Introduction to Anthropology is a course designed to give students a broad, yet rich, understanding of cultural diversity, including units on many different facets of culture, and including an in-depth consideration of what is culture and how are we shaped by it? The course is designed to allow students to examine cross-cultural examples that shed light on all aspects of human life from language and religion to technology and medicine to the study of our human and non-human ancestors. Throughout this course, we will consider both classic and contemporary examples of anthropological fieldwork and writing, and pay attention to concepts central to contemporary anthropological inquiry including power, gender, race, inequality, and political economy, all while attending to the cultural specificity that diverse examples allow. By the end of the class, students will not only have a grasp of the basic concepts of culture, but they will view their own culture(s) through a more critical and knowledgeable lens. Topics covered in the course include material culture, language, economy, political systems, religion, gender, race, kinship, non-human facets of culture, colonialism, race, tourism, health, globalization and humanitarianism. All of these topics are explored from different cultural perspectives that have been chosen to represent as many different cultural examples as possible, including examples from every continent. We will also do an in-depth study on Mali in order to examine one culture in particular detail, by reading Dettwyler's ethnography Dancing Skeletons.

a. What will students do to demonstrate that they have achieved an appropriate level of understanding of culture?

During the first few weeks of class, we spend two full days discussing the idea of culture, its definition, and its application to a specific case study from Brazil. In particular, I emphasize that culture is learned, symbolic, shared, all-encompassing, integrated, adaptive and maladaptive, dynamic and constantly changing and contested. These eight fundamental principles of culture are revisited through the semester with regard to all the cultures we study. I use several methods in order to give students the opportunity to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of culture. First, there are several questions on the first exam that pertain to this particular question. Examples include: a) Name and explain three of the characteristics of human culture; b) Cultural relativism is the principle that one culture should not be viewed by the standards of another culture. What are the advantages of this approach? Why do anthropologists have to be careful not to fall into moral relativism?; c) Gender roles, gender stereotypes, and gender stratification are three aspects of gender that are culturally constructed. Explain one of these, and give an example from readings/lecture or from your own experience that illustrates how it is culturally constructed; d) Discuss the ways that culture is both adaptive and maladaptive.

In addition, all of the other assignment throughout the semester are designed to explore cultural complexity.

For example, I have students present on current events throughout the semester (two students present at the beginning of each class) where they link the week's topic to something happening in the world, then they lead a discussion about the particular issue and culture they present on. In presenting, listening to others' presentations, and through daily discussion on these topics, students consider the many multiple facets of different cultures across a broad range of topics, and they also learn that these issues are both contemporary and constantly in flux.

Students also do an archaeology project on a cemetery where they look for signs of cultural change through material culture by examining the designs and shapes of gravestones. This project emphasizes cultural change, and the symbols by which cultural change can be recognized.

Students also do a paper assignment on Dancing Skeletons, where they answer essay questions about cultural relativism and its limits, cross-cultural parenting practices, and differing conceptions of health and illness. In discussions about Dancing Skeletons, we explore many aspects of Mali culture, and try to disentangle cultural practices from broader structural factors that have led to high rates of malnutrition and child mortality in this region.

While these are merely a few examples, every lecture, discussion, activity and assignment in this course is designed to address the central tenet of the first learning goal, which is to examine cultural complexity in depth.

b. How will students DEMONSTRATE their understanding that the culture studied is not monolithic?

Anthropology students learn that culture is produced among a group of people, that it changes over time and space, and that people in a cultural group experience their culture(s) in multiple ways, depending on their life stage, status, experiences, personality, and many other factors. Students demonstrate this throughout the semester as we discuss readings, films, and examples of cultural phenomena (such as political negotiations among the Balinese or sexual identity among people from highland Papua New Guinea). Students learn to interpret these cultural processes as shaped by the participants as well as the particular historical, economic, political moments that these people are within.

Our discussions of culture throughout the semester are designed to show that culture is not monolithic. Based on the eight principles of culture (see the response to a) above), I place a particular emphasis on the fact that culture is dynamic.

For example, during the second day of class, I have students do an in-class activity where they write all the national, international, sub- and micro-cultures that they belong to, then walk around the class until they find three or four other people who share one of their cultures or sub-cultures. In their small groups, they discuss how their shared culture or sub-culture relates to the eight facets of culture listed above. In our large group discussion at the end of the activity, we focus on the multifaceted and complex nature of our own culture, which itself contains many subcultures.

c. How will students DEMONSTRATE their understanding that the culture studied is not static?

During the second day of class we talk about the mechanisms of cultural change, including: diffusion (ie. borrowing traits between cultures), acculturation (for example, the spread of English pidgin around the world because of colonization), independent invention (the emergence of domesticated crops in the Middle East and Mesoamerica between 6 and 10,000 years ago), and globalization (for example, factory workers responses culturally produced responses to poor working conditions in Malaysia and China). The fact that culture is not static is particularly emphasized when we discuss the idea of kinship and how people's ideas about kin are flexible and fluid. It is also emphasized when we discuss structural violence and its impact on different cultures, as well as globalization, and how cultures adapt to the increasingly connected and technological and rapidly changing global world in ways that are culturally produced.

There are numerous exam questions, both in the midterm and the final exam, that emphasize cultural dynamism and change. Some examples include:

a) In Kottak and in several classes we discussed how different cultures respond to the forces of globalization. Use two examples (from lecture, readings, or your own personal knowledge) to illustrate how different cultures respond to these global economic, social, and/or political forces.

b) Indigenous movements have emerged as a result of the pressures of globalization and Westernization in an attempt to craft and maintain indigenous identities around the world. Name and explain two of the features of identity.

c) What is structural violence (Farmer)? Give an example to illustrate how it impacts the most marginalized populations.

What will students do to DEMONSTRATE their awareness that they ALREADY have culturally defined views that stem from their own background?

In our initial discussion of culture we emphasize that culture is all-encompassing. We discuss specifically the following three principles: that you can't step outside of your culture, that culture is a lens through which you do, see, and experience everything, and that culture influences your beliefs, actions, thoughts and ways of doing. Two examples of activities that we do to emphasize our own cultural beliefs includes the detailed discussion of shared sub-cultures, which draws attention to the different perspectives of people in the classroom, and an activity on ethnocentrism, which reveals the assumptions we already have about other cultures. In order to do this, we have a small group discussion on an article by Miner called "The Nacirema," which is a parody of an ethnocentric article about American culture. It presents Americans (Nacirema backwards) as barbarians, with barbaric practices. When the students realize they are talking about their own culture, they are forced to face their own ethnocentrism, and this sets the stage for the rest of the semester.

How will students DEMONSTRATE an awareness that their responses to a new culture is affected by their existing cultural

This topic is addressed the first day of class and is brought up repeatedly throughout the semester. Anthropologists have a methodological approach to studying "other" cultures called cultural relativism; essentially, trying to view people's cultural practices by their own (native) standards, and not judging them in terms of one's own cultural beliefs and practices. When one tries to practice cultural relativism, though, we come across instances where we have

perspectives (those referenced above)?

to become aware of our preconceptions shaping our interpretation of other people. Students demonstrate this extremely difficult skill throughout the semester, as we analyze film clips and readings about cultural practices different than their own. We dedicate an entire class period to this particular idea while discussing Dettwyler's *Dancing Skeletons* as she grapples in her text with her own ethnocentric ideas about motherhood and her difficulty in shifting between objective ethnographer and mother to her own child, who is with her in the field.
