

Summary and Reflection

EXPLORING GLOBALIZATION AT MASON: DISCUSSIONS AMONG ANTHROPOLOGY AND INTO MASON STUDENTS

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This assignment required students enrolled in ANTH 332: Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Globalization in Fall 2019 and in ANTH 114: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology in Summer 2020 (online) to engage in meaningful conversations with INTO Mason students by leading part of a meeting of an INTO class in small groups that they chose on their own, with assistance to connect students provided by the instructor (Cortney Hughes Rinker) as needed. In Fall 2019, as shown in the assignment, three INTO Mason courses were involved, while in Summer 2020, only one course was included. Michael Smith taught AE 073-001 (Dialogue with Americans) in Fall 2019, one of the courses ANTH 332 students visited, and AE 010-001 (Level 1 Core Class) in Summer 2020, the only course the ANTH 114 students met with for the assignment. This assignment had to be revised to fit the online modality and shortened time (5 weeks) of the summer course.

It is well-known that Mason has an extremely diverse student body with many international students, students whose parents or families immigrated to the United States, or those who were born abroad and raised in the U.S. (And we surely recognize that diversity has many different components, so these are just a few aspects among many.) We not only wanted to capitalize on this diversity in our classrooms, but wanted students to think about what the “global” means on-the-ground. This assignment enabled the students in the ANTH course to take the concepts and approaches from anthropology that they learned in these courses and apply them in creating a lesson plan for the session. Over the past few years, Cortney has been experimenting more with assignments and activities in her courses. She has tried to design ones that allow students to actually apply what they have learned as a way to help them better understand the key concepts and material. Students had to use the approaches and frameworks they learned in the course to create an original lesson plan for the session, which included preparing an ice

breaker and short introductory presentation in addition to selecting a reading, video, or podcast that all students would review in advance, facilitating the discussion about a particular topic with INTO Mason students during their class, and writing a short reflection of the experience.

INTO Mason students study Academic English to prepare them to matriculate into programs at George Mason. Although INTO Mason students are engaged in intensive English Language study in the classroom, they have little opportunity to engage in substantive conversation with native English speakers, particularly with Mason students who will become their classmates once they matriculate. Such conversations assist in enhancing their English language skills and knowledge of norms, values, and cultures in the United States, thus making them better prepared to become successful Mason students once they enter their program. We wanted to have these two student populations in the same room, either face-to-face or virtually, to try to help them engage with cross-cultural similarities and differences and to provide all students a space to begin important dialogues that crossed regional and international borders.

Upon completion of the facilitation, students in the ANTH courses wrote a short paper about the experience, what they learned from it, and how it related to course material. One student commented on the course evaluation for Summer 2020, “I liked all the assignments and the presentation that we had to do because it helped me to understand the concepts. The presentation was a different experience than I had before, because we had to present in front of students who I didn't know at all.” So, we can see that this assignment not only gave them a chance to engage deeper with the approaches, frameworks, and concepts from their courses, but also helped them further develop other skills, like public speaking. The interactions during class time gave INTO Mason students a time to interact with Mason students, which enabled them to hone their English language skills, particularly verbal but also in writing during the online session since they could use the chat as well on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and offered a more enriched experience of being on an American college campus. One significant difference between the two assignments was that for ANTH 332, students had to choose from a list of topics that came directly from the course: media, international development, public policy, etc. For ANTH 114 the following summer, we left it much more open and allowed students to choose any topic. We purposely asked them not to make it too abstract or theoretical so that it would be more accessible to non-native English speakers. On the one hand, this made it more challenging for the ANTH students because they had to really think about

how to use the concepts and theoretical and methodological approaches they gained through the course to frame their lesson plan. On the other hand, it seemed to also make the conversation “easier” because many people could speak to the topics chosen, such as snacks, holidays, and pets.

Part of our decision to create this assignment was our own reflection on the “global” and “globalization,” two words we hear a lot of in the literature, media, and at George Mason. As we reflected on how we use these terms in our own teaching, we realized that often, they are talked about in an abstract sense. No one can really pinpoint what they mean or look like exactly. Frequently, regions are juxtaposed: East and West, Global South and Global North. However, in reality, these binaries may not even exist, or at the very least, they are extremely porous due to the rapid flows of people, ideas, materials, items, and practices. This assignment helped our students make the “global” and “globalization” more concrete; we got a glimpse of these cross-regional and worldwide connections through the discussion. For example, one student in the ANTH course who was in the group that facilitated a conversation about traditions and holidays, is originally from Pakistan. He talked about how his family would give children money on Eid (the celebration at the end of Ramadan). The INTO Mason student from Saudi Arabia talked about how his family does the same. In the ANTH student’s reflection paper he wrote about how this was a surprise to him and something he never thought about; he did not realize that this was a practice across Muslim majority countries or Muslim communities until the conversation that day. We find that this assignment helped students locate themselves and George Mason within a larger global network, question cultural constructions and power relations that shape their everyday lives, and discover connects that may not be extremely obvious.

We piloted this program with INTO Mason students with different levels of English language proficiency. The students in AE 073-001 were advanced-level Academic English students, while the students in AE 010-001 were beginning-level Academic English students. By piloting this program with both advanced-level and beginning-level Academic English students, we wished to determine the language proficiency level INTO Mason students needed in order to successfully participate in conversations with domestic Mason students. We found that both advanced and beginning level Academic English students could participate in these conversations, albeit at different levels of complexity. For instance, advanced-level students could participate in the conversations easily with the

occasional assistance of a question requesting clarification of a vocabulary word or a concept. The introductory presentation given by the ANTH students was found sufficient to orient them to the topic and provide enough background with which they could engage with the material. The beginning-level students required a lesson presented before the ANTH students arrived, during which the instructor would provide them with an overview of the conversation topic, along with some basic vocabulary words relevant to the topic. As the beginning-level pilot was held online, beginning-level AE students were given the option of responding to a prompt either orally or in writing via the chat function. We initially were concerned that the students with low-level English proficiency might feel reluctant to participate in conversations with the ANTH students; however, we found that students at both levels of English language proficiency participated in the conversations with ANTH students and found these conversations rewarding.