



## Using an Object-Based Learning Approach to Strengthen Intercultural and Global Awareness and Openness to Diversity

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**Keywords:** Diversity, Global Awareness, and Intercultural Interactions

### Introduction

To *strengthen global and intercultural competencies in the classroom*, we organized a series of intercultural learning activities to enhance and assess students' intercultural/global awareness and openness to diversity. The activities were designed to contribute to the university's vision and initiatives to advance diversity and inclusion. Reflecting this vision, the university requires general education courses integrating the *Intercultural and Global Awareness* concept (IGA). For example, the content of the dress and culture learning module in the freshman-level Clothing and People course was recently revised to include two general education IGA learning objectives, which are shown in Figure 1.

To develop the learning module on *cultural diversity* and nurture students' *ability to respect, interact, and work effectively with people from different cultures* (intercultural/global awareness) at the departmental level, two material culture-related majors in a single department, Fashion and Residential Design received a Departmental Diversity Grant from the college and organized various guest lectures and learning activities for Clothing and People. As the global pandemic exacerbated the social disparities in the historically marginalized communities, our diversity grant activities focused on engaging with the local Native American community. Among these intercultural learning activities was an assignment developed for the dress and culture module of Clothing and People that focused on Native American dress. In addition to engaging with the local Native American Community, we felt that teaching students about the dress of a single culture with which students were not familiar would provide us an opportunity to demonstrate how and why dress differs across cultures, and ask them to analyze cultural experiences relating to dress from one's own and another's worldviews, thus nurturing students' intercultural/global awareness. Therefore, in Fall 2022, we collaborated with the Interim Director of the American Indian and Indigenous Community Center on campus, whom we will call Victoria. Collaboratively, we organized a guest lecture featuring an exhibition of Native American dress. Students were required to attend the event, complete a reading and a written reflective assignment, and take an end-of-the-semester survey for course credit. These activities were designed to address the two general education IGA course objectives. It should be noted that the first objective, IGA1, integrates the International Textile and Apparel Association's (ITAA, 2022) Content and Process Knowledge Meta-Goal Appearance and Human Behavior 2b: Understand and apply knowledge about the role of dress as it reflects and shapes intra- and intercultural interactions (See Figure 1). Following the assignment, we measured students' Openness

to Diversity via the end-of-the-semester survey to determine the impact of the intercultural learning activities.

### **Necessary Knowledge and Skills**

To organize the event and ensure that it addressed student learning objectives, we needed to recognize how a culture (its climate and natural resources, technology, social and political organization, religion, ideology, rituals, aesthetic rules, history, and contact with other cultures) impacts dress practices and dress and how these factors help to explain differences in dress across cultures (Reddy-Best, 2020). Furthermore, by recognizing *how* and *why* cultures differ, we ensure that we can interpret a culture's dress from multiple worldviews/perspectives, thus, increasing our own intercultural/global awareness, which in turn allows us to hone our students' intercultural/global awareness. Therefore, we designed a series of learning activities (guest lecture focusing on the items featured in the Native American dress exhibition, reading, and written reflective assignment) to achieve the IGA learning objectives and increase students' openness to diversity.

### **Intercultural Learning Activities Development**

#### **The Exhibition**

We knew that Victoria had a collection of replicas pre-European and post-European contact of what she referred to as "Monacan Indian" dress that she produced for her personal involvement in living history interpretation. Thus, we felt it would perfectly exemplify how culture influences dress and allow us to address IGA learning objectives by using an object-based learning approach in which artifacts are closely examined, analyzed, reflected on, and interpreted (Taylor, 1998). While we initially conceptualized a guest lecture where Victoria would speak in front of the student's regular classroom and show her Native American dress pieces flat, Victoria decided to curate an exhibition with mounted artifacts in the building she worked, which held a gallery space. In her exhibition, she included examples of pre-contact items such as a basswood top and wrapped skirt dyed with natural dyes including goldenrod and indigo, a wrapped grass skirt decorated with shells traded from other tribes from the coastal region, a deerskin dress, a hemp twined bag, and a raccoon fur wrap for the upper body (see Figure 2). She also displayed examples of post-contact items, which included a trade shirt and chemise made out of osnaburg (homespun) fabric, a wool, wrapped skirt (see Figure 3), a beaded buckskin dress, as well as a calico cotton ribbon skirt, a beaded bandolier bag, and a pair of moccasins (see Figure 4).

#### **Exhibition-Focused Guest Lecture**

After the exhibition was installed, we met with Victoria and discussed what content she should discuss during the guest lecture. To address the IGA objectives, we asked her to point out pieces in the exhibition that exemplify cultural factors impacting dress, which included materials, technology, and processes used to make the items, contact with other cultures such as other tribes and Europeans, and social and political organization and religious ideologies. Following the discussion, we developed the Dress and Culture Assignment Sheet (Appendix A) and the Dress

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and Culture Assignment Rubric (Appendix B). We posted the assignment sheet and rubric online before the exhibition-focused guest lecture to ensure that students were aware of aspects of the assignment (for example, attendance at the exhibition-focused guest lecture was required so that students could complete the written reflective assignment). We also posted the assignment guidelines to inform students what notes they should take during the lecture.

Students reported to the building on the day of the exhibition-focused lecture; then Victoria brought them to the gallery where the Native American dress exhibition was mounted. There, she explained each piece of the exhibition in-depth. Students were encouraged to take notes and ask questions throughout the lecture (see Appendix A: Dress and Culture Assignment Sheet, Step 2). As agreed, Victoria pointed out specific pieces and explained the tools, processes, and materials used to make the items in detail. She also explained whether the items were obtained from the natural environment or through trade from other tribes or European settlers. By covering how dress items were made and obtained, Victoria simultaneously addressed IGA1 and ITAA meta-goal Appearance and Human Behavior 2b. For example, she explained how Monacan dress reflected and was shaped by contact with other tribes (the addition of shells from coastal regions) during the pre-European contact era, as well as European colonists during the post-European contact era when tribal dress began to include Western dress styles such as osnaburg shirts and chemises (worn by Native American women to conform to European views of modesty). We hoped that exposing students to dress styles with which they may not have been familiar would increase their respect for others from various backgrounds regarding societies, cultures, languages, and religions, influencing their openness to diversity.

### **Reading and Written Reflective Assignment**

Following the exhibition-focused lecture, we required students to complete a reading and a written reflective assignment using the “Dress and Culture Assignment Sheet” (Appendix A). IGA 1 (and ITAA Meta-Goal directly: Appearance and Human Behavior 2b: recognize the role of dress as it both reflects and shapes intra- and inter-cultural interactions) was assessed through responses to Questions 1-3 in Step 3 of the Dress and Culture Assignment Sheet (Appendix A). Specifically, students would have to analyze information from the Native American dress exhibition-focused guest lecture and show that they recognized how dress reflects intercultural contact/interactions. By answering Question 2, “How do these technical patterns and tools, processes, skills, and inventions differ from those used to make your clothing?” students would indicate that the knowledge they gained from analyzing a single culture (Monacan Indian/Native American) could be *more broadly applied* when analyzing the dress of other cultures.

We assessed IGA2 (students’ ability to interpret an intercultural experience involving dress and appearance related to culture, race/ethnicity, and religion from both one’s own and another’s worldview) by examining responses to questions 4 and 5 under Step 3 of the Dress and Culture Assignment Sheet (Appendix A). In addition, students were required to read the article “‘Uncover’ in Hijab: Unveiling One Month Later” (Herrington, 2019), which details one individual’s experience of leaving her worldview behind and wearing the Hijab to understand the

Muslim community better. By reading this article, the students would be encouraged to move past their own worldview and analyze an intercultural experience relating to dress from one's own and another's perspective. In doing so, students were expected to avoid presenting an ethnocentric view (viewing one's own culture as superior to others) when responding to the question, "Would you wear the dress presented?"

While we assessed IGA1 and IGA2 directly, wherein students demonstrated their knowledge (See Appendix A: Step 3: Questions 1-5), we also assessed them indirectly, wherein students reflected on their learning (See Appendix A: Step 3: Question 6). To assess intercultural and global awareness indirectly, we asked students to reflect on how learning about Monacan dress increased their understanding of and respect or appreciation for other cultures *in general* (not just how the assignment increased their appreciation for Native American culture; See Appendix A: Step 3, Question 6). We also asked this question to gauge students' ability to broadly apply the knowledge they gained.

### Evaluation

To evaluate the learning outcomes, we used the Dress and Culture Assignment Rubric (Appendix B) and the Openness to Diversity scale (Appendix C). Student responses to questions corresponding to categories on the rubric were evaluated using criteria relating to rubric categories. For example, students' responses to Step 3: Question 6 were evaluated using the category titled "To increase your intercultural/global awareness." For each category, the instructor determined if there were no, minimal, moderate, substantial, and complete deductions, then subtracted the total number of point deductions from the total number of available points shown in the "Points" column. The total points earned were summed in the "Total" row to determine the students' overall scores. To understand the impacts of the intercultural learning activities offered throughout the course, we also measured students' openness to diversity near the end of Fall 2022 via a paper survey. We used Pascarella and his colleagues (1996)'s "openness to diversity" eight items (Appendix C) asking students' beliefs and values on different cultures and perspectives, and these items were measured by five-point Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data were analyzed via descriptive statistics. We also conducted *t*-tests to compare scores between individuals who completed intercultural learning activities throughout the course, including the exhibition-focused guest lecture, with those who did not.

For context, the Clothing and People class's demographic makeup is as follows: Most students were fashion majors ( $n = 38$ ), while two ( $n = 2$ ) were non-majors. In addition, students held Freshman ( $n = 31$ ), Sophomore ( $n = 4$ ), Junior ( $n = 4$ ), and Senior ( $n = 1$ ) class standings. Thirty-six of the 40 students enrolled in the course completed the written reflective assignment, and thirty-one ( $n = 31$ ) completed the Openness to Diversity survey.

### Direct Assessment

**IGA 1.** Students successfully analyzed information from the exhibition tour, demonstrating their understanding of how tools, processes, skills, inventions, and technical

patterns influence dress and helping to explain why dress differs across cultures, fulfilling IGA1. For example, when asked to compare their dress with Native American dress pre and post-European contact, one student explained:

The technical patterns and tools, processes, skills, and inventions differ drastically from those used to make the clothing I wear today. This is because a lot of the clothing I wear today comes from factories and is not handmade. Furthermore, the materials used are not as environmentally friendly and natural. I do not wear many garments with deerskin or porcupine needles. However, sometimes I will wear fur coats that come from real animals, but I try not to buy too much stuff like that because it is not very animal friendly. I think that is one main difference in the clothing industry now vs. when Native American tribes were first formed. Today, lots of society is very against using animal products, specifically fur, because of how unfriendly and harmful it can be to the animals. In addition, society has evolved so much that we don't need to rely solely on natural resources for clothing. We use natural resources mixed with newer materials and technology for many products.

In addition, analyzing the information from the lecture helped students recognize how a culture's dress changes as a result of intercultural contact/interactions (IGA1). This recognition is evidenced in one student's response as they compared early Native American (pre-European contact and early post-European contact) with American dress today:

The clothes we see back then were extremely time-consuming and could not be produced at the fast pace we are seeing now. Pieces took effort and dedication due to the difference in technology. Upon *trade*, that did manage to change, and certain parts of the production were produced at a more rapid pace....Other reasons why things were worn were influenced by tradition as well as *trade*.... I learned so much about the early dress, which helped me better understand where we are now and what influenced our position.

**IGA 2.** Most students could interpret an intercultural experience involving dress from one's own and another's worldview, fulfilling IGA2. When asked if they were willing to wear Monacan dress, some students indicated they would. For example, one student wrote:

Personally, I would try wearing the Native American dress to see how different it feels and to be more understanding of their culture. . . . After reading the article "'Undercover' in Hijab," considering the perspective of the author of the article, I would still wear Native American dress, with the approval of the tribe. The author of the article stated that she felt that she was lying about her identity because she was not a Muslim woman and did not believe in the Hijab. I feel like I would experience similar emotions - that I was pretending to be part of a culture that I'm not. However, I feel like one of the best ways to understand and learn about new cultures is to immerse yourself in them.

While most students responded that they would not wear another culture's dress out of concern for cultural appropriation, they were still willing to move past their own worldview. One student explained:

If I were a part of the Native American community, I would wear the dress of my ancestors to show appreciation and respect for the culture I belong to. Since I am not a part of the indigenous community, I would not wear the dress of the indigenous people due to the fact it would be deemed disrespectful and could be seen as cultural appropriation. I believe it is important to appreciate the culture, not appropriate it. In talk of other cultures, the article “‘Uncover in Hijab’: One Month Later” was an eye-opening piece. The author of the article wore a Hijab for a month as a social experiment to see how others treated her. Again, the question “would I wear the dress items presented” arose. Again, my answer would still be no. . . . I would not want the chance to appropriate a culture.

Only a few students’ responses did not provide evidence that they were willing to move past their own worldview when analyzing an intercultural experience relating to dress. For example, one student stated, “I personally would not wear the items shown in this exhibition. While they are fascinating and deeply important to the history of fashion, they are not my style of clothing.” Many of the responses of this type were from students who did not refer to the Hijab reading. Thus, it is likely that because the students did not complete the reading, they were not primed or encouraged to consider answering the question “would you wear the dress presented?” from diverse perspectives.

### **Indirect Assessment**

When asked if learning about the Native American dress increased their understanding of other people’s societies, nations, and cultures (Appendix A: Step 3, Question 6), students’ responses indicated that both IGA learning objectives were achieved. For example, related to IGA1 (recognized the role of dress as it reflects and shapes intercultural interactions), one student wrote:

Learning about these garments has increased my understanding of other societies. . . . I was able to learn about how different societies have different access to material, processes, skills, and tools . . . . it helped me to be more informed about different types of dress and their significance.

Responses to the question also related to IGA2 (interpret an intercultural experience from one’s own and another’s worldview), “This event broadened my knowledge of dress and culture; I think that being informed and educated about different cultures is important because then you gain a whole new viewpoint and understanding of a culture that is different from your own.” Students also indicated that the knowledge they gained from the learning activities could be *broadly applied* as one student explained, “Having the opportunity to learn directly from a Native American helped increase my understanding of not only their culture but how I could apply what I learned to other cultures as well.” Finally, students also noted that the exhibition-focused guest lecture increased their *respect* for others of different cultural backgrounds and enhanced their *ability to interact and work effectively with people from different cultures* through statements such as “I believe it is necessary to learn about other cultures such as the Monacans

because it allows us to connect with people who are different than us and respect different life perspectives.”

### **Openness to Diversity**

By analyzing responses from the “openness to diversity” scale (Pascarella et al., 1996), we gained a better understanding of how the intercultural learning activities implemented throughout the course (including the exhibition-focused guest lecture, reading, and written reflective assignment) impacted students’ openness to diversity. For example, the highest mean scores among the eight openness to diversity items (Appendix C) resulted from the following questions: “The courses I enjoy the most are those that make me think about things from a different perspective” (Mean = 4.39); “Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education” (Mean = 4.35). Regarding the *t*-tests conducted to compare responses of students who indicated that they completed other intercultural learning assignments ( $n = 23$ ) with those who did not ( $n = 7$ ), we found no significant difference in terms of the overall openness scores between the two groups. However, the item asking “The real value of a college education lies in being introduced to different values” was significantly different ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $t = 1.88$ ) between the group who attended the exhibition-focused lecture ( $M = 4.04$ ) and those who did not attend the exhibition-focused guest lecture ( $M = 3.28$ ). This finding implies that the purposeful interactions with the guest lecturer and the exhibition and follow-up activities after the exhibition-focused guest lecture would enhance students’ deeper learning on inclusion and diversity.

### **Past and Future Iterations and Conclusion**

This activity (exhibition-focused guest lecture with a reading and written reflective assignment to follow) was delivered once before in Spring 2022. It will be delivered within each future course iteration (every Fall and Spring semester). However, the guest lecture varies/will vary in content and format. For example, before the Fall 2022 iteration, instead of an exhibition-focused guest lecture, a guest lecture was held in the regular Clothing and People classroom in Spring 2022 that focused on Indonesian Batik textiles from Bali and Yogyakarta. One significant change to the activity was inviting guest speakers who self-identified as cultural insiders. In Spring 2022, the guest lecturer was an outsider who had traveled to Bali and Yogyakarta and was knowledgeable about Indonesian Batik. Assessments of the initial implementation of the activity in Spring 2022 revealed that students understood the influence of technology and the near environment (factors impacting dress) on Indonesian textiles because the guest lecturer focused largely on how Indonesian Batik textiles were produced (the aspect of Indonesian textiles that the lecturer was most knowledgeable about). However, students could not fully articulate an understanding of the social systems and aesthetic ideologies that contributed to the cultural significance of the textiles, as the guest lecturer had little personal experience engaging with Indonesian dress. Therefore, in Fall 2022, the decision was to invite guest lecturers who could offer an insider perspective of their culture and dress. In addition, due to the success of the Native American-insider exhibition-focused guest lecture in developing student’s ability to

interpret an intercultural experience involving dress from multiple worldviews (IGA2), a guest lecturer who identifies as an insider from Bangladesh and wears and researches both traditional and contemporary Bengali dress, was invited and is scheduled to present in Spring 2023.

One major advantage of the activity carried out in Fall 2022 was that students were able to view dress artifacts in-person, which enhanced object-based learning. Previous research has shown that object-based learning strengthens learning, creates more memorable learning experiences, and helps students draw connections between artifacts and their historical and social significance (Marcketti & Gordon, 2019). However, a disadvantage of using the object-based learning approach in-person is that students who were unable to attend the exhibition-focused guest lecture missed out and were unable to complete the written portion of the assignment (Some students who missed the lecture met with Victoria one-on-one to view and discuss the exhibition as a makeup activity). Thus, instructors considering replicating this activity may offer a hybrid or virtual option or record the exhibition-focused lecture live to accommodate students missing class due to illness or quarantine. However, we recommend that instructors find ways to encourage students to attend in person to receive the full benefits of object-based learning.

Regarding in-person versus online guest lectures, one challenge we faced while booking a guest lecturer for Spring 2023 was locating someone knowledgeable enough to speak on their culture's dress and could travel to campus and speak in person. Booking knowledgeable speakers may be challenging for other instructors wishing to replicate this approach. In such cases, instructors can weigh the benefits of having a knowledgeable presenter with examples to share with the short-comings of online object-based learning, which includes not being able to examine the artifacts up-close; thus, being unable to get a full sense of the artifacts' color, textures, and fine details (XXX, work by one of the authors). For example, rather than try to conduct a lecture on Bengali dress as outsiders, we felt it would be more impactful to invite a guest lecturer who is an insider of the culture and extremely knowledgeable about the subject, even if the guest lecture had to be held online.

Instructors may use this activity to enhance students' understanding of the impact of culture on dress, intercultural interactions, and global awareness/interdependence. We highly recommend that instructors invite guest lecturers who are insiders of the culture to give students an insider perspective. This recommendation is reflected in the change from a guest lecturer who was a knowledgeable outsider to a knowledgeable insider who wore the dress of their culture. If such guest lecturers cannot be located or are unavailable, instructors may use our approach above to overcome this challenge and invite individuals to share and discuss examples of their dress virtually.

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