

Asian Studies in a Classical Curricular Context:
Comparative and Contemporary Education

An Action Plan

Undertaken in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the NCTA East Asia Seminar
Belmont University
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Executive Summary

The author of this plan serves as Academic Dean at an independent school in Nashville, Tennessee. Established in 1867, the school is comprised of boys, grades 7-12, with selective admissions and a strong college preparatory focus. The curriculum for the school has strong roots in classical education of the western tradition.

The curriculum for the school is well-established, and very few electives are offered beyond the requirements of the curriculum. With a smaller student body, and a heavily prescribed course of study, the school explicitly confronted the question of the continued relevance and vitality of its western focus five years ago. At that time, the school's curricular mission was confirmed in large part under the new perspective of "A classical education for the 21st century." This reformulation of the curricular goals for the school left many of the traditional requirements in tact (Latin, Modern European History, etc.). However, the school has committed to broadening the context in which the traditional curriculum is applied. Three tools for achieving this mission have emerged:

- Modifying instructional strategies to engage multiple learning styles
- Supplementing context of current courses (including new textbooks as appropriate)
- Adding ancillary clubs, speakers, presentations, and evening classes as available
- Establishing a Chinese Language curriculum as an optional modern language to fulfill student foreign language requirements

The author's participation in the 2008 National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) East Asia Seminar has informed this Action Plan. The purpose of this plan is to support the

expanded inclusion of Asian studies within the curricular framework outlined above.

In addition to serving as Academic Dean for the school, the author of this plan also teaches Comparative Government and Politics AP[®]. The six target governments in this comparative study are the United Kingdom, Russia, China, Iran, Nigeria, and Mexico. Experience with this course shows the power of comparative study, particularly within the history/social studies curriculum. The benefits of comparative study within this course also bear fruits in the other course taught by the author of this plan: United States Government and Politics AP[®]. That realization informs the strategic approach behind this Action Plan.

This plan details opportunities for:

- Inclusion of information about Asian history, cultures, politics, literature and so on to add comparative clarity within current courses.
- Support of the activities of the new Asian studies club to make educational opportunities available to club members and through the club to the broader school community.
- Establishment of interdisciplinary connections between the Chinese language class and the cultural, historical, literary, and other studies across our curriculum.

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Inclusion in Current Courses

Cultural Geography:

Cultural Geography is a required course in the 8th grade. The course offers a cultural-historical survey of the world by regions. The course and its instructors already deal well with Asian cultures, but this Action Plan calls for a specific review of the material related to China and Japan. Specifically, we will review the coverage of religious traditions in China and Japan in order to improve of our presentation and expand the students' understanding of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shinto.

Not only will such development broaden the students' grasp of the specific religious traditions, it will also help deepen their understanding of the nature of religious traditions generally.

Comparative study will be further enhanced through attention to the details supported by the instruction and resources encountered at the East Asian seminar. Comparative study works best when the traditions under study are grasped and explained with similar detail. The specific review of the course material in Cultural Geography will help our instructors to offer that greater detail.

Ancient and Medieval History:

Originally conceived as a prerequisite for the study of Modern European history, this course has recently been asked to carry the water for our growing effort to understand broader world cultures and traditions. The time is ripe for a review of the content on this course with an eye toward establishing a better balance of coverage and a more effective and comparative approach. We will conduct a serious audit of the course so that students will be more comfortable in their

understanding of Asian culture and history as it parallels and even precedes the development of Western European culture.

Examination of early Chinese history in particular offers tremendous potential for a more balanced and global view of human history. Properly conceived and delivered, student understanding of ancient Chinese history will also add important context to the clash of civilizations that emerged in the modern period leading directly to the Opium Wars. Without question, a more balanced understanding of the Chinese perspective on European mercantilism will support not only a more accurate understanding of that period but also a much more thorough grasp of present-day relationships that will be covered in the Comparative Government and Politics AP[®] course.

Comparative Government and Politics AP[®]:

This course already rests on a solid unit of study of Chinese government, politics, culture, and history. Using the resources and knowledge gained through the East Asian Seminar, the author of this plan will be able to add greater depth to each of the areas already covered. We will simplify the introduction to the religious traditions and offer more significant resources to display cultural artifacts and traditions to students. The breadth and depth of understanding supported by the seminar will make it possible to improve not only specific lessons (see, for example the lesson plan submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for this grant), but also to offer expanded opportunities for individual student projects and presentations that will enrich both the content and instructional significance of the course.

Asian Studies Activities

The author of this plan will establish a joint relationship between the Chinese language teacher and himself to be sure that a two-way street develops between the academic courses and the extracurricular Asian studies club. Specifically, these efforts will include but not be limited to:

- Requiring students in Comparative Government and Politics AP® to attend club events and use what they learn in their understanding of Asian culture and history.
- Planning joint projects between general students and club members that will enrich the study of both groups.
- Securing at least one significant outside speaker or special program each year that the club will host and Comparative Government and Politics AP® will support.
- Making at least one significant presentation on an East Asian culture each year at our all-school assemblies.

Collaboration with the new Asian studies club and its student leaders and faculty sponsor will be directly enriched by the lessons and resources garnered at the East Asia Seminar. The author of this plan will serve as a resource for students planning activities. Guidance, direction, and support will be available to help students seek and present meaningful events that will enrich the student body as a whole and help to achieve a greater 21st century relevance for our classical curriculum.

Interdisciplinary Activities

Interdisciplinary study enriches student experience, improves understanding, capitalizes on comparative evaluation, and draws faculty strengths into common purpose. Often the inspirational factor and break down of departmental turf can have a great a positive impact on student achievement as the lessons that ensue. In the process of building this plan, the author encountered opportunities for interdisciplinary connections that were not initially explored. Eventually, this plan will lay the foundation for greater connections across all departments, but in this first phase, connections will be pursued within the humanities.

With the history/social studies curriculum broadening as described in the first section of this plan, every student at the school will encounter a more significant exploration of East Asian cultures. We will then convene a meeting of the English, History, and Visual Arts Departments with the Chinese language teacher and the Academic Dean to develop a more specific plan for including East Asian literature and art both within their current course and in partnerships with history and Chinese language teachers to supplement the lessons already established in those courses.

The interdisciplinary meeting will produce a plan with the following minimum criteria:

- Specific targets for including a small amount of East Asian literature in our English classes for the purpose of introduction, understanding, and comparison.
- Specific articulation by the Visual Arts Department of the kinds of support they can offer to history teachers as well as literature instructors and the Chinese language teacher.
- Initial plans for a joint presentation by teachers from at least two of these disciplines

under the auspices of our school's interdepartmental study grants through the Davis Foundation.

- Coordination of lessons so that literature, art, and history complement each other during the regular academic year.

Cumulative Impact on Students

Together, the review of these three specific courses and the content revisions/additions that will come from implementing this plan will impact every student in the school. Efforts to foster inclusion in the English Department, establish interdisciplinary connections among the History, English, and Visual Arts Departments will further enrich our overall curriculum. Deeper connections between all of these efforts and our nascent Chinese language program will not only enrich student perspectives but also strengthen the language program itself. Significant improvement in the global perspectives of our students will ensue, especially with respect to East Asian cultures.