

# **Inter-Cultural Competency Proposal Supplemental Reading**

## **A Statement About the Intended Purpose and Spirit of ICC Coursework**

For college students, inter-cultural competency is developed over time and via numerous experiences (Residential Life, service projects, world languages coursework, etc.) Indeed, as our campus community is actively working to integrate the valuable student learning that occurs across all facets of student life, it behooves us to acknowledge that inter-cultural competency, as well as the other Student Learning Outcomes, is fostered well beyond coursework (see Strategy II: Integrated Experiences in the Augustana 2020 Strategic Plan, adopted January 2014). We firmly believe that the inter-cultural competency learning outcome develops as the result of numerous student experiences at Augustana, and emphasize that we do not suggest that such competency could be adequately developed solely through two college courses.

However, the General Education Committee also believes that academic coursework devoted to developing inter-cultural competency is a vital and necessary component of an Augustana education. The collegiate classroom provides an intentional, disciplined, and intellectually-centered environment for engaging with substantive issues related to diversity and globalization. Academic coursework prompts students to carefully examine these issues, consider a variety of viewpoints, read important texts, and communicate their own ideas and arguments coherently in speech and writing. Such intentional, deliberative thought is not guaranteed to happen outside of the classroom, but will necessarily occur through academic coursework.

Intellectual growth through authentic learning is usually preceded by an uncomfortable period of disequilibrium. That is, deep learning occurs when the learner's present framework for understanding the world is challenged and proved to be inadequate. Though this is an uncomfortable situation initially, the devoted learner grows from this state of mental disequilibrium. He or she eventually comes to reconfigure or expand the old framework in order to create a new model for understanding the world. The classroom represents the college's best chance of pushing students beyond their current comfort zones and toward taking on an expanded view of the world.

Students seek comfort in their social and residential worlds. They are drawn to others whom they can understand, and who understand them. In moments when they do engage with others who are substantively different, during a service club tutoring project in a poor neighborhood, for example, the bonds of the comfort group can be solidified and walls of separation can be heightened. That is, the "servers" might use the project as a "feel good" moment that self-assures them of their generosity and sensitivity to societal needs, and yet leads to conclusions of "I already served my time" rather than "I need to learn more about and from this community and possibly help build bridges of lasting understanding." A college course, by contrast, should intentionally push students beyond the place of social comfort and also beyond the dangers of shallow encounters with difference. Students encountering the same tutoring site in the context of a collegiate course would likely be required to read social analyses of why some communities are poor while others are wealthy; they would be forced to wrestle with questions of why the racial distribution across such communities is so uneven; they would be pushed to wonder if the occasional "service visit" is an adequate social/political commitment in a just society. So, while the committee acknowledges that our

students' inter-cultural competency development across all domains of college life is worthwhile, we contend that academic coursework has a vital role within that set of domains.

Given this commitment to the notion that the college classroom should push on students' social and intellectual comfort zones, we argue further that ICC-designated courses should focus on issues pertaining to groups that have a history of being oppressed or marginalized. If an ICC course happens to have a historical or international focus, then it should focus on those cultures and societies that have not had a strong influence on or historical connection to U.S. culture. Individual faculty members seeking an ICC designation for their courses will be in a position to persuade the Gen Ed committee that their particular course meets this spirit.

The Augustana experience as a whole guarantees that our students will encounter multiple forms of difference in multiple ways. The suburbanite will encounter the farm boy in the dorms. The young woman who has to hold down a full time job to pay her way through college will encounter the affluent young man who drives the Mercedes he received as a high school graduation gift. Sorority sisters will tutor Burmese refugee children in an after-school tutoring program in order to fulfill their Greek service hour requirement. These and countless other encounters across difference will happen, and each has value. The required core curriculum coursework devoted to encounters across difference holds a particularly pivotal place in this spectrum of student experiences. It has the potential to ensure that students reflect on their encounters, examine difference deliberately, and, if the course is well designed, will bring students to an uncomfortable state of mental disequilibrium followed ideally by intellectual resolution and growth. We can best guarantee this by ensuring that this coursework takes students far away from the familiar and the comfortable and prompts them to examine that which is richly and beautifully different from the world in which they are usually immersed.

### **What constitutes a “substantial experiential learning” component for courses seeking the ICC-X designation?**

Our hope is that this curricular requirement will expand the experiential learning opportunities at Augustana and prompt faculty members to actively find ways of incorporating experiential learning into their courses. The Committee has flexible expectations for what will constitute “substantial experiential learning”. Approaches such as service learning, field trips, and international travel may constitute the experiential component if the instructor is intentional in his/her approach to how students will think about and reflect on these experiences. The committee will also consider other approaches to experiential learning and feels that the onus is on the faculty applicant to persuade the committee that a particular approach to experiential learning meets the intent of the ICC-X designation.

Some possible approaches to experiential learning include:

- Skyping with individuals or groups across the globe
- Visiting the studio or work space of a native American artist in order to view demonstrations and learn from the artist about his or her techniques
- Visiting and engaging with immigrant and ethnic communities in the Midwest (e.g., a Liberian religious congregation in Rock Island, Chinatown in Chicago, etc.)

- Inviting appropriate outside speakers to engage with a class
- Inviting student leaders from campus cultural groups to share their experiences and insights in class (Black Student Union, Latinos Unidos, Asian Student Organization, Gay Straight Alliance, etc.)