

Asian Studies (AS) Program

Summary

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the Asian Studies Committee began an intense review of the program with an eye toward revising the curriculum for the major. As Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary program operating in cooperation with several other departments and programs, our ability to enforce uniform compliance of learning outcomes is problematic. However, this year the committee initiated a discussion of learning outcomes according to disciplines and areas, which greatly affected revisions to the major curriculum.

Syllabus Template, and Learning Objectives

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the Asian Studies program, syllabi vary widely, and during our review of the major requirements this year it became clear that not all faculty are incorporating rubrics for "Learning Outcomes" or "Learning Objectives" in their syllabi. Although it is obvious that learning outcomes will not be consistent across the many diverse courses in our curriculum, ranging from History to Dance to Music to languages, the Asian Studies Committee will endeavor to ensure that all faculty and instructors at least incorporate a distinct rubric of learning outcomes and/or objectives into syllabi. The committee will also address outcomes that it feels should be universal across the curriculum, including, obviously, some measurable means to determine a student's increased knowledge of Asia according to the discipline, and/or a practical or demonstrable means of application. The latter is more apropos of language acquisition, for example. Although as a program Asian Studies is not in a position to impose its objectives on a department, such as GREAL, which has administrative jurisdiction over the Chinese and Japanese language programs, the committee began a dialogue about incorporating more objective means for determining progress in language acquisition beyond the standard battery of assignments and exams already being implemented. One evaluative instrument that may be of use for students in Japanese is a national standardized proficiency exam that is given in spring. The committee discussed with language instructors Akiko Jones and Jonathan Abel the desire to incorporate the completion of this exam by all students in all levels of Japanese language courses beginning next academic year (2007-2008), and Jones and Abel were in agreement that this would be a desirable and practical means to assess language acquisition and learning outcomes. For Chinese, however, the situation is a little more problematic in that a similar national exam system is not yet in place, and so an evaluative instrument may have to be designed. Implementation of the latter may be problematic in that GREAL and Asian Studies does not have a full-time instructor or professor of Chinese language, and Asian Studies feels reluctant to impose on a part-time, temporary instructor more assignments or responsibilities, such as designing such an evaluative instrument, which will no doubt be a significant undertaking.

Guidelines and Learning Outcomes for History 180 and 480

At present, History 180, cross-listed as Asian Studies 180, is the only course that all Asian Studies majors are required to complete. All other courses have alternates, and there are numerous electives. As of now, only two instructors, Walter Grunden and Jessamyn Abel, offer sections of 180. Both instructors have incorporated the Department of History's learning outcomes into their syllabi and operate the courses largely in accord with the expectations of the Department of History. Learning outcomes in this course are assessed according to a battery of assignments and exams as is common for undergraduate survey courses. Grunden's online summer session course for 180, for example, includes a rubric "Course Goals and Learning Outcomes" that incorporates the following:

1. Introduce students to political, economic, socio-cultural, and intellectual developments throughout Asian history.
2. Learn to think about the past historically by identifying and critiquing historical interpretations and analyzing issues in historical context.
3. Learn to select, analyze, and utilize evidence from primary and secondary sources.
4. Enhance critical thinking skills and communications skills, especially written.
5. Improve one's ability to recognize and understand connections between historical issues presented in this course and life in the contemporary world.
6. Better understand the historical context for events occurring in the contemporary world.

Assessment is made based on completion of a series of writing assignments and exams. When teaching 180 during the regular academic year, Grunden is disposed to giving a "pre-course test" at the beginning of the semester that assesses students' knowledge of Asia, but which is not calculated as part of the students' grade. A similar exam is given at the end of the semester (often focusing especially on geography and map exam) to assess the students' progress in learning key concepts about Asian history and culture. Grunden will work with Abel in the coming year to more formally institute this "pre" and "post" course evaluative instrument. With this exam, we will be better able to determine how many students have gained an acceptable level (passing grade) of proficiency with

key concepts over the course of the semester against those who have not, and to some extent, also the degree to which outcomes were realized may be determined and measured as well.

The Asian Studies 480 course, however, has been much more problematic. As of now, it is a “strongly recommended” course, but it is not officially required for the major, which is one change we are seeking to make in the coming year. In the past, Asian Studies did not have a capstone course, and there was no practical means to measure students’ progress or assess their learning outcomes beyond the standard monitoring of transcripts and junior audits. This year, we attempted to implement AS 480 as a senior “project” class in which students must complete a research paper, produce a suitably appropriate artifact, or submit a tape of a performance (music, dance), as evidence of progress in their learning about Asia. This project is intended to be holistic, representing the knowledge and skills set learned in their combined major(s) (often dual/double) and minor programs. For example, one current major with a double major in Computer Science completed a near 20 page research essay on machine translation in Japanese. Another recent graduate with a dual major in AS and Telecommunications created a short promotional video for the Asian Studies program, which has been linked to the program’s web page and can now be viewed by anyone at anytime on the University’s website. The committee’s intention has been to model AS 480 on the senior project of the Honors Program. Specifically, the student would be required to attend a class with other AS 480 students to report on her/his progress with a project, but the project itself would be supervised more closely with a faculty member with expertise on the particular subject. There would be two faculty members then responsible for grading and supervising the project. Structurally, however, this model has posed several problems for the program. First, we do not have faculty released from respective departments to take on responsibility for leading the AS 480 class, and this past year it was offered by Grunden on a more or less independent studies model. It is hoped that arrangements can be made to have the director (or a co-director) of Asian Studies serve as the anchor faculty for AS 480 with a course release from his/her home department to facilitate the additional course. Until such an arrangement can be made to assure a faculty member is available to offer AS 480 as a “regular” course, we may be constrained to the independent studies model for the foreseeable future. The committee would, however, like to begin to standardize the outcomes for AS 480 as a capstone course. But until students can actually meet in a more structured class, this may not happen.

Comprehensive Review of the Curriculum

The Asian Studies Committee began an intensive review of its curriculum and major requirements this past academic year and looks to implement many of these changes in the coming year. Among the more notable changes is a rearrangement of required and elective courses according to new major requirements under selected rubrics. More specifically, where before students might choose from a number of courses in electives and focus heavily on History without taking even a single Fine Arts course, now they would have to broaden their studies into all fields spanning the Social Sciences, the Arts, and the Humanities with the specific requirement that they would have to take at least one course in each area. There will also be more attention given to tracking the students into sub-specializations, either with a Chinese, Japanese, or South Asian emphasis. Moreover, this year the committee will begin discussions focused more on course content and specific learning outcomes for those courses and how they impart Asian content. As for the program as a whole, some discussion will be initiated as to how to track and assess a major’s progress from the first to last semesters and how such progress can be quantified for evaluation.

The Asian Studies Program continues to grow with nearly 50 majors now enrolled. It is clear we are experiencing some “growing pains” and we look forward to working with the administration to identify better ways to serve our students, to offer as many opportunities as possible, and to better assess their experience at BGSU.