POL 202 Contemporary Global Issues

Course Description
This course offers a contemporary multi-disciplinary perspective regarding the major issues and trends confronting the global society in the 21st century. Emphasis will be given to a critical review and assessment of the origin and present condition of the plethora of situations and problems affecting modern global society. The student will also learn to critically evaluate current and future events. The course will incorporate the views and approaches of the following disciplines: sociology/anthropology, economics, geography, political science, and history.

Course Objectives
This is a general education course and the student learning objectives for this course have been designed with this in mind. By the end of this course you should be able to:
• Define global citizenship and identify contemporary global issues.
• Synthesize information from different disciplines or perspectives to solve problems, gain new experiences, or create new things. (General Education SLO 1.2)
• Explain how values and ideas of cultures have evolved or how patterns of globalization have shaped the modern world. (General Education SLO 5.2)

Course Requirements
Exams (30%)  
• Global Geography and History  
• Global Politics, Economics, and Identities
Empirical Puzzles (30%)  
• Political Puzzle and Annotated Bibliography  
• Economic Puzzle and Annotated Bibliography  
• Identity Puzzle and Annotated Bibliography
Group Project (30%)  
• Country background, study abroad information, and country presentations.
Participation (10%)  
• Catch-all for general attendance and participation

Course Outline
1. Defining Global Citizenship  
   a. Defining Globalization  
   b. Defining Global Citizenship  
   c. Crossing Global Borders
2. Global Geography and History  
   a. Population Growth  
   b. The Global Environment  
   c. Waves of Globalization  
   d. In the Year 2525...
3. Global Politics, Economics, and Identities  
   a. The State and Global Institutions  
   b. The Market and Global Institutions  
   c. Identities and Global Institutions
4. Global Citizenship Revisited  
   a. Study Abroad Presentations  
   b. Connecting to the World

Empirical Puzzles
The empirical puzzles requirement had students generate three short research questions linked to contemporary global issues that involved politics, economics, and identities.

Step 1: Make observations about contemporary global issues.
Students were encouraged to keep track of current events throughout the semester, and BBC News's one-minute world news was played at the start of each class period. Conversely, students were also welcome to think about observations they may have made on their own, or in other courses.

Step 2: Come up with a research question.
From their observations, students were asked to come up with three research questions related to politics, economics, and identities.

Step 3: Locate scholarly research that addresses the question.
Students were encouraged to then locate and read at least two scholarly sources that appeared to relate back to the research question they were interested in answering.

Step 4: Identify the dependent and independent variables that matter.
Based on their understanding of the question and the scholarly research they had located, students were expected to identify both dependent and independent variables relevant to the question.

Step 5: Write a brief research proposal justifying the question.
The preceding steps culminated with the students writing a brief, 500-word, research proposal that described and justified the research question and described the variables of interest. Additionally, the students included a brief annotated bibliography of the scholarly sources they had found.

Country Projects
The country project requirement had students work in teams to learn about a country and then put together materials that might help convince other UW-La Crosse students to study abroad in that country.

Step 1: Pick a country to explore and learn about.
Students signed up for a country and topic area (e.g., geography) in class with up to five students assigned to a single country. This group formed the core team assigned to research and, later, present on the country.

Step 2: Create a plan to finish the country project as a group.
Each country team picked a leader who was responsible for drafting a plan for completing the country project. The groups were given the ability to assign weights to the three graded components and to set deadlines for when they would complete each piece of the assignment.

Step 3: Learn about the different aspects of the country.
Each student was responsible for writing a brief background paper on one aspect of the country—i.e., the geography, history, politics, economics, or culture—and to help contribute to the general knowledge of the country.

Step 4: Learn about study abroad opportunities offered by UW-La Crosse, and its partners, in the country.
As individuals or as a group, it was the responsibility of each country team to brainstorm questions and to find out more about the study abroad opportunities that were available to students at UW-La Crosse.

Step 5: Create a presentation that will help convince other UW-La Crosse students to study abroad in the country.
As a group, each country team created a presentation designed to entice other UW-La Crosse students to studying abroad in the country. These presentations were then evaluated by the entire class.

Revising the Requirements
For all of the ups and downs experienced in POL 202 Contemporary Global Issues during the Fall 2013 semester, these requirements will remain an integral part of the course for the foreseeable future.

The Empirical Puzzles
The empirical puzzles turned out well, but they were also left for too late in the semester to provide an opportunity for formative assessment:
1. Introduce the basic premise of the empirical puzzles earlier in the semester and emphasize viewing a single topic through different lenses.
2. Rather than three distinct papers, students will come up with research questions and include a discussion of the topic from different perspectives in two papers. This should help better address efforts to synthesize from different disciplines or perspectives.
3. Include a double-blind peer review component as part of the first paper assignment to assist with formative assessment earlier in the semester.

The Country Projects
Although the country projects turned out quite well, the project will change in a few important ways in the future:
1. Individuals will be assigned to a country team, but they will also pick two other countries to examine as the course moves through its different topics. This should help tie together the course materials and the country project in more explicit ways by building upon country comparisons across all three.
2. In an effort to make this project even more authentic, country teams will be creating posters and brochures that may be used by the Office of International Education to help promote different opportunities to students at UW-La Crosse.

Measuring Global Knowledge and Skills
As a participant in the 2014-2015 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows program, it is my hope to find or develop better direct measures of global knowledge and skills to help assess the effectiveness of activities such as these empirical puzzles and country projects.

Acknowledgements
Thanks to all of the faculty, staff, and students who offered their time and advice to both myself and my students, including:
• Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning,
• Learning by Design facilitators and participants, Office of International Education.

Contact Information
For more information about these requirements, or about ongoing research into ways of engaging students in global learning, please contact:
Adam Van Liere, Wimberly 423C, 608-785-6956, avanliere@uwlax.edu