Revising LAIS200 (Human Systems)

**CONTEXT**

LAIS 200, “Human Systems,” is the second required class in the Liberal Arts and International Studies core curriculum. After successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- recognize and describe the most important overall trends in the creation of modern political, social, economic, and cultural systems.
- produce advanced analysis of global affairs through critical application of the insights and theories developed by the major social sciences: history, sociology, political science, international relations, and anthropology.
- build upon the writing skills first introduced in LAIS 100, completing two 5-page papers requiring independent research and original analysis.

**WHAT WE ARE CHANGING**

- Our course innovations seek to solve these problems by incorporating more active, constructive, and interactive learning techniques into the course schedule. Lectures will be less focused on delivering content, and will instead provide students with models for different ways of thinking about the social sciences, based on carefully selected case studies.
- Some lecture content will also be moved online. These changes will allow us the opportunity to carefully plan for discussions and small group activities.

**LESSON EXAMPLES**

1. Early in the semester, one class meeting will start with a 15 minute review of the basic patterns of political, social, economic, and cultural interaction in a hunter-gatherer society, building on information covered in assigned readings. Students will then be divided into small groups, and asked to produce a short paragraph describing the outcome we might expect if we change the “variables” of hunter-gatherer societies to include domesticated animals (1/2 of the groups) and domesticated plants (1/2 of the groups). Class will conclude with roughly 15 minutes of reflection, as each group presents its major findings and the class as a whole builds upon these findings to analyze the comparative development of pastoral and agricultural systems. Class will conclude with 10 minutes of reflection, linked to the learning outcome, lecture and discussion.

2. About 1/3 into the course, one class meeting will start with a 15 minute overview of the three major perspectives of a subfield in international relations called international political economy (IPE). After completing pre-readings for homework, and watching an 8-10 minute segment from a documentary, the remainder of the class period will consist of a whole group discussion. IPE is normally comprised of three schools—25 students (broken down into three smaller groups of about 8 students each) will be “housed” in each school.

Within each school, one group of eight students will explain the basic aspects of the theoretical perspectives of the school, another group of eight will articulate the critiques of the school, and a final set of eight students will apply the IPE school of thought to contemporary issues. A spokesperson for the group will report out to the entire class, with the instructor as facilitator.

**INTENDED OUTCOMES**

- Discussions and group activities will be used as formative assessment. We have designed these to dramatically improve students’ opportunities for critical thinking, better preparing them for the independent research and analysis that is required for the major papers.
- The end result will be a notably more developed capacity for advanced analysis, as measured through careful comparisons to submissions from previous semesters.

There are four learning outcomes for this course. After the completion of this course, students will be able to:

A. recall, describe, and interpret patterns in the development of political, social, economic, and cultural systems on a global scale in the modern era, drawing upon illustrative material and case studies selected and presented by the instructor.

B. critically analyze the development of human systems over time and create original written arguments on this subject, drawing partly on examples and models provided by the instructor and partly on independent research and interpretation.

C. critically analyze the comparative development of distinct systems and create original written arguments on this subject, drawing partly on examples and models provided by the instructor and partly on independent research and interpretation.

D. apply concepts and insights obtained through objectives A-C in order to produce original written arguments explaining and analyzing current events make informed predictions about the future development of human systems.

“...to be more intentional and explicit about student-centered learning...”

Dr. Derrick Hudson is Teaching Associate Professor, International Relations, and Director of the Graduate Program, LAIS

Dr. Joseph Horan is Teaching Associate Professor, Environmental History, and Assistant Division Director in LAIS

June 2016 Cohort

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