



Teaching for Inclusion & Equity Intermediate Badge Artifact

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Class: ASEM: The Psychology of Religious & Spiritual Practices (17-undergraduate multidisciplinary, writing-intensive, discussion-based upper-division; part of the Common Curriculum)

Goal: Have students better understand and be able to apply a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the issues of appropriation relevant to exploring religious and spiritual practices and their use. Deepen more general understanding of appropriation. In prior classes, discussions of appropriation were tentative and surface level. Most expressed opposition based on concerns of “offense”; some did not see problems or harms. Few students and discussions deeply addressed historical and power contexts, issues of whose voices are included and what consequences are relevant for whom, complexities of weighing positive and negative consequences, and reflection on applying such considerations to varied practices.

Approach: Added learning objective: “Articulate an understanding of the positive and negative consequences of engagement in and modification of religious and spiritual practices for use by practitioners outside the originating tradition.” Added new course components explicitly aimed at this learning objective:

- 1) In-class student debate (used DU “Debate Across the Curriculum” program) early in the quarter. Students spent ½ session learning about non-competitive debate, in which students were randomly assigned to a pro or con side regarding whether “on balance there is more harm than good of use and modification of a practice outside the originating culture.” Popular press and scholarly articles addressing general issues of appropriation and specific practices were provided, and students were invited to find their own sources. Two weeks after this, a full session was used for students to take turns advocating for their side. Students were to ask questions of the speakers and to submit a question to the instructor afterwards.
- 2) Late quarter reflection paper on this topic. Students selected a practice and analyzed the positive and negative consequences of use of the practice outside the culture of origin.

Assessment sources:

- 1) Half session after the debate was used for student feedback.
- 2) On last day of class, students submitted anonymous evaluation whether the overall course helped them achieve the learning objective, whether the debate and paper helped achieve it, and the gave feedback on the objective and assignments.
- 3) I evaluated their reflection paper on the topic.
- 4) I reflected on the course.



Assessment summary:

The debate helped students learn the scope of the issues involved and the diversity of perspectives on the issues, seeing more nuance and “grey area” than before the debate. They reported learning how “two true arguments can oppose” and thinking “OMG, you are right -- for every talk,” and hearing arguments they hadn’t considered, both harms and benefits. Having a session focused on this issue early in the quarter was seen as useful in applying the viewpoints across the quarter to each practice discussed; it also “set the tone for dialogue over the idea of a correct answer” by modeling respect and consideration of contrasting viewpoints and experiences.

Two of 15 responses suggested an alternative to the debate (a group project or a class discussion) as a better way to approach the learning objective. The paper received fewer comments. All were positive, and two noted the value of having it weeks after the debate (so delayed reflection and integration) and before the final paper (to raise the issues for the final essay). Considering the course and learning objective more broadly, students found the range of topics covered and the “respectful approach” to be helpful for understanding diversity. They noted the value of “adopting multiple perspectives during the class,” “acknowledging the iterative nature of religious development,” and “I did not come to a clear conclusion, but was able to deeply reflect, and this will be helpful in the future.” One noted that it “was really helpful to learn about appropriation in this context with this topic, because it is so relevant.” One wrote, “Pleasantly surprised that any modification was not written off as appropriation and dismissed” and another that, “I was pushed into thinking about the importance of spiritual appropriation I had not been aware of especially yoga and medicine.” Another wrote, “Course helped a lot: had a very black and white view before where thought all was completely unacceptable. Now see different practices differently. Learned ways that could respectfully engage without commodifying it. Must look at each practice separately.” More generally, they valued the back-and-forth discussion, the space for different viewpoints, and the push for analysis and consideration of multiple perspectives. Several noted that this learning objective was a crucial aspect of the course that will have long-lasting influence, including “the discussion of appropriation will be one of the primary things I take away from the class.” The reflection paper showed that all students had the ability to apply the considerations raised in the debate to a specific practice. Discussion across the quarter included the topic of appropriation, and my sense is that it was discussed in a more nuanced way and with more engagement than in prior iterations of this course.

Reflection and future considerations: Keeping this as an explicit element in the course and including assignments explicitly focused on this is a good idea. It was seen as connected an important to the goal of learning about and analyzing various practices and learning how to think and communicate thoughtfully about them. Students whose beginning positions were on opposite sides indicated they valued the objective and how it was approached, as well as now look at it with more nuance and depth. Possible to integrate it more (e.g., student suggested each practice include a section on this)? Consider tweaks to debate, for example student suggestion re doing a group project to allow for deeper analysis of the issues (a hybrid debate/discussion)? Is the reflection paper well structured? Connect the debate (or discussion) to approaches to discussion throughout. There is a benefit to both the engaged, multiple-perspective approach and to the content and issues about appropriation raised in this process.