

Sociology 465: Comparative Societies An Online Course
Dr. Georgeanna Tryban
812.237.3447
gtryban@isugw.indstate.edu
Spring 2010

Course Description

In this class you will examine cultural norms, artifacts, values, beliefs, and communication patterns, along with social institutions of various societies in order to understand cultural variations and their effects on human behavior. When you have only experienced your own culture it is hard to understand what 'culture' is, but when you visit or read about another culture (or several other cultures) you can see differences in what other people believe, how they live, and how they solve problems, celebrate accomplishments, mourn losses, and feel affection (and all the other human emotions) toward each other. You wonder if their customs and beliefs are a result of growing up and living in that culture. How can humans react so differently to the same thing? You also begin to notice that some of what you, and our society, consider to be problems, accomplishments, losses and objects of affection are the same as those you are reading about in these other societies. And you wonder if it could be something universal... because maybe everyone looks at this in the same way. The world is like an exquisitely beautiful and complex quilt with each culture having its own unique way of making colors and patterns. Looking at and understanding all of those patterns at once can seem overwhelming, but taken a few cultures at a time, they can each be seen, understood (a little), and appreciated for themselves. This course will look in depth three countries, Morocco, Japan and Italy, in addition to the United States, and examine them in depth. The cultures will have some similarities and some differences that we will try through critical analysis to better understand.

This class is a Foundational Studies course and therefore has the following learning objectives. Students will:

1. Locate, critically read, and evaluate information to solve problems;
2. Critically evaluate the ideas of others;
3. Apply knowledge and skills within and across the fundamental ways of knowing
4. Demonstrate an appreciation of human expression through literature and fine and performing arts.
5. Demonstrate the skills for effective citizenship and stewardship;
6. Demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultures within and across societies;
7. Demonstrate the skills to place their current and local experience in a global, cultural, and historical context;
8. Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions and actions;
9. Express themselves effectively, professionally, and persuasively both orally and in writing.

Within Foundational Studies this class focus on Global Perspectives and Cultural Diversity and for that reason puts particular emphasis on the following learning objectives:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of cultures and worldviews;
2. Identify social, economic, political, and environmental inter-relationships between cultures and worldviews;
3. Use multiple lenses such as race and ethnicity, gender, social class, regional culture, and religion to evaluate one's culture in comparison to those studied; and
4. Articulate how the social construction of culture and worldviews shapes contemporary social and political issues.

Within the College of Arts and Sciences this is a Sociology course and therefore will emphasize certain sociology specific perspectives:

1. You will learn how sociologists look at other cultures with a perspective unique to and developed within the discipline, called "*the sociological imagination.*"
2. You will learn what sociologists consider to be the important components of culture.
3. You will learn how components are connected to each other.
4. You will learn how to analyze (NOT judge) the culture according to how well its components interact, and why all cultures have some components that interact more smoothly than others.
5. You will learn how different cultures think about and treat social class, race, gender and a number of additional variables like religion and geography, which display varying levels of significance to interactions within each culture.
6. You will learn how to apply these goals to the cultures of the United States of America, Italy, Morocco, and Japan.

Required Course Materials

- M. J. Gannon & R. Pillai, Understanding Global Cultures 4th Edition
- Kyoko Mori, Polite Lies
- Elizabeth W. Fernea, A Street in Marrakech
- Alan Epstein, As the Romans Do: An American Family's Italian Odyssey

Recommended Books

- K. Armstrong, Buddha
- K. Armstrong, Islam
- M.M. Charrad, States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco
- Baker, Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women
- R.J. Davies & O. Ikeno, The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture
- B. Kerper, The Collected Traveler Morocco
- The "... for Dummies" books for a quick overview of Buddhism, Islam or Catholicism
- A. Fantini, Living in Italy
- R. Flower & A. Falassi, Culture Shock! Italy

Other Resources

Your local library: Videos about Japan, Italy, Morocco and even American culture

On Line:

www.census.gov
www.world-newspapers.com
www.ricksteves.com
www.un.org

Journals:

International Sociology
International Journal of Cultural Studies
Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Human Development
Cross-Cultural Sociology
Cross-Cultural Research: The Journal of Comparative Social Science
Cross-Cultural and Inter-Cultural Communication
Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology
Journal of Intercultural Studies

Important University Policies

Academic Honesty. It is very important to answer the Blackboard discussion questions and the longer assignments in your own words. You might be tempted to read through one of the assigned books and just pull words directly out of each paragraph to explain your answer. Sometimes this is known by the term 'paraphrasing.' There is another more serious term for it – **plagiarizing** – and the penalty is a failing grade for the assignment, or for the discussion question, and if serious enough for the entire class! Some people think plagiarizing only means copying the exact words out of the book without using quotation marks, but it also means a process where you try to change some of the words a little, using synonyms for example, to keep from the more difficult and time consuming task of thinking about how to understand the idea and then put it into words that are totally your own. Don't take the risk! Make sure that your answer is completely your own and doesn't belong in some way to another student or writer! You can better understand Indiana State University's position on Academic Dishonesty by reading about it in the Student Code of Conduct at

<http://web.indstate.edu/academicintegrity/studentguide.pdf>. I think all students should be informed about the issue of plagiarism and urge you to go to the website the library maintains to learn more about what is and is not considered plagiarism. You can find the site at <http://lib.indstate.edu/tools/tutorials/plagiarism/>
The Sycamore Standard. The student government association at ISU has adopted a standard of integrity for all students. See that statement at:
<http://www.indstate.edu/gened/docs/Foundational%20Studies/Info%20on%20Sycamore%20Standard%20and%20ADA%20and%20Laptops%20and%20Academic%20Freedom.pdf>

Academic Freedom. This is an important component of university teaching. Read more about this at the above website.

Laptop Computer Use. Since you are taking an online class I assume you know how essential it is to have a computer and an appropriate level of internet access at all

times. It is your responsibility to have a plan in place in the event that you have computer problems or internet connectivity problems. Class assignments and deadlines will not be modified unless there is a problem that originates here at the university and affects all students. This is the university's official statement on laptop usage as applied to this class (Soc 465):

“Laptop Required for Course: Regular Usage: For the purposes of this course, it will be assumed that you are in compliance with the mandatory laptop policy of the University. You will be expected to bring your laptop and be ready to use it for every class period. Usage of the laptop must conform to the provisions of this course as laid out in this syllabus as well as the Code of Student Conduct.”

Students with Disabilities. The university takes its commitment to educational opportunity for all students very seriously. Read about that commitment here: <http://www.indstate.edu/gened/docs/Foundational%20Studies/Info%20on%20Sycamore%20Standard%20and%20ADA%20and%20Laptops%20and%20Academic%20Freedom.pdf>

Evaluation

<u>Assignments</u>	<u>610 Points</u>
Discussion Board Self Introduction	10
Blog Entries for Four Assigned Books (15 wks at 10 pts ea)	150
Projects:	
Gathering Basic Data for Comparison	100
Comparing Movies	100
Vacation or Study Abroad	100
Interviewing an Exchange Student or Member of Your Community	150

Grading Scale

91-100%	A
89-90%	A –
87-88%	B+
81-86%	B
79-80%	B –
77-78%	C+
71-76%	C
69-70%	C –
67-68%	D+
61-66%	D
55-60%	D –
below 55%	F

Addressing Learning Objectives

Blog Entries Covering Four Books

This blog addresses FS learning objectives specified in the syllabus as 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9. In particular, for 1 & 2 students reading the books and writing the blog will be

required, by those very activities to **“locate, critically read, and evaluate information to solve problems; and critically evaluate the ideas of others.”** A multicultural course with these readings is the ideal venue for reasoned inquiry and independent thinking since in examining other cultures we almost automatically compare them to the United States by noticing the artifacts, beliefs, values, norms of behavior and social structures that are different from those to which we are accustomed. The particular questions they are asked to respond to in their blog ensure systematic critical evaluation of their own and others’ ideas. For 3 & 4, **“Apply knowledge and skills within and across the fundamental ways of knowing, and Demonstrate an appreciation of human expression through literature and fine and performing arts,”** in addition to the main text (M. J. Gannon & R. Pillai, *Understanding Global Cultures 4th Edition*) which stresses cultural metaphors, multiple media forms will be used to examine the culture from the perspective of the insider. A required reading (Kyoko Mori, *Polite Lies*) has a Japanese author discussing her culture, as do several recommended readings (M.M. Charrad, *States and Women’s Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* and Baker, *Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women*). Two films (Shall We Dance and Ringu/The Ring) originally made in Japan (Japanese authors and directors) are compared to the subsequent American remakes. Immersion in the culture from the perspective of the linguistically fluent outsider will take the form of two required texts (Elizabeth W. Fernea, *A Street in Marrakech*, and Alan Epstein, *As the Romans Do: An American Family’s Italian Odyssey*), supplementary material in the form of a video blog from Japan, from Italy, and video that I, myself, shot in Morocco illustrating the places from the anthropological study the students will read. This is only a partial list of resources used. (Another literature-performing arts project is under development in which the movie Babel, written by a Mexican (with an M.A. in psychology), directed by a Mexican and produced by two Americans set in Morocco, Tunisia, Mexico and Japan will be discussed by the instructor who is a Japan specialist and a graduate student from Morocco who holds sociology and social work degrees and is currently in the School Psychology program at ISU.) For FS 6 **“Demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultures within and across societies,”** this course covers a number of cultures in its introduction to culture as metaphor for a selection of 38 societies (M. J. Gannon & R. Pillai, *Understanding Global Cultures 4th Edition*) and then goes on to focus on Japan, Morocco, Italy and the United States of America (Kyoko Mori, *Polite Lies*, Elizabeth W. Fernea, *A Street in Marrakech*, and Alan Epstein, *As the Romans Do: An American Family’s Italian Odyssey*). By reading the material and answering the instructor’s blog questions students will fill this requirement. In terms of FS 7, the objective that students **“Demonstrate the skills to place their current and local experience in a global, cultural, and historical context,”** each culture must be understood in terms of its authors’ practical experiences of cultural context as informed by the location of the culture in the global community and its historical context. All authors make reference to these variables stimulating students to make parallel considerations in their own lives in their blog entries. FS 8 is achieved through these readings since due to living in each of the four focus societies, all required authors confront and explicitly discuss issues of the ethics of inhabiting the role of the other, needing to discern right and wrong within the context of the culture in which they are living and this challenges the student to think critically about what their definitions of

ethical behavior are, thereby they **“Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions and actions.”** Finally students meet the FS 9 objective that they, **“Express themselves effectively, professionally, and persuasively both orally and in writing,”** by writing the 15 blog entries, through further informal responses in electronic conversation with each other and the instructor around supplementary material (not to mention the additional four written projects that also require that they express themselves effectively).

This weekly blog assignment also addresses GPCD learning objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4 as has already been described in the initial narrative.

Projects:

Gathering Basic Data for Comparison

Although this exercise will develop students' skills in FS1, the primary focus of this assignment is on GPCD 1, 2 and 3 which specify that students will learn to **“Demonstrate knowledge of cultures; and Identify social, economic, political, and environmental inter-relationships between cultures; and Use multiple lenses such as race and ethnicity, gender, social class, regional culture, and religion to evaluate one's culture in comparison to those studied.”** These four countries were intentionally chosen for study because their particular similarities and differences would stimulate extended comparison. This exercise is structured to steer students into gathering knowledge of each culture and making a variety of comparisons. All the countries have water in common. Japan is an island surrounded on all four sides by water with a mountainous middle and a volcanic history, Italy, as a peninsula, is surrounded on three of its four sides by water with a mountainous middle and one of the world's most famous volcanoes. Morocco has two major coasts and additionally has mountains, volcanic activity, and, unlike the others, a desert, and the United States has three coasts, mountains, desert and seismic, though little volcanic, activity. Students will be able to look at the cultures and analyze the ways geographic similarity has sometimes produced similar cultural response. All three foreign countries contain ancient traditions although they are at different stages of modernization with different governmental systems. The dominant religion in each society allows for another set of interesting comparisons. Japan's population is largely Buddhist, Italy's is Catholic, and Morocco's is largely Muslim, while the United States is made up of many religions. This first project will be constructing a chart that lays out some of the most obvious similarities and differences to provoke student's critical imagination as they discover and demonstrate their knowledge of them.

Comparing Movies

This assignment fulfills the goals associated with GPCD1, 2, and 4, specifically, **“Demonstrate knowledge of cultures and worldviews; Identify social, economic, political, and environmental inter-relationships between cultures and worldviews; Articulate how the social construction of culture and worldviews shapes contemporary social and political issues.”** As students compare two movies within the romantic or horror genres, they must draw on the text books' discussions of culture and its social economic, political and environmental aspects as described by Gannon and

Mori to bring to their critical analysis to the social construction of American and Japanese culture and their definition and social construction of love or fear.

Vacation or Study Abroad

GPCD specifically 1, 2, 3, and 4, **“Demonstrate knowledge of cultures and worldviews; Identify social, economic, political, and environmental inter-relationships between cultures and worldviews; Use multiple lenses such as race and ethnicity, gender, social class, regional culture, and religion to evaluate one’s culture in comparison to those studied; and Articulate how the social construction of culture and worldviews shapes contemporary social and political issues.”** In this exercise students meet these goals by defining a purpose for visiting another culture and planning in detail, taking into account their knowledge of the culture and race, ethnicity, gender social class and religion of their location in the USA and also these same factors in their country of destination. In defining their purpose and planning its accomplishment on their trip, they also examine the social construction of the culture they will visit.

Interviewing an Exchange Student or Member of Your Community

This meets the GPCD learning objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4, specifically, **“Demonstrate knowledge of cultures and worldviews; Identify social, economic, political, and environmental inter-relationships between cultures and worldviews; Use multiple lenses such as race and ethnicity, gender, social class, regional culture, and religion to evaluate one’s culture in comparison to those studied; and Articulate how the social construction of culture and worldviews shapes contemporary social and political issues,”** Students will do this by exploring via interviewing a particular person’s culture (someone from abroad not living in the USA) and the combination of that individual’s social/economic/political/environmental worldview and their race/ethnicity, gender, social class and religion in understanding their currently-lived construction of culture and how that construction has formed and evolved from the time of their arrival in the United States.