

1.

SEAS 215/UC 215 is designed to be an introductory/gateway course in Southeast Asian Studies at U-M, aimed particularly to be inclusive of and attractive to students in pre-professional courses of study. Taught and coordinated by a single faculty member, the course features four thematic units (Politics, Economics, People and the Environment, and Health), each of which features guest lectures by faculty and advanced graduate students from a wide spectrum of disciplines. This structure helps us meet two of our principal goals: 1) to demonstrate that Southeast Asia can be the locus for study of many questions that might interest students, and 2) that Michigan – with its large and wide-ranging faculty specializing in the region – is an excellent place to continue that study.

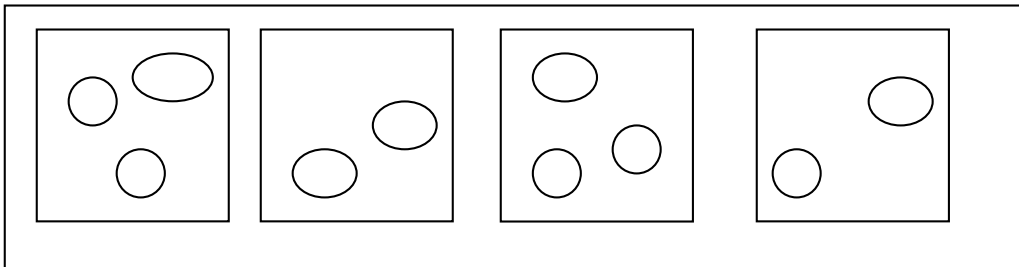
Within each thematic module, the lectures scope from the general to the specific. The initial lecture of each module – our “Level 1” lecture – examines that theme broadly. (Examples of these lectures, which we recorded this year for use with our outreach programs, can be found at <http://lecb.physics.lsa.umich.edu/CWIS/SPT--BrowseResources.php?ParentId=321>). “Level 2” lectures then examine the theme in a regional comparative basis, and finally “Level 3” lectures provide specific case studies. (Examples of our “Level 3” lectures on the religions of Southeast Asia can be found at the same link above). Presented with a variety of speakers taking multiple approaches to the theme, and at different levels of engagement with the subject, students are led to think critically about the multiple ways any particular subject can be addressed. Our hope is not only that students will question their own lenses they bring to their academic work, but also that they will come to value points of view and approaches that differ than their initial instincts as well.

2.

The course very clearly uses the Embedded Units with Guest Lecturers approach, below:

Embedded Units with Guest Lecturers

Coordinating faculty provides overall framework and assignments.
Units organized by coordinators. Many different guest lecturers present.



The challenge is in arranging the lectures to fit faculty schedules so they also make sense within each thematic unit (ie., that we start with Level 1 – global view, and then go through Level 2 – regional view,

and on to Level 3 – case studies.) We are fortunate in that our faculty have shown themselves to be very flexible and accommodating to this basic structure; and it has helped that we begin the planning as early as we can.

One advantage the modular structure does allow for, however, is for the thematic units themselves to be offered in a different order, if needed. In Winter 2009, for instance, we offered the Economics unit before the Politics unit, (they had been offered in the reverse order the previous two years) to accommodate the travel schedule of a senior professor on sabbatical. In doing so, we also found that economics and globalization, combined with covering the East Asian financial crisis, was quite a good way to start things off, and enriched students' understanding of the political treatment of democracy and its limits in Southeast Asia.

Besides that, the course ran fairly much as it had the previous years in terms of structure, and in keeping with the evaluation we had with CRLT.

The big change this year however, was that we "handed the course off" to a new instructor for the first time. For the most part, this worked quite well. The previous instructor, a staff member at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, took responsibility for scheduling the class and the guest lecturers initially, and this was of great help to our new instructor, who was also a visiting scholar at the Center. Next year, it will be handed off again. Our initial instructor will again help the new faculty member with scheduling the course, and will create a manual of sorts to help faculty who may teach the course in the future to understand the rationale for some of the decisions made in the past. We do think that ongoing CRLT engagement in the evaluation portions of the course will be helpful, however.

3.

Give an example of the structure of assignments that were used to encourage students to think interdisciplinarily.

Apart from each week's reading assignments that represented a wide variety of disciplinary approaches to each subject, the course included three quizzes and a final written assignment. The structure of three quizzes encouraged students to think interdisciplinarily by asking them to combine at least two or three themes from each unit into a single analytical essay. Furthermore, the structure of the final assignment asked them to combine two thematic units together into an explicitly interdisciplinary and comparative paper. (The four major assignments are attached.)

4.

Describe the value to the faculty members from teaching students in an interdisciplinary environment. Include development of pedagogy as well as intellectual growth.

The value to a faculty member teaching students in an interdisciplinary environment stems mainly from three parts. First, each thematic unit allows/requires faculty members from different departments to work together to build up perspective in an interdisciplinary way. For example, the economic unit drew upon faculty members from business school, sociology, history, and economics/public policy. The political-cultural unit drew upon faculty members from anthropology, political science, sociology, laws, and urban and regional planning. The space thematic unit draws upon faculty members from city and regional planning, natural resources, and Southeast Asian Studies.

Second, each faculty members received reflections from students in response to their reading assignment prior to the lecture. These reflections provided faculty members with various ideas and questions from students who came from different academic background, and the reflections would often explicitly refer to the presentations and readings of faculty members from other disciplinary backgrounds.

Third, each faculty members gained teaching experiences in class where students came from various disciplines, especially during the question-answer session.